Virgin Vampires

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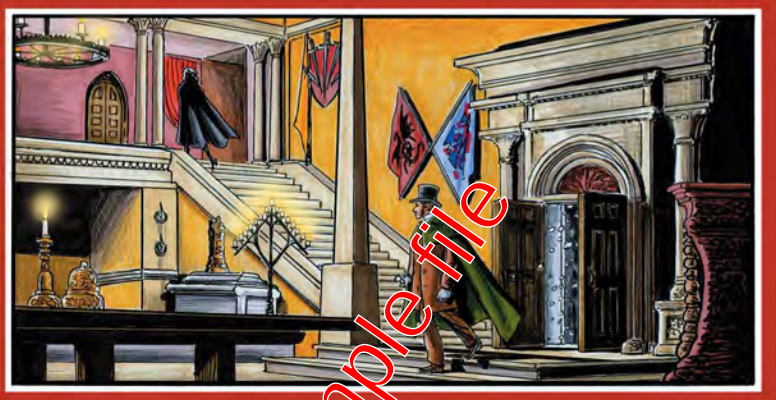
VIRGIN VAMPIRES



Or, Once Upon a Time in Transylvania

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For my wife Sue, my ongoing refuge in
the storm of a world seemingly gone mad
Doug

To my wife Jo, who is always there
to support me in my artistic endeavors
Joe

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A PREFACE...

Here is *Virgin Vampires*, which I devised in skeletal form, via words, and which Joe Orsak proceeded to bring to rich, vibrant realization by fleshing out the bones and adding the blood (well, not blood, at least for several characters) necessary to bring them all to full life (or a believably undead state) with his remarkable illustrations.

As to the aesthetic for *Virgin Vampires,* nothing influenced us so profoundly as those Hammer horror films produced in England between 1958–1973, a fifteen-year-period in which the talents at that studio developed a sensibility unlike anything ever seen before. The beloved noir atmosphere that characterized Universal Studio's horror in the 1930s and 40s was set aside, along with faux studio sets.

Hammer Films were often shot outdoors, in muted pastel hues, the innocence of which was obliterated by sudden surges of bright red blood. The nocturnal sensuality hinted at in Universal's classics gave way to full-throttle sexuality and, in time, graphic nudity, and equally graphic violence. With such an aesthetic Hammer Films was destined to produce *Dracula*, which it did in 1958, and eight other Dracula-related films, which were released before 1970.

Virgin Vampires faithfully relates the biographies of Vlad Tepes and Elizabeth Bathory, as well as the biographies of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, with a few concessions to creative license, if only to postulate how "Carmilla" and *Dracula* came to be. Those fictional creations that now and forever tie the four actual people together. What we provide, then, is not "the" truth but "a" truth.

In creating this tale, our hope was to not only recapture the glory days of Hammer Films, but to reinvent those bygone guilty-pleasures for horror fans of today. We wanted to relate a new story that incorporates all the old devices, acted out by our key characters, who appear together again, for the first time. We aimed to draw diverse, significant, pre-existing influences into an apotheosis of the very form, as implied by our subtitle: *Once upon a time ... in Transylvania.*

Douglas Brode
July 6, 2012

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A PRELUDE...

The first thing you need to know about what follows is that all of this is absolutely true. The second? Everything contained here is entirely fictitious.

Confused? Don't be. Please, allow me to explain...

As far as "the truth" goes: Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–1873) and Bram Stoker (1847–1912) were the Dublin-based writers who provided the world with *In a Glass Darkly* (aka, "Carmilla," 1872) and *Dracula* (1897), horror-stories that jointly created our vision of "the modern vampire." By that, I refer to the vampire as the familiar popular-culture figure that emerged in the Victorian era (1837–1901) and remains with us today: an aristocratic, elegant seducer or seductress, a figure of romance as well as terror, whose existence proffers a cautionary fable concerning the dark side of human sexuality.

In recalling Mina and Lucy, the female leads in Stoker's *Dracula*, we see complimentary examples of Victorian women living in an age that insisted on the repression of carnal desire, particularly in women. Sex, according to the Victorian view, constituted evil: not only the acts explicitly banned by the Bible, but even procreational relations between husband and wife, which are not criticized in The Good Book, much less damned, anywhere from Abraham through Jesus—any such anti-sexual proclamations only appearing in the form of a postscript by Paul.

