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English 218

Bro. Richards

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Short Story: Golem (3rd Draft)

Within the barely lit shadows of a warehouse deep in the alleys of Saunte—the capital city of the Central Plains—sat a man hunched over a pot of doughy brown clay. Stone piled high on the weathered tables around him, and jars and bags of sparkling Runik Dust stood amongst them, exuding their magical aura. Behind the man was an upright bench supporting a jumble of boulders in the loose shape of a human. To the left, supported by another upright bench, was another humanoid construct with made from carved granite and coated with clay. Lines of Runik Dust crisscrossed over a portion of the stone left uncovered by the clay, occasionally sparking in the air.

The man brushed back his oily hair and sighed. He kneaded the clay in the bowl and stretched it, ignoring the flecks now stuck on the top of his head, then stood up and applied it to the joints of the construct. When the clay melded into the joints, he scooped his hand into a bucket on the floor and dunked another handful of clay into the bowl.

The man returned to the table and pulled a polished sphere of limestone from the center of the table up to the edge. Carefully etched lines spidered across its surface, all filled with the glowing Runik dust save for the top. After carefully brushing specks of gray dust from the surface, the man took a brush from a bowl of Runik dust and began carefully filling the empty engravings with it. His hand bumped into a half-filled glass of water as he worked, tipping its

contents over a half-eaten sandwich and draining it on a plate. But he continued his work, not caring about the ruined lunch.

A trail of violet mist swirled into the room from an open window. It gathered together behind the man into a cloud, then solidified into a transparent, human figure. He appeared as an old man wearing rags, except the edges of his body continued emanating the ever-present mist.

He scowled at the scruffy young man with disdain. "Ahem," he coughed in a warping voice. The man didn't respond.

The man of mist groaned and pulled out a spherical crystal emanating a pulsing, crimson light. "Ahem." Again, no response.

The man of mist shouted in frustration and threw the crystal at the man. "*Lyrom!*" The crystal clouted the man over his head and landed on the soggy sandwich, completely undamaged.

Lyrom fell forward and grunted in surprise, then groaned and rubbed the back of his head. He looked up and shook himself, then gasped, staring carefully at the sphere to ensure the Runik dust wasn't disturbed. It remained within the lines he so carefully carved despite the sudden jolt.

He sighed and picked up the brush. "Eion, you nearly ruined my golem's brain." He turned and noticed the crystal. Chuckling, he set down the brush, then picked the crystal up from the

sandwich. "But at least you brought a Life crystal. I was wondering how much longer it would be till I had a core."

Eion's legs dissipated into gas as he floated around to face Lyrom. "You're lucky I found a deposit that wasn't already in the hands of a gambling house." He crossed his arm and leaned back. "I already sold the rest. Always demand for corrupted Runik. One of the few things we can hold after all."

Lyrom stood up and polished the crystal's surface with a mud-stained sleeve. "And you even filled it with life energy for me." He turned back and grinned. "You old ghost—"

"I'm no ghost!"

Eion swooped in front of Lyrom and sneered. "You're lucky I owed you for getting me out of that glass." He turned around and turned into a simple wisp of mist once more. "Just leave me out of your golem business, knockerhead." He disappeared through a crack in the skylight.

Lyrom shrugged and marveled at the crystal in his palm. "Pure concentrated lifeforce...the energy that drives the living." He turned toward the granite golem. "Exactly what you need." He set the crystal down on the table and returned to the limestone sphere. "Just a few more touches and the brain will be ready."

After nearly an hour of carefully embedding the energy-filled Runik Dust into the grooves, he set down the brush and pulled on a pair of grungy gloves. He gingerly held up the sphere and stepped up a stool up to the head of the golem, the top of which lay open. He set the brain within the cavity, sparking the trails of Dust that threaded down at the bottom, completing the

connection with the rest of the body. He closed the cavity, making the head a perfect hemisphere with only a pair of rectangular eyes on its front.

Lyrom pumped his fist in the air. "Perfect!" He quickly inspected the rest of the body, then froze at the sight of revealed dust trails on the granite chest.

Lyrom swore under his breath and swiftly snatched the bowl of clay from his workstation. "Can't believe I missed that! After studying a real golem for so long, after all the inspired work..." he muttered as he rolled the clay out in his hand and placed it over the revealed Runik circuits. "Can't have water wash this away," he muttered.

