

The **Vampire** Library

Vampires in the Movies



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ADAM WOOG



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Actor Béla Lugosi (pictured in this 1931 movie poster with actress Helen Chandler) created an enduring character in his portrayal of Count Dracula. His charming, seductive vampire was a far cry from the grotesque and disturbing Max Schreck character.

phenomenon may have been connected to the deeply stressful times: America was two years into the devastating misery of the Great Depression. They comment, “Dracula was a uniquely frightening picture that found its audience during a uniquely frightening year.”⁷

Whatever the reason, the movie’s success brought Universal’s shaky finances back to life. It also inspired a sequel. Never mind that Van Helsing had killed the Count; Dracula refused to die. In fact, Universal brought him back several times, including 1936’s *Dracula’s Daughter* (with Lugosi and

“How Beautiful It Will Appear on the Screen”

The first movie known to invoke the name of Dracula for its main character was a now-lost 1921 Hungarian film, *Drakula halála* (The Death of Dracula). Only a few publicity stills are known to exist, but an article by an unnamed Hungarian journalist, published while the movie was being shot, provides one of the few remaining clues about it. In his piece, the writer describes one scene in particular:

Drakula's wedding gives a taste of the film's energies. There is an immense hall, dressed in marble, with a very, very long and dark corridor in the middle. That is where Drakula lives his mysterious life. It is night. The flutter and shrieks of a multitude of beasts can be heard, and the door in the middle of the hall opens. Beautiful women parade through it, all dressed in dreamlike costumes, all of them being Drakula's wives. But now Drakula awaits his new woman, the most beautiful and desirable of all. She will be welcomed with a rain of flowers.

. . . When the film is finished, this scene will constitute just a small section of a four-act film. On the screen, this scene will not last more than five minutes, whereas it takes a full day's work to produce. The viewer, sitting in the theatre, will have no idea what extraordinary talent was required from the director to rehearse, shoot, and edit the sequences one by one.

Quoted in Gary D. Rhodes, “Drakula halála (1921): The Cinema's First Dracula,” *Horror Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, p. 29. <http://mrger.freeweb.hu>.

Chapter 2

The Vampire Evolves

The studio that almost single-handedly brought vampire movies back to life in the late 1950s was an English company called Hammer Films. Hammer was already famous for cranking out dozens of lurid horror and adventure movies. Its output ranged from classic tales of Frankenstein and the Mummy to originals like *Slave Girls* and *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*.

When Hammer added Dracula to its roster, the studio followed its standard guidelines for making a good horror movie. This meant living color, usually with plenty of bloody reds, along with elaborate sets but relatively few special effects. They also followed the Hammer tradition of using scripts and actors that varied drastically in quality.

Are Vampires Always Messy Eaters?

The first in Hammer's series, released in 1958, was simply called *Dracula*. (In the United States it was retitled *Horror of Dracula* to avoid confusion with the Lugosi version.) Director Terence Fisher and screenplay writer Jimmy Sangster used some elements of Stoker's novel and Universal's movie. (A few years later, in 1962, the copyright on the novel went

WHO WILL
BE HIS
BRIDE
TONIGHT
?



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HORROR OF DRACULA