

Was Dracula an evil vampire who drank human blood to achieve special powers and immortality? Or was he the hero, maligned and by his enemies, that the country folk in Romania (fka Transylvania).

Dracula: Hero


By Rick Marino

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DRACULA- HERO

A man in a dark trench coat stands on a rocky shore, looking out at a stormy sea under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The man is seen from behind, his coat flapping in the wind. The sea is turbulent with white-capped waves crashing against the rocks. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with a bright light source breaking through on the right side, creating a silhouette effect on the man and the clouds.

RICK MARINO

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CHAPTER ONE

“Even now, stirring the embers of a faded fire, I see sparks ignite from coals I thought long dead.”
- Blake Stone

A vagrant wind chilled the early autumn night. The moon, a silent sentinel, stood watch in the starless sky. Alec Blake pulled his car off the road and parked it in a small copse of trees. Turning up his collar, he stepped out into the darkness.

He crossed the road and kept walking until he reached a wrought iron gate that bordered the Harrison estate. It was an imposing structure, but Blake, a raw-boned figure forged from sinew and steel, effortlessly scaled it. Then he dropped silently into the woods on the other side and made his way toward the Harrison home.

Tonight, he was the predator seeking to take down Dean Harrison. Harrison was the American dream on steroids; a low rent Jay Gatsby. He had created a counterfeit identity, turning his back on his family. His rush to success became a tidal wave of greed leaving broken lives in its wake. The need to feed his ego became just as addicting as the cocaine he frequently consumed.

Blake had taken down some real monsters. Harrison didn't qualify yet. But he was on his way to becoming one.

The crunch of the scrub brush underfoot and the scent from the trees brought back memories of another forest on a night, long ago. On that night, Blake was the hunted not

the hunter. In those Transylvanian woods, he was being pursued by a young archer, one of his enemy's henchmen. Knowing his surroundings, Blake set a rapid pace causing his adversary's arrows to fall helplessly short of their mark.

After a time, Blake's energy waned. His much younger adversary was gaining on him but Blake remembered a clearing just ahead. It would be bathed in moonlight. Crossing it would make him vulnerable. Yet it was worth the risk, because the forest beyond it was so dark and impenetrable that even the smallest shards of light couldn't pierce it. Once there, the assailant would become disoriented and Blake could make his escape.

Blake was halfway across the clearing, when he heard growling sounds. He turned and saw that the bowman was now facing him. There were flashes of fur behind him.

"Keep still or those wolves will attack," Blake called in a hoarse whisper.

The archer chose not to heed the warning. He lifted his bow, set an arrow, and let it fly. It hit Blake in the shoulder, knocking him backwards to the ground. He felt a tug on his collar before being dragged backwards over the rough terrain. His assailant reached for another arrow but his movement stirred the wolves to action. Before passing out, Blake heard the other man's screams.

For weeks he lapsed in and out of consciousness. An ancient man ministered to Blake's wound and got him to take sips of a warm, sweet liquid to fight dehydration.

Finally, Blake came around. He was lying in a big, comfortable bed. The room was small but cozy; warmed

by a wood fire. On the floor beside him was the largest wolf he had ever seen. The magnificent creature had a thick coat; silver grey with shades of dark blue. As Blake slowly sat up, the beast stood, putting his chin on the bed.

The man standing with his back to Blake investigated the fire and spoke, "His name is Maximus. I raised him from a pup. He dragged you for almost two miles. If he had not brought you here, you would have bled to death." Stirring the fire, he continued, "Max has been quite protective; even tried to keep me away until he was sure I meant you no harm."

"How long have I been here?" Blake asked.

"For quite some time," the man replied, turning to face him. "You had a rough go of it. Now that you are awake, I think some solid food would do you well."

Blake was stunned. "Jakub, is that you?"

"One and the same," Jakub smiled. He stepped into a small larder, emerging with a plate of eggs and a thick slice of bread. "A light repast courtesy of your host,"

"Jakub, it is wonderful to see you after all this time. But my presence, here, will put you in danger. I should leave."

"Thank you for your concern," Jakub smiled. "But you are in no condition to go anywhere and we are quite safe, here."

Jakub added "Besides, it is not very often that I get visitors; especially one as important as the infamous Dracula."

Alec Blake had been born Vlad Tepes III. His father, Vlad II was a brilliant general and fierce fighter. His closest

friend and military aide, Jakub Andropov, helped him lead the army against attempted invasions by many warring countries. Vlad II was the first national leader of Transylvania.

Learning that the Romans had designs on Transylvania, Vlad and Jakub made a long, perilous journey to meet with Roman leaders, including the emperor, himself. They knew the Romans had other, more pressing concerns besides Transylvania. Rioting and rebellions were brewing in the remote regions of the Realm. Vlad and Jakub agreed to lead the Roman legions against the uprisings in exchange for their country's freedom.

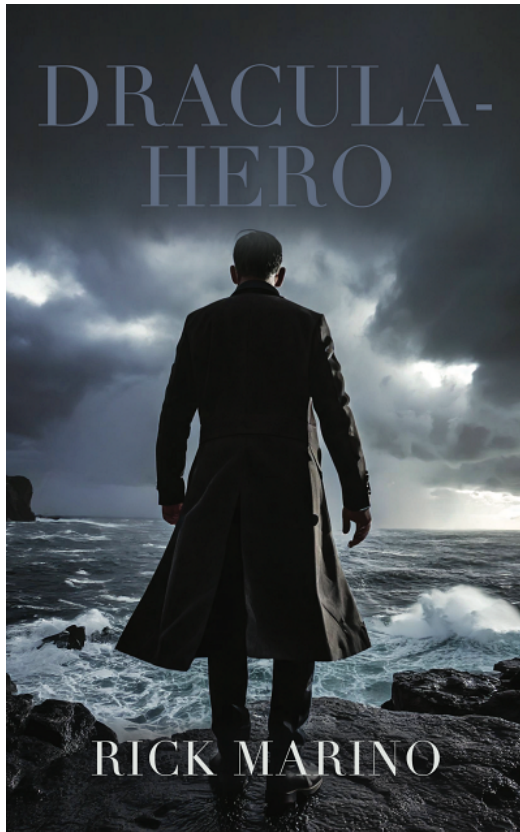
For two years the wars raged on, but, in the end, peace was restored.

The Holy Roman Emperor kept his word. Transylvania was spared. The emperor bestowed the name Dracul "Dragon Warrior" on Vlad II. Years later, as an homage to his father, Blake took the name Dracula, son of Dracul. There was sadness in Jakub's voice when he said, "I owe you an apology, my friend. When your father died, I was hit with my responsibilities here. My heart was no longer in the fight. So, I stole away and built this sanctuary. Perhaps if I had stayed..."

Blake replied. "No Jakub, I had to make my own way. My father left me the sacred trust of protecting our people. Only I could prove him right. Besides, I had my own aide de camp and confidante, Petrov." Then he lay back, too weak to continue the conversation....

DRACULA: HERO

The sound of an owl stirred Blake from his thoughts, back to the quest for Harrison. He had reached the gnarled oak at the top of the Harrisons' driveway. It was a good vantage point from which to catch Dean Harrison coming home.



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