

Let There Be Monsters!

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VOL MOLESWORTH



*Let There Be
Monsters!*

A FANTASY

by

VOL MOLESWORTH



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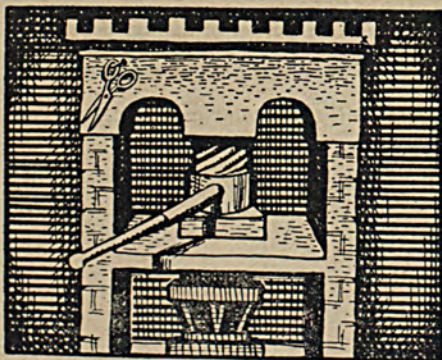
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Made in Australia.

Dedicated to
BERT F. CASTELLARI
who opened the way on February 20, 1939,
this edition is limited to 110 copies,
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Val Molisworth



Let there be monsters; Satan's spawn!
Creatures of evil, damnably born
In the eerie wombs of dreary tombs.
Arise ye Dead! daylight hath fled.
See tombstones shake as zombies wake!
Go forth, ye ghouls, to graveyards strewn
With lovely bones; while, muzzle tilted
Towards the Moon, a werewolf howls
Above the groans that echo soft,
As bat-winged vampires soar aloft.
Call up legions of living dead,
Spread this gospel of human dread:
Let all abhorred pollute the earth,
And spill their taint in monstrous birth.

The moon spread fantastic shadow-patterns in the garden and silhouetted the rambling old house against the etherised evening sky. One by one the lights in the house blacked out, and the men concealed about the grounds began their long vigil. Cramped, desiring to smoke, but forbidden cigarettes, half-sceptical that their quarry would turn up at all; they rested the sub-machine guns across their knees and scanned the empty and silent spaces surrounding the house.

Perhaps, each man may have admitted to his soul, they did not *want* their quarry to come. Ten men, deployed about the house, all armed with automatic weapons, could blanket the grounds with interlacing lances of stammering fire — but were bullets enough? To the materialist, admitting the existence of nothing immeasurable in terms of space and time, bullets may have seemed sufficient; but if such things as the non-spatio-temporal could be — what avail was lead?

Through the darkness infiltrated a distant bluish-white glow, as though another, but smaller moon were rising in the west. Its source could not be pin-pointed, but there seemed to occur a

general softening of the darkness, a ghostly lightening of the deeper patches of shadow about the house. The watchers, each busy with his private stream of ideas, grew tense, their fingers feeling for the reassuring coolness of the metal parts of their guns, like soldiers crouching behind canvas in the middle of a bombardment.

The phosphorescent dial of a watch showed a few minutes to midnight. Centuries of superstition now added to the mental apprehension of the waiting men. Suggestive hour of evil, focal point in man-reckoned time for the emergence of the forces opposed to naive goodness, this brief tick in the cosmic clock slowed some pulses, quickened others, in the armed band about the house.

"Tonight", the Superintendent had told them, "you will undertake an unusual assignment; — it may be difficult or it may be a fiasco. We believe an attack will be made by a single person on the occupants of a house in a deserted area about forty miles from the city. The assailant is reputed to have certain — unusual — powers".

The Superintendent had reason to hesitate

over that adjective. In daylight, in the solid reality of his office at detective headquarters, the ideas one entertained, alone, in the small hours, seemed far less credible. The files hinted that the alleged attacker exerted supernormal, if not *supernatural*, techniques. The facts themselves were flimsy; their implications difficult for a matter-of-fact, everyday individual to accept.

The attacker, as a child, had been very self-centred and rather queer in his tastes. Intelligent, certainly — above average, with the usual precocious tendency to argue with his teachers, to remain obstinately unconvinced despite the authority of shelves of text-books. He loathed games of any sort, preferring to "play" in his private zoo. But whilst other children kept rabbits and white mice, this youngster bred bats. Not flying foxes, but the real article — blood-sucking bats which somehow he had obtained from the one area in Australia where the vampire is indigenous — the Wilson's River district of Central Queensland. Not only did he breed these obscene creatures, but, by some uncanny skill, managed to train them to take wing and return at his command. Contemptuous of such

arbitrary subjects as history, the child had mastered languages with a facility that both astonished and gratified his tutors; but it was in mathematics and the little chemistry and physics taught in the high school that he revealed a rapacious desire for knowledge. A scholarship carried him to the University, where he climaxed three brilliant years in the Faculty of Science by abruptly terminating his honours course without explanation.

