



PRINCE RADU IONESCU

What we know is so little
and what we presume is so much
and we learn so slowly
that we ask and then we die.
Better to keep our pride
for the city of the dead
on the day of the departed
and there when the wind goes through
the hollows of your skull
it will decipher these enigmas for you,
whispering the truth in the space
where your ears used to be.
—Pablo Neruda, “Through a Closed Mouth the Flies Enter”

Introduction

In the world of the Kindred, there are two New York Cities. There is the soaring metropolis, its glittering towers lifting a confusion of players above a chessboard of intrigue, each street and corner locked in a web of advance and retreat, gambit and sacrifice. And there is the city below these streets, a subterranean kingdom of foundations, warrens, and tunnels; an unguessed expanse of concrete and rust, secret roots and forgotten crypts, discarded relics and abandoned stations. Known by its denizens as Dis, this sprawling necropolis is ruled by a single creature—Radu Ionescu, the Pale King, Prince of the Nosferatu. Radu’s domain is absolute, and if size alone were the elector which crowned the head of Gotham’s true prince, St. James would be forced to abdicate in shame.

Description

Prince Radu is, despite his political acumen and keen mind, still a Nosferatu, and therefore not a pleasant sight to behold. Nearly seven feet tall, his skeleton seems unnaturally stretched—his fingers and toes are abnormally long, and he walks with a shambling gait caused by a cruelly twisted spine. Radu’s skin is an unwholesome blue in color, and years of gradual contraction have pulled it drum-tight across his misshapen frame. His anoxic flesh is ritualistically scarred,

every square inch carved with bizarre Byzantine inscriptions. Radu's face has an ancient, nearly alien cast, with a sharp nose and pointed ears flaring from his elongated skull. His eyes are equally unearthly; large and hooded, they are spaced disquietingly far apart on his face. His irises glow with a golden light, but the abyssal black of his pupils slowly changes shape—sometimes round, sometimes slit, other times trifurcated into lobes. Compared to most Nosferatu, Radu's teeth are small; twin racks of translucent needles licked by a long, violet-black tongue. The crown of his domed head is bald, a halo of mysterious Cyrillic letters tattooed around his skull like an unknown zodiac. Beneath this crown, Radu's coarse white hair streams from his head in six intricately-plaited braids, their astonishing length ornamented by gold rings and glittering jewels. Nearly twelve feet long, these braids are occasionally woven over stiff lengths wire and twisted into fantastic shapes suggestive of spirals, wings, scorpion tails, or tentacles. Radu customarily wears an expression of mandarin serenity; but his eyes are always alert, and no detail escapes their phosphorescent gaze.

The Pale King adorns himself in garments that harken back to the Byzantine Empire, favoring long robes plated in hammered metals and gleaming faience, bracelets carved in complex whorls etched with strange alphabets, and bejeweled rings of blood red, feral green, and sulfurous yellow. Radu's collection of rings is famous, and he wears several on each long, spindly finger—at least one behind each multi-jointed knuckle. Each of Radu's rings boasts a story or legend, from the ring of meteoric iron once worn by Judas Iscariot to his diamond signet designed by the House of Fabergé. Radu also wears rings on his elongated toes, and when seated on his throne, his feet grip the dais like talons. The large toe of his right foot sports the golden Fisherman's Ring once worn by Pope Clement V. Radu sometimes makes visitors kneel and kiss this ring as a sign of respect—a calculated gesture which allows him to gauge their humility.

Personality

A deep thinker with eclectic tastes and a fondness for ritual, Radu's temperament is an unusual fusion of Enlightenment philosophy and Byzantine splendor. Fluent in over a dozen languages, the Prince expresses himself with great precision, often illuminating his points with quotations from Lao Tzu, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine, Avicenna, and Shakespeare. An enthusiastic patron of the arts, Radu rivals the Toreador in his passion for music, particularly composers from the "heartland" such as Bartók, Kurtág, and Ligeti. He recently Dominated Alfred Schnittke into giving a command performance, and has provided Duncan Capelthwaite with more than a few original manuscripts believed lost to antiquity. Radu's baritone voice is resonant but restrained, and he is fond of reciting poetry at length, his current favorites being Pablo Neruda and Simin Behbahani. Although Radu espouses no religious beliefs, his two most trusted advisors are a Sufi philosopher and a Jesuit priest. And yet, despite his remarkable intelligence and charisma, Prince Radu is surprisingly humble. To much of the Kindred world beyond America, his court is regarded as a pretentious curiosity. Radu understands his limitations, and seems content—for now—to remain the "power beneath the throne."

Feeding Habits

Radu rarely hunts, a practice he considers beneath him. His feeding rituals have acquired the nature of tributes, and twice weekly a victim is marched before him and sacrificed to his hunger. Radu consumes each mortal utterly, leaving behind only a gleaming skeleton. These tributes are pre-selected by a special branch of the Ascunși Îngeri, Radu's formidable secret police force.

Declared “wicked in life but useful in death,” each victim has earned a death sentence through his own actions, whether carried out against the Nosferatu or against his fellow humans.

History

A product of diverse nationalities and influences, it is perhaps fitting that Radu Ionescu was born in a city with four names. “Napoca” to its long-dead Dacian founders, “Klausenburg” to the German Saxons who arrived in 1272 at the bequest of the Magyar king, “Cluj” to the oppressed Romanians who claimed ancestry to the original Dacians; to Radu it was always known by its Hungarian name, the town of Koloszvár in Transylvania.

