

Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto

Gianni Rodari

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In Gianni Rodari's madcap allegorical fairy tale *Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto*, an Italian nonagenarian's villa is besieged by unwelcome guests.

Baron Lamberto is plagued by twenty-four sicknesses, including arteriosclerosis and Zellweger syndrome; his butler tracks his health. He's also blessed with twenty-four banks. His life is strange and takes zany, hairpin turns: on the advice of an Egyptian fakir, six strangers chant his name in an attic day and night without knowing why; some question the rationale behind their job (though most appreciate that it pays them well). These attic-dwellers form a chorus throughout the tale. Its suspense increases when the baron's bankrupt nephew stirs trouble in his life, and then when bandits who all bear the Lamberto surname descend on his home and demand a ransom.

Those against the baron reflect villainy of a hodgepodge nature: there are murder attempts, submachine guns, and an island occupation, but the bandits fail to do much real harm. Allusions to fascism run beneath their hapless bid for control, even as the events in the villa pique the curiosity of those in the nearest town. Still, the baron is unflappable, undermining the bandits' ability to inspire real fear. His multilingual prowess and the bankers' stodgy refusals to heed their ransom requests are among the efforts to thwart them.

Cartoon illustrations complement the text, sending up the villa's eccentric residents, who are earnest about getting information, secrets, or prosperity, with skill. And the ebullient prose savors fun, sometimes specialized diction coupled with situational humor. Subtle gestures to a put-upon ferryman who is tasked with procuring bizarre goods contribute to the book's whimsical weirdness.

In the illustrated novel *Lamberto, Lamberto, Lamberto*, a man's improbable restoration is moved along by the imaginative hijinks of his visitors.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2025)

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