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VAMPIRES

Who is Dracula?

Dracula, the character created by Bram Stoker in 1897, is probably the most famous vampire of all. He was based on the horrific tales of one Vlad ("The Impaler") Tepes whose preferred method of torture was to impale his unfortunate victims on wooden stakes. Vampires reputedly drink the blood of their victims to sustain their existence. In addition they are immortal and abhor daylight, preferring to sleep in coffins until it is safe to go about their business at night. They cast no reflection, detest garlic and can be killed by driving a stake through the heart. Nice.

Where did these ideas come from?

Xeroderma pigmentosum (XP) meaning pigmented dry skin is a rare genetic disorder leaving its victims acutely vulnerable to skin and eye cancers if they are even briefly exposed to the sun or ultraviolet rays.

Porphyria is a condition where the body fails to produce one of the enzymes necessary to make haem - a molecule which is vital in red blood cells for carrying oxygen.

There may be a variety of skin problems with porphyria. Sensitivity to sunlight plays a key part. Sometimes the skin can scar and there can be excessive hair growth, also the skin and gums can retract from the teeth giving a 'fanglike' appearance.

Some of the compounds in garlic can turn a mild case of porphyria into a more severe and painful one, so people with this disorder should avoid it.

The effects of these distressing illnesses may have sparked the imagination of the creators of these mythical monsters.

More Vamps? Well, we've devoted the whole cellar in the Goth House to things that suck blood – not just imaginary movie monsters either!

http://www.planet-science.com/outthere/planet_goth/index.html

or check out <http://vampires.monstrous.com/> may not be ideal for young children but there's loads of history of the Dracula legend.

What is a vampire's favourite mode of transport? A blood vessel!