Family

Born in 1463 to a Hungarian mother and a Romanian father, Radu was an interesting mix from the very beginning. His mother, Eszter Erdélyi, was a Hungarian whose family had been living in Koloszvár for countless generations, claiming direct lineage to Stephen I. She was known for her many eccentricities, a property much of her family shared, and was rumored to be the product of generations of inbreeding. Radu’s father, Iancu Ionescu, was from Wallachia, the territory across the Carpathian Mountains. Though essentially a neighbor to Transylvania, the dark and barbarous lands of Wallachia were as distant from beautiful Koloszvár as the spires of far Constantinople.

Iancu had fled Wallachia in 1459, seeking refuge with a Hungarian branch of his family, and his tale was grim, indeed. His prince—Vlad III, son of Dracul, grandson of Mircea—had gone mad. In an attempt to crush the corrupt, disloyal, firmly-entrenched *boyar* nobility, he had invited the nobles to his capital city of Tîrgoviste on the pretense of a great feast. There, after a meal salted by his arrogant inquisitions and paranoid intimations of disloyalty, the mad ruler ordered his soldiers to bolt the doors, and all five hundred *boyars* were taken captive—along with their wives and attendants—and impaled upon great stakes outside the hall. Their rotting bodies were left as food for the blackbirds. After that, Vlad “the Impaler” began a systematic campaign of subjugation in order to crush the *boyars*, giving their lands and powers to peasants in an attempt to purchase their loyalty. Although that evening of mass slaughter was the most horrifying incident, there were many more deaths, and even rumors of forced slavery.

Iancu knew that he could not avoid the insane wrath of his *voevod* for long. Although his family was better educated and less corrupt than the typical *boyar*, they were no friends to the line of Mircea the Great, and had on more than one occasion vexed the Impaler’s father, Vlad II Dracul. Additionally, they had close ties to a Hungarian family in Transylvania, a clan that supported Landislas in a bid for the throne of Hungary, whereas Vlad III supported Corvinus. The entire political climate was growing hostile, and Iancu knew that it was only a matter of time before his family triggered the terrible wrath of the Impaler. After several vain attempts to convince them of the impending danger, Iancu came to the decision to depart Wallachia alone. Equipped with an antique sword and a collection of valuables reluctantly stolen from the family treasury, he fled Wallachia with a caravan of merchants. Upon reaching Koloszvár he was welcomed by his Hungarian cousins, who were well aware of Vlad’s insanity—his bloody incursions into Southeastern Transylvania left quite a few Saxons impaled in the ruins of their burning villages. Three weeks after his arrival, Iancu learned that his family had been executed and his ancestral land had been doled out to Vlad’s peasant cronies.

Although Iancu Ionescu was safe from the Impaler, he was still a Romanian in an area where the Magyar and Saxon held sway. Fortunately, he was well-educated and spoke fluent Magyar, and had brought with him a small fortune in jewelry. This, in addition to his Hungarian blood ties, helped attenuate Magyar prejudice, the biggest obstacle to Iancu's social advancement. When he changed his name to János and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1461 he was generally accepted as an equal. In 1462 he married his cousin Eszter Erdélyi, and in 1463 their first son was born. Although his father wanted to give him a Hungarian name, his mother insisted on her favorite Romanian name. Despite the local prevalence of anti-Romanian sentiments, Iancu acquiesced to his wife's request, and their son was named Radu.

Radu grew up in an unusual household, one that was marked by generous ethnic tolerance as well as a certain degree of peculiarity. His mother was prone to having "fits," and his father seemed, at times, to be a tangled skein of contradictions—a Vlach who passed as a Magyar, a Wallach who identified as Transylvanian, an Eastern Noble who longed to be a Western Bourgeois. But despite these eccentricities, Radu grew up in a supportive atmosphere, and he never lacked for material needs. He learned German and Romanian as well as classical Greek and Latin, and his mother secured a small library to nourish his curious intellect. When Radu came of age, he departed his beloved family and traveled to Buda-Pest to attend school. After excelling at his studies of religion and philosophy, he left for Vienna in 1483.

A Renaissance Discovery

In Vienna his life was changed forever, for here Radu discovered his first invigorating traces of the Renaissance—that vast front of intellectual rebirth advancing slowly across the Continent. Although Vienna was no Florence, it was still touched by the winds of change in ways unknown in Transylvania, and Radu allowed himself to partake of the fresh air without reservation. Delighted by new advances in science, he turned his attention to the study of mathematics, physics, and medicine. Characteristically, Radu was an excellent student with a voracious appetite, but soon found himself growing restless. Vienna was beautiful, but it was Italy which beckoned him onwards: if the New Learning was a storm, Italy was its whirling heart; and if the mirrors of Vienna were flickering with the Light of Rebirth, they were merely reflecting the distant conflagrations of Florence, Milan, and Rome. Learning Italian from a Genoese poet in exchange for lessons in German, Radu left for Italy in 1485. Three weeks after his departure, Vienna fell to Matthias Corvinus.

If Vienna had stirred his spirit, in Florence Radu became completely reborn, and he moved through the rarified air and complex strata of Italian life with the ease of a native. Everything was so different from Transylvania; everything was so new, so modern, so alive. The art, the music, the science—Radu absorbed everything he could, working odd jobs as a translator to supplement his diminishing wealth. It was his goal to return to Transylvania transformed—perhaps even establish a school, a peripatatum of sorts, an academy open to Magyar, Saxon, and Romanian alike. It was a naïve and impossibly idealistic goal, but immersed in the heart of the Renaissance and given his family background, who could fault the young scholar for holding lofty aspirations?

