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Anno Dracula

1976-1991

Johnny Alucard

Written by Kim Newman

Published by Titan Books

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ANNO DRACULA 1976-1991

JOHNNY ALUCARD

ALSO BY KIM NEWMAN AND AVAILABLE FROM TITAN BOOKS

ANNO DRACULA
THE BLOODY RED BARON
DRACULA CHA CHA CHA

PROFESSOR MORIARTY
THE HOUND OF THE D'URBERVILLES

JAGO

THE QUORUM

LIFE'S LOTTERY (APRIL 2014)

ANNO DRACULA

1976-1991

JOHNNY ALUCARD

KIM NEWMAN

TITAN BOOKS

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For F. Paul Wilson

ANNO DRACULA

1976-1991

JOHNNY ALUCARD

'As the Count saw us, a horrible sort of snarl passed over his face, showing the eye-teeth long and pointed. But the evil smile as quickly passed into a cold stare of lion-like disdain. His expression again changed, as, with a single impulse, we all advanced on him. It was a pity that we had not some better organised plan of attack, for even at the moment I wondered what we were to do. I did not myself know whether our lethal weapons would avail us anything. Harker evidently meant to try the matter, for he had ready his great Kukri knife, and made a fierce and sudden cut at him. The blow was a powerful one; only the diabolical quickness of the Count's leap back saved him. A second less and the trenchant blade had shorn through his heart. As it was, the point just cut the cloth of his coat, making a wide gap whence a bundle of bank-notes and a stream of gold fell out. The expression of the Count's face was so hellish that, for a moment I feared for Harker, though I saw him throw the terrible knife aloft again for another stroke... It would be impossible to describe the expression of hate and baffled malignity – of anger and hellish rage – which came over the Count's face. His waxen hue became greenish-yellow by the contrast of his burning eyes, and the red scar on his forehead showed on the pallid skin like a palpitating wound. The next instant, with a sinuous dive he swept under Harker's arm, ere his blow could fall, and, grasping a handful of the money from the floor, dashed across the room, threw himself at the window. Amid the crash and glitter of falling glass, he tumbled into the flagged area below. Through the sound of shivering glass I could hear the "ting" of the gold, as some of the sovereigns fell on the flagging.

'We ran over and saw him spring unhurt from the ground. He, rushing up the steps, crossed the flagged yard, and pushed open the stable door. There he turned and spoke to us: –

"'You think to baffle me, you – with your pale faces all in a row, like sheep in a butcher's. You shall be sorry yet, each one of you! You think you have left me without a place to rest; but I have more. My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you love are mine already and through them you and others yet shall be mine – my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed. Bah!"'

Bram Stoker (attributed to Dr John Seward), *Dracula*

'That Count Dracula's no good for anybody, and he never was!'

Mario Belato (Joe Dallesandro), *Blood for Dracula*

PROLOGUE

PROMISES TO KEEP

ANNO DRACULA 1944

Even before the War, Transylvania was the country of the dead. These forests and mountains were homeland to the dead that walked.

The boy had no fear of vampires. Nor of the Germans and the Russians. Nothing more could be done to him.

Once, the boy had known a home. His world included parents, a larger family, church and school, playthings and playmates, food preferences, choices of clothing. Now that was a hazy dream, a story told around the campfire. The Iron Guard – Romania's SS – had come to his village to put an end to 'Red activity', blotting out his former life with flame and blood. The boy couldn't separate his own tattered memories from the images which sprang into his mind from the others' stories.

In the dark, he remembered things which had happened to Brastov, Nicolae or Magda. Sometimes, he even sank into the golden, embroidered past of the Baron Meinster, whose tales of lost elegance and privilege no one believed. Over half the partisan band were Reds, but they let the Baron retain his title and the pretence of command. The boy thought the vampire Brastov, who'd once let slip that he could also claim a title, was the true leader. The sullen living man Nicolae was the brute who made sure the sly, cat-like Brastov got his way most of the time. The fiercely independent Magda Cuza, a Jewish social democrat, always argued her own course, forcing the men to take her into account. The boy never added to the endless debates. They all knew better than to issue him orders. He did what he did and that was the end of it.