Then the world had swallowed him, except for vague reports of excavations in Libya, of pilgrimages to old monasteries in France and Italy, of weeks spent poring over books and parchments in the venerated libraries of England and Europe. Two years ago, he had returned, with a shipload of curios gathered far and wide, and a fortune accumulated in half-a-dozen currencies. An adult now, slim, dark and monosyllabic, he settled in a convict-built house far from the city, living there in a solitary fashion which perplexed his neighbours.

In a gregarious society, any individual who chooses to live in isolation will soon be the victim of exaggerated stories told by neighbours whose curiosity is piqued by lack of real knowledge.

Such rumours circulated about this man and in due course reached the ears of the Superintendent. He discounted them — then. Now, he was less certain of their improbability.

It was said, for example, that there had been an unaccountable social upheaval in the agricultural areas in the vicinity of the stranger's retreat. There was a slow, but marked, increase in crimes of violence, particularly of outrage and murder; an equally marked falling off of attendances at church; and ugly stories of incest and other illicit sexual practices. Cattle were found mutilated, and the dogs remained cowed in their kennels at night.

The local Police-Sergeant, determined to restore order, instituted a nightly patrol of these areas: one constable was found with his throat ripped out and his loins criss-crossed with peculiar serrations; the other, with his uniform in shreds, was discovered wandering aimlessly, muttering to himself, and obviously quite insane. Bats were seen in hordes, and a plague of giant frogs kept farmers awake with the unusual volume of their noise. An ornithologist sceptically investigated reports

that whippoorwills, not native to Australia, were nesting in the disturbed areas — and found them true. Finally the farmers reported that something, which traditionally was labelled a "bunyip", had taken up residence in a large waterhole.

The disturbances reached their climax one Sunday morning when a sixteen-years-old farm hand, climbing the high fence with which the newcomer had enclosed his property, discharged both barrels of a shotgun and raced back to the village crying that he had slain the Devil which had come into their midst.

The stolid and unimaginative youth was led before the Sergeant, transformed by his feverish excitement into a quick-gesturing, fumbling-phrased fanatic whose eyes burned with the zeal that had carried the Crusaders to Jerusalem and had urged to even more dreadul efforts the monsters of the Inquisition.

"I shot him," the youth gloated, "he looked up and copped both barrels fair in the kisser. There was a bat — a filthy great brute — which scooted off when I fired. There'll be no more evil doings in these parts now, Sarge!"

With the serenity of a Joan of Arc he walked into the cell; then the Sergeant, accompanied by the local medico, drove hastily to the scene of the confessed crime.

The stranger was lying a little distance within his grounds, flies clustering about his head, which was sticky with blood.

"Is he dead?" the Sergeant asked, mentally chalking up a murder charge

"No; there's a faint heart beat." The doctor frowned. "That's peculiar!"

"What's up?"

"There seem to be *two* heart beats." He put away his stethoscope. "Help me carry him to the house."

Only a few rooms in the spacious old house showed evidence of use. One was equipped as a laboratory, another lined with books. The third was a combined sleeping and living room, and here they laid the wounded man on his bed. The Sergeant's glance darted about while the doctor went to work.

"Hmmm. Scalp wounds, mainly. Boil up some water, will you?"

The Sergeant put a kettle on the electric stove and looked in the fridge. Save for several sealed jars containing greenish fluid, it was empty. What did the fellow eat? Sounds of scuttling drew him back to the laboratory, where among the disarray of glass and bakelite equipment the pink eyes of an oversized rat gleamed at him. A small electric motor whirred in one corner of the room. The kettle screamed.

Leaving the doctor busy with hot water and towels, the Sergeant went into the library. Here the bright jackets of new books shone among the shabby bindings of older volumes. Scientific and philosophical works abounded. The stranger was an inventor maybe, working here in secret! Then his glance fell on a shelf lined with books about black magic, witch trials, and daemonology. Odd things for a scientist to have.

The doctor came in, head down, scowling.

"Finished, doc?" the Sergeant asked.

"I've dressed the wounds and given him a needle. That'll keep him quiet while we get him to hospital. But I don't like it, Sergeant. There's something decidedly peculiar here."

"How so, doc?"

The doctor looked up, his eyes clear. "The fellow's a freak, Sergeant, or a superman. He's got two hearts. His respiration is abnormal. And his wounds are starting to heal."

