

# Vampire Hunters

A Troublemaking Clan of Their Own

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Through the years of viewing vampires in entertainment, I have come across the fact that there is a formula for being a vampire slayer. A kind of indictment, one is not *just* a hunter of the undead, one *becomes* a hunter of the undead. Within my lifetime of entertainment that I have been exposed to, which would mostly contain anything from the 1990s, and the new millennium, along with a bit of the 1980s, I have come to the conclusion that: 1.) Most vampire hunters are a troublesome bunch, they cause problems for the “normal, unaware society,” and are almost always never believed and succumbed as liars. 2.) Although they feel like they are alone in the world and only they understand the battle, they truly are not. Vampire Slayers, as of late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are never alone, while in fact they have followers that turn into their confidants that help them battle the evils of the world. I believe that there is no longer only “Vampire Slayer” there is instead a combination of “Vampire Slayers” and “Vampires Hunters.”

I want to begin with a quick vocabulary lesson: the difference between “hunter” and “slayer.” **Hunter:** a person who hunts game or other wild animals for food, a person who searches/seek for something. **Slayer:** a person who kills by violence, to destroy or extinguish, or to murder another entity. (Dictionary.com). Many people find the words Hunter and Slayer interchangeable, but they are not. In this case the Slayer is the individual who actually performs the act of extinguishing the evil from the earth, for example; the one who pierces the vampire’s heart with a wooden stake. The Hunters are the established crew who follow their lead, the Slayer, into “battle,” they are the only ones to believe the Slayer when they say there are evils in our world. For all intensive purposes, they are the backbone to the operation; they help “*hunt*” the vampire that must be *slain*.

I want to bring one more idea to the forefront: the “complex discovery plot” brought to attention by Noel Carroll after WWII. This idea puts a specific function to the structure of story lines: “onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation.” (McClelland 169). This creates a focus towards the Slayers, they are the ones discovering the truth, yet are mocked for it. In doing this it lets the audience view

things from their point of view, to see their social status change and for them to become outsiders. (McClelland 169).

Now onto the timeline that represents Slayers/Hunters throughout the ages. We begin with our very first clan of Vampire Hunters in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, to our most recent Vampire Slayer Charlie Brewster of *Fright Night* (2011).

In 1897, almost an entire century before I had actually viewed vampires in entertainment, *Dracula* was published. The novel scared its way into the hearts of millions, but to my disbelief I found the story was not really centralized around Dracula. It was centralized around a clan of men who are dealing with their first encounter of vampirism, and how to neutralize the problem that has traveled to them from Transylvania. The story gets interesting is when Dr. John Seward writes to his mentor, Abraham Van Helsing, for advice on a patient that confounds him, Lucy Westerna. After hearing of her anemic like symptoms he arrives at London and claims vampirism! Obviously, he is not believed in the beginning, and his recommendations on saving Lucy's life are not taken. This leads to Lucy's demise, and the rise of Van Helsing in the eyes of the men coveting around her. He leads the men to Lucy's grave to prove that she has indeed been turned into a vampire; once she is killed the men hang on Van Helsing's every word. The men even go to the extent of following him across the continent to Dracula's castle to exterminate the fowl beast and hopefully save Mina, another woman about to be laid to waste because of his bite. (McClelland 99) This is our first embellishment of numerous men becoming Hunters, while the genuine act of slaying is a shared duty by more than one man.

What is different about Van Helsing, comparable to the Slayers/Hunters, today is that he is a **seer**, "he has not personally entered into the world of the dead, ... nor does he personally possess any mystical insight into the demonic – he only possesses "rational" knowledge, irrational as it may appear from the point of view of medical science." (McClelland 161). Although Van Helsing has never

encountered a real vampire before, he contains the most knowledge on the subject so the men follow his word blindly. The man does become a Hunter though, while throughout the many adaptations of *Dracula* through the years he also becomes a Slayer. The point is that this man, is first not believed, but after straining predicaments he is eventually proved right, which gives him his following of Hunters, that all together help slay Dracula. (McClelland 161).

Fast-forward about 75 years and we have a new character on the scene, the Las Vegas scene to be exact, and he is not your typical Vampire Hunter/Slayer, if it was in fact a vampire that he had slain at the end of *The Night Stalker* (1972). Carl Kolchak, a revolutionist to the vampire game, who was once a big city journalist, is now through faults of his past, a down on his luck reporter at a small newspaper in Las Vegas, Nevada. This marks him as a troublemaking outsider from the very beginning, considering that all of his past writing credentials are now tarnished. Kolchak is working on a story around a string of deaths of “evening dancers” on the strip, all of which mysteriously are drained of every last drop of blood. (McClelland 171).

