



# Countess Dracula

**GUY ADAMS**

**HAMMER**

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## About the Book

**You can do anything in Hollywood and be forgiven, anything except grow old...**

It's 1930 and cinema stands at the dawn of a new age, the silent era is all but dead, talkies are here and Technicolor is on its way.

The whole world loves movie icons Frank Nayland and Elizabeth Sasdy, lapping up each new picture and following their romantic life story both on and off the screen. But all is not as perfect as it appears.

Not only has the advent of talkies meant torturous sessions with a vocal coach to try and remove Sasdy's Hungarian accent but she's starting to spot the first few grey hairs, and the lines on her face are getting deeper every day. If she loses her looks she'll lose everything, but even a woman as powerful as Elizabeth Sasdy can't fight nature. Can she?

But just how far is the Queen of Hollywood prepared to go to stay beautiful for ever?

## About the Author

The author of the novels *The World House* and its sequel *Restoration*, Guy Adams gave up acting six years ago to become a full-time writer. This was silly, but thankfully he's kept busy, writing bestselling humour titles based on TV show *Life on Mars* and *Torchwood* novels *The House That Jack Built* and *The Men Who Sold The World*.

He has also written a pair of original Sherlock Holmes novels, *The Breath of God* and *The Army of Doctor Moreau*, as well as a biography of actor Leonard Rossiter and an updated version of Neil Gaiman's *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams & The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. He has also adapted three classic Hammer Horror movies, *Kronos*, *Hands of the Ripper* and *Countess Dracula*.

His website is: [www.guyadamsauthor.com](http://www.guyadamsauthor.com)

# Countess Dracula

## GUY ADAMS



## Foreword

ON AN EARLY summer Saturday in 1970 I had a call from Alexander Paal, a fellow Hungarian, asking me to read that morning's *Times* as there was a well-researched article by another Hungarian on the life of Countess Elisabeth Bathory. I remembered the name from my school days; a powerful member of a great aristocratic family, who was famed for her cruelty. Once I read the piece it all came back: the gruesome story of a historical figure from the 16th century. According to the article, legend has it that Bathory hit a chambermaid so hard that blood from the girl's nose spurted onto her face. When Bathory washed the blood off and looked in the mirror her face appeared more beautiful and her skin whiter. She then began to bathe regularly in virgins' blood and is credited with the murder of over 600 peasant girls for cosmetic purposes.

I had arrived in London as a student following the Hungarian uprising in 1956, and promised myself I would not take on Hungarian subjects as a director in the UK. However, this was such a strong story I couldn't let it go. Having directed a number of costume dramas for BBC Television (*Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall* and Henry James' *The Spoils Of Poynton*) I felt I'd done enough to prove that I could deal with non-Hungarian subjects. Especially since I had just directed my first Hammer feature film, *Taste The Blood Of Dracula*, which was very well received. The top critic of the day, the *Sunday Times*' Dilys Powell, called it 'a surprise from Hammer ... pretty good; well played and directed with a straight face by a newcomer, Peter Sasdy: a nice feeling for the Victorian setting.'

Together with Alexander Paal I located the journalist behind the story and took an option on it during the same weekend. By Sunday evening we had a one-page outline for a film based on the life of Countess Elisabeth Bathory.

Following the success of *Taste The Blood Of Dracula* I was in favour because of the old principal that you're only as good as your last film and I still had my office in Hammer House on Wardour Street. It was decided that on Monday morning I would approach my big boss, Sir James Carreras, with our idea for my next film. It was about 11 o'clock when I got to see him. He read the page, asked a few questions about the way I saw the story developing, then looked at his watch and said: 'Come back at 12.45 with a coloured poster with a title on it. I'll take it with me to Genero's where I'm having lunch with the managing director of the Rank Organisation. Let's have another chat after lunch at about 3 o'clock. OK?'

We had our own graphics department on the top floor. I rushed up and explained Sir Jimmy's order, and while talking to the graphic artist about the story of the Countess and how she needed the continuous supply of blood - just like Dracula - the obvious choice for a title suddenly hit me: *Countess Dracula!*

At 12.45 the poster of a beautiful blonde, partially covered in blood with the title across her body, was on the desk of Sir James. After lunch I was summoned and with a huge smile on his face Sir James said: 'You'll start shooting *Countess Dracula* six weeks from today at Pinewood. I'll need a script in two weeks, a cast in three weeks - same budget as your last one with a 30 day schedule. OK?'

