

FAMOUS MOVIE MONSTERS™

MEET

DRACULA



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CHAPTER 3

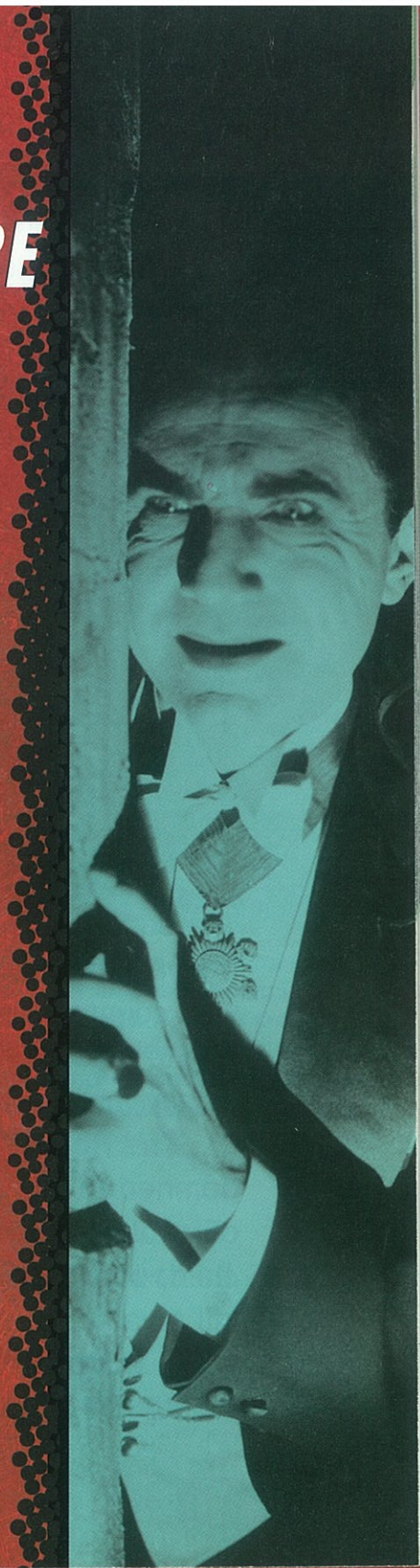
MYTH OF THE VAMPIRE

The Count Dracula we are familiar with today came directly from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*. However, dark tales of vampires existed for hundreds of years before Stoker's novel was even published.

As do many of today's legendary film monsters, *Dracula* has deep roots in folklore and legend of old Europe and Asia. Many of these stories had religious undertones, where the vampire represented the evils and mysteries of sin and life beyond the grave. Vampires were widely considered to be creatures that return from the dead to drain the blood or energy from the living. The description of these creatures varied from culture to culture. In the Far East, they appeared as zombielike creatures with pink hair. As the centuries passed, the vampire myth moved west and into eastern Europe where it transformed itself into the myths we know today.

SLAVIC VAMPIRES

The vampires of eastern Europe first emerged around the eighth century AD in



Slavic countries such as Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania. At the time, Christianity was fighting for dominance over Europe. Here, the vampire legend began to immerse itself in religion, as Christians used the dark beings to help explain the unexplainable. Possible causes of vampirism began to arise as part of this folklore. Some of the explanations for vampirism included being conceived on certain days or being improperly buried. Likewise, rules for preventing people from becoming vampires, or killing them once they did, also began to arise. These legends included placing a cross in the coffin of the dead, tacking the dead person's clothes to the coffin, or piercing the body with thorns or stakes. Some of these beliefs continued with the modern legend of the vampire.

ROMANIAN VAMPIRES

The eastern European country of Romania is home to many of the vampire legends we are familiar with today. Romania is a vast country that stands as a last outpost before Europe gives way to Asia. Romania is also home to the province of Transylvania, the traditional home of Count Dracula.

The Romanians developed many causes for being damned to vampirism. These causes included being born out of wedlock, dying before baptism, being born as the seventh child, or, of course, being bitten by an existing vampire. To kill a vampire, the Romanians believed, one must drive a stake through its body, decapitate the corpse, and stuff the mouth full of garlic. Many of these Romanian beliefs would

be used in Bram Stoker's famous novel.