An invalid disjunction, my dear Doctor. The terms are neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Some non human are non freaks non supermen, and some — possibly all — supermen are freaks.

"Have you struck a case like this before?" the Sergeant asked.

"Once, about seventeen years ago. A girl — she died in infancy. There are cases scattered through the medical books"

Yes, Doctor — scattered; and, like guerillas, ineffective on a large scale. We can haggle humanity, but not overwhelm it.

"Well, I'd better buzz off and get the blood waggon," the Sergeant said. But as he turned to go, a new voice cut in, speaking in cool, quietly humorous tones, "That will not be necessary now, Sergeant."

He swung around, and there, framed in the doorway, was the stranger, his face showing no sign of his recent injuries.

"I'll decide that, Mr. Kernwagh," said the doctor.

"No, doctor — I can judge my condition better than you. I have, shall we say, *tested* my my body in various ways over many years; and, to alleviate your professional anxiety, I have studied medicine at the Sorbonne."

The doctor shrugged. "It's your risk."

Kernwagh smiled. "That would be no novelty, doctor. But observe — the wounds have healed."

"How does your Sorbonne degree explain that, then?"

"Call it a complex series of conditioned reflexes," Kernwagh said. "As you said, I am a freak."

Or a superman. But the tag is unimportant. What breaks both my hearts is that, in any generation, there is no guarantee that both male and female will occur.

The Sergeant hunched his shoulders. "If you're not hurt, what about the lad who fired at you?"

"Turn him loose, Sergeant. One does not blame the ant which attacks you when you stir up

it's nest."

"In that case," said the Sergeant, heavily,
"It might be a good idea to leave the ants alone."

"Or exterminate them," said Kernwagh.

"Just what are you doing here?"

"Thinking — and experimenting."

"In what field?"

"In rather diverse fields, doctor."

"Such as atom bombs and witchcraft?" the
Sergeant suggested.

Kernwagh nodded. "Transformation generally, but without Milesian or Cartesian fallacies. I seek the solution to an old problem — a very old problem. And now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me — "

"You're certain you will be all right?" the doctor asked.

"I should be — if you can keep your village idiots away from firearms."

"It takes two to make a quarrel, Mr. Kernwagh," said the Sergeant.

On that note they left, and, in the weeks that followed, it seemed that the Sergeant's parting shot had been heeded. Things settled back

to normal. The bats and whippoorwills vanished, and the crime wave died out. At the inquest on the constable, the Coroner returned an open finding.

But the murder of a constable, even in a provincial area, is not taken lightly by the authorities: it is a challenge to the police force itself. The Superintendent of the C. I. B. put two detectives on the job. By a process of elimination they arrived at Lyell Kernwagh, and began probing his background.

The father had been an archeologist. His excavations in Sinkiang had made it necessary to revise theories of prehistory. In 1927 he set off into the Burmese jungle — and never returned. Back in Australia, his young wife had committed suicide in a mental home shortly after the birth of her only child: Lyell had been christened and raised by his grandparents.

Cables to London, Paris and Rome had yielded other information. Leyll had been to five universities, had passed his examinations with high distinction, but never waited to collect a degree. He had been mixed up with the Satanist school in

Cologne, held for questioning in connection with the murder of a spiritualist in Rome, and asked to leave Hungary because his excavations in the Carpathians were unpopular. But apart from this impression of an intangible superiority, there was nothing to help the detectives.

The Superintendent called for this file when he was visited by the new South American consul, Senor d'Alvarez. The man was agitated, spilling out his story in flurried little phrases: it was to his daughter, the dark and lovely Pequita, that the Superintendent directed his attention.

"You say this man — Lyell Kernwagh — *demande* you in marriage, and said he would *collect* you at midnight on Friday?" She nodded. "You have never seen him before?" "No." "Then I'd better have him picked up and charged with offensive behaviour."

"No," the consul exclaimed. "No, *no!* All we ask for is protection. It would be foolish to provoke him. *Tenga cuidada, senor!* I know these things. It is in the history of family."

"What do you mean?"

It was the girl who answered: "If this man

is — what we think he is — there is very little we can do," she said. "The name 'Kernwagh' is known and hated in the Old World. It is a corruption of *coeur-noir*, which is itself an attempt to translate *κερναρο*. The family was a powerful one before the Inquisition crushed it, but the line was not stamped out. From time to time men of the Kernwagh breed appear — " She hesitated, and glanced at her father.

