

Literary page

# Night Stalker

by Ross Gray

"Come on This way! It's just at the base now!"

The dark haired man's neck craned around down the staircase to the bellowing howl below. He reached up and clasped his friends hand.

"Nasty predicament, eh?" said the companion.

"You have a gift for understatement, Ian," the black haired youth said. He wore a white tuxedo shirt and black slacks over loafers. Ian followed close up the last few wooden steps and under a gaslight. He wore a red double breasted vest, a white frilled shirt, matching pants and high boots. He combed his blond hair over his head with a hand, then motioned down the long Victorian-era hall. Doors lined each side, with little statuettes every few feet or so.

"Can't give up now, Devon, old friend," said Ian. He jogged quickly to the first door, but after finding it locked, proceeded to the next frame. "Yes, very nasty. Come on, don't stand like a Venusian sloth." He tugged at another door.

Devon started pushing at the other selection of exits. After trying in vain, he pushed heavily against the fourth, and burst into a dusty, small reading room. It was lined with old shelves of ancient books, and white linen sheets swooped over old furniture.

Just before Ian followed in, he glanced at the base of the stairs. From the illumination down the steps, he saw the massive shadow of the beast clambering up with cat-like grace.

"Nice going," he said. He shut the door and locked it with the small, puny belt.

Devon took a step forward, but Ian held

out a hand, and pursed his lips with a finger just as another deafening roar pierced the stagnant air. His breathing stopped as the heavy steps came nearer. Blood pounded in his head, and he thought his chest would explode. The footsteps came nearer. Devon became aware of a bead of sweat running down the side of his head. Then the footsteps stopped at the door. Devon readied himself for a quick sprint out the window. Ian gave a slight frown.

Then, from just within his hearing, Devon heard another massive step taken, followed by another, and another, until they faded away.

A minute went by before Ian relaxed, and slumped against a short banister which stood in front of the stair down to Devon's level.

Devon slouched against a marble statuette on its pedestal.

"Ian, even if you're not scared, would you please act it so I don't feel like such a coward?" Devon walked to a wall, and picked off a gleaming cutlass above the fireplace.

"Rather impudent of Dr. Markwell not to tell us of his experiments in biogenetics. Not to mention his family curse. Like adding sulfuric acid to TNT, I think. Well, I suppose it's best to go back to our beloved time craft, and get out of here."

"We can't do that, Ian."

"Of course we can. All I have to do is re-set the coordinates and we're ready."

"Don't you understand the deviation of the time stream with Markwell in his present state? And the loss of life should he ever get loose?"

"Oh pish. Don't make my morality act up, please."

Devon walked over to Ian, and patted his shoulder.

"You've seen Markwell's laboratory. If we can find the right chemicals, it's just possible that we can reverse the effects."

"And if that doesn't work?"

"Then we'll have to make another formula that will destroy him."

"Fine, then," Ian said. "But what about Markwell? I suspect that he's tearing this place apart looking for us."

"We'll take extra care to be quiet. Do you still have your suppressor?"

"Yes, but I doubt that its charge will be enough to force him back for long."

"It'll have to do. I think this blade is silver."

"Come on now," scoffed Ian. "You're not going to fall for those legends about were-creatures, are you?"

Ian grabbed the doorhandle and pulled back the lock.

"I think so," he said as he began to turn.

Glass shattered as a huge hand-like projection was thrust through the clear balcony door. Both travelers looked at the dark figure illuminated by the moonlight. Ian ripped open the handle and plunged into the corridor. Devon backed off, keeping both hands on the sword. Then, he glanced at the small statue. He picked it up with one hand, and flung it at the shadowy form. The white marble bounced like rubber off its hairy hide. Devon continued his retreat at a faster rate. Once past the mahogany frame, he dashed off after Ian, who, by this time, was making his way down the staircase three steps at a time.

They passed the second floor, the main floor, and continued down the circular case until they hit the basement level. Ian skidded to a halt and Devon nearly barreled into him. Around them were large metallic structures. Lights pulsed from some in synchronized fashion.

"There's another exit from here isn't there?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ian. "Just up that other set of stairs." His attention was not fixed on the other door, but on the round pit just

before him. It was twenty feet wide, and gasses from yellow and red flames erupted from them. "Interesting."

"Ian, get over here. I want you to mix these chemicals. Can you make a hydrolix perphosphene-admamtium mix? I think I might know a reactionary for our problem."

"Child's play," Ian said.

Another scream from above indicated the beast's proximity.

Ian skittered across the stone floor, and examined the glass tubes. Like a college professor, he looked at each one individually for what Devon though must have been an hour. When he finished, Ian put the last bottle down and selected two others. With these, he began mixing and pouring them into empty beakers.

"Quite potent for the 19th century," he said, quite casually. He poured another element into his liquid experiment. "Remember what Markwell said when he gave us the tour of the place?"

Devon shrugged off the comment, mixing chemicals of his own.

From above, the sounds of furniture splintering against walls echoed through the stone masonry.

"Sounds like Dr. Markwell is having a temper tantrum, not being able to find his playmates," Ian remarked.

Devon examined the last of his catalysts, and jogged next to Ian with the bottle in his hand.

"There," Ian said. He smiled proudly at the multi-coloured mixture in his own container. Devon immediately snatched it from his hands, and began pouring it into his own flask. "You could at least say 'Thank you'," said Ian.

"Devon mixed the two bottles, and after dividing the new compound into two even halves, thrust one bottle at Ian.

"Here. We haven't got much time. This is how we're going to work it. I want you

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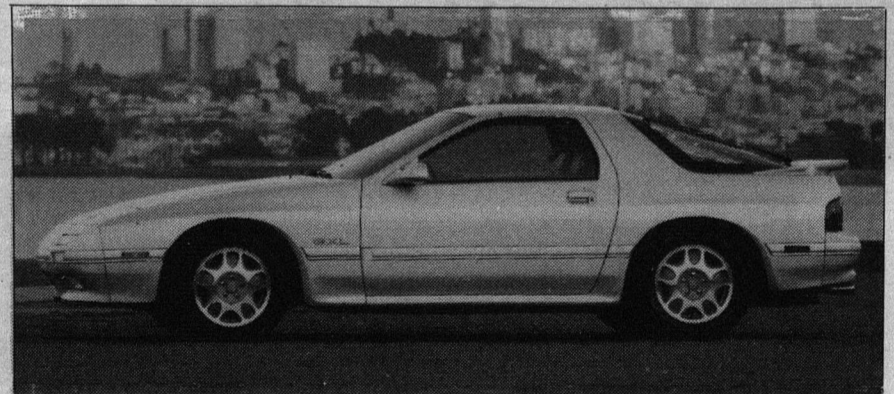
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