Radu returned to Koloszvár in 1490, but little had changed in Transylvania. Magyar ears were not ready for the gospel of racial harmony and religious tolerance. Were they not already more advanced than their Romanian neighbors? Did not Saxon and Magyar share good relations? And was the Turk not a greater threat than their own lack of Italian worldliness—indeed,

perhaps even Italian decadence and irreverence? These were dangerous years, and it was no time for a Hungarian to engage in feckless dreams.

This stubborn resistance disheartened Radu, and nothing more so than the surprising reluctance of his own family to share his cosmopolitan ideals. The more he pushed, the more inflexible the townsfolk became, and it wasn't soon after his return that he began to overhear the gossip behind his back, that he was nothing but a Vlach upstart, or worse, a gypsy putting on Magyar airs. Of course these claims were absurd, but the insults stung. Dismayed and filled with a growing depression, Radu retired to his studies, finding solace in the constant stream of books he had shipped from Buda-Pest and Vienna. Although the talk died down, it was obvious that his inner light was fading out, and his untapped Romantic optimism was fermenting into a sour cynicism. Radu's mother feared that her son was destined to become a recluse; but nothing she could do rekindled his enthusiasm for human contact. Then, in 1492 his father died.

His father's death affected Radu in a strange and unpredictable manner—he suddenly became acutely conscious of his heritage as a Romanian. He found himself intrigued by his father's past, and going through his papers and belongings, he found clues to Iancu's strange history. A new world opened up for Radu, a world of savage mountains and bloodthirsty *voevods*, a world of Turkish assassins and heroic crusaders. He even changed his last name to Ionescu, a move which delighted his mother but raised Hungarian eyebrows, and more than likely confirmed some old suspicions. In the spring of 1493 he decided to travel east and seek out his Romanian relatives—that is, if any had survived the ravages of Vlad Tepeș.

But he would never find out, for on the way he encountered something far worse than a bloodthirsty *voevod*. Or, specifically, a *very* bloodthirsty *voevod*.

The Translator

It was in the Carpathian Mountains, north of Turnu Rosa, that Radu first encountered Cornel Lupescu. An aging lord in a crumbling castle, Lupescu welcomed the young traveler into his home with the graciousness of a good Christian and the hospitality of a fellow Romanian. Intrigued by the scholar's questions about Vlad Dracula and fascinated by his modern quest for personal identity, the Romanian proposed an arrangement. If Radu would stay with Lupescu through the winter, he would help Radu locate his surviving family in Tirgoviste. In return, Radu would help translate a small collection of books that had recently come into the *voevod's* possession. Excited and gratified, Radu readily agreed.

At first, the young scholar was delighted. Lupescu left him to his own devices, and the books were satisfyingly challenging to translate. Primarily a collection of astrological texts from medieval France, there were also a few cryptic works written in modern Latin, and a German book about witches and demons. As the esoteric nature of the texts became clear, Radu found his curiosity piqued. Apparently the old *voevod* was something of an alchemist! It was certainly a profession that suited Lupescu, with his odd hours and his "forbidden chambers." Lupescu was reclusive, but when he did entertain guests, they frequently discussed arcane subjects, their conversations scintillating with references to Paracelsus, Alhazred, and Agrippa. Unfortunately, when Radu pressed Lupescu about his work, his host became cagey and irritable, and sometimes flew into a rage at the most innocent of inquiries. Understandably this put a strain on their relationship, and eventually—and regretfully—Radu began looking forward to the completion of his task.

Furthermore, there was the disturbing fact that Lupescu had yet to make a single remark touching upon his part of their agreement, and every time Radu brought the subject up, he was casually dismissed.

Twelve weeks into his stay Radu finished the final work, a recent text penned by the German alchemist Ludwig Prinn. Filled with no small amount of trepidation, he approached his employer and demanded information about his family's whereabouts. Lupescu just laughed, and summoning two fearsome gypsies with a wave of his hand, cast Radu into the dungeon.

It would be three years until Radu saw his host again.

Imprisonment

Radu's imprisonment was terrible, and all the more depressing for being inexplicable. Although he sent down the odd volume to be translated, Lupescu never once paid Radu a visit or justified his actions. Despairing for his life, Radu nevertheless attempted to improve his situation. He set out to discover any fact he could about the *voevod*, his ability to speak Magyar opening up a channel of communication with the other prisoners. He learned that the old Vlach was actually a prince of some kind, a *domnul*, but over what lands he ruled, the Hungarians were curiously reluctant to specify. One decrepit prisoner, half insane from syphilis and prone to fits of incoherent babbling, claimed that Lupescu was actually a *strigoi*, a vampire from a family of monsters called the Tzimisce, and he was *domnul* only of the night: for he ruled a domain of the dead. Another prisoner claimed that Lupescu was over two hundred years old, and had been terrorizing the Carpathians since Wallachia was established in 1330. And still another—a Saxon who was executed two weeks after being detained—claimed that Vlad Țepeș was also a *strigoi*, and had learned his mortal cruelties from studying the life of Cornel Lupescu.

Despite hearing one corroborating story after another, Radu refused to entertain the notion that his jailer was anything but a mendacious human tyrant. Growing weary of such superstitious nonsense, Radu began conversing with one of the guards, a Turk by the name of Kemat Musan. Sharing Greek as a common language, Radu learned Turkish and reciprocated by teaching the guard how to read. Over time, he struck up a friendship with Musan, and was thereby able to keep abreast of outside politics. Radu was surprised to discover that Musan, too, thought Lupescu was an immortal monster—a belief the guard held as matter-of-factly as his belief in the surrounding walls.