He is the first to “cry vampire” even if only as a joke to the police force. He does not believe this theory himself, but soon to his own despair he begins to really think the authorities should be looking for a vampire, although, this is an example of being a Seer and not a Hunter. Of course no one believes him, but here is the difference, even after staking the killer who was pinned to a darkened corner after the sun had risen, no one still believe him. That only proves further of his role as Seer, he has absolutely no real pull being only a journalist; he cannot arrest, kill or even attempt to extinguish the world of evil, only persuade the men that have the authority to do so (McClelland 173). Kolchak is the exception to part two of my theory. He is completely alone on his presumption about the killer being a vampire. The only person to help him research vampirism would be his girlfriend, but, she is the only one who believes. He only finds help in the very last few minutes of the film while trying to murder the killer.

The “social authority” is probably the Seer/Slayer/Hunter’s biggest dilemma when ridding the world of vampires. (McClelland 173). The “social authority” is any police force, school administration, political administration, publisher, or anyone holding power within the constraints of normal society. These “social authorities” are what makes our heroes out to be pariahs. The idea of the social authority is completely ironic though, the Slayers are the ones trying to revert our world back to a state of normalcy; while the authorities are the ones saying “no, that’s a lie, you’re doing it wrong.” While in most movies today the Hunter/Slayer hits hero status by the end credits, Kolchak does not. He is actually punished for his slaying and ordered to leave the city, while also losing the girl. Kolchak only fits one point of my Vampire Hunter/Slayer theory, but he hits that point on all counts of being a troublemaking, “lying” outsider.



A little over a decade later we have the movie that first introduced me to vampires, and this vampire was only a different rendition of the Count himself in the 1987 Fred Dekker cult-classic film *The Monster Squad*. This film is not based around just Vampire Hunters/Slayers, but Slayers of Universal’s five original monsters: Count Dracula, Frankenstein’s Monster, the Mummy, Wolf-Man and Swamp-Thing. But these guys are different than your typical Hunter/Slayers, if only by a ten year age gap. The “Monster Squad” is comprised of three fifth graders, one sixth grader, possibly a fourth grader, one five year old girl, one 17 year old girl “virgin” and one “Scary-Old German Guy.” Needless to say, these guys are the misfits of the misfits, your typical troublemakers; the opening scene is of the leader, Shaun, and his best friend, Patrick, in the principal’s office for drawing monsters in their algebra class who is taught by “Meow Mix,” a nickname given to their teacher by themselves, of course. The first five minutes of the film is proof enough that Vampire Hunters/Slayers are your classic menaces of the town. Also, the group can count on no one but themselves, the adults won’t even listen to them; which is

absurd considering Shaun's father, a police detective, deals with two problems the monsters create first



hand. One, a missing mummy from a museum, and two, a man claiming he needs to be locked up under the full moon because he's a werewolf. This portrays how alone the kids really are and how no one at all, especially their own parents don't believe them. Nobody helps them but "Scary-Old

German Guy:" he is the only one who can translate Van Helsing's journal, which is their only clue on how to defeat the monsters that are all of a sudden terrorizing their town. (IMdB.com)

The film is a prime example to prove both parts of my thesis; not only are they the troublemakers of the town, but there is not one singular Slayer, there is a leader, like most entertainment, but not a singular Slayer all by himself. Shaun is the one with the most knowledge on monsters, but other members bring information to the table as well. They also all have different tasks in the movie that help contribute to slaying the monsters by the time "Limbo" arrives. They are successful in extinguishing the monsters and also in becoming heroes unlike Kolchak's character, in *The Night Stalker*.

In the same year another cult classic film was released; *The Lost Boys*. Oddly enough the Vampire Hunter/Slayer formula is eerily similar to that of *The Monster Squad*. We have three adolescent boys, about thirteen or fourteen who consist of our main hunters, one brother recently turned vampire, and at the end, a grandfather who apparently knew about the vampires in Sana Carla all along. Two of our Hunters/Slayers are the Frog brothers, Edgar and Allan, these are our members who know everything about vampires, in the '80s it seems as though comic books were a pretty popular thing and this is where their knowledge of horror came from. Then we have Michael and Sam, the two brothers separated by about a four year difference who just moved to the town. Sam knows nothing about