Alone on the ill-maintained road to Dinu Pass, the boy leant on his rifle while he made a slow path upwards. Stood on its stock, the Russian gun was fully three-quarters his height. Inherited from a fallen partisan, the rifle was his only true comrade. Well after midnight – the whole band had fallen into the sleeping-waking habits of the undead among them –

the air was thickly moist. Either heavy mist or light drizzle. There was no moon. On the plain below, it was summer, hot August made hotter by the still-burning petroleum refineries of Ploieşti. Poisonous black smoke was everywhere. High in the Transylvanian Alps, the ice grasp of winter never fully relaxed and the air was clear and sharp in the lungs.

The boy saw little – the occasional glistening patch of wetness on black granite or blacker fir tree – but heard all the sounds of the night, the tiny, scurrying creatures who were justifiably afraid of him (his staple diet, when they could be had) and the ancient, ever lasting creak-breath of mountain and forest.

No Germans had been to Dinu Pass for three years, since the Wehrmacht abandoned the ancient Keep that perched above the deepest gorge. The Iron Guard was smashed, thrown away by the Nazis in the War against the Russians. Their passing didn't make this a safe country. The forests were infested with bandits, deserters, wolves, rival night-creatures. Often, the partisans didn't know who they were fighting until the skirmish was over and bodies could be examined.

Carefully, solemnly, the boy made his way up the steep road.

He did not know how the message had been received, but they were summoned to Dinu Pass, to the Keep, to meet with the one they all respected and feared, far above circus clowns like Hitler and Stalin.

Dracula.

Even a boy without history, with little sense of what came before or after any moment, knew the name. It came with many titles, more even than Meinster claimed: Voivode, Prince, Count, Vlad Tepes, Prince Consort, Graf, King of the Cats, Prince of Darkness, Sovereign of the Damned. In these mountains, the peasants and the gypsies knew the titles were a cloak, meaningless and unnecessary. Here, the name was enough.

Dracula.

For months, Baron Meinster had regaled them with yarns of Count Dracula, his father-in-darkness, father and furtherer of almost all the vampires in the world. Transported by his own stories, the Baron seemed little more than an excited boy himself, with his wave of golden hair, natty grey cloak and odd fastidiousness about feeding. He spoke of the old times when the undead were masters of the warm, as fondly as a Red spoke of the coming age when the masters were killed and the workers ruled. Now, at the point of entering the Royal Presence, the Baron was quiet on the subject. Perhaps the father was as inclined to punish as reward, and Meinster too doubted his self-declared status as the favoured get.

Suddenly, the Keep was in front of the boy, radiating cold like a monumental chunk of black ice. He felt no discomfort. Cold was his

natural condition, as much as hungry. He no longer shivered, rarely made a sound, never complained. Invisible until its walls were only feet away, the Keep had been built of blocks quarried locally. It seemed grown from the mountain, commanding the pass, moated by a deep gorge crossed by a shored-up causeway.

For generations, Dracula had been away, adventuring in the world, spreading his bloodline across the globe, making and changing history. Now, in his homeland's hour of darkest need, he was returning. Brastov speculated that the Count had been shipped from Cairo to Italy by the Americans or the British, and flown over Transylvania by planes like the bombers that had destroyed the Ploieşti refineries in April. Above the clouds, he would slip out of the aircraft to glide on great leather wings, down towards his native soil. His coming was the blue flame that would spark an uprising, uniting all the partisans, taking Romania out of the Axis. Brastov, looking to Russia, and Meinster, out for himself, welcomed the return of Dracula, but the warm – Magda, the old gypsy Maleva – were wary, fearful that one great evil was to be exchanged for another.

The boy was early. The Keep was empty. If Dracula were here, he'd have sensed it. Such an immense person would disturb the air. He stood on the causeway and made out the arch of the ungated entrance to the courtyard. Nothing was here, not even rats.

He cared little that in Bucharest, General Antonescu was withdrawing from alliance with the Germans and Italians, that the army was on the point of turning against the Nazis they had fought beside in Russia. Even the hotly anticipated uprising didn't excite him, for he had no belief in the future. The others discussed with passion the various factions of Axis and Ally, pitting their imagined saviours, America and the Soviet Union, against each other. The single lesson of the boy's young life was that there were no saviours, no Jesus Christ or St Nicholas, no Hitler or Stalin, no French or Americans. There was only the merciless crush of falling granite, as solid and black as the Keep, as implacable as the night and the cold.

