

Hometown Helena vampire film 'Crimson Winter' debuts



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[INDEPENDENT RECORD](#)

The vampire love story "Crimson Winter," filmed in Helena's surrounding hills, makes its U.S. premiere 6:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 24, at the Myrna Loy Center.

But there's another love story told in this film that many in the audience won't see: what it took to get this story on the screen.

By day, the cast and crew of Carroll College alumni work as baristas, in state office buildings or at odd jobs, but on their own time, they're living their dream.

Bryan Ferriter, the film's lead actor, writer and director, will be on hand to tell a bit of that story Friday night before the screening.

He is also speaking at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23, at Carroll College about making the film, what it takes to follow a dream, the importance of his Montana roots and how his Carroll College experience sparked this dream.

Hardships

What audiences will see is the story of Elric, a 1,000-year-old vampire — an idealist who struggles with a dark side. He falls in love with a human, Isabelle, played by New York actress Paulie Rojas.

"It's kind of a racial commentary," said Ferriter. Elric wants to live side-by-side with the humans, but not everyone has the same altruistic view.

What the audience won't see is the price and devotion it took to launch this dream.

It's taken more than three years and more than \$400,000 to get it this far.

Most of those working on the film aren't getting a dime for it — at least not yet.

Working conditions weren't ideal, either — such as filming in 15 below zero temperatures and almost getting hypothermia.

Ferriter and others did their own stunt work, which almost earned Ferriter a broken kneecap.

But if there are some things Ferriter learned while he was a linebacker for the Carroll College Saints; among them was how to deal with pain and overcome setbacks.

And, oddly enough, his dream to create a vampire love story started on the football team.

"I was always a big fan of movies," Ferriter said over a cup of coffee at The Hub, "but you never think it's a possibility to make one. I had a buddy — Martin Rogers ... — from playing football. He started talking about making a movie."

Ferriter began taking acting classes and "fell in love with it."

"I had the realization that if I could walk out on stage every night, that's what I want to do," he said.

A major crossroads

His third year at Carroll, he decided to take a year off. During that time, he realized that acting is what he wanted to pursue and throw his heart into.

His father, Rudy Ferriter, "was really supportive. He thought it was awesome I wanted to do acting." He urged his son to go into it "and try as hard as you can."

Two weeks later, Rudy died suddenly from a heart attack.

Ferriter, who was in Grandstreet's production of "Sound of Music" at the time, was devastated.

But the day after his father's death, he forced himself to go out on stage because he knew that's what his father would have wanted him to do.

When Ferriter returned to Carroll the following year, his focus was on football and acting. "It's the two things I love."

In the months after his father's death, "I was in a dark place," he said. It was then that the first idea came to him to create a vampire film for Carroll's Charlie Film Festival. "It was a very basic idea of kids in the woods who run into vampires and all hell breaks loose."

He joined forces with theater pal Ryan Pfeiffer to make it.

"('Vampyre') won 10 awards," said Ferriter, including best picture.

"People just liked it a lot. There was a lot of passion behind it. It was beyond a thriller, it was a drama," said Ferriter. "There was a lot of Shakespeare influence."

Part of this came from roles, like Hamlet, that Ferriter was playing onstage at Carroll.

"I was 23 at this point," he said. "I thought we should turn this film into a real movie."

One thing that made this dream seem both easy and daunting is that Ferriter and his football buddy Rogers had already raised \$100,000 to make an earlier film, "My Favorite Movie," which is still shelved, waiting for its debut later this year.

But, it was during that earlier filmmaking venture, Ferriter cut his teeth on the basics.

"That experience was extremely important to me. We were learning everything" — even where he was supposed to stand for the camera to be in focus.

This is also where his football training came to the fore.

"The things I learned from college football really helped us," he said. "We have this

perseverance and will to win and are tight as a group to fight for each other. It was surprising how it spilled over into filmmaking.”

Not only was the work on “Crimson Winter” arduous and the money stretched to the maximum, but Ferriter lost yet another person he loved — his childhood friend Keith Carlson, who was in the film.

“That knocked me on my ass,” he said.

But after taking a few days to regroup, he told the cast and crew, “We’ve got to finish this film for Keith.”

“It was intense,” he admitted. “We had hit every kind of obstacle.”

More in the works

They finished the filming 2 1/2 years ago, he said, but since then, have been learning everything about the business end of filmmaking.

Pfeiffer, who plays the vampire Guiscard, had written all of the “vampire dialog.” He then stepped in to do the rough cut of the film, recalling he had to pack his computer in ice packs when he hooked up four to five hard drives to his home computer on some hot summer days.

“Candles were melting in the apartment without any flames,” he recalled of the Helena heat wave.

“It can be quite draining,” he said, “when what you love is not what you do to survive.”

But he and Ferriter and a team of friends — including Isaac Marble and Brandon Day — who comprise Interwoven Studios see this film as just the beginning. They have two other film projects — “My Favorite Movie” and “What Separates Us”— in various stages of completion and have ideas for sequels to “Crimson Winter.”

They are also launching an Internet film of “Romeo and Juliet” they did with Montana Shakespeare Company. On the back burner are two other powerful stories they want to put on film.

“We just want to make powerful works of art that inspire people,” he said.

Using all resources

“We’ve never paid ourselves,” said Ferriter. “Every amount of money we raised goes into the endeavor. It’s been our rite of passage.

“Making an independent film is not easy to do,” said Carroll Theatre Director Chuck Driscoll, who taught and mentored Ferriter. “It takes a great deal of sacrifice. A lot of those qualities pave the way to success. He (Ferriter) believes strongly in his work. He’s going after his vision.”

“The film looks phenomenal,” said Denny Staggs, film commissioner with the Montana Film Office, which has worked with Interwoven Studios.

“The energy is great,” he said. “And the location value is phenomenal.”

The Elkhorn Mountains in the film compare favorably with New Zealand’s scenery in “The

Hobbit," he said.

"What they got for \$400,000 looks way more than that. That's what's great about their project. They knew their locations, and they used their known asset," Staggs said.

His film office has worked with Ferriter and his crew to get their films completed and out into theaters, assisting them with funding and distribution advice.

He wants Montana's young filmmakers, like Ferriter and his friends, to get the help they need to stay in Montana and make films, he said.

The office used to focus on luring Hollywood filmmakers to come here, he said, but now it works "inside out."

"We're just excited that talented filmmakers like these guys want to make films in Montana."

If you go:

What: Premiere of "Crimson Winter"

When and Where: 6:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 24, at the Myrna Loy Center, 15 N. Ewing

Additional film screenings: Jan. 25, 26, 28 and 30

Cost: \$8 adult, \$7 students and seniors, discount for Carroll students

Contact: 443-0287

After party: Following the premier Jan. 24 at the Rathskeller at the Montana Club

Also: 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23, talk at Carroll College Campus Center, lower level

Note: Film is for mature audiences

Montana Film Office: 841-2879