Vampires existed long before Victorianism, in literature and in life. The first wife of Adam in the unexpurgated text, called "Lilith," was the original Vamp in Judeo-Christian culture, our earliest *femme fatale*. But the existence of the vampire is not restricted by borders of region or religion, as illustrated by the *Jiang Shi* of China, the *Mapuche* of Chile, the *adze* of Africa, the *Loogaroo* of Haiti, the *Vetela* of South Asia and the *Windigo* of Algonquin Native-Americans, which are but a few examples of this universal archetype.

As for the British Isles, in the early 1800s "Varney the Vampire" was a monstrous figure lurking in alleyways to grab and gobble down unsuspecting passers-by in "penny-dreadfuls": paperback novels, published weekly, that proved popular with the semi-literate lower-classes of the nineteenth century's first half. No element of eroticism existed in this hideous creature, who probably served as a metaphor for the plague. The first emergence of what we recognize as the modern vampire was in John Polidori's *The Vampyre*, 1819. Polidori modeled the charismatic but cruel title character on his lover George Gordon, aka Lord Byron.

Le Fanu, and later, Stoker, picked up Polidori's conceit and ran with it, taking the character of the vampire to new depths and new heights, as well. Their vampires were strangely appealing phantoms of the night that could not enter a house unless invited. For a moral citizen to allow an elegant count or baby-faced countess to crawl in the window, slip into one's bed, suggested a terrible truth about human nature: Inside every seemingly upstanding member of Victoria's upward-aspiring society there lurked an atavist, secretly hungering to draw back

to some earlier, less civilized, pre–Christian form: Natural man, not as the romantic French philosopher Roseau defined him: "the best man," but as Victorian Classicists did: "the worst man."

Or woman. The devil in the flesh. This explains why The Cross proved such a powerful weapon. And now, old-time religion was abetted by newfangled science at a time when the two knowledge systems were perceived as natural allies, long before a lunatic fringe posited these elemental aspects of humanity—spirituality and rationality—as oppositional. In Stoker's novel, vampire hunter "Van Helsing" carries a cross in one hand, his science text in the other.

At any rate, via literature and movies, Dracula and Carmilla have become "real," in fact, They've become "meta-real," more alive in the human subconscious than many of the famous human beings who actually lived. As Iconic Archetypes they are "real," even if they never existed.

Dracula and Carmilla, however, actually did exist. Or at least were based on historical figures Stoker and Le Fanu studied, leading to the inspiration to revive Vlad Tepes (1431–1476), a Wallachian prince who earned the nickname "the Impaler" owing to massive executions of enemies, real or perceived. Such victims were staked on poles, Vlad seated below, entertained by the death throes while blood trickled down onto the near-raw steaks *Dracule* consumed for his dinner.

There will be blood...!

Carmilla, meanwhile, is a counterpart of one of Vlad's distant relatives, Ersbet (Elizabeth) Batory (Bathory) (1560–1614), the wife of Count Ferenc Nadasdy. During his long absences the crimson countess perfected her techniques of torture on her servants, invited lovers into her remote home and, if the old tale is to be believed, bathed in the blood of virgins, owing to a belief that this ritual would preserve her great beauty.

So we have our cast of characters: two talented writers who seized on two historical villains to create two monstrous icons. That this happened cannot be denied. Yet a difficult question naturally follows: *Why?*

Why, that is, did these scribes, neither of whom had ever expressed interest in, much less obsession with, the supernatural, change courses (previously they were historians and political activists) to create the most memorable vampires of all time? That's the motivation we can't resist pondering in this tale, even if the answer has been obscured in the mists of time.

We do know that in 1858, before Sheridan began writing "Carmilla," his wife Susanna died under mysterious circumstances. In reading the tale one can't help but notice that an inexplicable capitulation from perfect health to a premature and hasty passing mirrors the rapid decline of those exposed to the vampire's bite.

In time, Dracula and Carmilla came to represent a most dangerous sexual escapade, that in which *le petite morte* leads either to death, or a doomed immortality. No one ever depicted such a situation more entertainingly than screenwriter Nicholas Meyer. In his 1973 script for *Invasion of the Bee Girls,* several suburban guys sit at a bar, discussing the appearance of beautiful female vampires who devour their victims at the height of sexual excitement. "Just imagine," one fellow, apparently longing for the fate of his deceased friends, sighs: "coming and going at the same time!"

For that, in truth, is what the vampire story is now, and always has been, about: the all-

too-terrible relationship between sex and death. Or, as Woody Allen once wonderfully put it: "The two things that occur once in my life."

Could there be a more darkly romantic conception than to die for love? Or, if not true love in the noble sense of that term, *lust*: an uncontrollable passion that will, and must, destroy body and soul of the sufferer, though that destiny is, as desired as it is feared.