'You are wrong, my son.'

He was not alone, after all. The voice came from inside the Keep, a whisper carried by the stone. It sounded inside his skull, smooth as velvet and harsh as tree-bark.

The boy saw the eyes first.

In the courtyard, eyes shone like a cat's, red around black. The boy approached, passing under the arch.

'I am Dracula,' said the tall vampire.

The boy had no reply. Before Dracula, he was no one.

Dracula did not have leather wings, but a one-piece black jump-suit, autopsy-scarred by silver-white zips, worn over heavy airman's boots and under a woollen cape. His hands were ungloved and very, very white. His face was unlined but ancient, so pale it had a faint moon glow. His hair was night-black, thick and unruly like his eyebrows and moustaches. A leather satchel lay by his feet. He was the only person the boy had seen this past year who was not carrying a gun.

Used to the undead, having lived so closely with Meinster, Brastov and others, he understood how the red thirst that set them apart was as much a weakness as his own hunger, that they were not so different from warm men and women. Dracula *was* different, the creature he had imagined vampires to be before he had met one. Then, all he had known of the undead came from the whispered stories of old women like Maleva, whose memories of Meinster's golden age were of stolen babies and opened throats.

The others were watching from back in the forest, from up in the trees. It had been decided the boy alone should go first to the meeting place. Brastov worried that the Count would see anyone larger as a threat and scent betrayal – every few weeks, he and Nicolae decided someone was a traitor and killed them for food – while Magda claimed they had no proof that Dracula was not secretly on the side of the fascists and would lead them all into a trap and death.

Also, and only now did the boy understand this, the whole band recognised that he alone was truly without fear, truly did not care what happened to him. Once, Maleva had said of him that he was deader than any vampire. When the old woman realised he had overheard her, she was afraid of what he would do but he took a cold pride in her understanding. He was dead as ice or stone, as impossible to hurt.

'It is well we should meet, my son.'

Dracula was not his father. He had no father.

'Again, you are wrong. I shall be your father, and more than a father.'

The boy felt nothing but the absence of feeling.

He had no love, no hate, no fear. He was empty. He noted that Dracula heard his thoughts as if they were words, but did not care.

'Come to me,' said Dracula, extending a ghost-white hand. His nails were blood-black diamonds.

The boy stood before the Count. The red eyes were supposed to overwhelm him, to impose a will upon his own, to draw him close. But there was nothing in his heart to catch, nothing to pull.

Dracula smiled. Pearl-white shark-sharp teeth showed beneath his moustaches.

'It is good you are so hard inside,' he said, not out loud. 'It is fitting.'

Of his own accord, the boy approached the vampire.

Dracula was snake-swift, his fangs so razor-keen their work was done before pain could reach the boy's brain.

He understood the others had known about this, had delivered him to Dracula as an offering. He was not alive, so his death would mean nothing.

At the end, he felt only the cold.

Dracula spoke to him in his mind, all through the sucking and draining. He soothed and demanded, made promises and prophecies, shared secrets and passions.

When the boy was empty, Dracula hugged the almost weightless body to his chest and strode out of the courtyard, onto the causeway. The boy could still smell; his nose filled with the male animal scent of the undead giant, which sparked more memories, hundreds of years of memories, of distant times and lands, of unknown and unknowable things. His own family came back to him – he could remember the name they had called him! – and the whole truth of their deaths. He was swept beyond a cloud of terror into the womb and the pasts of his parents and their parents. Throughout centuries, there was always the black figure with scarlet and silver highlights, the eternal presence of Dracula.

A finger tapped at his temple, fluttering his eyelids open.

Dracula wiped his mouth clean on his sleeve, ensuring that the boy's attention was on him.

'Don't run away yet, my son.'

Dracula poked out his tongue, like a goblin or a cheeky boy. It was long and scarlet, swollen at the end. It looked not like a tongue, but a red adder. The vampire shut and opened his mouth, nipping off the very end of his tongue. A tiny lump of flesh was neatly severed; Dracula spat it out to one side. His mouth filled with his own blood, leaking through the corners of his smile. Even in the night, it was rich and red. He bowed his head and kissed, prising the boy's mouth open with his bleeding tongue. A flow of cold, salt blood came, sliding over the boy's palate and into his throat.