The rest is history. We started and finished the picture on time and I enjoyed the freedom Hammer gave me once they knew I'd deliver what they required. Hammer were always very good at choosing their subjects. Some thought audience identification with a 16th century blood-sucker might seem far-fetched, but in the 21st century women

(and some men) spend thousands on modern cosmetics and face-lifts motivated by the same desire to look younger. At least they won't end up in a dungeon, as Countess Dracula did ...

**Peter Sasdy, Director  
November 2012**



# PRE-CREDITS

**ONSCREEN CAPTION: 12 August 1971**

**THE CAMERA PANS FROM THE TRAFFIC WORKING ITS WAY ALONG HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD. WE FIND A SMALL PARKING LOT, TWO OR THREE STORES AND AN OPEN-TOPPED MINIBUS.**

Hollywood eats. A fat beast of concrete, neon and dust, jaws open, ever-hungry. And wherever a behemoth eats, scavengers like Leo Hogarth follow.

Stranded in the late sun of summer he broiled in his black T-shirt and jeans, the official uniform of The Golden Hollywood Tour, its logo screen-printed across his chest like a rancher's branding mark. As Leo was the managing director, guide and creator of the tour he had only himself to blame.

'Should have gone with white,' he moaned. 'But black just looks classier.'

'You got that right,' said Roland, his African-American driver. 'I've been telling people that for years.'

Roland didn't live up to his own claim, rammed into a chauffeur's suit that was two sizes too small for him. 'Quit your moaning,' Leo had told him when he'd found it at a closing-down party store. 'People only see you from the waist up.' Which was true, and a reason to be thankful, because Roland had to keep the trousers unfastened in order to still breathe while manoeuvring the open-top bus around Hollywood Hills.

'At least people can't see the sweat patches,' Roland added. 'In white, you'd look like a Holstein by noon.'

'I wouldn't care so much if we were getting the numbers in,' said Leo, looking around the corner at the short queue that was beginning to form for the three-o'clock tour. 'I mean, look at it: I'd make more money cleaning buses than driving around in them.'

'It's a quiet year,' said Roland, lighting a stubby joint and settling back into his usual attitude of casual apathy. 'There's a recession.'

'There's always a fucking recession.'

The queue was only five people long: two fat couples and an old guy. 'They're not even a good audience,' sighed Leo, reaching over and taking a drag on the joint. 'One of 'em looks like he'll be lucky to last the trip.'

'As long as he pays he can die whenever he likes.'

'Yeah, senior rate. That's two bucks blown before I even leave the kerb.'

'Better than nothing.'

'Says you. I pay you a wage - what do you care if I lose my shirt?'

Roland shrugged. He knew better than to get into an argument. Leo was blowing off steam: it didn't mean a thing.

'Wait a minute.' Leo perked up suddenly. 'All is not lost!'

A pair of girls were ambling over to the queue. Both of them were blonde and were wearing bikini tops and denim shorts, the uniform of the college student on holiday.

'You may be poor but your dick still works.' Roland found this incredibly funny but that was just an effect of the dope.

'Let's get over there before they change their minds.'

Leo checked his reflection quickly in a shop window, just to make sure his T-shirt was tucked in.

'Black is class,' Roland assured him, pinching out his joint and slipping it into his shirt pocket for later.

'Good afternoon, everybody!' Leo announced, arms spread Christ-wide, ever the showman when he was on

display.

Roland hung back as always, waiting for the audience's attention to be fully on Leo so that he could sneak into the driver's seat without them seeing the top of his trousers gaping open.

'Thank you for joining us here on The Golden Hollywood Tour,' Leo said, 'where we bring the history of Tinseltown to life before your very eyes! Every star, every story, every scandal - all from the comfort of our open-topped tour vehicle.'

'Must be a long tour,' the old guy mumbled. But Leo chose to ignore the implied criticism; the oldster was far from the first customer to make the comment.

'You'll certainly get your money's worth,' he replied, deciding to stick to the subject and sell the small group their tickets before anyone changed their mind.

As they filed onto the bus, Leo tried hard to fix things so that the girls would sit up front with him. For the life of him he couldn't distinguish between them, so typical of their type was each one.

'My name's Brandi!' announced one of them. 'And this is my friend Cheryl.'

