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June 12th, 2009

Vampire trend bites into big, small screens

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These days vampires seem to be all love and no bite.

Or they bite mainly when they're making love, as in the case of "True E" original HBO series that premieres its second season on Sunday, and is the focus of aggressive marketing with an advertisement that took over the front page of the ailing Los Angeles Times on Friday.

The series, based on Charlaine Harris' book series called the "Southern Vampire Mysteries," tells the story of telepathic Sookie Stackhouse, who falls in love with vampire Bill Compton in a small Louisiana town where vampires have come out of the coffin, so to speak.

The show stars Anna Paquin and is one of HBO's brightest hopes after the cable channel suffered the one-two punch of losing "The Sopranos" and "Six Feet Under."

The series also is part of the latest phenomenon of vampires biting into movies and television.

The blockbuster "Twilight," featuring rising stars Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart, recently swept the MTV Movie Awards and the trailer for "New Moon," the second installment in the movie series, earlier this month received 10.6 million online views in its first week.

Also showing its fangs again is an erstwhile vampire favorite. Producers say a new "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" movie is in the works, following on the original 1992 movie which morphed into a popular television series from Joss Whedon that ran from 1997 to 2003. Cable channel the CW will debut a new series in the fall called "Vampire Diaries" that tells the story of a love triangle between a girl and two vampire brothers, one good and one evil. So it seems producers are seeing an opportunity to make a killing from the vampire craze.

Even Alan Ball, the creator of "True Blood," joked about audiences' thirst for blood-sucking drama, at the screening of the second season at Paramount Pictures Studio this week, and how he's constantly asked why people are so fascinated with vampires.

"Usually I answer with something vague about vampires being sexy or we've all known somebody who's sucked the life out of us," Ball said, drawing laughs from the audience.

"But I don't really say what I truly believe which is: Why are people so fascinated with vampires? I don't know! Why do we have appendices? Why are they still making Hummers? Who are Jon and Kate and why does anyone care? Some questions just cannot be answered," Ball joked.



How is this latest generation of blood-suckers different from

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others, like the classic

Dracula?

"The main difference is that they are very complex in their portrayal of characters and relationships ... You didn't see that in the others that were really blood and gore, violent and campy," said Elayne Rapping, a professor of American studies at the University at Buffalo.

Rapping said the latest vampire hits are more like soap operas. And the unrealistic story line makes the intense emotional entanglements possible. With a more realistic story line, "it would seem too goofy, really," Rapping said.

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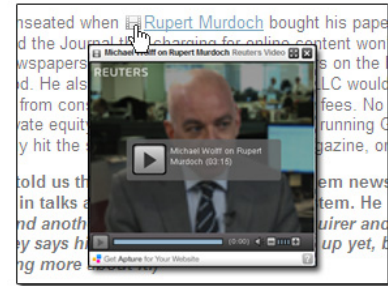
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