One night in 1495 Lupescu had Radu dragged up from the dungeon. Without a word of explanation, he was washed, dressed, and provided with a hearty meal. Confused and hardly daring to permit himself any hope, Radu was marched to Lupescu's chambers and introduced to the creature who would forever change his life: Milos Azul, an ambassador from Constantinople.

Transformation

Milos Azul was approximately twelve years old, and as he turned to greet Radu an evil smile slithered across his face—a smile that held untold depths of wickedness, a terrible thing to see on a boy so young and beautiful. Dressed in elaborate finery and clutching a pyx chased with esoteric carvings, the boy placed three books in front of Radu, one in French, one in German, and one in Latin. His Romanian flecked with a Turkish accent, Azul asked whether or not Radu could translate them. Gripped by sudden bravado, Radu answered that he could, indeed—and

to Lupescu's surprise, he answered in Turkish. (Unknown to Radu, this ostentation would cost Musan his head.) Without further ado, the boy removed three wafers from the pyx and wrapped them in silk, presenting them to Lupescu with a sardonic bow. The *voevod* nodded and informed Azul that Radu now belonged to him. Their meeting apparently over, Azul motioned for Radu to accompany him.

Still uncertain about the boy's position and station, not to mention his preternaturally arrogant bearing, Radu followed his new "master" in hesitant silence, holding his tongue until they had traveled several miles from Lupescu's castle. Dizzy from the fresh air and struck delirious by the moonlight, Radu boldly put forth the question as to his fate. Nothing—not his captivity, not his arcane studies, not the stories told by his fellow captives—could have prepared him for Azul's response. The boy stopped the small caravan and invited Radu to dismount and approach. Before Radu's very eyes, the lad's angelic features warped and melted, flowing like clay into a new configuration, a monstrous mask of spite. His eyes bulged like those of a fish, carious yellow fangs tore through his lips, and a reek spilled from his flesh like the stench of sour milk. His mind reeling with shock, Radu was helpless as the creature seized him, and twisting him to the ground, sank his fangs into the back of his neck, and drank.

Radu remembered dying; he remembered drinking the fetid blood of life; and he remembered—most of all—the cruel, mocking laughter of Azul's gypsies.

Enslavement

Radu's new master was cruel beyond the dreams of Cornel Lupescu. Born a century ago, Milos Azul was a Janissary, a child sent from his home in Varna into bondage to the Turks. But in Salonika he was changed, Embraced by a Turkish Nosferatu and pressed into a band of vampires sworn to rid the world of Christianity. And so they fought, attacking by night and causing terror among the Slavs and the Greeks, eventually disbanding in 1453 after the fall of Constantinople. There Azul began his career as astrologer to the newly-crowned Prince of Istanbul. As of late, his work required a translator, so it was fortunate that Lupescu was able to arrange a deal, selling Radu into slavery for three antique communion wafers from the Hagia Sophia.

Radu did not adapt to his new life gracefully. His transformation horrified him, and as his flesh pulled tighter over a skeleton that deformed more with each passing day, he fell into a bottomless well of despair. Chained to a dungeon in Istanbul for the first decade of his servitude, he was senselessly tortured. Azul would deny Radu sustenance for weeks, and then encourage him to frenzy over any victim flung within reach. Even these victims seemed selected to increase his self-loathing. Azul delighted in feeding Radu infant babies, pregnant mothers, young girls and boys, syphilitic whores, and disease-ridden animals. The assault on his body and spirit was unrelenting, and had no ostensible purpose except cruelty. When Radu refused to translate or assist Azul in his studies, he was tortured, hacked, and flayed; and when that failed to get results, he was starved into complicity, allowed one drop of blood for every page translated.

The nights were unbearable, and Radu nearly went insane—and there were certainly times he was tempted to do so, to plunge his anguish in the inchoate Lethe of madness. But he did not. Reaching deep into his being, he discovered a sane and rational core, and Radu ordered his miserable life around that keystone of identity. Although it took him many painful years, he realized what he needed to do in order to survive. He would have to let go, to surrender his

human-ness, and yet maintain his humanity. He had to accept the fact that he had become a monster—and once this was accepted, he had to become the best monster he could. He learned to discipline his hunger, and he taught himself how to control a rising frenzy. He developed more effective strategies of dealing with Azul, and began translating willingly, only asking in return that he be permitted to select his own victims. He forced himself to seek exposure to his Sire, for no matter how terrible the consequences, each moment spent with Azul was rewarded with additional knowledge about his nature. Soon, Radu understood his Sire’s twisted psychology as if it were the anatomy of a vile creature laid out on a dissecting table. Empowered by this understanding, Radu practiced manipulating the Janissary, and after several years of subtle work, earned some genuine trust.

In the end Radu prevailed. Ten years of this was enough, perhaps, for even Azul, and finally his master released him—but cautiously. Azul watched his progeny closely, and as the years went by, he engineered situations designed to grant Radu opportunities for escape—but the canny Radu never took advantage of them, and avoided all of his master’s traps. Slowly Azul began granting Radu more freedom, and within twenty years of Radu’s Embrace, his Sire introduced him to the Prince of Istanbul. Despite the fact that Radu was a Nosferatu, his natural charm and intelligence made a favorable impression on the Prince, who came to value Radu’s advice. Eventually Azul realized the importance of Radu as an asset, and within thirty years their relationship as Sire and Progeny had almost normalized.

