

The Vampire Bat



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"The Vampire Bat" starts out fabulously, with eerie images of large bats fluttering through the dark night and a very atmospheric portrayal of a petrified little town with its superstitious inhabitants under the spell of a serial killer who seemingly drains all the blood out of his/her victims' bodies. The opening sequences of this film (the first 15 minutes or so) is pure vintage horror, with a suspenseful introduction to the story (extended speeches with a detailed description of the killer's modus operandi) and a great use of set pieces and interiors that already proved their effectiveness earlier (the same scenery was used in Universal classics, like "The Old Dark House" for example). Very regrettable, however, is that the story quickly becomes tedious and predictable and the only element left to admire near the end is the sublime acting by a multi-talented cast. In the remote town of Kleinschloss (very cool name, by the way), they keep on finding bodies with not a single drop of blood left in them. The scared and superstitious villagers are convinced that there's a vampire in their midst (it wouldn't be the first time, according to the history books) and the prime suspect is the village-idiot, Hermann, who shows a bizarre affection towards bats. The only straight-thinking authority figure is inspector Karl Brettschneider, but even he can't come up with

a rational explanation for the murders. If you're somewhat familiar with the roles and careers of eminent horror actors in the 30's, you know who the real culprit is right away and even if you're not it's not hard to guess, since the clues are numberless. "The Vampire Bat" isn't a very efficient whodunit mystery, but it definitely remains a must for fans of classic horror films since it brings together names like Fay Wray (immortal for her role in "King Kong"), Lionel Atwill ("Mystery of the Wax Museum"), Melvyn Douglas (Polanski's "The Tenant") and Dwight Fry. This latter is my personal favorite cast member here, mainly because he's a very underrated actor who always stood in the shadows of more important horror veterans. His performance of Herman the nut is truly terrific.

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