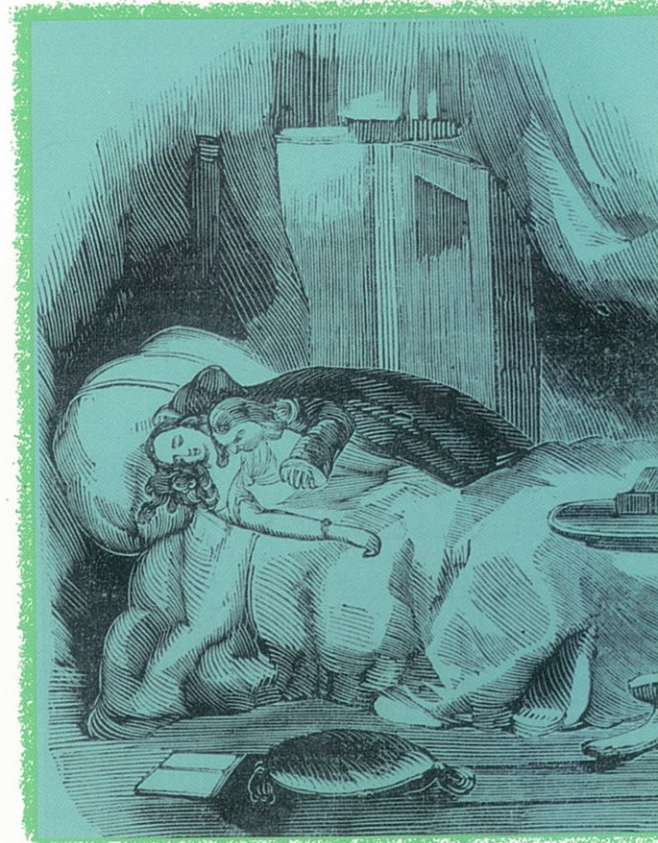
VAMPIRES IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Vampire tales in literature began appearing in France and England in the early nineteenth century. Englishman Dr. John Polidori first popularized the English vampire tale in his 1819 novel, *The Vampyre*. Several versions of the vampire story followed, most notably, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's 1871 novella, *Carmilla*. This piece would have a profound influence on a young Irishman named Bram Stoker.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

Bram Stoker was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1847, and suffered through a sickly childhood. As a young man, Stoker was inspired by Le Fanu's tales. By his early twenties, Stoker had embarked on a writing career of his own.

In 1875, Stoker published his first set of horror tales entitled *The Chain of Destiny*. As his writing career began,



Shown above is an illustration from *Varney the Vampire or the Feast of Blood*, a penny dreadful circa 1800. The term "penny dreadful" was used to describe violent crime or adventure novels. Vampire stories were popular in nineteenth-century literature. These tales inspired young Bram Stoker.



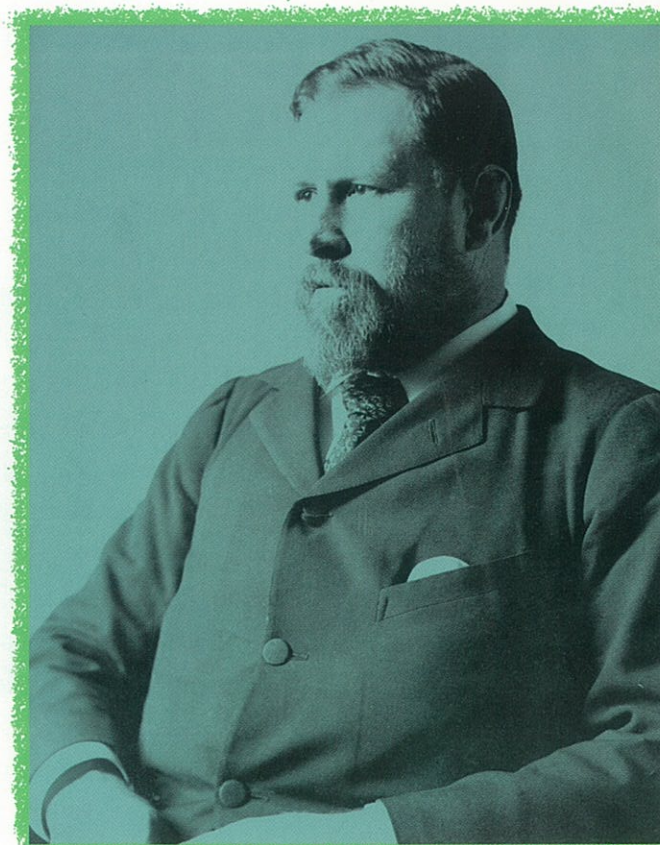
Pictured are the ruins of Princely Court, the home of Vlad Dracula, located in Targoviste, Romania. Vlad Dracula, also known as Vlad the Impaler, was the real-life inspiration for the Count Dracula made famous in Bram Stoker's novel. Though he did not suck the blood out of his victims, his reign as ruler of Wallachia, a Romanian province, was a bloody one in which he became famous for impaling his enemies.

