

Vurkolak (*Dragova's Fancy*)

Homo lupus sapiens

Ah, Professor Stanislava Dragova. Now there was a Mad Scientist who could never catch a break. Not because of her gender, except among the most odious vulgarians; most people are wise not to taunt those who can warp the very laws of Nature themselves. No, her problem was that she was a crazed biologist working in Bulgaria decades before Mendel's research was rediscovered. Certainly if Dragova had known what she was getting wrong, things might have ended up rather differently.

The short version: Professor Dragova was a Bulgarian patriot who naturally decided that the Great Powers' insolent policies towards the new Bulgarian state required an appropriate response. Which is to say, a horde of monsters. So in 1875 she traveled to England (it was an island, and thus a good control group to refine her research) to seek her revenge via the deliberate mutation of wolf pups into, obviously, half-human, half-wolf hybrids. The exact method is rather indelicate to mention; suffice it to say that the wolves' very seed itself was extracted, altered, then incubated in the she-wolves to produce the twisted and unnatural births needed. The idea, of course,

was to fill the English countryside with ravening wolf-monsters, causing all sorts of trouble and chaos and encouraging the English to stay at home more. And thus the Vurkolak was spawned!

Well, of course, it didn't work out the way she planned. The basic problem is that all Mad Science is about throwing pieces of the laws of physics and biology together, and seeing if there's anything interesting left over at the impact site. In this case, Professor Dragova succeeded remarkably well: she had indeed created a humanoid with wolfen reflexes and impulses that still retained some of the reasoning power of the human. However, the new Vurkolaks still operated as pack animals. And -- this is the important thing -- *humans smell like they're part of a Vurkolak pack*. So do wolves. So do dogs, in fact.

Vurkolaks develop at about the same rate as humans do -- and maybe live as long as; it's too early to tell -- so the first 'wolf-boys' started coming in from the woods at about 1880 or so. Fortunately for them, they were winsomely cute in a way that appealed to Victorian sensibilities; they were also fairly easy to socialize. Vurkolaks *can* talk, although they're typically silent; but they're amazingly good trackers and excellent with livestock, can learn to

read and operate machinery (nobody's sure how smart they can get, though; again, too early to fully tell), and are even able to grasp the concepts of ethics and morality. Most don't like the big cities, because of the smell, but Vurkolaks are becoming increasingly common in the English countryside. It would seem that the British tolerance for eccentricity extends even to people with fur, snouts, and a tendency to scratch themselves in public.

As for Professor Dragova: well, the British authorities caught up to her in 1882. Things could have gotten, ah, *hairy* for her then; but fortunately someone in the Foreign Office had the clever idea of having her trade her Mad Biologist services in exchange for the British Empire taking a much more conciliatory line with the Principality of Bulgaria. After all, Vurkolaks were becoming fashionable. And possibly even of interest to Her Majesty's armed forces.

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