When the last of the Dust was covered, he let out a sigh of relief, then focused on the gaping hole in the center of the golem's body. "And now," he said, staring at the Life crystal, "for the finishing touch." He snatched the crystal from the table, then very gradually eased it into the hole in the chest. Dust sparked again, and after quickly securing the crystal with yet more clay, he stepped back and waited.

Moments passed. Then minutes.

The golem lay still, lifeless.

The beaming grin on Lyrom's face fell into a frown. He turned on his heel and pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes. "No, no, no, *no*. Where did I go *wrong*!" he asked himself, kicking away an empty bucket with a clank. "I followed everything to the smallest detail!"

The core pulsed.

"The Life should have started it like an engine!" Lyrom shouted, slamming a table.

The golem's eyes pulsed amber.

Lyrom pulled his hair and yelled, "I even put nerves down in the—"

Urrrrraaaaaaggh....

Lyrom froze. The golem stood erect, facing forward. Spidery amber light glowed from beneath the clay coating his body, and crimson Life core beat like a heart in the chest. Its barrel-sized arms hung away from its body, and the short legs didn't shake under the body's tremendous weight. He towered over Lyrom, with even its head dwarfing Lyrom's chest.

It looked down, training its eyes on Lyrom's. ***"Grrruuuuaarr..."***

"*Gah!*" Lyrom scrambled back, tripping over loose rock and piles of books as ran behind the dead, natural golem, huddling behind for some semblance of protection.

Lyrom screwed his eyes shut and whispered, "D-D-Don't be like other golems...*please...*" He forced himself to look out from behind the dead golem and found his artificial golem simply stood in place. It lifted a hand and studied it, cocking its head. It flexed a crude finger, silent.

Lyrom narrowed his eyes, intrigued. The golem continued looking round about, shuffling its feet across the floor, unknowingly creating long, scathing gashes across the stone.

A smile crept across Lyrom's face. "I...I've done it," he said to himself. "I created a real golem! A *docile* one at that!" He clasped his hands together and laughed, "Thank you, Solus!"

The golem's head shifted toward Lyrom, and the man grimaced and silently prayed to his god that he wouldn't snap him like a twig.

“Urrrgh...” the golem groaned, backing away and holding its hands up defensively. The back of the golem’s peg-like foot bumped against a stray beam of wood.

Lyrom breathed in sharply and shouted, “Careful, you’re going to—”

“Raagh!” the golem groaned again. He stepped back further, the volume of Lyrom’s voice spooking it. It tripped across the wood and tipped back. It waved its arms frantically, desperately trying to keep in balance. It failed, and it crashed to the ground, shaking the entire warehouse and everything within. A lantern’s rope snapped and made it crash against the stone floor, while more cracks crawled across the grime-covered windows. The dead golem tumbled apart, with the boulders that made it narrowly missing his head.

After minutes of silence, Lyrom rose up from the jumbled stone and saw the entire workshop in shambles. Buckets spilled their Runik onto the floor, lumps of clay sagged across their tables, and a ceiling beam cracked under all the stress. Nothing remained the same after the golem’s landing, not even the pillar in the center of the warehouse, which held an enormous crack across its stone base.

He looked beyond the mess, toward the rising cloud of dust. Nothing could be seen except the vague shape of the golem and what remained of the plank it tripped on.

Lyrom crossed the room into the cloud and tentatively asked, “Golem? Are...are you alright?” The dust settled over the sprawled-out golem, shading its eyes and everything around it.

Lyrom stood over it, seeing nothing wrong with its construction. He set a hand on his forehead and muttered, "By Solus, what an extraordinary thing."

The golem's eyes flashed. Lyrom paled, backing away as the golem sat upright, moaning. The golem's right arm still lay on the floor, disconnected from the shoulder, with the disjointed socket spitting out sparks from its magical circuitry.

Lyrom winced as the golem looked left and right, noticing nothing. It raised its shoulder, seemingly to scratch the top of its head. When it failed to feel its hand, it looked at its shoulder, then the floor. Its eyes flickered.

"Raauugh," it moaned pitifully, picking up the arm with its remaining hand and feebly attempting to connect it back with the shoulder. After seeming to make the clay joints meet, it let go of the arm, only for it to fall a moment after. It lowered its head, its eyes dimming.

"Groooaaw..."

Lyrom rubbed his chin, closing his eyes. He soon opened them again and weaved through the near-ruined warehouse to the bowl of clay he had prepared moments earlier. He poked a finger through it to ensure it was still malleable, then went back to the golem and approached it, holding the clay out.

The golem jumped back, dragging the arm with it. **"Raa-uuuhhn!"** It held the arm close to its chest, drawing itself to full height.