Almost. For Milos Azul remained a petulant and sadistic creature, and every period of tranquility was balanced by a lapse into pointless barbarity—and the little fiend was nothing if not inventive. One of the worst of his tortures was punishment by magical branding. Every time Radu committed a “serious” offense—usually by breaking one of Azul’s many contradictory rules—he was branded. In a ceremony taken from a medieval grimoire, Azul created a brand in the shape of a Cyrillic letter, each letter standing for the particular “sin” committed by the errant Radu. Azul ritualistically seared these letters into Radu’s head. After the band of scars completely encircled Radu’s skull, Azul began carving designs into his progeny’s flesh using magically envenomed knives. Radu bore it all, believing that the time was not yet ripe for his revenge.

In 1526, Azul Embraced a Wallachian monk by the name of Razvan Vilcu. Razvan was an intriguing but infuriating addition to the “family.” His Embrace was a minor miracle among the Nosferatu, for his features did not warp into something horrific. Quite the contrary, Azul’s vitae bestowed the young Romanian with an unearthly beauty. And then there was Razvan’s relationship with his Sire. No matter how much Azul tortured him, Razvan did not resist, frenzy, or produce audible sounds of pain. The more sadistic Azul’s tortures became, the more beatific Razvan seemed in accepting them. It was nearly impossible to watch; there was something disturbing about Razvan, something approaching the unholy. Radu tried to befriend his blood-brother, but the monk only regarded him with chilly disdain.

Release

In 1547, Fortune finally smiled upon Radu Ionescu. Moldavia fell to the Turks, and Azul, Radu, and Razvan were sent to Iasi. Their instructions were simple, but important: They were to collect as many texts as possible from the infamous Black Monastery of Vatra Inima, then translate them into Greek and Turkish for the Prince. These documents were not the usual monkish scribblings—no theosophical treatises, saintly hagiographies, or clumsy studies on folklore. The

monks of Vatra Inima had been constructing a library dedicated to a very specialized subject: vampires. Apparently they had been aware of the existence of the Kindred for generations, and decades of surreptitious observation had produced a body of highly accurate vampire lore, focusing particularly on the Nosferatu and the Tzimisce. Although this knowledge was valuable, nothing was more interesting to Radu than a certain book, a grimoire penned in a nearly-illegible script that proved to be Latin corrupted by curious Romanian circumlocutions. Fortunately, Azul reflexively put Radu in charge of its translation.

It was to be his undoing; for the grimoire was surprisingly potent, the exact kind of work that Azul would have given his soul to possess. Radu seized his opportunity, and began the careful construction of a fatal trap. Calling upon his knowledge of eldritch lore, he introduced a few subtle—but specific—translation errors into the text, all the while dropping cautious hints about its tremendous powers. Azul took the bait blindly, suspecting nothing. Indeed, he found it difficult to conceal his eagerness for the completion of the translation. After Radu made the finishing touches to his doctored manuscript, he casually presented it to his Sire. He anxiously waited out the next few days, half-terrified that Azul would discover the deliberate errors, half-terrified he would not.

Azul did not. One night near early morning, the monastery was shaken by the sound of a wailing rising from deep within the hidden catacombs. The sound was horrifying, a gurgling shriek that ascended in pitch to rend the air itself, tearing open the night and inviting madness to pour in from some unnamable gulf. The scream lasted for an eternity of five minutes, terminating in a small, helpless whimper. Radu, riveted to the floor of the chapel in terror, later became convinced that during the course of the scream, he witnessed the icons crying, tears of molten gold streaming from the eyes of the saints, and streams of blood running down the legs of the Virgin Mother.

No one saw Milos Azul, or the book, ever again.

Radu fled from Moldavia and made his way back to Transylvania, losing Razvan somewhere in Bukovina. He paused only to send word to the Prince of Istanbul. In a letter detailing his conflicted history with Azul and outlining the reasons for his flight, he informed the Prince where the translated works could be found. Fifty-four years after leaving, Radu Ionescu returned home.

The Domnul

Liberated from a tyrannous master and resolved to his fate as a Nosferatu, Radu decided that it was time to finally make his mark on the world. Because of the information gathered by the Black Monks of Vatra Inima, Radu possessed a working knowledge of Kindred lore that rivaled all but the greatest Tremere historians. He understood the strengths and weaknesses of the local Camarilla and Sabbat. He knew the secrets of the Assamites and the Turkish Ventrue. He knew the locations of the greatest Tzimisce lairs, and he understood that clan's tangled web of alliances and rivalries. He possessed details on the internal politics of the Black Hand that would have shocked the most jaded Lasombra. How the Monks had acquired this information was a mystery, but every time Radu put it to the test, it further demonstrated its accuracy. Keeping out of sight of the Tzimisce, Radu explored the region surrounding Koloszvár for others like him, mapping the world of the undead with the precision of an architect. Facts were facts, of course: the Carpathians belonged to the Tzimisce; that much was obvious. Wallachia, too, was ruled by the

Tzimisce, with its forests overrun by the Strigoi—atavistic creatures that resembled him only in their terrible appearance. Moldavia was too dangerous, and Hungary and Serbia were battlegrounds between warring factions of Ventrue. But Transylvania....