The boy remembered his mother's breast. He suckled.

After seconds that stretched out forever, he was thrown away, off the causeway. The blood in his mouth and stomach burned like ice. The voice in his head was a wordless cry of joy. He thumped against a slope of pebble and leaf-mulch and rolled into the gorge, smacking against bushes and outcrops, shuddering in death and turning and rebirth. His old life – even from moment to moment with the partisans, he'd had a mortal life – was shredded away. His sturdy dead man's clothes ripped on flints.

He lay in a tangle in the dark. Now he could see the stars, even through thick clouds.

Above, he *was* Dracula, arms proudly folded. Meinster's band came out of the forest to kneel before him, to take their orders – the insurrection was set for the twenty-third of this month – to be awed by the Presence.

Below, he was not who he had been, but not yet who he would become.

The boy was, however, thirsty.

PART ONE

COPPOLA'S DRACULA

ANNO DRACULA 1976-77

1

A treeline at dusk. Tall, straight, Carpathian pines. The red of sunset bleeds into the dark of night. Great flapping sounds. Huge, dark shapes flit languidly between the trees, sinister, dangerous. A vast batwing brushes the treetops.

Jim Morrison's voice wails in despair. 'People Are Strange'.

Fire blossoms. Blue flame, pure as candlelight. Black trees are consumed…

Fade to a face, hanging upside-down in the roiling fire.

HARKER's Voice: *Wallachia… shit!*

JONATHAN HARKER, a solicitor's clerk, lies uneasy on his bed, upstairs in the inn at Bistritz, waiting. His eyes are empty.

With great effort, he gets up and goes to the full-length mirror. He avoids his own gaze and takes a swig from a squat bottle of plum brandy. He wears only long drawers. Bite marks, almost healed, scab his shoulders. His arms and chest are sinewy, but his stomach is white and soft. He staggers into a programme of isometric exercises, vigorously Christian, ineptly executed.

HARKER's Voice: *I could only think of the forests, the mountains… the inn was just a waiting room. Whenever I was in the forests, I could only think of home, of Exeter. Whenever I was home, I could only think of getting back to the mountains.*

The crucifix above the mirror, hung with cloves of garlic, gazes down with blind eyes on Harker. He misses his footing and falls on the bed, then gets up, reaches, and takes down the garlic.

He bites into a clove as if it were an apple, and washes the pulp down with more brandy.

HARKER's Voice: *All the time I stayed here in the inn, waiting for a commission, I was growing older, losing precious life. And all the time the Count sat on top of his mountain, leeching off the land, he grew younger, thirstier.*

Harker scoops a locket from a bedside table and opens it to look at a portrait of his wife, MINA. Without malice or curiosity, he dangles the cameo in a candle flame. The face browns, the silver setting blackens.

HARKER's Voice: *I was waiting for the call from Seward. Eventually, it came.*

There is a knock on the door.

2

'It's all right for you, Katharine Reed,' Francis whined as he picked over the unappetising craft services table. 'You're dead, you don't have to eat this shit.'

Kate showed teeth, hissing a little. She knew that despite her granny glasses and freckles, she could look unnervingly feral when she smiled. Francis didn't shrink: deep down, the director thought of her as a special effect, not a real vampire.

In the makeshift canteen, deep in the production bunker, the Americans wittered nostalgia about McDonald's. The Brits – the warm ones, anyway – rhapsodised about Pinewood breakfasts of kippers and fried bread. Romanian location catering was not what they were used to.

Francis finally found an apple less than half brown and took it away. His weight had dropped visibly since their first meeting, months ago in pre-production. Since he had come to Eastern Europe, the insurance doctor diagnosed him as suffering from malnutrition and put him on vitamin shots. *Dracula* was running true to form, sucking him dry.

A production this size was like a swarm of vampire bats – some large, many tiny – battening tenaciously onto the host, making insistent, never-

ending demands. Kate had watched Francis – bespectacled, bearded and hyperactive – lose substance under the draining siege, as he made and justified decisions, yielded the visions to be translated to celluloid, rewrote the script to suit locations or new casting. How could one man throw out so many ideas, only a fraction of which would be acted on? In his position, Kate's mind would bleed empty in a week.