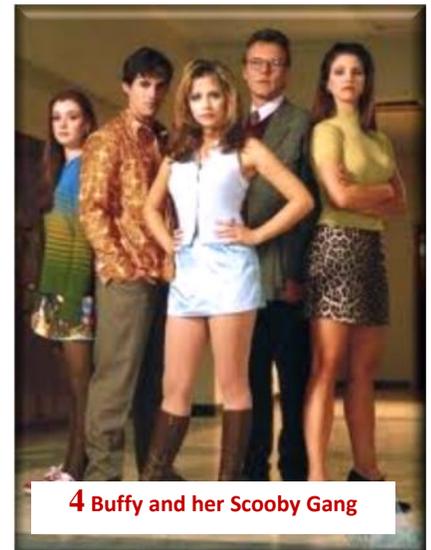
vampires until running into the misfit Frog brothers at a comic book store and Michael does not even realize he's been changed by his new "friends" until his brother realizes what his new habits of sleeping all day and even floating in the air mean. The title can be interpreted two ways, the obvious one that most people would see is that the lost boys are the vampires, who

believe the tagline: "Sleep all day. Party all night. Never grow old. Never Die. It's fun to be a vampire." (IMDb.com). That would be the obvious choice right? But what about the hunters, they too are misfits, looked upon as outcasts of the town. It is obvious that two brothers named Edgar and Allan Frog are troublemakers; they are definitely too big for their britches thinking they can handle a clan of vampires on the vampire's home turf, in a very comedic scene.

Again, there is no singular Vampire Slayer in this film either. In actuality, each Hunter slays one vampire, minimum in the film. That means that each Hunter then becomes a Slayer as well. Even Michael, the recently turned vampire fights and kills who the audience perceives as the lead vampire. We have vampire against vampire and for the first time in a major motion picture a fight happening in mid-air nonetheless! (Melton 225). They are alone when it comes to any adults believing them, Sam and Michael's mother scoff at Sam's plea for help when they decide to confront the vampire. And she of course does not believe them when they tell her that she is dating the head honcho of the vampires! In my opinion, the four lost boys band together to rid the town of vampires and in turn all become Slayers of the undead. What is interesting is that the grandfather, himself, is even a Slayer, this is not revealed until the very end of the film, considering he is the one who actually "runs" the wooden "stake" into the real leader of the clan.

From cult classics of the 80s we move to the 90s, with the premier of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in 1992, first in film, then in 1997 with a hit television series. In the film *Buffy* is first very popular and in no way a troublemaker, but that soon changes when the blood suckers hit the town. Then, not so mysteriously, her soon-to-be mentor, Merrick, follows suit. Merrick has trained all the previous generations of *Buffy's* blood line since vampires first walked the earth. In this case he is a very knowledgeable Seer, placing the stake in *Buffy's* hand, much like Van Helsing giving the information needed to the group who ride to slay *Dracula*. In the film she is very much alone for the most part, and is singularly the Slayer after Merrick is killed. As she becomes more involved with vampires, she becomes more of an outcast, and much more of a troublemaker, putting her at full status of being the “Chosen One.” (Melton 75). It is as if the hunting and slaying of vampires that takes away her air-headed popularity and she sees that there is so much more to life than just being a “Valley Girl.”

Her character develops more though in the TV series, she goes from being a loner, to having her “Scooby Gang” who helps her track down and kill vampires. Seeing as I have not viewed the entire series, I do not know if they ever help kill the vampires or not. So as for the information I have, *Buffy* is pure Slayer with the help of her friends as Hunters. Along with her new Seer, the school librarian, Rupert Giles and *Buffy* are the know-how behind vampires. Her “Scooby Gang” follows and hangs on her every word after they see firsthand the evils of the world, again, much like Van Helsing in *Dracula*. (McClelland 179). The only difference here is that *Buffy* slays the undead. She still proves my point though, that as the job progresses, she does need help and she is not alone in ridding the west coast of the undead.



Jump ahead another decade, and we have a movie based on the man that started it all, *Van Helsing* (2004). But this is a very different rendition of the original Abraham Van Helsing, who was *Vampire Slayers & Hunters*

