

Erratum

A recent letter drew my attention to a terrible mistake I made in my column on vampires (9 January, p 135). I inadvertently wrote that vampires should be confronted at night, when in fact their strength at that time is at its maximum. I hasten to make this correction to avoid serious accidents. Regarding the gentle criticism that my account was incomplete, this is because you can squeeze only so much vampire stuff into a small space, or even a rectangle. But out of concern for potential victims and their families, I will summarize essential points from the letter.

Vampires are most effectively killed during the day, preferably with a stake made from a tree called "Tremble." The stake should be driven through the heart from the back, the letter says, although in the movie the anterior approach seemed equally effective. The decapitated body of a vampire should be immediately burnt and the ashes widely scattered, preferably in a dry place. If it cannot be burnt for some reason it should be covered with an opaque material and buried face down as deeply as possible, because moonlight shining into a "dead" vampire's eyes can bring him back to life, as can a process called palingenesis, which occurs if the ashes are immersed into specially energized consecrated water.

The letter also claims that vampires can marry and have children quite normally; that it is not true that every person whose blood has been drunk by a vampire becomes a vampire; and that, on the contrary, you become a vampire by drinking the vampire's blood. Even more controversial is the statement that most so called victims are consenting partners, "as the act of having your blood drunk by a vampire is said to give an orgasm far superior to that obtained in any other way" a dangerous statement to be printed, one that at the American Medical Association could lead to instant dismissal.

A world headquarters of all genuine vampires is said to be situated on an island near Venice; a worldwide register of vampires is kept in North America; and there is much more. A postdoctoral sociologist has now sent me an extensive book covering all historical and sociological aspects of vampirology. She also wondered if the letter from Paris was actually written by a vampire; but I doubt if any vampire would send information that could lead to his destruction.