

Email addresses were offered up before a rapid fire of missives were exchanged in which they explained that both women regularly “fed” on others’ blood. How often? No more than once a month came the reply, quickly followed up by the disclaimer that health issues were dealt with by blood tests. Then I was invited to the “deed”. I asked the girls what it was like. “Awesome,” they replied.

I logged on to the vampire website *sanguinarius.org* for a more articulate run-down. “When I feed, I am very focused on only that; it is not my main concern, it’s my only concern. The taste is beyond delightful ... It gives a sense of peace, of wellbeing, of euphoria, of relaxation and energisation [sic] at the same time ... It’s akin to being drunk almost, but different. Drunk, without the sluggish clumsiness of inebriation ... As for what I’m thinking during feeding, not much. I’m focused on the feeding, almost entirely, wanting more, wishing it were gushing down my throat.”

There’s no denying vampirism’s contemporary cultural cachet. Take *Twilight*, Mormon mum Stephanie Meyer’s vampire romance novel which has sold some 17 million copies and been translated into 37 languages since it was first published in 2005, and which has also spawned a series of films. Then there’s *Six Feet Under* writer Alan Ball’s HBO series *True Blood*, the *Underworld* trilogy and Diablo Cody’s upcoming film *Jennifer’s Body*.

This surge in activity has not taken place in a media vacuum, however. A simple Google search elicits thousands of sites catering to the vampiric underworld, from guides for the uninitiated through to in-depth manuals on the practises that define vampirism. Some of these are written like macabre public service announcements which warn of the dangers of sharing needles and the importance of sterile conditions. One notes, “If you’re worried about accusations of mental instability, DO NOT cut your forearms. Upper arms are harder to find a vein in, but at least they don’t scream suicide attempt.”

At sites such as *sanguinarius.org*, the vampire community offers advice on their common dilemmas such as “Dealing with bloodthirst” and “Blood substitutes”. On the latter score, one participant writes, “I hate to say it, but if you cannot find fresh blood, you may just have to ride it out and bear it. Else buy some larger rodents they sell at pet shops to feed snakes with, and feed from those.”

While much of this vampire-centric activity is focused on what’s going on in the US, where vampire nights are a feature of the Goth clubbing scene, Australian noticeboards are similarly festooned with enquires about local versions. A quick trawl through *vampirepersonals.net* reveals a significant number of Aussies looking for their own prince or princess of darkness.

“The Australian vampire scene is definitely growing,” says Sydney-based photographer and artist Avelina De Moray, who has spent several years chronicling the subculture. “There’s a beauty, romance and mystery to vampire culture that other supernatural genres just don’t have. While shows like *True*



Vampire art, such as *Wretched Immortal* by Sydney-based artist and photographer Avelina De Moray, depicts the “beauty, romance and mystery” of the subculture.

Blood and *Buffy* know their stuff, there’s a poetry, maturity and eroticism that has been diluted in the current generation of vampire media. I view myself as a bit of a purist. *Twilight* is just like *Dawson’s Creek* with a bit of a vampire scene, but without the blood, the fangs or the sexuality.”

De Moray’s work is characterised by fierce female vampires poised to feed on one another. Fangs are bared, talons crimson and the images have an undeniable air of sexuality. “There’s an intimacy and romance in the [vampire] act that’s beyond sexuality as we know it,” she says, before adding, “but I’ve never been involved in bloodletting rituals. For a start, there’s the health issues and I have no interest in trying it. But there are those who do.”

Which brings us neatly back to Emma and Rachel who kindly emailed the day after the feeding to check if I was okay, and once again outline the entirely consensual nature of their vampire feeding. “How many others are out there doing this?” I ask. “More than you think,” came the reply.

Such a claim can be backed up by the litany of “vampiric” crimes which have made Australian headlines over the past few decades, the most intriguing of which is the case of self-dubbed “vampire gigolo”, Shane Chartres-Abbott. In 2002, the baby-faced male prostitute who specialised in rough sex with both male and female clients, had been hired by a 30-year-old

“There’s an intimacy in the vampire act that’s beyond sex”

woman for sex at the Hotel Saville in Melbourne’s South Yarra. She told police that Chartres-Abbott told her he was a 200-year-old vampire who drank blood to stay young and had assaulted her with such horrific brutality, that when hotel staff found her bloodied and unconscious in the shower, she had not only been repeatedly raped, but had teeth marks in her right thigh and was missing a 5cm section of her tongue which police believed Chartres-Abbott bit off. In a further macabre twist, Chartres-Abbott, 28, was gunned down on his way to court the following year by a pair of hit men believed to be acting on the orders of the woman’s ex-partner, Mark Adrian Perry. Perry is still on the run and has a \$1 million bounty on his head. →

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