

# The Fall of the Romanian Vampire



*A tale of the infernal*

**BRENT MONAHAN**

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**Romania.** If you're like most Americans, you only have a vague notion of where this mysterious nation is. If you thought, "Somewhere north of Turkey and south of Russia," or, better yet, "North of Bulgaria and south of Ukraine," you'd be right. But you probably have no idea why a country so far from Rome would have that name. The answer is that it was conquered and settled by Romans during the heyday of the Roman Empire, and while those descendants of Romulus were eventually pushed back from virtually everywhere else, a goodly number managed to hold on in the land between the Black Sea and the Carpathian Mountains. In fact, if you speak Italian and a smattering of Latin, as I do, you can actually navigate in Romania. For example, if you read the phrase "vizitați muzeul" you could correctly guess that it means "visit the museum." The public signs look just like the ones from *Mission Impossible*.

Aside from this information, the only other fact Americans know about Romania is, "Part of it is Transylvania, where all of the vampires come from." Half right this time.

No, I'm not Romanian. I never was. My parents weren't. I live in New York. Within the shadows of the George Washington Bridge. I like all of the shadows of my neighborhood – but not everything that slinks within them.

That's "where."

"When" is December of 2011. The Heights is definitely not midtown Manhattan, either in the quality of living or shopping; but we do manage to fire up the holiday spirit. A good deal of that can be attributed to the current inhabitants: lots of Roman Catholics, more than half of whom were born in Central America or the Caribbean islands. As everyone knows, those who have little chance of scaling the gringo class pyramid, those just immigrated from poor countries, tend to accept violence as part and parcel of day-to-day existence. So we in The Heights have more than our share of violent deaths. During the first nine months of 2011, we had ten fatal shootings and seven fatal knifings.

But then the number went up. Not from shootings. Not even from knifings. The next six blade deaths were neck slashings. Severed carotid arteries. All made right to left; all of the same width. Every victim had been robbed of their wallet or purse, and all had dressed in a relatively prosperous manner. The combined Special Investigation summary (dated December 4, 2011) of Precincts 33 and 34 speculated that the instrument was a straight razor, and that a left-handed killer had decided to make northwest Manhattan his "happy hunting ground."

The *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as national public records of social/international/cultural and of business/financial news, respectively, could not give two shits

about a lethal robber at the opposite end of their island. The TV and radio media, however, had just begun to focus their antennae on the welcome bad news. I had predated their interest because I happened to witness the predator's third takedown. Everything about it was wrong. At least for me it was very wrong. I tried in vain to get an answer for it for two solid days – and then gave up and resigned myself to taking care of it on my own.

This meant preparations. It meant materials – and not the kind you got from a visit to the local bodega or Rite Aid. But I took care of the logistical considerations. And in that time two more died.

Every day after that, as soon as twilight slid through the brick and stone canyons – which, as the winter solstice approached, was about half past four – I was out on the streets. I had taped a map of Upper Manhattan onto a piece of cardboard that had recently protected an HDTV and pushed a pin into each place where one of the bloodlettings had occurred. They described a roughly one-kilometer-wide circle around a locus of 133rd and Broadway. This was the ruse of a mind at least semi-intelligent, a plan to misdirect the police. I had watched him leave his third victim and noted well that his escape via a south-bound bus would take him out of the circle. It made things difficult. I could not simply hunt the hunter. I had to take him down close to my place of residence.

The two-legged predator looked young, but that had no bearing on my strategy. The challenge was that he outweighed me by maybe forty pounds. So I armed myself with the biggest, baddest, bolt-of-lightning Taser I could order. I'm not talking about the hand-held variety you have to jam into your assailant's side and that generates 30,000 pants-pissing volts. I got the Taser X26 Civilian that lists for \$999 (\$875 on the Internet) and is capable of penetrating an inch thickness of clothing with a pair of wires at fifteen feet while delivering 7.5M volts of shock therapy.

I dressed up like a mark and minced along the grimy sidewalks. My needs dictated my patrols, so that I felt like a character from *The Truman Show* patrolling a limited beat. Even though I confined myself to four-square blocks, I was able to finish my admittedly restricted holiday shopping early.

At nine fifteen on a Tuesday night, I spotted him tailing me. It might have been the slight fake drag of my right foot or the two bulging shopping bags I was...as the true New Yorker says...schlepping. It might have been the carefully constructed slump of my shoulders. Whatever it was, my bait had worked. I rapidly calculated the route I must take, staying among the crowded sidewalk traffic until I was on the block of my apartment dwelling.