Ah, Transylvania! Surprisingly, the villages of Transylvania were largely free from the undead, and the few Kindred who called it home were unburdened by any preexisting social structure. Most vampires in Transylvania dwelt in isolated crypts or caverns, or were degenerate scions from noble clans gone to decadence in crumbling ancestral castles. Not only were these anarchic conditions unfavorable for a traditional Camarilla approach, the political forces surrounding Transylvania were too antagonistic for any Kindred pretender with a sense of self-preservation to start making outrageous claims. Well, maybe not some foreign Ventrue, at least; but an Enlightened Nosferatu with intimate knowledge of the landscape, remaining hidden underground and organizing his domain one region at a time? Yes, that was just barely possible; and if Radu had failed to bring the Renaissance to his mortal peers, he would deliver it to the world of the undead.

It took Radu years to carve out a territory from Transylvania, for memories of the Tzimisce-dominated nights were still strong among the clanless ones. He started with Koloszvár, ruthlessly purging the area of atavistic rabble and establishing a network of progeny and like-minded Nosferatu. He selected his progeny with care, seeking suitable mortals from all nationalities and classes, each entering the Embrace willingly and proclaiming allegiance to Radu's master plan. He scored a minor coup when a Saxon Ventrue named Lorenz von Reussen joined his ranks, pledging his fealty and promising to bring fresh Ventrue blood into his growing coterie. Von Reussen became one of Radu's most trusted advisors, and his cooperation and camaraderie during those early years was essential in locking down Hermanstadt.

Of course, there were also missteps and false moves. A misguided effort to make peace with the Inquisition's Máscara de Bestia almost cost Radu his life. Initial contact with the Tzimisce proved even more hazardous. Cornel Lupescu called for his head on numerous occasions, and once dispatched an insane Fiend to bedevil Radu's lands and hunt down his coterie. The enmity between Radu and his former jailor persisted until 1644, when Lupescu was assassinated by his own progeny during the Sabbat purge known as the Night of Coal Roses. A few years later but closer to home, Radu was betrayed by a trusted Hungarian ally, a setback that nearly cost him the city of Alba Iulia, and forced him to reevaluate his relationship with the Hapsburg Ventrue.

By the mid seventeenth century, Radu's coterie numbered four dozen strong, and their world covered the triangle between Koloszvár-Cluj, Hermannstadt-Sibiu and Karlsburg/Alba Iulia. Eventually the Tzimisce opened formal relations with Radu, dispatching an ambassador named Viorel Iclozan to his court. The understanding was simple: if Radu cooperated with the Tzimisce and did not interfere with their war in Hungary, he would be allowed to rule his dominion without interference, provided he operated outside the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Alps. His dominion was to serve as a buffer zone, a neutral ground between the Western Camarilla and the Eastern Sabbat. It was an unenviable position, but Radu maintained his neutrality, playing one side against each other with a subtle (and very Romanian) skill that kept him in power. And if the Sabbat saw him as a buffer zone, the Camarilla saw him as an acceptable alternative to either Sabbat encroachment or Turkish domination.

In 1677 Radu was granted the hand of Princess Irina of the Székely Nosferatu clan, a marriage that delivered the cities of Timisoara and Oradea. The following year the Camarilla Princes of Buda-Pest and Beograd jointly bestowed Radu the title of *domnul*, or “Prince.” It caused a few rumbles among the Sabbat, but their attention was occupied by their existential struggles against Western Europe and the Eastern Turks. Radu was merely issued a warning to “exercise extreme caution” when dealing with the Camarilla. In 1697 Radu assuaged Tzimisce fears with a secret treaty. Radu would provide the Sabbat with a clandestine passage to Europe through Transylvania, and aid in the construction of a new Tzimisce barrow in the Bihor Mountains. In return, the “Prince of Transylvania” was granted the right to maintain an ambassador in the Sabbat stronghold of Bucharest, and more importantly, he was allowed to annex the crucial city of Bistritza. It was with this city that Radu’s dominion reached its point of maximum expansion, creating a territory he would rule for the next two-and-a-half centuries.

Radu was a very effective *domnul*, skillfully maneuvering his ship of state through the turbulent waters of Kindred politics, Turkish intrigue, and European calamity. Synthesizing the best practices of East and West, Radu’s reign featured the symbolic trappings and glorious mystery of the Byzantine Empire, but inclinations towards blind zealotry and meaningless brutality were checked by Western notions of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. He ruled wisely and generously, but unquestionably, and serious resistance to his authority earned a swift response. Fortunately, Radu was rarely forced to employ direct violence. Preferring quieter solutions, he established an impressive network of informants and spies across mortal and Kindred world alike. And when his spies failed, he always had the threat of his Ascunși Îngeri, or “Hidden Angels,” a secret police force composed of highly-disciplined Assamites, ghoulish conscripts, and former vampire hunters. Dissent among the ranks was one thing; but in the intrigue-filled world of the Kindred, a wise leader never lowered his guard. Radu may have been a product of the Renaissance, but he was still a Romanian *domnul* and a former servant of the Turks.

Also critical to Radu’s success were the advisors he appointed to his inner circle. Blessed with the singular ability to earn the unwavering loyalty of his Primogen, when Radu takes an advisor or make a political appointment, he welds an ally to himself with a bond stronger, and certainly more enriching, than the blood bond. Radu’s most trustworthy advisor has always been his wife, the Princess Irina, whose sagacious counsel was as important to his early reign as her contacts among the Hungarian Camarilla. Another indispensable advisor has been Nisrat Ozut, a Turkish Imam, scholar, and mystic with connections among the Assamites. As the decades marched on, Radu gained the service of Octavian Tóth, a Kindred historian; Tudorel Maldea, a Tremere sorcerer and adroit diplomat; and Strix, an ancient witch who had settled in Transylvania with the original Dacians. So efficiently and wisely did Radu rule that Viorel Iclozan, the Tzimisce ambassador to his court, asked permission to remain with Radu when his services were no longer required in Bucharest. The only real thorn in Radu’s side has been his blood-brother, Razvan Vilcu. Despite being rescued from a lifetime of servitude to Milos Azul, Razvan regards his older brother with bitterness and rancor, and his periodic stays in Radu’s court were—and still are—fraught with tension.