Lyrom took a step back and quietly said to it, "I...I mean you no harm." He pointed at the arm with the bowl. "I can fix that." The golem stared, unmoving.

Lyrom stared at the ceiling, considering what to do, then looked down at the bowl. He took out a small lump and set the bowl down on the floor, then fashioned the lump into a rough caricature of the golem. He held it out to it. The golem cocked its head.

Lyrom took a deep breath, then grabbed an arm of the clay look-a-like. "Stay with me here." He yanked the arm off and held it away. The golem jumped and backed up against the wall, forcing dust to fall from the ceiling.

Lyrom hurriedly took the remains of the arm and applied more clay from the bowl to it, then reattached it to the rest of the golem. He smoothed out the creases and showed it to the golem once more, not caring that it was poorly put back together.

The golem's eyes shifted from the clay miniature to Lyrom's face, then his arm. Lyrom smiled hopefully and set a hand on his own chest. "I can fix you."

It remained silent. Slowly, he turned to face Lyrom and held its arm away from its chest. He reluctantly scooted forward, creating more scours on the floor, then held its arm out towards Lyrom. "liirrrkk..."

Lyrom smiled and accepted the arm, propping it against his chest. "Thank you." He set the arm down, then pushed gently against the golem's chest. The golem remained in place, dimming one of its eyes in confusion.

Lyrom rolled his own eyes and laid down on the floor, demonstrating to the golem. Its eyes blinked, then it lay down sharply, causing the warehouse to shake more. Lyrom cringed, thinking to himself, *'It's going to cost a fortune to fix the damages.'* When the dust settled, he

quietly said to the golem, "Softer, please." He dragged the arm up to the golem's shoulder, then when the bits of clay met, he carefully aligned the glowing Dust circuits with the darkened ones on the arm, then applied a new layer of clay on the surface to seal them. The golem stood still, seemingly unaware of the circuits reconnecting.

Minutes later, the seam glowed momentarily, then settled, leaving only a bump of clay as any indication of damage. Lyrom stepped back and motioned for the golem to rise. It did so, then studied its arm. It rolled its shoulder, then shook the arm, then flexed all its digits.

It stood back up and flashed its eyes. "**Huhuhuuunnh,**" it said, seeming to laugh. It reached out for Lyrom, drawing its arms together around him.

Lyrom eeped and dodged underneath the attempted embrace. The golem turned to him and moaned, cocking its head. "**Grruuh?**"

Lyrom took what clay was left in the bowl and held it up. He pointed at the golem, then his hand, then himself and the clay. He squeezed the ball, forcing it between his fingers and grimacing. The distorted and mangled corpse of the ball spread out as Lyrom widened his hands.

The golem's arms sagged. "**Uhn.**" He stepped back, eyeing the mess Lyrom had on his hands.

Lyrom nodded and sighed in relief. "Good...you understand." He scraped the clay off and threw it away. He stood straight and brushed off the front of his coat. "I suppose introductions are in order." He pointed at himself with a smile. "I am Lyrom."

The golem blinked, then poked Lyrom in the chest, making him stumble back.

“Rrryy...rrruum...”

Lyrom’s jaw dropped. *‘Did...did he just **speak**?’* he thought. *‘A golem, learning my name.’*

He abruptly laughed, holding his hands to his head. “This...this is incredible!” he shouted.

The golem stared momentarily, then pointed at himself and groaned, **“Kerrr...naaan.”**

Lyrom’s eyes grew wide. “K—Kernan?” He thought to himself, then pointed at the golem.

“Kernan.” The golem nodded and pounded its chest.

Lyrom shook his head, slowly at first, then vigorously. “Golem...no. You’re not that at all. You’re too advanced, too sophisticated...too intelligent.” He looked up at the golem’s pulsing Life core and said, “You are so much more than a mere golem. You are...you are...” He thought of the numerous texts theorizing of the creation of an artificial man, one that could walk with them as an equal. The name of it instantly came to mind.

“You are...an automa,” Lyrom breathed.

The golem blinked, then slowly nodded its head. **“Aww...tooww...maaa.”**

Over the next several weeks, Lyrom began educating the newly named automa, Kernan. Starting with basic words and objects, he grew with the mind of a child, constantly absorbing information and processing it. And, much to Lyrom’s surprise, the brain he so carefully crafted began to make new connections all on its own—leading Kernan to become more intelligent. He didn’t care how long it would take, but he knew that this automa would stand side-by-side with humans—along with the others that would surely follow.