Stoker took a job writing theater reviews for the *Dublin Mail*. During this time, he befriended the acclaimed stage actor Sir Henry Irving. In 1878, Stoker took over managing Irving's stage company, the London Lyceum. Here, Stoker would find the passion and inspiration to begin work on his greatest tale.

In the early 1890s, Stoker began work on his masterpiece, originally entitled *The Un-Dead*. The novel was

finally published as *Dracula* in 1897 and almost immediately cast a spell over the reading public. The novel uses an epistolary narrative device, which weaves a series of diary and journal entries from the main characters. This narrative allows the reader to get inside the mind of each character as the story unfolds and the characters realize the horror they are facing—the horror that Count Dracula the vampire is walking among them. The story took several years to write and went through many changes. One such change was Stoker's original name for his vampire—Count Vampyre. Then the author discovered a little-known historical figure, Vlad the Impaler.

Stoker's novel dove deeply into the psyche of Victorian England. To this day, scholars argue over the purpose of Stoker's work. Some say it was a religious allegory of cultural paranoia that evils were encroaching on Christian Europe. Others say that the book was a look into the darker aspects of the human mind.



This photograph of Bram Stoker was taken around 1900. The Irishman wrote many novels, short stories, and essays, but he is most famous for *Dracula*. Though numerous writers since Stoker have expanded the vampire myth, they have all been influenced by his work.

VLAD TEPEȘ: THE REAL DRACULA?

Today, most of the vampires we see in the movies draw their inspiration from Stoker's book. But Stoker himself needed inspiration to create his Dark Prince. He found this inspiration in a minor fifteenth-century Romanian ruler named Vlad Tepeș, better known as Vlad the Impaler. Vlad would have become a minor footnote in European history if it were not for Stoker's book. Today Vlad the Impaler is thought of as the "real" Count Dracula.

Vlad Tepeș was born in 1431 and later ruled over a Romanian province called Wallachia, near Transylvania. Although Vlad the Impaler was not the blood-sucking vampire we see in movies, he did have a taste for blood.

At the time, Romania stood as the outpost that defended Christian Europe from Islam in the Middle East. Vlad followed in his father's footsteps as a passionate defender of Christianity. When the Islamic Turks killed his father, Vlad became vengeful and his reign became bloody. After killing his enemies, Vlad would impale their bodies on stakes surrounding his castle. Sometimes his enemies were impaled while still alive, which led to a very slow and painful death. According to legend, Vlad the Impaler was known to set up a banquet and dine around his victims.

But the connection to Stoker's Count Dracula does not stop there. Vlad's father, also named Vlad, belonged to the Order of the Dragon. This organization of the Roman Catholic Church was dedicated to destroying rivals in eastern Europe. From the Order of the Dragon, the elder Vlad adopted the name Dracul, which means "dragon" or "devil" in Romanian. Hence, his son would adopt the name Dracula, with the "a" added to show lineage.

Ultimately, Vlad the Impaler's short yet bloody reign got the best of him. He was overthrown twice and was eventually killed by one of his own subjects. Nearly 400 years later, Stoker would raise Vlad the Impaler from the dead and immortalize him within the pages of the chilling *Dracula*.



Whatever Stoker's reasons for writing *Dracula*, the book had an immediate impact on the general public. As soon as word spread through the country about this dark and chilling new novel, Stoker and others began to realize the theatrical value of his tale. The legend of Dracula would soon leave the pages of a novel and begin to be portrayed in dramatic readings, on the theatrical stage, and eventually on film. Stoker himself would not see the potential of his tale realized. Stoker died in 1912, leaving behind one of the most important books of the late nineteenth century. His work would also stand as the ultimate authority on the vampire tale, where his characters would be re-created repeatedly to weave the wicked tale of Count Dracula.