A big budget film shot in a backward country was an insane proposition, like taking a touring three-ring circus into a war zone. *Who will survive*, she thought, *and what will be left of them?*

The craft table for vampires was as poorly stocked as the one for the warm. Unhealthy rats in chicken-wire cages. Kate watched one of the floor effects men, a new-born with a padded waistcoat and a tool-belt, select a writhing specimen and bite off its head. He spat it on the concrete floor, face stretched into a mask of disgust.

'Ringworm,' he snarled. 'The commie gits are trying to kill us off with diseased vermin.'

'I could murder a bacon sarnie,' the effects man's mate sighed.

'I could murder a Romanian caterer,' said the new-born.

Kate decided to go thirsty. There were enough Yanks around to make coming by human blood in this traditionally superstitious backwater not a problem. Ninety years after Dracula spread vampirism to the Western world, America was still sparsely populated by the blood-drinking undead. For a lot of Americans, being bled by a genuine olde worlde creature of the night was something of a thrill.

That would wear off.

3

Outside the bunker, in a shrinking patch of natural sunlight between a stand of real pines and the skeletons of fake trees, Francis shouted at Harvey Keitel. The actor, cast as Jonathan Harker, was stoic, inexpressive, grumpy. He refused to be drawn into argument, invariably driving Francis to shrieking hysteria.

'I'm not Martin Fucking Scorsese, man,' he screamed. 'I'm not going to slather on some lousy voice-over to compensate for what you're not giving me. Without Harker, I don't have a picture!'

Keitel made fists but his body language was casual. Francis had been riding his star hard all week. Scuttlebutt was that he had wanted Pacino

or McQueen but neither was willing to spend three months behind the Iron Curtain.

Kate could understand that. This featureless World War II bunker, turned over to the production as a command centre, stood in ancient mountains, dwarfed by the tall trees. As an outpost of civilisation in a savage land, it was ugly and ineffective.

When approached to act as a technical advisor to Coppola's *Dracula*, she had thought it might be interesting to see where it all started: the Changes, the Terror, the Transformation. No one seriously believed vampirism began here, but it was where Dracula came from. This land had nurtured him through centuries before he decided to spread his wings and extend his bloodline around the world.

Three months had already been revised to six. This production didn't have a schedule, it had a sentence. A few were already demanding parole.

Some vampires felt Transylvania should be the undead Israel, a new state carved out of the much-redrawn map of Central Europe, a geographical and political homeland. As soon as it grew from an inkling to a notion, Ceauşescu vigorously vetoed the proposition. Holding up in one hand a silver-edged sickle, an iron-headed hammer and a sharpened oak spar, the Premier reminded the world that, 'In Romania, we know how to treat leeches – a stake through the heart and off with their filthy heads.' But the Transylvania Movement ('Back to the forests, back to the mountains') gathered momentum. Some elders, after ninety years of the chaos of the larger world, wished to withdraw to their former legendary status. Many of Kate's generation, turned in the 1880s, Victorians stranded in this mechanistic century, were sympathetic.

'You're the Irish vampire lady,' Harrison Ford, flown in for two days to play Dr Seward as a favour to Francis, had said. 'Where's your castle?'

'I have a flat in the Holloway Road,' she admitted. 'Over an off-licence.'

In the promised Transylvania, all elders would have castles, fiefdoms, slaves, human cattle. Everyone would wear evening dress. All vampires would have treasures of ancient gold, like leprechauns. There would be a silk-lined coffin in every crypt, and every night would be a full moon. Unlife eternal and luxury without end, bottomless wells of blood and Paris label shrouds.

Kate thought the Movement lunatic. Never mind cooked breakfasts and (the other crew complaint) proper toilet paper, this was an intellectual desert, a country without conversation, without (and she recognised the irony) life.

She understood Dracula had left Transylvania in the first place not merely because he – the great dark sponge – had sucked it dry, but because

even he was bored with ruling over gypsies, wolves and mountain streams. That did not prevent the elders of the Transylvania Movement from claiming the Count as their inspiration and using his seal as their symbol. An Arthurian whisper had it that once vampires returned to Transylvania, Dracula would rise again to assume his rightful throne as their ruler.