I paused on one corner while he pretended to be engaged by a poster kiosk opposite me. Finally, the sidewalk ahead was empty from the alleyway to the next corner. I resumed my slow walk. I

knew without turning to look that he was crossing the street and timing his pace so that he would be beside me just as I came to the mouth of the alley.

I set down the smaller of my shopping bags, a festive holiday design from Bloomingdales, and shook my sleeve slightly, coaxing the Taser down into my hand. Then I bent, to make his attack all the more tempting. A moment later, I found myself propelled into the deep shadows, being bum-rushed by an inhumanly strong creature whose clothes smelled to me of Eastern Europe. The odor surprised me, but his power did not. I more than matched it by dropping to one knee, grabbing the lapel of his car coat with my left hand and aiming the X26 directly at the underside of his chin. Before he could react, I squeezed the trigger.

At point-blank range, the double wires easily penetrated the skin stretched under his mandible bones – the same place a dogcatcher jabs his pole hook when he is confronted with a dog suspected of having rabies.

I realized that the Taser had enough residual power to drill through the blade of his tongue and lodge in his hard palate. For a moment, his cheeks lit up like a Chinese lantern. Then, accompanied by crackle and sizzle, he fell to the concrete and did a 2x breakdance. I eased off the trigger and scooped from my coat pocket a pair of handcuffs. These were not the kind sold in adult toy shops, or even to ordinary police departments. If Carl Denham had had King-Kong-sized cuffs made of this steel, the big monkey would have never escaped. I pushed his non-resisting wrists behind his back and snapped on both pairs. Then I went back for my second shopping bag, grabbed the first with the same hand and dragged the killer none too gently halfway down the alley to the service door of my apartment building.

Where I live is in aged, but respectable shape. Four stories. One service and one tenant elevator. Twelve addresses in all. What pleased me most was the dark back alley and a storage room in the basement that had a good deal of junk in it, but which nobody seemed to want to access until they moved out. Among the items long ago propped against an inner wall, up on a skid, and sealed in thick plastic, was a king-size mattress. I had augmented this one with three others...one for each wall. To cover the ceiling, I had ordered anechoic foam, material extruded into rows of highly sound-absorbent cones. The stuff is god-awful expensive, but indispensable.

Once I had the nuisance stowed inside my soundproofed room, I turned on the overhead light and gave him a good study. He was a handsome bastard, in a Slavic way. High, prominent cheekbones; thick, dark hair; cupid-bow lips. I could see why such an attractive man would want to hold back the aging process by a factor of a hundred to one. As he appeared at that moment, he

could get women from eighteen all the way up to confident grandmother cougars.

Before he regained consciousness, I removed the probes and wires from his palate, tongue and chin. While chaining his middle to a column support that held up the building, I observed the amazing healing process of the vampire. The blood that poured out of his slightly open mouth stopped dribbling after twenty seconds. The two puncture marks under the curve of his chin closed within two minutes. By the time I finished securing industrial zip ties around his knees and ankles, his eyelids began to flutter. I noted that his irises had a distinct amber tint. When he ran his tongue over his blood-stained upper teeth, I observed the slightly overlong canines.

I slapped him several times across both cheeks. He focused hard on me, then tested the strength of his various bonds. It was at that point that he began to look truly frightened. I unbuttoned my coat and fished the crucifix out from the front of my shirt. I let it dangle inches from his amber eyes. His terror eased. He refocused on me.

“Nothing, huh?” I asked.

He remained silent.

“What about this holy water?” I asked, uncapping a tiny vial I had tucked into one of my pockets. I threw it on his face. He failed to flinch.

When I was refurbishing the storage area days earlier, I happened upon a half-length mirror. I fetched it and turned it toward the vampire. I bent and peered into the silvered image. It was reversed as it should have been, and displayed everything before it, including the face of the man turned monster.

He laughed at me.

“But you are a vampire,” I asserted.

“Call me whatever you like,” he replied.

I returned the mirror to its place of shelter. “What about ‘Bela Lugosi?’” I suggested, since his accent and even the timbre of his voice harkened back to the long-dead actor.

“How did you know what I am?” he asked.

“I watched you kill somebody about a week ago. You slashed her throat with a straight razor.” Having said that, I dug into his left coat pocket, found the closed razor and claimed it for my own. “Then you put your mouth to her neck and sucked down about two pints of blood. Finally, you robbed her.”