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thought to be named after Bram Stoker (Bram is short for Abraham), this is Gabriel Van Helsing; the vigilante monster hunter. In a turn of events, during the climax of the film we find out he is The Archangel Gabriel, the Left Hand of God. (Rottentomatoes.com). This is another example of a particular character as being “The One” in some form or another, just like Buffy was the “Chosen One.” (McClelland 183). Yes, this particular Van Helsing is the *main* Slayer, but in no way is he in complete solitude. In the beginning of the film he is very alone, with only the “Knights of the Holy Order” helping behind the scenes with weaponry and sending him out with missions. This “lone-wolf” persona changes when he is sent to help the family Valerious to slay Dracula, the Prince of Darkness. Carl, the friar with a steady supply of unstable chemicals in hand, accompanies him to Transylvania against his will to help expert Van Helsing in the ways of killing a vampire. In this case Carl is a knowledgeable Seer who helps the Slayer hunt down his victims. When they get to the vampire riddled country, there Van Helsing gains the help of Anna Valerious, who also resists in helping him in the beginning because of her pride, she does not think, nor want Helsing’s help. (Rottentomatoes.com). Although Carl and Anna both struggled with aiding Van Helsing, after time, they accept their fate, and he is no longer alone. Eventually he even incorporates the help of Frankenstein’s Monster, which was also done previously in *The Monster Squad*.

This is another film that does a great job of establishing the vampire Slayer as an outcast troublemaker. Within the very first few minutes of the film, after Van Helsing contributes to the death of another monster, Mr. Hyde, you see wanted posters for Van Helsing, dead or alive. He is a classic case of the “misunderstood hero,” this is displayed numerous times in the film. Once, in a particularly funny manner, thanks to the aid of Carl; after the two of them assume that they had helped the town during a vampire attack, they are immediately turned to with pitchforks and scorned faces. Carl then asks “Are you always this

*Vampire Slayers & Hunters*



5 Carl and Van Helsing's arousing welcome

popular?” Van Helsing replies with “Pretty much.” (IMDb.com). It is so simply done, yet it sets the tone that they are outcasts and that nobody sees them as heroes or believe that they are doing good. The townsfolk never support Van Helsing and they only see that he and Carl are making life more difficult for them, as most troublemakers are perceived.

To round off on Vampire Hunters/Slayers in our last decade, we have the most recent film about slaying vampires; the remake of *Fright Night* (2011). In this revamp of *Fright Night* we have two teenage hunters, a love interest, and another Seer. This Seer does actually commit in some killings though. Let me introduce first, Evil Ed, the “old” best friend of our main Slayer, Charlie Brewster. Ed puts in all the backbone work with another “old” friend of Charlie’s, who has mysteriously disappeared. These two are the ones who figure out that all the mysterious disappearances around the suburb of Las Vegas is because of Charlie’s new neighbor; Jerry. Back when Ed, Charlie, and the third friend were still best buddies, they were social oddities. No one knew they existed in their high school; they were the bottom of the food chain. Then Charlie all of a sudden dumps his old childhood friends for a girl, typical high school. When this happens and Ed tries to convince Charlie that his new neighbor, Jerry, is a

vampire, he laughs in his face and doesn’t believe him. When Ed is lost by his last best friend, Jerry stalks and turns Ed into a vampire as well. In a later development of the film we see the tables turn on Charlie and that no one, including the all-knowing gothic, fake magician Peter Vincent, believes his “cry vampire.”



Eventually, Peter becomes part of Charlie’s crew to dismember the vampire clan that is growing under Jerry’s house. Charlie’s mother and Amy, his girlfriend, also help aid in the destruction while they are still conscious too. Amy slays Evil Ed after Charlie wounds him, seeing as he could not kill his old best friend. His Mother is used as the get-away car, and she too attempts to kill Jerry, quite creatively

with a “For Sale” sign as a stake; she of course, misses the heart. Although Charlie is the single man who actually slays the main vampire, he has the help of old friends before their demolish, a girlfriend before she is turned, a mother, and a Seer who also acts as Slayer, Peter Vincent. Peter had actually encounter Jerry before, but as he also “cried vampire” when he was younger, no one believed him. So he told himself they were nightmares, and made Bloody-Marys out of tomatoes. He found out all he could about vampires throughout his year, but lied to Charlie when propositioned by him.

In conclusion, the Vampire Hunter and Vampire Slayer have evolved throughout the years, but two things have almost remained constant about them. A Vampire Slayer is nothing without his backbone of Vampire Hunters and hardly ever is their just one person doing the slaying. Also, Vampire Hunters and Slayers are always pigeonholed as being or becoming troublemakers, occasionally they may be viewed as heroes by the end, but always at some point they give authority a run for their money. This also proves, by default, that the authority can be trusted to never do the right thing and actually believe the “cry of vampire.” It is never until the “social authority” views the evil with their own eyes, that they will ever help or even believe the Hunters/Slayers words about the undead. Therefore, Slayers are never alone in their battle; they have Hunters and other Slayers to help them extinguish evil even if the normal world views them as liars and pests; they are protecting our way of life by slaying our threats out of existence.

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