

Vlad, the Fabulous Vampire

Flavia Z Drago

(Walker Books, 2023)

Review by Sharon King-Chai

Vlad (or Vladislav Varnaby Roland Dragul) is an utterly stylish vampire. Fashion is his passion. And like all other paranormal beings, he embraces black as a dress code to wear with pride. Elegant, fun, mysterious black. There's a problem, Vlad has a secret he wants to share. His cheeks glow rosy pink and he fears his friends wouldn't like him if they discovered who he really was.

Vlad's dilemma teaches us important life lessons. The idea of 'normal' is an unhelpful and outdated concept. We shouldn't focus on our differences as a way to make ourselves outcasts. Instead, we could shift our perspectives and remove barriers: life is a rich spectrum where there is space to celebrate what makes us all unique. We don't need to change ourselves or hide away. We can – and need to – love all our beautiful differences, in ourselves and in others.

Vlad, the Fabulous Vampire is the third in Flavia Z. Drago's 'World of Gustavo' series of paranormal creatures. Previous hits include *Gustavo, the Shy Ghost* (2020) and *Leila, the Perfect Witch* (2022). The characters all make special cameo appearances in each other's titles, inviting children into their fantastical world by giving a sense of familiarity – the way you may have previously met characters at a kids' party and know who they are – so there's a joy in knowing something about them already. Drago's monsters transcend the barriers of race and culture and bring to these stories an otherworldly presence which gives them a universal appeal. I personally can't wait to see what character or being will materialise next.

Drago is a New York Times bestselling author and illustrator, who is currently indulging her love of monsters and the macabre. She is also embarking on a PhD researching horror in children's picture books at Anglia Ruskin University (and Dr Drago does have a very nice ring to it). Not that you would associate the word 'horror' with her artwork or her characters, who are delightfully charming with a gothic twist. Drago proudly showcases her Mexican heritage in her books – in her exploration of story and also her edgy folk art style. The colour palette begins dark and sophisticated, then explodes into bright fuchsia and tangerine. So delicious, you can't help but drink it all in.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/737578/vlad-the-fabulous-vampire-by-flavia-z-drago-illustrated-by-flavia-z-drago/>

Sharon King-Chai

Born in Australia to Chinese-Malaysian parents, Sharon King-Chai moved to London in 2003 after studying Visual Communication at University of Technology, Sydney. She fell in love with storytelling through music and books and found her niche working as a designer in music and publishing industries. This eventually led to her creating her own books and establishing her own card and print range. She illustrates books for Julia Donaldson, including Animalphabet, Counting Creatures and Colours, Colours Everywhere. Their titles have won a range of international awards, including the Chen Bochui award for Best Picture book. Sharon's recent penned book Starbird, won the Greenaway Shadower's Choice Award in 2021.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

© Sharon King-Chai