

October 12 “Have you figured out how they are animated?” Nicodem asked, leaning close to the abomination on the table. “I haven’t a clue,” Doctor McMourning admitted, his gloved hands held loosely behind his back. They twisted and fidgeted anxiously. Nicodem poked the flesh of the cadaver, cut in a square from the muscle beneath, one side still connected to the body. It was pinned to the wooden slab at the two corners of the skin. It was thin and dry like paper. Nicodem felt the firm flesh, hard and brittle, with his forefinger. McMourning didn’t approve. The undertaker traced the tube protruding from its wrist that traveled within his forearm, to exit at its armpit and into its open chest cavity. The tubing connected to a metal tank approximately four inches in diameter and, although imbedded within the thing’s chest, there were numerous dials, gauges, and adjustable knobs to the adjoining apparatus. With the inner organs removed and the front of its chest fully absent, perhaps the original reanimator, clearly a prodigy of resurrection and grafting, could continue to make modification on the design and operation. “How did our anonymous friend reanimate a corpse so old, so disconnected from its spirit and forgotten in the depths of time?” He asked softly, more to himself than McMourning. Still, McMourning responded. “That’s exactly why I called you here. The grafting technology makes no sense. Like it’s superfluous, an afterthought. Half of the internal apparatus aren’t even connected.” Nicodem was skeptical. “This chamber,” he said, pointing to the internal cylinder, “it’s the necrotic pump, no?” McMourning grinned a broad and toothy smile. It made Nicodem scowl in contrast. “Yes. They keep thinking it’s a steam boiler.” Nicodem opened the small hatch at the top of the rusted cylinder, and the stale and acrid odor of necrotic residue struck him at once. It was long dry, of course, but the smell would linger forever. “Steam? Why would they think so?” “Narrow-minded, of course. They get fixated on one idea and cannot accept any other.” “Then what do you make of the pump and necrotic assemblies if they’re ‘superfluous’?” “My theory is that this corpse has been reanimated several times.” Nicodem lifted his head from examining the disconnected apparatus within the remains. “I cannot tell which might have come first: a reanimation using more conventional Resurrectionist arts such as you employ, or the grafted mechanika that may have first driven it.” “And now they’ve been awakened again. By the Event?” He shrugged. “Possibly. But many modifications to this corpse have been made over the numerous years since its original demise. Although dead flesh does not scar, of course, lacerations into it decompose differently than surrounding tissue. Some of these inner components have been added to the original design and older material is discarded but left mounted where it was. What’s most fascinating is not how it has been reanimated—” “Of course it is,” Nicodem interrupted. “Raising a single corpse, over and over, despite injuries to the flesh – this could be the missing piece to our puzzle.” “Yes, yes. We will study this thing, of course. But, listen. This corpse is ancient.” “Neverborn. Some ancient practitioner ahead of his time.” “Much of the technology is too modern. And the corpse isn’t exactly Neverborn.” “Then human. From the first Breach exploration a hundred years ago.” McMourning smiled that broad, ridiculous smile that made him look like a carved Jack-o’-lantern. He cracked

his knuckles and looked practically overjoyed. “It’s no human, either. It’s far older than the other Breach, as well. This has anatomy similar to both humanoid species. Like it’s descended from both. Many generations removed from the originals.” Nicodem’s scowl drew deeper. “We know that small breaches open from here to there all the time. They must have brought some humans over and conducted some experiments?” Nicodem offered. Even he

