

'Vampire's Assistant' OK for 13 year olds

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Although flawed, the new film "Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant" adequately serves its intended audience of 12 year old boys.

"The Vampire's Assistant" is based on the second story in Darren Shan's multivolume book series.

Teenager Darren and his friend Steve receive an invitation to a freak show called the Cirque du Freak. Darren sneaks out of his house and the two boys enjoy the show's collection of strange performers, including a bearded lady, a wolf man and a reptile boy who only wants to play music.

Darren steals a precious spider from the circus' master of ceremonies Larten Crepsley. Steve is bitten by the spider and Darren returns to the circus to get an antidote. Crepsley



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agrees to help Darren as on the condition that Darren becomes his assistant. Crepsley is a vampire and needs an assistant to take care of mat-

ters while he is asleep in his coffin.

Darren agrees, but has to face the consequences of being a half-vampire. He must leave his home and never see his family again.

Darren soon learns that the vampire world is divided into two camps. Crepsley's side has a policy of not killing humans for blood. Vampanese, however, have no issue with killing humans for blood. Tensions between the two groups has

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been growing and Darren finds himself in the middle of the impending war.

The film is good for children who are outgrowing R.L. Stine's "Goosebumps" tales, but are too young for the gore and mean spiritedness of films like "Saw." It has a few frightening scenes, but is generally more like the freak show in the film itself, more bizarre than scary.

The cast is excellent, with Riley giving an enjoyable performance as Darren's mentor.

Caris Massoglia is likeable as Darren and avoids the pitfalls of the current vampire trends by presenting his character as a normal kid who just happens to be a vampire. Willem Dafoe has a wonderful cameo, playing a character that seems plucked out of a 1930s movie.

There are two problems that plague "The Vampire's Assistant." First is the pacing of the story. While there were some good ideas and a great cast, the film drags and fails to develop any tension.

The second is a condition that

has surfaced in many films since the success of the "Harry Potter" series. These movies are made with the intent of having multiple sequels. Again, this leads to a lack of tension. Instead of a complete movie, the audience is given an episode, which means the movie does not have a concrete conclusion. This would be forgivable if it had managed to build up a cliffhanger ending, but it does not.

While there are some likeable aspects of the film, I cannot recommend it to anyone older than 13.