Radu ruled Western Transylvania for centuries, and to go into granular detail about his reign would be a thankless task. However, the world underwent profound changes during that time, and Transylvania was not immune to political upheavals. She had her Renaissance, her Turkish domination, and her Enlightenment; and she passed through the hands of several earthly powers

and dominions. Through all these changes—the Hungarians, the Turks, the Hapsburgs, and finally the Romanians—Radu kept his invisible kingdom intact. Granted, he occasionally stumbled in the delicate ballet between Camarilla and Sabbat, his achievements nearly crushed by the blind machinery of the great Jyhad. At times the Camarilla branded Radu a Tzimisce pawn, while the Sabbat intermittently threatened him with extinction if he failed to follow this or that dictate. Ventrue and Lasombra accused Radu of being an upstart pretender, revolutionary Brujah attacked him as a “false republican,” and some younger Nosferatu mocked his “delusions of grandeur.” In 1848 Radu almost lost his kingdom when the Camarilla “placed” his realm under the control of the Austrian Ventrue; it required two decades of tireless maneuvering to eliminate the Hapsburg threat and reclaim the land as his own.

In the end Radu Ionescu survived, the greatest Nosferatu to ever call himself Prince.

The End of Empire

Four hundred years is a long time, and Radu began feeling restless as early as the nineteenth century. The world was changing so fast, and despite his best attempts, Transylvania was being left behind. Even the Tzimisce were leaving. Something of the Wanderlust of his youth rekindled in his elder soul, and he longed to set sail for America, maybe even found an entirely new empire. And yet he had so many responsibilities, so many souls depended on him! Also, things were quite different in America—there was less respect for the Old Order, and even the princes were a different breed. The rise of modern cities brought another set of challenges. Radu had always lived more or less in the open, dwelling in crumbling castles, declining mansions, and long forgotten caverns. But to establish a new realm under the bowels of an American metropolis?

True to form, Radu dispatched spies and ambassadors to America to gather information about her cities and her Kindred. It proved to be a shrewd investment, for the opening decades of the twentieth century brought unparalleled chaos to Europe. Even before the Great War, Radu lost a considerable portion of his Hungarian holdings to the Prince of Buda-Pest. But the War itself was devastating in the chaos it inflicted upon Eastern Europe, and the Kindred felt its effects as acutely as humans. When Transylvania was annexed to Romania, Radu was faced with a fresh set of mortal politicians and their Kindred backers—including *nouveau-riche* Ventrue with little tolerance for a Nosferatu *domnul* from the “Dark Ages.” His relationships with the agents of King Carol II were particularly sour, and as additional Tzimisce deserted Romania, Radu stepped up his efforts to find a new home. Fortune smiled again in 1934, when he received a startling report from his agent in New York, a Nosferatu neonate named Alexandru Valentin. It seemed that the entire warren of Gotham Nosferatu had suddenly vanished overnight.

Gone. Just like in the ancient legends of the Nictuku.

More information soon followed. Apparently, the warren was little more than a collective, a group of anarchistic Nosferatu loosely presided over by a rebellious former slave named Dead Caesar. Occupying the cemeteries and tunnels of New York, the clan had been ostensibly left behind by a rapidly-evolving Camarilla. Unorganized and vulnerable, they were an easy target for catastrophe. Such as, perhaps, an ancient monster...?

Although the so-called “Vanishing” was certainly tragic for the Nosferatu as a clan, Radu felt that a significant window of opportunity had been thrown open, and he ordered Valentin to

establish contact with the Camarilla leader most likely to be sympathetic to their cause. Valentin did just that, forming a rather unusual friendship with the leader of Clan Toreador, one Duncan Capelthwaite. Apparently Duncan had maintained a good relationship with Dead Caesar's Nosferatu—for the Toreador of New York City had built themselves a vast, underground cathedral. Now this, this was *exciting*.

Radu began secretly packing up his Transylvanian kingdom and preparing his court for the transition to New York. In the meantime, Romania had gone mad, the whole state becoming a twisted puppet of Nazi Germany. Although the rise of the Nazis sent shockwaves across the entire supernatural community, Radu turned the political confusion to his advantage, using it as cover for the complicated stratagems required to pull off his move. His plans came to fruition by the end of the Second World War, and in 1946 Prince Radu Ionescu traded his ornate throne in Transylvania for an abandoned subway station in New York.

Gotham's Pale King

Radu adored his new city. Although he missed the craggy mountains and dark forests of his homeland, he was reinvigorated by the challenge of creating a new home, a subterranean kingdom beneath the greatest city since Constantinople. With the quiet support of Duncan Capelthwaite, Radu consolidated and expanded the Nosferatu's base of power. The first wave of new Embraces took in architects, masons, sewer workers, artists, and security personnel. By the mid-1950s, Radu had reestablished his court, recruited dozens of new Nosferatu to his cause, and completely renovated and modernized Dead Caesar's old warren. Duncan paved the way for contact with the "New World" Ventrue, and Radu was astonished to find a willing ally in Marius. What kind of world was this, where a Roman methuselah treated a Romanian Nosferatu as an equal? Ventrue resources allowed Radu to expand more aggressively, and by the mid-1970s, the Nosferatu reigned unchallenged beneath the streets of the metropolis, occupying an area that included the five boroughs, much of Long Island, and part of New Jersey.

