

Overview

Count Dracula is the title and primary character of Bram Stoker's 1897 gothic horror novel *Dracula*. He is considered to be both the prototypical and the archetypal vampire in subsequent works of fiction. He is also depicted in the novel to be the origin of werewolf legends. Some aspects of the character are believed to have been inspired by the 15th-century Wallachian Prince Vlad III the Impaler, who was also known as "Dracula". Other character aspects have been added or altered in subsequent popular fictional works. The character has subsequently appeared frequently in popular culture, from films to animated media to breakfast cereals.

Stoker's creation

Bram Stoker's novel takes the form of an epistolary tale, in which Count Dracula's characteristics, powers, abilities and weaknesses are narrated by multiple narrators, from different perspectives.

Count Dracula is an undead, centuries-old vampire, and a Transylvanian nobleman who claims to be a Székely descended from Attila the Hun. He inhabits a decaying castle in the Carpathian Mountains near the Borgo Pass. Unlike the vampires of Eastern European folklore, which are portrayed as repulsive, corpse-like creatures, Dracula wears a veneer of aristocratic charm. In his conversations with Jonathan Harker, he reveals himself as deeply proud of his boyar heritage and nostalgic for the past, which he admits have become only a memory of heroism, honour and valour in modern times.

Early life

Details of his early life are obscure, but it is mentioned "he was in life a most wonderful man. Soldier, statesman, and alchemist (which was the highest development of the science knowledge of his time). He had a mighty brain, a learning beyond compare, and a heart that knew no fear and no remorse... there was no branch of knowledge of his time that he did not essay." He studied the black arts at the academy of Scholomance in the Carpathian Mountains, overlooking the town of Sibiu (also known as Hermannstadt) and has a deep knowledge of alchemy and magic. Taking up arms, as befitting his rank and status as a voivode, he led troops against the Turks across the Danube. According to his nemesis Abraham Van Helsing, "He must indeed have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkey-land. If it be so, then was he no common man: for in that time, and for centuries after, he was spoken of as the cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest of the sons of the land beyond the forest." Dead and buried in a great tomb in the chapel of his castle, Dracula returns from death as a vampire and lives for several centuries in his castle with three terrifyingly beautiful female vampires beside him.

Narrative

Short story

In "Dracula's Guest", the narrative follows an unnamed Englishman traveller as he wanders around Munich before leaving for Transylvania. It is Walpurgis Night and the young Englishman foolishly leaves his hotel, in spite of the coachman's warnings, and wanders through a dense forest alone. Along the way, he feels that he is being watched by a tall and thin stranger (possibly Count Dracula).

The short story climaxes in an old graveyard, where the Englishman encounters a sleeping female vampire called Countess Dolingen in a marble tomb with a large iron stake driven into it. This malevolent and beautiful vampire awakens from her marble bier to conjure a snowstorm before being struck by lightning and returning to her eternal prison. However, the Englishman's troubles are not quite over, as he is dragged away by an unseen force and rendered unconscious. He awakens to find a "gigantic" wolf lying on his chest and licking at his throat; however, the wolf merely keeps him warm and protects him until help arrives. When the Englishman is finally taken back to his hotel, a telegram awaits him from his expectant host Dracula, with a warning about "dangers from snow and wolves and night".

Novel

As the Dracula novel begins in the late 19th century, Dracula acts on a long-contemplated plan for world domination, and infiltrates London to begin his reign of terror. He summons Jonathan Harker, a newly qualified English solicitor, to provide legal support for a real estate transaction overseen by Harker's employer. Dracula at first charms Harker with his cordiality and historical knowledge, and even rescues him from the clutches of the three female vampires in the castle. In truth, however, Dracula merely wishes to keep Harker alive long enough to complete the legal transaction and to learn as much as possible about England.

Dracula leaves his castle and boards a Russian ship, the *Demeter*, taking along with him 50 boxes of Transylvanian soil, which he needs in order to regain his strength and rest during daylight. During the voyage to Whitby, a coastal town in northern England, he sustains himself on the ship's crew members. Only one body is later found, that of the captain, who is found tied up to the ship's helm. The captain's log is recovered and tells of strange events that had taken place during the ship's journey. Dracula leaves the ship in the form of a dog.

Soon the Count is menacing Harker's fiancée, Wilhelmina "Mina" Murray, and her friend, Lucy Westenra. There is also a notable link between Dracula and Renfield, a patient in an insane asylum overseen by John Seward, who is compelled to consume insects, spiders, birds, and other creatures—in ascending order of size—in order to absorb their "life force". Renfield acts as a kind of sensor, reacting to Dracula's proximity and supplying clues accordingly. Dracula begins to visit Lucy's bed chamber on a nightly basis, draining her of blood while simultaneously infecting her with the curse of vampirism. Not knowing the cause for Lucy's deterioration, her three suitors - Seward, Arthur Holmwood and Quincey Morris - call upon Seward's mentor, the Dutch doctor Abraham Van Helsing. Van Helsing soon deduces her condition's supernatural origins, but does not speak out. Despite an attempt at keeping the vampire at bay with garlic, Dracula attacks Lucy's house one final time, killing her mother and transforming Lucy herself into one of the undead.

Harker escapes Dracula's castle and returns to England, barely alive and deeply traumatized. On Seward's suggestion, Mina seeks Van Helsing's assistance in assessing Harker's health. She reads his journal and passes it along to Van Helsing. This unfolds the first clue to the identity of Lucy's assailant, which later prompts Mina to collect all of the events of Dracula's appearance in news articles, saved letters, newspaper clippings and the journals of each member of the group. This assists the group in investigating Dracula's movements and later discovering that Renfield's behaviour is directly influenced by Dracula. They then discover that Dracula has purchased a residence just next door to Seward's. The group gathers intelligence to track the location of Dracula for the purpose of destroying him.

After the undead Lucy attacks several children, Van Helsing, Seward, Holmwood and Morris enter her crypt and destroy her to save her soul. Later, Harker joins them and the party work to discover Dracula's intentions. Harker aids the party in tracking down the locations of the boxes to the various residences of Dracula and discovers that Dracula purchased multiple real estate properties 'over the counter' throughout the North, South, East and West sides of London under the alias 'Count De Ville'. Dracula's main plan was to move each of his 50 boxes of earth to his various properties in order to arrange multiple lairs throughout and around the perimeter of London.

The party pries open each of the graves, places wafers of Sacramental bread within each of them, and seals them shut. This deprives the Count of his ability to seek safety in those boxes. Dracula gains entry into Seward's residence by coercing an invitation out of Renfield. As he attempts to enter the room in which Harker and Mina are staying, Renfield tries to stop him; Dracula then mortally wounds him. With his dying breath, Renfield tells Seward and Van Helsing that Dracula is after Mina. Van Helsing and Seward discover Dracula biting Mina then forcing her to drink his blood. The group repel Dracula using crucifixes and sacramental bread, forcing Dracula to flee by turning into a dark vapor. The party continue to hunt Dracula to search for his remaining lairs. Although Dracula's 'baptism' of Mina grants him a telepathic link to her, it backfires when Van Helsing hypnotizes Mina and uses her supernatural link with Dracula to track him as he flees back to Transylvania.

The heroes follow Dracula back to Transylvania, and in a climactic battle with Dracula's gypsy bodyguards, finally destroy him. Despite the popular image of Dracula having a stake driven through his heart to kill him, Mina's narrative describes his decapitation by Harker's kukri while Morris simultaneously pierced his heart with a Bowie knife (Mina Harker's Journal, 6 November, Dracula Chapter 27). His body then turns into dust, but not before Mina sees an expression of peace on his face.