'We're here for five days!' announced Cheryl, though Leo hadn't asked how long they were staying. 'Brandi's dad paid for it because he thinks she's going to be a star.'

Leo could think of only one branch of the movie industry in which they would excel. 'That's just great,' he said. 'The dream starts right here, huh?'

'Yeah,' said Brandi, only too happy to believe him. 'We're going to see my future house!'

'Our future house,' Cheryl laughed. 'Wherever you go you'll need your manager with you.'

'Yeah,' chirped Brandi again. But the sentiment didn't reach her eyes. She held up a fat paperback book. Leo looked at the title: *The Hit List: 1000 Stars of Hollywood*.

'I'm going to be in this one day,' she said, and hugged it to her like a child with a teddy bear.

'Believe it,' Leo replied - unnecessarily, because she so clearly did.

He sat them down on the seat next to him before reminding himself to pay attention to the rest of the party.

The first of the two couples looked like they had come on holiday by mistake. The wife's expression was one of sour disapproval as she glanced cautiously at her seat before sitting down on it. She gazed at Leo with clear scepticism. Her husband simply stared out at the road, a thick white line of sunblock painted down his nose like tribal warpaint.

'I always think it's nice if we each introduce ourselves,' said Leo, looking towards them. 'My name's Leo and, as well as being your guide today, I'm the author of the best-selling book *Hollywood Glitter*.' It was certainly the best-selling book to be offered on the tour and that was enough for him. 'At the end of the tour you'll have an opportunity to buy a signed copy as a souvenir.' He looked at the disapproving wife. 'Would you like to tell us all who you are?'

'Doesn't seem like I have much choice,' she replied, glancing around in obvious displeasure. 'My name's Margaret Riggers and this is my husband Tony. We're visiting from Colorado where my husband runs an extremely successful car-hire agency.'

'All the way from the mountains!' laughed Leo. 'Glad you're with us.' He looked at the next couple, a diminutive pair dressed in outfits that seemed to be colour-coded, a vision in taupe and cream.

'My name's Jerry,' the husband announced in a cheerful Southern accent, 'and this is my wife Vonda. We actually won our trip here on an episode of *Celebrity Shuffle*!'

Vonda couldn't have been more proud of him for having brought up the subject. 'We beat Al Lewis with a pair of queens!'

Leo could have done without the mental picture this conjured. 'You card sharks, you! Remind me not to get in a game while we're on our travels.'

'We'd have the shirt off your back!' Jerry promised.

Leo was pleased to notice this made Cheryl giggle. 'In this heat I just might let you!' He looked at the elderly man who had placed himself right at the back, head down as if embarrassed even to be on board. 'And you are?'

'Eager to get going,' came the quiet reply. The old man looked up and Leo was struck by the colour of his eyes: they were the palest, most striking blue he had ever seen. Although he might have aged, this guy had once been a player in his day, that was for sure.

Once it was clear that nobody was going to ignore him, the old man sighed. 'Gary Holdaway.'

'Pleasure to have you with us, Mr Holdaway,' said Leo. 'Well, then,' he said, 'all that remains is for me to introduce your driver, Roland Johns -' Roland gave a casual wave from his seat. '- and we'll be on our way.'

Roland pulled out into the traffic, relying on the philosophy of bus drivers everywhere: 'Nobody wants to screw with you when you're this damn big.' The manoeuvre made Margaret Riggers gasp but they got into a lane without colliding with anything. Leo launched into his script, a warmed-over rehash of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon* with a few extra invented tales thrown in. Nobody cared about facts, they just wanted gossip.

'What does "prodigious" mean?' Cheryl asked him when he alluded to the legendary manhood of Errol Flynn. Leo would have showed her if only he could.

They headed up into the hills, with Leo pointing out one-time homes of the barely remembered in this most forgetful of industries.

'Of course,' he said, filling a gap in the procession of sights, 'it's worth remembering that Hollywood was built out of nothing. The first studios only came out here because

they were avoiding the legal minefield created by Thomas Edison who sued anyone he considered was illegally using the technology that he had invented.

'All of this was nothing but dirt and farms, wide-open spaces waiting for the movies to come and make their mark on them. In 1900 it was a small town - a hotel, a main street and a boxcar line into Los Angeles. A two-hour journey through the vineyards and orchards. But Hollywood builds its legends quickly. It grew and grew until Los Angeles and it met, the larger city swallowing the smaller and making the place its own.