"My wife," d'Alvarez said, "was attacked by one of these filthy creatures. She spent her last years in a mental hospital."

"I see," the Superintendent nodded. "Very well, it shall be as you wish. We will take no action until he does."

And there he was, waiting for the promised attempt to *collect* the dark Pequita. Would it prove to be another crank threat, or —

No, Superintendent. My hour has come. The bride waits; the field must be sown and the harvest reaped.

The Superintendent looked at his watch.
Midnight!

"All clear, Sergeant?"

"Quiet as a grave, sir."

And then it happened. Every light in the old house flashed on, and an alarm system tripped, hammered a frantic call. The Superintendent ran to the house, followed by two detectives. The others, guns ready, crouched waiting.

The three men reached the house, and separated. The Superintendent made for the front door, swung the massive knocker, and felt the door give under the pressure. As he thrust his way into the hall, he wondered fleetingly why it was not locked. A pistol shot rang out, and a girl screamed. Soft, amused laughter sounded.

The Superintendent reached a curtained doorway, shouldered through the drapery, and pulled up short, gun in hand. Facing him, with a look of terror on his face, was the South American consul. He was nursing his wrist, and at his feet lay a Luger automatic. At the far end of the room, with her back to the fireplace, stood Pequita. She was wearing a golden tinted kimono, belted at the waist, its flowing lines suggesting the shapeliness of the figure it concealed.

And at the other end of the room, by the

open windows, stood a tall, slim man clad in evening dress, black eyes smouldering in a dead-white face.

"Lyell Kernwagh?" he asked.

The stranger bowed.

"You're under arrest."

He smiled. "I have no time for kindergarten games, Superintendent. This gentleman has already tried my patience with his toy pistol. You will interfere at your own risk." He turned to the girl. "Prepare yourself, Pequita."

The girl's hands went to her waist, then to her shoulders, and with a long rippling motion the kimono slipped away from her body. Kernwagh's eyes blazed with triumph as he looked at her. What a perfect instrument this would be! His eyes swept over the soft curving lines of her breasts, downward to the swelling hips and the breathtaking sweep of her thighs. There would be many nights with her. She would strip her body of its coverings and dance before him. He would probe with her every excess of pleasure. And she would bear him children.

The Superintendent had also caught his

breath. The girl's young body was exquisitely appealing.

"Come to me," said Kernwagh softly.

Arms lifted, hips swaying, an expression of ecstasy on her face, she obeyed.

"No!" the consul screamed.

He fell to his knees, scooped up the Luger, levelled it, and fired three shots in rapid succession. The Superintendent's eyes snapped to Kernwagh to see if the shots had been effective. But it was the girl who jerked, threw out her arms, and pitched to the floor, blood spurting from her body.

"You fool!" Kernwagh snarled.

"I've saved her," the consul cried. "It was no use shooting at *you*, but Pequita was human. I could kill her. I killed my own Pequita." He sobbed, then like a spring unwound, hurled himself across the room. Kernwagh lifted a hand, and, as though he had met an invisible barrier, the consul stopped short, shuddering: his legs buckled and he fell beside the body of his child.

The Superintendent squeezed the trigger of his own gun. The room rang with the thunder

of the shot, but Kernwagh stood untouched.

"Save your bullets," he said, bitterly. "This fool has beaten me. Who would have thought a human ant would slay its own offspring? I thought he was trying to shoot *me*. Always and again I am cheated."

The Superintendent lowered his gun.

"How did you get here, Kernwagh? I had the place surrounded."

He shrugged. "You were watching for human methods of approach."

"Just what are you, then?"

"To you and your kind, I am a monster, an evil thing to be destroyed. To myself I am a lonely person, desiring a mate and children. But among human females only very few could mate with me. I thought tonight my search had ended. This ant defeated me." He turned to the window. "Somewhere there must be another woman who carries the Kernwagh blood in her veins. Call off your watchdogs. Superintendent: I am finished here."

"I'm taking you in, Kernwagh."

"Arrest that fool on the floor! I sought

life here, not death." He slipped a leg over the window sill, and disappeared.

The Superintendent fired. Outside a sub-machine gun hammered into action.

"Where'd he go?"

"Over that way."

"No, he didn't."

Sad, mocking laughter drifted back.

THE END.

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