

# **GUIDE TO DRACULA**

## **STYLE**

Dracula is an “epistolary” novel, meaning that it is written in the form of letters (epistles), telegrams, journal and diary entries, and newspaper clippings. All of these bits are sequenced to tell a story, or narrative, about these characters’ experiences with Count Dracula.

The largest parts of the book are “written” by Jonathan Harker, Mina Murray (who becomes Jonathan’s wife), and Dr. Seward. The characters Lucy Westenra (Mina’s friend) and Dr. Van Helsing also contribute important parts of the novel. Because of the epistolary format, you may feel like a “historian,” as if you are reading a collection of documents that, pieced together, tell a story.

With this format, you end up hearing parts of the story from numerous first-person narrators. They are characters in the story, and you must evaluate their reliability as narrators based on what you see them do and say. They are **not** omniscient, so they cannot tell you what is actually going on in the mind of another character. They can only tell you what they see and experience individually, and they can only make assumptions about what others are thinking.

## **BACKGROUND**

Dracula was first published in 1897 and is Bram Stoker’s most famous work. Vampire legends are ancient, and Stoker chose aspects of various myths to form his own idea of the vampire, which is characterized by Count Dracula. The title character’s name, Dracula, is taken from that of Vlad Dracula, or Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler), a medieval nobleman and Romanian hero, known primarily for his defense of the country against the Muslim Turks and his penchant for cruelty. Other than the name and the negative associations with Vlad, Count Dracula really has little to do with the historical Dracula.

## **A WARNING....**

Dracula is primarily a story of horror and adventure, and hopefully you will enjoy it on that level. I would caution you not to watch any films as a shortcut. Some are closer to the novel than others, but none follow the book’s story with much devotion. In fact, if you watch a film you are likely to get confused. Many films are actually based on an early 20<sup>th</sup> century play that has a somewhat different plot than the novel, and the characters of Mina and Lucy are switched, which makes for much needless confusion.

## **Character List**

Dracula – The vampire. He has various powers, and grows younger in appearance as he consumes more blood. He plans to move to London, which will provide a large supply of new prey. Mina and Lucy become targets.

Jonathan Harker – The first character to encounter Dracula, he is held captive while visiting Dracula in Transylvania on a business trip.

Mina Murray (later Harker) – The pure foil to Dracula's lust and villainy. She marries Jonathan, is Lucy's best friend, and becomes corrupted by Dracula's blood.

Lucy Westenra – Mina's flirtatious best friend. She marries Arthur Holmwood and becomes one of Dracula's victims.

Professor Abraham Van Helsing – A brilliant scientist and Dr. Seward's mentor. He is open to the idea of vampires, and this open-mindedness results in him correctly diagnosing Lucy's condition. He sees Dracula as an evil that endangers mankind and wants to destroy him.

Dr. Seward – He runs an insane asylum and is one of Lucy's suitors. Seward is not initially accepting of Van Helsing's talk of vampires.

Arthur Holmwood, aka Lord Godalming – Holmwood is a very rich aristocrat who wins the battle for Lucy's affections. He is a good friend of Dr. Seward and Quincey Morris.

Quincey Morris – Another of Lucy's suitors. He is a Texan (some would say a bit stereotypical) who joins in the hunt for Dracula.

Three Vampire Women – Previous victims of Dracula who live at his castle. They attack Jonathan Harker while he is held captive.