Dracula, at long long last, was truly dead, had been for more than fifteen years. Kate had seen his head stuck on a pole, heard the confession of his merciful assassin, attended his cremation on a beach outside Rome, seen his ashes scattered into the sea. From that, there was no coming back, not even for a creature who had so many times avoided his appointment in Samarra.

But the Count meant so much to so many. Kate wondered if anything was left of him, anything concrete and inarguable and true. Or was he now just a phantom, a slave to anyone who cared to invoke his name? So many causes and crusades and rebellions and atrocities. One man, one monster, could never have kept track of them all, could never have encompassed so much mutually exclusive argument.

There was the Dracula of the histories, the Dracula of Stoker's book, the Dracula of this film, the Dracula of the Transylvania Movement. Dracula – the vampire and the idea – was vast. But not so vast that he could cast his cloak of protection around all who claimed to be his followers. Out here in the mountains where the Count had passed centuries in petty predation, Kate understood that he must in himself have felt tiny, a lizard crawling down a rock.

Nature was overwhelming. At night, the stars were laser-points in the deep velvet black of the sky. She could hear, taste and smell a thousand flora and fauna. If ever there was a call of the wild, this forest exerted it. But there was nothing she considered intelligent life.

She tied tight under her chin the yellow scarf, shot through with golden traceries, she had bought at Biba in 1969. It was a flimsy, delicate thing, but to her it meant civilisation, a coloured moment of frivolity in a life too often preoccupied with monochrome momentousness.

Francis jumped up and down and threw script pages to the winds. His arms flapped like wings. Clouds of profanity enveloped the uncaring Keitel.

'Don't you realise I've put up my own fucking money for this fucking picture,' he shouted, not just at Keitel but at the whole company. 'I could lose my house, my vineyard, everything. I can't afford a fucking honourable failure. This has abso-goddamn-lutely got to outgross *Jaws* or I'm personally impaled up the ass with a sharpened telegraph pole.'

Effects men sat slumped against the exterior wall of the bunker (there were few chairs on location) and watched their director rail at the heavens,

demanding of God answers that were not forthcoming. Script pages swirled upwards in a spiral, spreading out in a cloud, whipping against the upper trunks of the trees, soaring out over the valley.

'He was worse on *Godfather*,' one said.

4

Servants usher Harker into a well-appointed drawing room. A table is set with an informal feast of bread, cheese and meat. DR JACK SEWARD, in a white coat with a stethoscope hung around his neck, warmly shakes Harker's hand and leads him to the table. QUINCEY P MORRIS sits to one side, tossing and catching a spade-sized bowie knife.

LORD GODALMING, well dressed, napkin tucked into his starched collar, sits at the table, forking down a double helping of paprika chicken. Harker's eyes meet Godalming's, the nobleman looks away.

SEWARD: Harker, help yourself to the fare. It's uncommonly decent for foreign muck.

HARKER: Thank you, no. I took repast at the inn.

SEWARD: How is the inn? Natives bothering you? Superstitious babushkas, what?

HARKER: I am well in myself.

SEWARD: Splendid… The vampire, Countess Marya Dolingen of Graz. In 1883, you cut off her head and drove a hawthorn stake through her heart, destroying her utterly.

HARKER: I'm not disposed just now to discuss such affairs.

MORRIS: Come on, Jonny-Boy. You have a commendation from the church, a papal decoration. The frothing she-bitch is dead at last. Take the credit.

HARKER: I have no direct knowledge of the individual you mention. And if I did, I reiterate that I would not be disposed to discuss such affairs.

Seward and Morris exchange a look as Harker stands impassive. They know they have the right man. Godalming, obviously in command, nods.

Seward clears plates of cold meat from a strong-box that stands on the table. Godalming hands the doctor a key, with which he opens the box. He takes out a woodcut and hands it over to Harker.

The picture is of a knife-nosed mediaeval warrior prince.

SEWARD: That's Vlad Tepes, called 'the Impaler'. A good Christian, defender of the faith. Killed a million Turks. Son of the Dragon, they called him. Dracula.

Harker is impressed.