'The most iconic presence of all, the Hollywood sign, was originally built to advertise a chunk of real estate. *Hollywood Land*. The name came from something overheard on a train journey, describing someone's Florida holiday home.

'Legends. Born quickly, built in a frenzy and then left to bloom. Much like the legends that surrounded the actors that would earn their fame here. Some of the performers came from the theatre, many were no more than hopefuls, faces that fit. Flooding in from all corners of the globe, the studios would take them and embellish them, give them their legend. Let them soar.'

'Stop the bus!' shouted Holdaway, moving with a speed that was clearly beyond his age, swaying at the rail as he stood up and looked beyond the road.

Roland, out of panic, did just that. He swerved to the shoulder, a roar of car horns washing over them as the vehicle screeched to a halt.

All the passengers fell forward and Leo tumbled onto his back in the centre aisle. There was an amplified curse, then a whine of feedback as the microphone left his hand and collided with the speaker.

'What the fuck?' he shouted, more at Roland than at the old man who had fallen against the back of the seat in front and got himself wedged between the two.

‘There’s no need for that!’ insisted Margaret Riggers, though whether she meant Leo’s language or the emergency stop nobody could be sure.

‘I thought there was something wrong,’ said Roland, looking around in confusion and embarrassment. ‘Did I hit something?’

Nobody bothered to answer him, all of them too concerned with themselves. Vonda had let go of her capacious purse and was shuffling around on her hands and knees trying to gather up her belongings. Crushed tissues like sickly roses, mascara stick, loose change, hairbrush and confectionery wrappers, all hoovered back into place before anyone else could comment on them.

‘I think I have whiplash,’ Margaret Riggers was insisting. ‘You’d better hope you have good insurance cover, Mr Hollywood, or you’ll be in hock to me for the rest of your life.’

Leo chose to ignore the threat for now, his attention on the old man who was pulling himself upright and looking out across the road.

‘Why did you shout?’ Leo asked him. ‘What was the problem?’

‘Her house,’ Holdaway insisted. ‘You were going right past her house.’

‘Whose house?’

Leo rubbed the back of his head where he was pretty sure a bruise was building that would be big enough to need a hat of its own. He walked over to Holdaway who was still staring off between the palm trees.

‘Elizabeth,’ the old man said, his tone wistful, as if he was discussing someone lost.

‘Elizabeth?’

Holdaway looked at Leo and those beautiful eyes had disbelief in them. ‘You must remember her – she lived just there.’

Leo swallowed a little ball of panic. He hated being caught out in his lack of knowledge, it was the sort of thing that lost an audience in a heartbeat. Of course, he wasn't an expert: the history of this mad town was just too sprawling and the family tree of stardom spread its branches wide. He played for time.

'There are a lot of Elizabeths,' he said, though his mental count was still coming up short. 'Elizabeth who?'

Holdaway's disbelief turned into sadness. 'Legends soar, isn't that what you said?' He looked away again and Leo stared in the same direction. Beyond the trees he saw a road cutting further up through the hills before sinking away into a valley. The barest glint of sun on glass caught his eye. There was certainly some kind of residence up there, though it didn't belong to anyone he knew from his scant research.

'They crash all too easily, too,' continued Holdaway. 'Elizabeth Sasdy. Once a queen of this town, adored by all. Now you don't even remember her.'

Leo didn't, but he wasn't going to admit it easily. 'Elizabeth Sasdy? She lived up there?'

There was a rustle of paper from behind him as Brandi worked her way through her book.

'Elizabeth Sasdy,' she said, stumbling slightly over the surname. 'Born Nadasdy, Hungary, 1885. Silent-movie actress ...' She looked up in confusion. 'Silent? She never said anything?'

'It means the movies were silent,' said Leo with a sigh, though in truth he was glad to have the opportunity to talk from a position of knowledge. 'All movies were silent - or mostly silent - until the late 1920s.'

Brandi laughed. 'They can't have been much good, then! I knew that they didn't have colour all those years ago but who knew they couldn't even speak either?'

Cheryl laughed along with her.



'Some of the all-time classics of cinema were silent,' said Leo, 'Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* ...'

'Tedious,' said Holdaway, his attention back with them. 'Not a patch on Elizabeth's greatest works.'

'You're obviously quite a fan,' said Leo. He smiled, hoping that he could get the old man onside through a little flattery.

'I was, but not just that. I worked with her ...'

