

# COUNT ON HIM

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

The Gothic horror novel “Dracula” by Irish writer Bram Stoker was first published in London 125 years ago. Stoker’s story was an artful blend of terror, sexually tinged imagery, legends and historical events.

His work has gone on to popularize an entre genre of vampire books, movies, comics and TV shows.

## The author: Bram Stoker

Abraham Stoker grew up a sickly child in Dublin — he couldn’t stand or walk until age 7. He overcame his weakness to become an athlete by his college years. He worked as a drama critic for the Dublin Evening Mail and, for nearly 30 years, served as a personal assistant to his hero, actor Henry Irving, and as the business manager for Irving’s 2,100-seat London theater, the Lyceum.

Stoker published his first book — an instructional manual for legal administration — in 1879 at age 32. He then turned to romance novels and, of course, his Gothic horror masterpiece, “Dracula.” Stoker went on to write 13 novels and to publish three collections of short stories before he died following a stroke in 1912 at age 64.



Bram Stoker in 1906

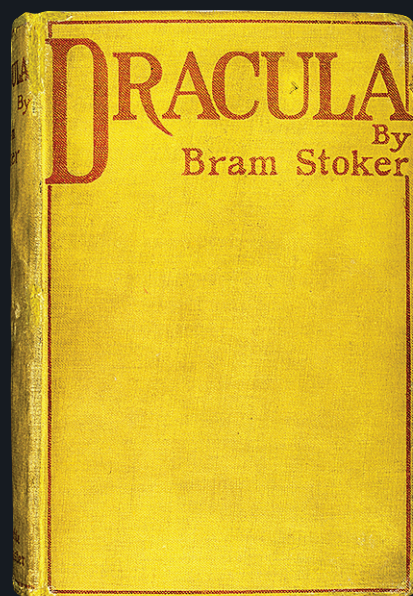
## The novel: ‘Dracula’

In “Dracula,” a Romanian nobleman hires the services of a young English lawyer to help him buy land in a small English seaside village. The lawyer discovers the nobleman is a vampire who drinks blood to stay alive and whose real purpose for relocating to England is to seek fresh prey. The lawyer then finds himself pursued by seductive vampire women, his fiancée and her friend come under attack by a vampire and he joins forces with vampire hunters.

Stoker constructed his narrative with an unusual mix of personal letters, diary entries and excerpts of newspaper articles — all of which was aimed at convincing his readers his tale was true. Stoker’s brief introduction to the tale assures readers that the characters are real people and the events of the story really happened.

Stoker’s editor refused to publish the novel as submitted, insisting that Stoker remove parts intended to make the book seem like nonfiction. His logic: It had been only a decade or so since London’s horrific Whitechapel murders. The publisher had no interest in creating a panic.

The version of “Dracula” that went on sale in London on May 27, 1897, was missing the first 101 pages of Stoker’s original manuscript and much of his epilogue, not to



The 1897 first edition cover

mention changes he was forced to make to much of his story to tone it down.

Stoker’s novel was serialized by U.S. newspapers and then published in book form in 1899. Many years later, when filmmakers sought rights to Stoker’s story, it was discovered he hadn’t fully complied with U.S. copyright law. Just like a vampire turning into a bat, Stoker’s novel turned into a public domain property.

## The legend: Vlad the Impaler

Stoker based at least part of his tale on the infamously bloody legend of Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia. While consolidating power in the 15th century in what is now Romania, Vlad was known to have his enemies killed and their bodies posted on stakes. This earned Vlad the nickname Vlad the Impaler.

Vlad’s father, a knight, had been appointed to the Order of the Dragon and took on the surname Dracul. In the Romanian language, drac has evolved to mean “devil.”

Another influence was that of Elizabeth Báthory, an Hungarian noble who was said to keep captives in small cages and used fresh blood in an effort to stay young.

Vampire stories had already been in existence for years. Another Irish author, Sheridan Le Fanu, had written “Carmilla” — about a female vampire — in 1872.



Vlad III, “the Impaler”

## The legacy: A cottage industry in vampires

“Dracula” was a huge hit. When motion pictures came into vogue in the 1920s, Stoker’s novel was adapted — plagiarized, actually — into a silent movie called “Nosferatu.” Stoker’s estate won a lawsuit against the movie’s producer, but “Dracula” was already in the public domain in the United States.

Since then, the story of the bloodthirsty Transylvanian Count Dracula and his progeny has been told time and time again — from popular horror movies starring Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee and Gary Oldman — to children’s adaptations like the Count from “Sesame Street.”