

Bunnicula Books Bolster Rabbit Character's Fame

Author James Howe's Bunnicula book series attracts more than just small animal fans.

By Angela Pham

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Bunnicula A Rabbit-Tale Of Mystery was the first book in the series. The final book in the series was Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allan Crow.

When author James Howe needed a vampire character for the new book he was writing, he imagined a character not clothed in a black cape, but covered in white and black fur.

Not a strapping, pale human with a voracious taste for blood, but a tiny, fluffy bunny with an appetite for the juice of vegetables. A bunny found not in a coffin, but rather in a shoebox.

The name of this ironic vampire rabbit? Bunnicula. And the rest is haunting Halloween-themed history.

Bunnicula's Beginnings

Howe created a legendary character out of Bunnicula the bunny in 1979, starting with the first book in the series, aptly titled Bunnicula: A Rabbit Tale of Mystery, and transformed it into a series that continued with Howliday Inn and The Celery Stalks at Midnight. The line of books only recently concluded in 2006 with Bunnicula Meets Edgar Allen Crow!

Though the series comprised a number of beloved titles, Bunnicula remains the fan favorite. The first title alone garnered more than 10 Children's Choice awards, and with loveable, cuddly characters like Harold and Howie the dogs and Chester the cat, both children and adults find the series hard to resist.

The World Of Bunnicula

What's the draw for most audiences? Howe said he thinks readers of all ages are fascinated by the secret lives of animals, much like the ones he's created in his stories.

"I imagined that as soon as we leave the room, they start talking to each other," Howe said. "It makes it fun for the reader that the animals have this whole life that people are clueless about."

Howe constructed a book series that revolves around the Monroe family's newest addition to the household: Bunnicula. Found in a shoebox in a theater showing the Dracula film, Bunnicula is a rabbit with oddly vampirelike traits. He latches onto vegetables with his pointy fangs and hungrily sucks the juices from them, turning them white. He mysteriously is active only at night. And he raises the suspicions of Chester, the family cat, who demands that Bunnicula be killed for his vampire ways.

While Howe chose to make Chester, Harold and Howie able to speak their minds, Bunnicula stays silent throughout the series, save for some yawns and cries. But despite a lack of monologue, Bunnicula remains a fan favorite. And though he doesn't vocalize his thoughts, Bunnicula does show glimpses of his personality.

"He is definitely a little mischievous," Howe said. "We do know he kind of hops around at night and digs into refrigerators."

Photo courtesy Mark Davis

Although author James Howe grew up with rabbits, he felt more fond of hamsters and white mice.

Bunnicula The Loveable

Bunnicula is not all mischief, though — Harold and Chester have both been known to sing lullabies to Bunnicula, clearly thinking him quite a sweet little bunny.

And they're not alone. At book signings, Howe has encountered many readers who named their own rabbits after Bunnicula. He's signed many a stuffed rabbit, as well as signed book dedications to real rabbits upon owners' requests.



When the test copy of the audio book version of Bunnicula came out, the man who bought the rights to the record told Howe, "I tested it out last night; I read the book to my two rabbits, put them on my lap with a big cookie in between them, and they listened to it the whole time."

Such fan reaction to the Bunnicula rabbit character is surprising to Howe, who grew up with rabbits in the family but was never particularly fond of bunnies.

"Really, I was more into hamsters and white mice," Howe laughed.