Leo's mood picked up - it just might be that this trip could be turned around after all. 'You worked with her?'

'On a couple of pictures.' Holdaway looked over at Brandi and Cheryl. 'Though you sure won't find me in that book of yours. My career never really took off. Not like hers.'

Leo made a snap decision. 'You want we should go take a look at the old place?' he suggested. 'You could maybe even relive a few memories for us.'

Holdaway looked at him for a moment and then smiled. 'You like the idea of a guest star, huh?' he asked. Then he nodded. 'What the hell. I'll tell you what I remember but I can't promise you'll like all of it. Elizabeth was ... well, she had a reputation. They called her the Countess, because of her accent, but the things she got up to in that place ...'

Leo didn't need to hear more. He knew what his audiences liked, the sleazier the better. 'Roland, get over there.' He held out his arm to Holdaway. 'You maybe want to sit up front so you can tell him the way?'

'Does this mean we're going to skip Kirk Douglas's place?' moaned Vonda. 'I really wanted to see him.'

'Just a little detour,' said Leo. 'A special bonus, some first-hand Hollywood history.'

'I can manage,' Holdaway insisted, pushing past Leo and settling down next to Roland.

'I'll have to go on a little way,' the driver explained, 'and switch direction at the bridge.'

‘Probably making it up as he goes along,’ said Margaret Riggers. ‘I don’t believe a word of it.’

Maybe not, thought Leo, but at least it’s shut you up about litigation.

It took them five minutes to change direction but then they were off the main strip and heading into the hills. It occurred to Leo that the old house was bound to have new occupants and he hoped there was somewhere they could park and get a good view without having to deal with overeager security personnel.

He needn’t have worried. Once they had climbed a short distance Holdaway directed Roland down into the valley and soon the house was ahead of them. If it had any new occupants they hadn’t yet made their presence felt. As Leo and his group descended towards the building they had an aerial view of the place and the closer they got the more its run-down state became clear.

It had been built in the Spanish style but its white walls had turned smoker’s-teeth yellow and its orange tiles were cracked and thick with moss. The central courtyard, which had once been laid out to perfection, was now no more than a chaos of bougainvillea, palm leaves and oleander. A driveway, openly accessible because the pair of wrought-iron gates that should have given it privacy had swung wide and rusted in place, was a minefield of potholes and weeds, grass bursting forth in sundried clumps all the way along it to the front door.

‘Oh, Elizabeth,’ said Holdaway, looking at the place, ‘your castle has fallen.’

‘The place is a dump,’ agreed Jerry, with an enthusiastic chuckle. ‘I wonder how much they want for it?’

‘You reckon we could take a peek?’ asked Vonda. ‘I don’t see that it’s trespassing, not with the gates open like that.’

Leo might have pointed out that just because someone left their door open didn’t mean that the law considered it fine to walk right in. But, looking at his passengers, he saw

so much excited curiosity that he couldn't help but pander to it. 'Why not?' he said. 'After all, if Gary here was a friend ...'

'I was never that,' said Holdaway, sitting back down. 'Nobody was. But there's no one here anyway, so who's to tell?'

'Let's just get on with it,' said Tony Riggers and Leo realised this was the first time he'd heard the man speak. It seemed to surprise his wife slightly, too. She glanced at him, perhaps remembering what his voice sounded like after all these years. 'I want to be back in town on the outside of a cool Margarita, and the sooner we get this over with the sooner I'll have salt on my lips.'

Roland looked at Leo, who nodded. Grinning, he selected first gear and took the bus slowly down the drive. Margaret was moaning again immediately the suspension took its first jolt as it navigated the potholes.

Leo looked to either side of the drive, seeing the thick grass choked with weeds, and wondered how somewhere like this could have been allowed to deteriorate so far. Surely a chunk of real estate like this should have been worth a fortune? He was as eager to hear about it from the old man as were the rest of his passengers: what had happened here that had marked the place out as a ruin?

Roland gave up two-thirds of the way towards the house, deciding that if they risked going along the driveway any further they might never get the bus back out again. 'What say you all walk from here?' he suggested. 'I'll turn the bus around.'

'We have to walk?' moaned Vonda, 'I didn't bring the right shoes.'

'Maybe just take a quick look around,' said Leo. 'Shame not to explore after all - the home of a genuine star!'

'Maybe you'll buy this place!' Cheryl joked with Brandi. 'We could put in a pool.'