Always, in vampire lore, *more* desired than feared! For that is the heart (I dare not say "and soul") of such horror, and the key to understanding the vampire's unique brand of eroticism.

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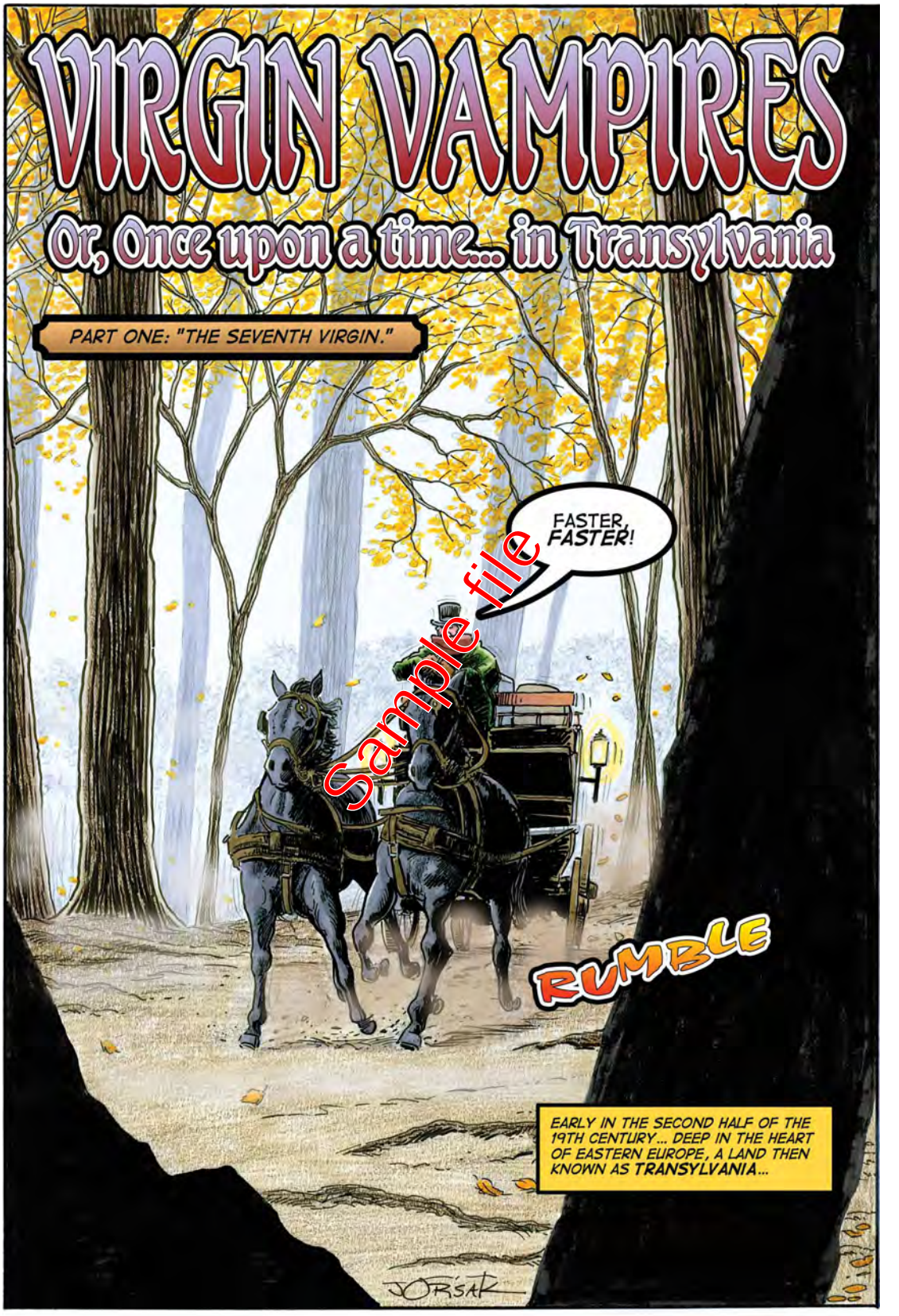
VIRGIN VAMPIRES
Or, Once upon a time... in Transylvania
PART ONE: "THE SEVENTH VIRGIN."
FASTER, FASTER!
RUMBLE
EARLY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY... DEEP IN THE HEART OF EASTERN EUROPE, A LAND THEN KNOWN AS TRANSYLVANIA...
JORSAK