

FILM REVIEW

# Quebecois comedy *Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person* fails to draw blood

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- **Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person**
- **Directed by:** Ariane Louis-Seize
- **Written by:** Ariane Louis-Seize and Christine Doyon
- **Starring:** Sara Montpetit, Félix-Antoine Bénéard and Steve Laplante
- **Classification:** N/A; 90 minutes
- **Opens:** In select theatres Oct. 13, including the TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto

There are a number of sharp gags in Québécois filmmaker Ariane Louis-Seize's new dark comedy – though the best one is right up there in the title. *Humanist Vampire Seeking Consenting Suicidal Person* (*Vampire humaniste cherche suicidaire consentant*) is a hell of a thing to call your movie, doubly so when it's your feature directorial debut. The question is whether the actual film lives up to the quirky gutsiness promised by its packaging. And while Louis-Seize's work isn't exactly a case of false advertising, it is ultimately a rather vampiric example of biting off more than your title can chew.

The film opens ambitiously, setting up a hidden supernatural world existing just beneath Montreal in which vampires have access to their own specialized dentists and behavioural psychologists – experts desperately needed by the parents of Sasha (Lilas-Rose Cantin as a child, Sara Montpetit as a teen), an innocent young monster who just cannot bring herself to hunt and kill the humans whom she needs to feed herself.

Her sympathetic father (Steve LaPlante) and frustrated mother (Sophie Caideux) give Sasha bags of blood that she sips on like juice boxes, but after a few decades of this charade (vampires age differently than humans, with Sasha's high-schooler appearance masking the fact that she's 62) the parents reluctantly cut their daughter off.

Still burdened with an overwhelming sense of morality, Sasha seeks balance in her life while living with her more brazen vamp cousin, Denise (Noémie O'Farrell), who thinks nothing of bringing home random McGill bros to feast upon. But just as Sasha is fearing that her undead existence is at a crossroad, she happens upon Paul (Félix-Antoine Bénéard), a depressed teen who is looking to die on his own terms – and who just might provide Sasha the ethically sourced meal that she's long been craving.

That's as entertaining a set-up as there ever has been – pitched somewhere between Taika Waititi's *What We Do in the Shadows*, the canon of Wes Anderson and a sticky-sweet John Hughes coming-of-age film – but Louis-Seize doesn't quite know where to go beyond the nifty conceit. The script abounds with tiny, wonderful details about Sasha's family – including how Sasha ruins one of Denise's conquests, leaving her cousin saddled with an un-deadbeat boyfriend – but it also has an air of missed opportunities, swerving around or ignoring so many potential narrative and emotional avenues. The picture ultimately feels like a great short film ballooned to feature length for no particularly good reason perhaps other than genre flicks can be easily sold around the world these days, no matter how stretched the ambitions.

That secret vampire society world flicked at early on is abandoned (though Louis-Seize and her production-design crew capture Montreal in an admirably surreal evening glow). Characters are either cartoons or lacking crucial nuance – there is no discussion, for instance, about whether Sasha has any qualms about drinking those sippy-cup servings of blood that must have come from some poor victim or another.

Meanwhile, Paul's suicidal tendencies are treated more like a cute foible than a complex emotional layer, which unintentionally feeds the oxymoronism of the title. (Can a suicidal person be considered capable of giving consent to be murdered?) These might seem like quibbles, but they only came to mind because too little else in the film offered anything of greater intrigue.

Montpetit, best known for last year's haunting Quebecois drama *Falcon Lake*, does a fine job transcending the Wednesday Addams vibes that Sasha feels cribbed from, and the actress has natural chemistry with Benard. But even when sparks fly between the two cross-starred lovers (that is, Sasha has a tough time when sharing the space with a crucifix), it is hard to fall too truly, madly, deeply into their world.

Next time around, though, there's a good bet that the emerging filmmaker Louis-Seize will truly draw blood.