If Immanuel St. James was aware of the increased activity literally undermining his dwindling realm, he gave no sign; indeed, the Prince seemed oblivious that any change in Nosferatu leadership had occurred at all. The only significant problem Radu encountered was unsurprisingly with the Sabbat, who resisted his efforts to restructure warrens in Queens and Brooklyn. Fortunately, all-out war was averted by Radu's Tzimisce vizier, Viorel Iclozan, who secured a face-to-face meeting with Lilith. In return for a formal non-interference policy, Radu agreed that certain areas such as Green-Wood Cemetery and the Queens waterfront were off-limits. He also declared that Nosferatu who joined the Sabbat were not to be considered *antitribu*. Compared to the Sabbat of the Old World, these Gotham Cainites were comparably reasonable, and Radu agreed to a peace that has held to present day.

One final concern weighed heavily on Radu's mind—what had happened to the old Nosferatu? Nictuku or not, the previous clan had vanished without a trace, leaving behind an abandoned warren like a subterranean *Marie Celeste*. Regardless of the cause, Radu was determined that it would never happen again. Appointing Octavian Tóth as Keeper of the Lore and Milton Porter as Chief of Security, Radu ensured that his domain would be prepared for the return of the Nictuku—whatever they, or it, might be. Although Radu reserves the right to believe in the Nictuku "when the time comes," his clan remains in a constant state of vigilance.

Current Role

Today, the Pale King reigns supreme in Gotham's sprawling underworld. Free from the political entanglements of Old Europe with their undercurrents of prejudice and disdain, Radu has found that American Kindred treat him with the deference deserving of a great and noble elder. All who pass through Radu's realm must pay him homage, and he commands the respect of Ventrue and Caitiff alike. His warren has become a modern legend among the Kindred, and Nosferatu from all over the world travel to Dis like pilgrims on a voyage of redemption. And who knows, maybe someday in the future, the Pale King will be invited to emerge from his underworld and take the reins of the city entire. As those old alchemical books so often proclaimed, "As above, so below." Or was it the other way around?

It's time to mow the flowers,
don't procrastinate.
Fetch the sickles, come,
don't spare a single tulip in the fields.
The meadows are in bloom:
who has ever seen such insolence?
The grass is growing again:
step nowhere else but on its head.
Blossoms are opening on every branch,
exposing the happiness in their hearts:
such colorful exhibitions must be stopped.
Bring your scalpels to the meadow to cut out the eyes of flowers.
So that none may see or desire,
let not a seeing eye remain.
I fear the narcissus is spreading its corruption:
stop its displays in a golden bowl
on a six-sided tray.
What is the use of your ax,
if not to chop down the elm tree?
In the maple's branches
allow not a single bird a moment's rest.
My poems and the wild mint
bear messages and perfumes.
Don't let them create a riot with their wild singing.
My heart is greener than green,
flowers sprout from the mud and water of my being.
Don't let me stand, if you are the enemies of Spring.
— Simin Behbahani, "It's Time to Mow the Flowers"



Sources & Notes

I love the underbelly of New York, with its sunken foundations, miles of subway tunnels, and those irresistibly mysterious abandoned stations. There is something very "decaying castle" about this subterranean world, and it always puts me in mind of Dracula, presiding over a crumbling monolith of damp stone corridors and scurrying rats. I wanted the leader of Clan Nosferatu to suggest this resemblance, but I wanted him to be paradoxically more *grandiose* than the setting itself, a Hadean philosopher king confined to a paradise of his own creation.

Recognizing [Bram Stoker's Dracula](#) as my main inspiration, I read a few books about Transylvania and Romania, the best being Robert D. Kaplan's [Balkan Ghosts](#). To get the flavor of New York's underground, I am particularly indebted to Colum McCann's [This Side of Brightness](#), a well-researched novel about the homeless living in the subway tunnels. These sources helped shape my philosopher king's background, but what about his appearance? Well, I wanted Radu to be pretty weird, but to still reflect the classic Nosferatu archetype. The biggest influence is obviously Count Orlok from the silent film [Nosferatu](#). I was equally inspired by Ted Nicolaou's [Subspecies](#), a surprisingly solid B-movie also inspired by *Nosferatu*. I borrowed the name "Radu" from Nicolaou, happy to note its prevalence in the historical Dracul family. Other influences on Radu's appearance include the Cenobites of the [Hellraiser](#) series and the King of the Wood-Elves from Rankin-Bass' animated [The Hobbit](#). I should also acknowledge [Stephen Hickman's statue of Cthulhu](#), which gave me the image of Radu's talon-like toes curled around his dais.

2018 Update

This document was first uploaded to New York by Night on 2 October 2002. For this 2018 revision, I tightened up the writing, corrected inconsistencies, and fleshed out details about Radu's history. I also made a few name changes for the sake of authenticity.

Image Credits

The banner uses bats designed by the incomparable Edward Gorey. These frame an image pulled from the film *Subspecies*, one of the inspirations for Prince Radu.

Author: A. Buell Ruch

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Email: quail (at) shipwrecklibrary (dot) com

Online Version: <http://shipwrecklibrary.com/vampire/radu-ionescu>