MORRIS: Prince Vlad had Orthodox Church decorations out the ass. Coulda made Metropolitan. But he converted, went over to Rome, turned Candle.

HARKER: Candle?

SEWARD: Roman Catholic.

Harker looks again at the woodcut. In a certain light, it resembles the young Marlon Brando.

Seward walks to a side-table, where an antique dictaphone is set up. He fits a wax cylinder and adjusts the needle-horn.

SEWARD: This is Dracula's voice. It's been authenticated.

Seward cranks the dictaphone.

DRACULA's Voice: *Cheeldren of the naight, leesten to them. What museek they maike!*

There is a strange distortion in the recording.

HARKER: What's that noise in the background?

SEWARD: Wolves, my boy. Dire wolves, to be precise.

DRACULA's Voice: *To die, to be reallllly dead, that must be… gloriousssss!*

MORRIS: Vlad's well beyond Rome now. He's up there, in his impenetrable castle, continuing the crusade on his own. He's got this army of Szgany gypsies, fanatically loyal fucks. They follow his orders, no matter how atrocious, no matter how appalling. You know the score, Jon. Dead babies, drained cattle, defenestrated peasants, impaled grandmothers. He's god-damned Un-Dead. A fuckin' monster, boy.

Harker is shocked. He looks again at the woodcut.

SEWARD: The firm would like you to proceed up into the mountains, beyond the Borgo Pass…

HARKER: But that's Transylvania. We're not supposed to be in Transylvania.

Godalming looks to the heavens, but continues eating.

SEWARD: …beyond the Borgo Pass, to Castle Dracula. There, you are to ingratiate yourself by whatever means come to hand into Dracula's coterie. Then you are to disperse the Count's household.

HARKER: Disperse?

Godalming puts down his knife and fork.

GODALMING: Disperse with ultimate devotion.

5

'What can I say, we made a mistake,' Francis said, shrugging nervously, trying to seem confident. He had shaved off his beard, superstitiously hoping that would attract more attention than his announcement. 'I think this is the courageous thing to do, shut down and recast, rather than continue with a frankly unsatisfactory situation.'

Kate did not usually cover show business, but the specialist press stringers (*Variety*, *Screen International*, *Positif*) were dumbstruck enough to convince her it was not standard procedure to fire one's leading man after two weeks' work, scrap the footage and get someone else. When Keitel

was sent home, the whole carnival ground to a halt and everyone had to sit around while Francis flew back to the States to find a new star.

Someone asked how far over budget *Dracula* was. Francis smiled and waffled about budgets being provisional.

'No one ever asked how much the Sistine Chapel cost,' he said, waving a chubby hand. Kate would have bet that while Michelangelo was on his back with the brushes, Pope Julius II never stopped asking how much it cost and when would it be finished.

During the break in shooting, money was pouring down a drain. Fred Roos, the co-producer, had explained to her just how expensive it was to keep a whole company standing by. It was almost more costly than having them work.

Next to Francis at the impromptu press conference in the Bucharest Town Hall was Martin Sheen, the new Jonathan Harker. In his mid-thirties, he seemed much younger, like the lost boy in *The Subject Was Roses*. The actor mumbled generously about the opportunity he was grateful for. Francis beamed like a shorn Santa Claus on a forced diet and opened a bottle of his own wine to toast his new star.

The man from *Variety* asked who would be playing Dracula and Francis froze in mid-pour, sloshing red all over Sheen's wrist. Kate knew the title role – actually fairly small, thanks to Bram Stoker and screenwriter John Milius – was still on offer to various possibles – Klaus Kinski, Jack Nicholson, Christopher Lee.

'I can confirm Bobby Duvall will play Van Helsing,' Francis said. 'And we have Dennis Hopper as Renfield. He's the one who eats flies.'

'But who is Dracula?'

Francis swallowed some wine, attempted a cherubic expression, and wagged a finger.

'I think I'll let that be a surprise. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I have motion picture history to make.'

6

As Kate took her room key from the desk, the night manager nagged her in Romanian. When she had first checked in, the door of her room fell off as she opened it. The hotel maintained she did not know her own vampire strength and should pay exorbitantly to have the door replaced. Apparently, the materials were available only at great cost and had to