

Detroit is for Lovers

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Scrolling *Time Magazine's* list of "The 100 Best Movies of the Past 10 Decades," one would not think to find auteur Jim Jarmusch's night-dwelling vampire romance *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) amongst the likes of Quentin Tarantino and Greta Gerwig, set to represent the 2010s.

Flying off the coattails of pop culture's teenage vampire hysteria, Jarmusch set out to represent the group in a different light (or lack thereof), simply as people who just so happen to be vampires and in love. Yet, in this film we find a more refined and adult take on vampire love. We find Jarmusch's vampires, a husband called Adam (Tom Hiddleston) and his wife Eve (Tilda Swinton), living separate lives in Detroit and Tangier, respectively. Adam, a dark brooding enigma contributing to the Detroit rock 'n' roll scene from behind the walls of his dilapidated Brush Park home, is contemplating what it means to be truly immortal and trying to evade the "zombies" (what Adam so kindly calls the human population). Eve, however, lives a quiet life in Tangier. She is a whimsical, well-read woman, mentored by a vampiric Christopher Marlowe (John Hurt). While on the phone, Adam fumbles around his somber, antique-filled home, Eve hears the clangings and lovingly calls him "my old pack rat". Eve's face is glowing on an old wood-cabinet tube TV, presumably from the 1950s, as she lays in bed Face timing with Adam from her iPhone5 she senses her husband's ennui and reluctantly makes the trek to Detroit. She chooses to fill her luggage only with books she thinks may save Adam from his moral despair, because why would a vampire need clothes?

“So this is your wilderness? Detroit.”



The wilderness of Detroit is probably the most idyllic hideout for a vampire trying to stay off the map. Between its use of Georgian and neo-gothic architecture, the doom and gloom of empty neighborhoods abandoned by the 2008 housing crisis, and the rich art and music hub it once boasted - the appeal is real. Walking down a dimly-lit sidewalk, guarded by a tall wrought-iron fence, Eve questions Adam’s choice to stay in this city, but one can already feel that Eve is reveling in the foreboding darkness that only Detroit harbors. Adam shows off the Packard Plant and in typical Detroit-dweller fashion, suggests the two go for a drive. Viewers are casted with the dark shadows of empty buildings and a lack of streetlight, but ultimately a lack of human or “zombie” existence. He shows off Jack White’s childhood home, suggests they go see the Motown Museum, and ultimately end up at The Michigan Building...”and now it’s a car park.”

Adam has a “zombie” confidant named Ian (Anton Yelchin) who tries to help him stave off the local “zombies” showing up at his doorstep demanding to know whose music is shaking up the local scene. For obvious reasons, vampires are meant to be tastemakers, but never share in the fame. They can live forever, but Adam no longer wants to be alive. Just as Eve arrives to renew meaning into his life, their reconnection summons the “blood sister” of Eve, Ava (Mia Wasikowska), who is charismatic in style but egocentric in nature. Hailing from “zombie central” also known as Los Angeles, she is essentially everything Adam hates.

Ava’s visit doesn’t last long as she selfishly “drinks” Ian, causing Adam and Eve to send her back to zombieland. This tragic circumstance required the couple to flee Detroit, so they head back to Tangier where they are confronted with the death of Eve’s long-standing mentor who had fallen victim to some tainted blood. The two roam the streets of Tangier, mourning their declining morality and connection to the current state of the world. They are tired, bloodthirsty, and feeling quite savage. They quickly become faced with an identity crisis, contemplating a return to a much truer vampiric nature that the pair had seemingly fought against for quite some time, feeling that way of living was just “so fucking 15th century.”

Adam found a home in Detroit because of everything it represents. Detroit is an underdog. Detroit is intimidating. Detroit is what you make of it. It is dark and inspiring, disappointing and lonely. Romanticized and vilified time and time again, much like vampires. Its personality shines in places where the sun does not. There’s a history that lies deep within the city - and it is palpable. It takes a truly special being, like Adam, or Ohio-native and Detroit phenom Jarmusch, to begin to re-frame this often misread city. Jarmusch understood what a person like Adam would be doing in the city of Detroit, and understood the city of Detroit enough to know which kind of person’s influence would make a mark upon it.

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