He shrugged. “I only pretend to be a vampire. I’m as human as you are,” he professed. “There’s a whole club of us in Greenwich Village, but all the rest drink tomato juice blood. Phonies and cowards they are.”

“I felt your strength,” I returned. “I see your amber eyes. The extra length of your canines. You’re the real thing.”

He took a moment to digest my words. "What do you care?" he said casually. "You're not a policeman, are you?"

"No."

"You're also not an honest citizen if you took all the trouble to drag me into this place instead of giving me to the police." He leaned forward as far as the chain would let him go. "My wallet is in my back pocket. You will find more than eight hundred dollars there."

"Not enough," I said.

"Then take the key from my front pocket. I'll give you the address of my living quarters. You can go there right now. I have a box in my bedroom with more than three thousand dollars in it. That should be enough to buy your silence."

"You speak English well," I told him.

"Thank you."

"Considering you only came from Romania several weeks ago."

"You are guessing, but you are also correct."

"What made you move?"

"The new blood of the New World," he replied. He gave me an unhurried, assessing stare. "I think I understand. You captured me because you also want to be a vampire. To have the joy of eternal youth. To have great strength and speed, and the ability to heal quickly if you are harmed."

"If that were so, could you make me into one of your kind?" I said, leaning back against the mattress directly across from him.

"Of course, of course! You've seen in the cinema how it works. You cut my chest or arm and drink some of my blood." All the while he spoke, he nodded his reassurance. "What the writers and movie folk think is that you must die and then wake up cold and un-breathing. Undead. No, friend, I must let you drink my blood several times in one week. You will still live, but you will slowly transform. And you will know when that transformation is complete because you will develop a hunger for blood. Touch my forehead. Am I cold as the concrete?"

I did not move.

"No, I am not. Have you not watched me breathing? Put your hand against my chest and feel the beating of my heart. This is much less sacrifice than you ever imagined, right? But still you will no longer age or catch colds." A twinkle of amusement suddenly lit his eyes. "And when you go to my apartment, you will not find a coffin filled with dirt from Transylvania: like garlic, mirrors, crosses, holy water, being invited to enter a house," he spat, "most of what you think is right is just nonsense. The inventions of ignorant peasants."

I continued to regard him without moving, even so much as blinking.



“What are you waiting for?” he asked. “What else do you want?”

“The truth,” I answered. “It’s the only thing I want.” I pushed off from the mattress and went for a cardboard box. Inside it was a Sears DieHard battery. Brand new. Guaranteed for 72 months. I had already connected the jumper cables.”

“What are you doing?” the vampire asked in a voice an octave higher than moments before. “What’s the matter with you?”

Without reply, I connected the negative pole to the handcuffs and the positive one to his right ear. His screams made me very glad that I had soundproofed the storage room so well. I let him burn for several seconds, then disconnected the positive cable.

“The street people you slaughter are just incidental,” I told him. “Who were you sent to kill in New York?”

“What?” he gasped hoarsely.

“Who must you kill to earn your powder?”

The vampire drew in a quick, sharp breath. He turned his neck as far as it would go, so that he could regard me with new eyes.

I asked, “You weren’t told that I was here, were you?”

“No, no,” he managed.

“How many vampires does the devil allow to operate at any time?”

“Eighteen.”

“Finally an honest answer. Six, six and six. The true number of Lucifer. In what year were you born?”

“Nineteen eighty.”

“A mere baby. No wonder you were so easy to catch.”

“How old are you?” he asked.

“One hundred and seven. You were right; you’re as human as I am.” I reared back my upper lips and displayed my overlong canines. I followed up by removing my blue contact lenses and storing them in their case. I leaned forward to show him my amber eyes. “You also told the truth about not needing to die to become a vampire. Who did your demon tell you to kill for your monthly powder?”

“Two professors at Columbia,” he supplied without hesitation. “The blind one I have already killed, pushing him down an elevator shaft. I was told to wait three months before killing the second, so there would be no ideas connecting the first to the second.” He had been trying to break the handcuffs for the past minute and was only now realizing how totally helpless he was. “How long have you lived in New York?”

“Eighteen years.”

“I don’t understand,” he said.

“I believe I do,” I replied. I unclipped the negative cable from the handcuffs, but I did not bother to walk around to address him face to face.

“You are a brother,” the young vampire cooed in what I guessed was his most ingratiating tone. “We are the same.”

