

## Exclusive excerpt: “THE BREATH OF GOD”

Written by Michael Gingold

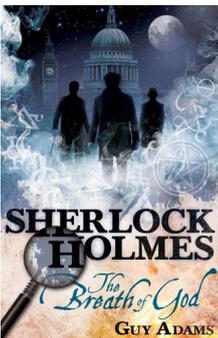
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Literature’s greatest detective joins forces with history’s greatest occultist in THE BREATH OF GOD, a new novel out today from Titan Books. Written by Guy Adams (pictured), it’s set at the close of the 19th century, when Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson team up with Aleister Crowley to solve a series of murders, and we’ve got an exclusive excerpt after the jump.

Following the discovery of a crushed body in the London snow with no footprints nearby, and a subsequent series of equally strange deaths, Holmes and Watson travel to Scotland to enlist Crowley’s help. Other prominent psychics and demonologists join the investigation—but will they be able to stop the gathering dark forces? Find out by ordering THE BREATH OF GOD at Amazon.com [here](#), and get your first taste below:



### CHAPTER ONE

*The Death of Hilary De Montfort*

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I was not there, let me be clear on that point.

When presenting the career of my friend Sherlock Holmes to the reading public, I have most commonly recounted events as one who saw them with his own eyes. The one obvious exception being the accounts of his many clients. Even then—perhaps especially then—I have repeated their testimonies as close to verbatim as my notes will allow. Whether Holmes will credit it or not (and he does not) I have always considered it important in these sketches to present nothing less than the pure truth. Enlivened in tone perhaps, constructed with a wish to excite as well as inform, but never altered in detail.

When looking to how this affair started—an affair that would see London in chaos mere moments before this brave new century began—I can only look to the eyewitness reports gathered by the constabulary, the effusive reportage of the press and the colour and clarity offered by hindsight.

But, whether I was there or not, whether I can swear to each and every event in those last moments of the life of Hilary De Montfort (for, as is so often the way, our story began in death) begin here we must. Because when the Breath of God first blew, it blew on young De Montfort, socialite and expender of other people's bank accounts.

And it blew so very, very hard.

De Montfort commenced the evening of the 27th of December 1899, with champagne and cards. He ended it in a broken heap in the middle of Grosvenor Square. As for what came in-between, I will tell you as well as I can. Certainly it involved a great deal of running for his life...

London is many cities in one, from the tarry reek of Rotherhithe and its opium houses, to the crisp refinement of Mayfair. Travelling its length and breadth in the pursuit of Holmes' enquiries I would often find myself faced with the most spectacular sights. I have travelled halfway

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across the world, lain bleeding on a foreign field of battle and yet the place most capable of filling me with awe is the city in which I now make my home. For that reason alone I don't believe I could live anywhere else.

For Hilary De Montfort I suspect London was a more singular place. His life revolved around club pursuits and fashionable addresses. In this he was not unusual amongst the youth of society's elite. His family had owned a considerable portion of Sussex for generations and until young Hilary found himself in line for familial duty and the responsibilities of running the estate, his time—and parents' money—was his own.

On the evening in question he had been ensconced at the tables of Knaves, one of the many gambling clubs to have opened since the demise of Crockford's forced gentlemen to take their money and betting books elsewhere. He was by no means a bad gambler, as likely to leave the tables with another man's fortune as he was to lose his own. That night the cards had been dealt in his favour and the doorman—a dour gent by the name of Langford—would later remark on the young man's high spirits as he left the club.

"He was as fizzy as Champagne," Langford was quoted as saying in the *The Daily News*, "he skipped down the front steps as full of life as any that was."

It was to be a short lived condition.

Snow had begun to fall earlier that evening, and it was through swirling sheets of it that De Montfort made his way, on foot, to his next destination—the lounge of Salieri's, that week's preferred watering hole for young men with money to burn. Why he chose to walk given the inclement weather, we can only guess. Perhaps he hoped the cool air would clear his head of the excesses of Knaves; brush away the alcohol and cigar smoke, ready for him to absorb yet more.

When next we catch a glimpse of De Montfort, he is running in terror along the streets surrounding Grosvenor Square. He was spotted by an elderly gentleman making his own way home. The fellow was alerted to De Montfort by the sound of the young man's cries, constant and desperate, thrown over his shoulder as he hurled himself along the snow-covered pavement. It is clear that De Montfort believed himself to be pursued, though the ageing

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witness would swear an oath to Scotland Yard that the street had been empty but for the two of them.

"Hardly surprising when one considers the weather," he said to Inspector Gregson in his statement, "Not just the snow, though that was thick enough, but the wind which had built from little more than a breeze at the commencement of my journey to a veritable tornado at the close of it."

Gregson noted a considerable unease in the gent as he recalled the gale: "I had to grasp the street railings," he continued, "or for sure I would have been blown along the pavement after the poor young man. For some moments I was quite unable to see a thing, the snow whipped so thick it obscured all but the faint glow of the lamps above."

"And by the time it cleared...?" Gregson asked.

"There was no sign of him, the street was empty but for the snow drifts the wind left in its wake."

Indeed the peculiar patterns of the snow were remarked upon by the officer first attending the scene after De Montfort's body was discovered. The constable in question—a young chap by the name of Wilson, fresh in the job and quite thrilled to have "such a corker" of a cadaver on his patrol—was so impressed by the drifts of snow that he attempted to make a sketch of them in his notebook.

"It was as if the hand of God itself were on his heels," he would later say to Holmes. "Cutting its way across the square right after him. I reckon as it would take something of the sort to make that mess of him, he'd been worked over good and proper that's for sure."

Indeed he had. The damage was clearly beyond the work of a single individual. There was scarcely a bone left intact in his body, the flesh of which was purple and black with bruising. He was of the state expected of those unfortunates washed up on the banks of the River Thames, a bloated and disfigured approximation of a body. Of the weapon that caused such distress we

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could barely guess. There was no obvious impressions left on the remains, not the mark of a club or cudgel. I might have sworn that the body had fallen from a great height. But as varied as our capital might be, it will always be found wanting of mountain ranges. This man had died in the clear, open space of one of London's garden squares, and there was little to explain the state of his remains.