

# Lone Star Film Fest movie preview: *Let the Right One In* (Låt den rätte komma in)

*Bloody subarctic Hell!*

By John P. Meyer

There is so much weird and wonderful about the Swedish vampire movie, *Let the Right One In*, that it's hard to know just where to begin telling you about it.

So I'll begin at the beginning and let the snowflakes fall where they may, which is: on the opening credits.

When we first meet 12-year-old Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant), the dreamy, socially-stunted kid is standing in front of his bedroom window, staring down at the snow-covered courtyard three floors below. It's dark, and we observe Oskar as he stares through his own reflection into the frozen night. He's shirtless, and his boyish physique is rendered delicate and transparent by the reflected image. He's solid and ethereal at once.

Below, in the street, a taxi discharges its occupants and their luggage. It's a middle-aged man with an air of weariness about him, and a smaller, younger individual (a girl?) who precedes him into the building as he gamely shuttles their luggage up onto the portico. Upon reaching their third floor apartment (next door to Oskar's, it turns out), this sad looking fellow (Per Ragnar, as Håkan) proceeds to cover the window with cardboard.

Oskar, who is pestered (to put it lightly) by a pack of bullies at school, is playing by himself in the frosty courtyard the next evening, stabbing at a tree with a knife, pretending to wreak savage vengeance on his tormentors. Suddenly he notices a presence behind him on the drifted-

over jungle gym: it's a young girl of about his own age, whom he discovers to be his new next-door neighbor. Eli (the preternaturally-talented Lina Leandersson, in her first film role) will end up playing a starring role in Oskar's heretofore solitary existence.

Turns out the introverted Oskar may be a **Dexter**-in-waiting, judging by his scrapbook of newspaper clippings detailing grisly murders and accompanied by advertisements for an assortment of wicked-looking knives. This kid needs to get out more. (Or maybe not.)

Oskar's nascent anti-social proclivities pale beside the fully-developed ones evidenced by Håkan, who demonstrates an hysterical ineptitude at the craft of homicide by gassing a forest hiker into submission, hanging him upside down from a tree and proceeding to slit his throat in order to funnel his lifeblood into a five-gallon jug. Only, it's not exactly an out-of-the-way spot, as we discover upon the appearance of an inquisitive poodle followed closely by its human companions. Håkan flees the scene, leaving behind the bloody product of his ill-conceived labors.

As a result of her guardian's failure to deliver, Eli is forced to obtain her sustenance organically, as it were, by attacking a late-retiring bar patron within plain sight of his apartment block - where, as luck would have it, a reclusive gent is taking his ease in the frigid balcony overlooking the plaza while Eli drains the chap dry. Rather than going to the police (who are never anywhere in evidence), this fellow shares his wild tale with his fellow bar patrons the next evening, by which time all that remains of the luckless victim are bloodstains buried under snow.

The repentant Håkan, meanwhile, has sledded the shell of the person formerly known as Jocke (Mikael Rahm) to a neighboring frozen lakeside, where emergent waste water has thawed a pool large enough to dispose of the corpus. Which will lead, at a later date, to his recovery in the form of a Jocke-sicle.

Oskar and Eli grow ever closer, with she counseling him to fight back against the leader of the bullies bedeviling him - a despicable, charismatic youngster named Conny (Patrik Rydmark). When Oskar fights back, it's with a single-minded intensity that takes the little Aryan bastard (and his gang of pale-skinned minions) by complete surprise. Touché, Oskar!

Oskar, being an observant sort, can't help but notice that Eli is a little strange: when he buys her candy, she cautiously chews a piece and then immediately hurls. And of course there's that whole "emerging only after dark" thing. When she shows up balanced on the sill of his bedroom window - and has to receive his explicit permission before gaining entry - he's pretty much got the whole thing figured out. Oskar fears Eli not at all, and positively relishes her presence - even when she's spattered in the blood of her victims. (Talk about your wet kisses!)

One of Eli's entrees - a weatherbeaten barfly named Virginia (Ika Nord) - is "saved" by the slightly-tardy intervention of her ambivalent companion. Leading to her stomach-rumbling craving for... she's not sure at first exactly what. But Virginia is a quick learner and soon discovers that cats have a particular and violent aversion to vampires. (Who knew?)

Events reach a climax when Eli - deprived of her guardian (in spectacularly grisly fashion) - is forced to flee Stockholm, and Oskar, for good. Or is she?

The dream-like atmosphere of director Tomas Alfredson's pitch-dark film is bolstered by its frozen-in-place setting, as is its claustrophobic tension. There's an edgy adolescent sexuality thread running through the narrative, though never distastefully so. And if you think you're familiar with all the imagined manifestations of vampirism, think

again. (For instance, you'll learn what happens if a vampire enters the domicile of a person who has not invited him or her into their presence. Ouch.)

This devilishly clever film has already been optioned for an English language remake, but don't wait to see whether some American director can do justice to the material: it's brilliant just as it is.