“‘Blood brothers,’ right?” I replied.

He offered me an earnest approximation of a laugh. “Exactly.”

“What is the name of the demon you serve?”

“He calls himself Beroald.”

“And through what image does he visit you?”

“I carry a figure of a mermaid carved from the bone of a whale. I purchased it in a museum in Bucaresti. What is your figure?”

“Mine is ivory. A netsuke of a Japanese shogun.”

“What is a netsuke?”

I ignored his question. The youth of this era are ignorant beyond belief. “And who is Radu Negru?”

“Radu Negru? I think I have heard...Why is it important that I know this name?”

“Because you were chosen to replace him and apparently found very wanting in the balance. Professors at Columbia were the excuse, but you were sent to me.” I stopped talking to silently resent my situation. Looking at my captive I sighed, “Once again, I must do the bidding of those powers confined in darkness and forbidden from the earth until Judgment Day.”

Before the naive young vampire could understand my intent, I slapped a length of duct tape over his mouth. It truly is the solution for a thousand needs. The muffled screaming was terrible, but not what I would call...in my expert opinion...blood curdling. I flipped open his straight razor and drew a deep cut into the nape of his neck. Not deep enough to bleed him out, but enough to allow me to drink deeply before his supernatural healing power sealed it shut. I was able to drink from him for two full days before he died.

Three days after Bela Lugosi Jr.’s disposal, I was visited by my personal demon. It came just before I lay down to sleep.

“What do you have to report?” it asked in a voice filled with the smoke of fire and brimstone.

“Nothing out of the ordinary,” I replied, turning the netsuke figurine so that the unmoving lips faced me. “Another huge Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center, a fresh crop of skaters —”

“Do not talk of the season!” it bellowed.

“Ohhhh,” I said with oil in my voice, as if finally understanding its question. “You mean the inept Transylvanian you sent here for me to kill.”

“He is dead,” the voice said, more declaration than question.

“No. I let him go. Everyone deserves a second chance.”

“Your powder will arrive late,” it threatened.

“I figured as much, what with all those last-minute FedEx and UPS deliveries for...Hanukah.” The room lapsed into silence. I knew I had toyed with Hell as much as I dared. I sat on the bed. “Here’s my version of what happened: and since you rarely give me the truth, I’ll have to be satisfied with it. You were spoiled by Radu Negru. It’s hard to replace a seven- or eight-hundred-year-old psychopathic, sadistic butcher – especially in these soft times. You tried to fetch water from the Transylvanian well once too often. ‘Old ways are the best ways,’ right? But you were wrong. This one hunted here in The Heights as he did in those ancient villages. Befouling his nest. Now, New Yorkers are far too sophisticated to suspect the work of a vampire. But not in the old country. If my guess is right, they were visiting cemeteries with pitchforks and torches before you shipped him here. You had to send him to somewhere where English is the main language, since that’s probably the only foreign language he spoke well. You sent him to New Amsterdam on a quasi-bullshit assignment and knew I wouldn’t allow him to live. Can’t very well ask the normal humans to slay a vampire; but, like they say, ‘It takes one to slay one.’ So it was the dumpster out back for young Vlad Tepid, and you’re now busy looking for someone much more clever. Like me.”

“The one you replaced was also smarter and more loyal than you,” the spokesdemon from Hell replied. “Make no mistake: the Creator’s intelligent design continues to churn out truly frightening mistakes every day. Learn more respect – or one will come for you someday.”

“I am contrite, Sir Reverence,” I replied. And by that unrepentant response I knew that I was beginning to tire of the price I pay day after day for day after day.

“In the new year, you will move to Chicago,” the voice said. “There is much to be done there...and far too many drained humans in New York.”

“Happy New Year,” I wished myself bitterly. I drained the last of Johnny Walker and sank down onto the sheets for another tortured night.

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From [www.bloviatingzeppelin.net](http://www.bloviatingzeppelin.net), July 2, 2012: “As the sun rose Sunday, New York City hit a remarkable milestone: recording just 193 murders in the first six months of the year. In that same span, more than 250 murders were recorded in Chicago – a city just one third as large...”

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Brent Monahan is the author of 14 published novels, two of which were made into films starring Oliver Reed, Peter Fonda, Sissy Spacek, and Donald Sutherland. His vampire novels, *The Book of Common Dread* and *The Blood of the Covenant*, have recently been re-released by WTF Books. [www.wtfbooks.net](http://www.wtfbooks.net)