was not convinced. McMourning's expressive face conveyed his distaste of the theory. "Not like the Neverborn we know. They would cross-breed with a human? That seems the kind of thing only a human would do." His grin returned to the discomfort of Nicodem. "Seems the kind of thing I would do." He began wringing his hands, excited at the prospect. His mind was already busy thinking of the difficulties in the endeavor, the delicious impossibility, and the joy of overcoming it. He detached further and further from Nicodem, into his own realm of science and the twisting of the natural law that was his dominion. His pondering was interrupted as the bulbous head of McMourning's assistant, Sebastian, popped from around the heavy wood door to the dissection lab. "Pardon and 'scuse me, suh," he said, his thick tongue smacking within his mouth and his fleshy jowls quivering. "But there be a inspectuh or two waitin' to ask a few questions of ya, suh." One of Sebastian's eyes pointed to the ceiling above the two Resurrectionists while his primary eye may have fallen in the general direction of either McMourning or Nicodem. "And I maybe so bold, Doctor," and his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, "but I b'lieve they got a Death Marshal along." Sebastian sounded like a buffoon; just a simpleton off of Old London's impoverished streets. He was far from any of those things, Nicodem knew. It was all an act, obfuscating the truth of a man who knew and understood far more than any might suspect. McMourning didn't seem to notice Sebastian or acknowledge his statement. So it was Nicodem who said, "Stall them, Mister Sebastian. Give them a tour of the good Doctor's examining room. That should give them something to be excited about." Both men smiled at one another. Sebastian because it added to the illusion of his simplicity. Nicodem merely to add to the illusion of his genteel politeness. Both knew the Guild Inspectors would find nothing incriminating in this mortuary. Not that McMourning was overly cautious. On the contrary, he was addled and absently forgot he even stood upon Guild facilities. Sebastian, however, hid everything for his master. "Of course, suh. I b'lieve 't will." He waddled off to keep the Guild inquisitors running in circles. "Doctor," Nicodem ordered, his voice more commanding than his thin frame would suggest. McMourning's eyes fell upon him. "Guild Inspectors? Death Marshals?" "Yes, and it's their third visit, so I imagine it'll be an uncomfortable afternoon." Nicodem sighed but managed to refrain from rolling his eyes. "What have you done to garner their attention?" "Work you requested, actually. Trying to make a better warrior. And I stole a page from your book. Like you use those crazy sword wielding Nipponese monstrosities, I've been working with some deceased Guild Guardsmen. That's why the Inspectors are here. A couple of Guild autopsies 'seem to be missing'," he said in a mocking lilt. "So did you succeed? Can they shoot?" "They can, but not worth a damn. I'm still fiddling with their brains to see if I can access that part of their training and get them to remember. So far, if you give them the typical weapons they were trained to use in life, they seem to try to shoot the sword and slice with the gun. Doesn't even matter if you switch the weapon to the other hand." He drifted off in thought, again forgetting the gravity of the Inspectors waiting to question him. He was thinking of the brain and the layout of the organ, already contemplating how he might revise his last attempts. Neither felt any urgency to either finish their discussion or evade the Guild Inspectors. Nicodem gave no thought to the Guild officers within the building when he said, "We cannot afford to wait much longer. What of the reclusive scientist you once spoke of? Could he give you any insight into this problem? Identify something you're overlooking? It's been long enough and neither of us have made any significant progress."

McMourning winced. It clearly offended him to suggest he could not solve this problem. "He's no longer a teacher. No longer my professor, that's for sure." "No. You said he came to Malifaux to escape the law that condemned his experimenting on the deceased. Is he still here conducting those experiments?" "I don't have a bloody clue. It's been over a year since we spoke. I hear he's not been in the City in nearly as long. Maybe he's gotten himself killed out there in the wild, poking his nose in a Nephilim nest." McMourning hated to admit that anyone was a better scientist, but his old teacher was something of a prodigy and pioneered an entirely new way of looking at the function of the anatomical form. In fact, he might have inadvertently invented the Resurrectionist art, though that was not exactly his intention. He would say that he wanted to improve upon what nature had begun. It was, however, enough to have him driven out of the University at Ingolstadt (where McMourning had enthusiastically studied beneath him), his research compound in the Orkney Islands, and finally from his lab in North Africa where he was rumored to have conducted horrifying experiments that were intolerable to civilized man. In fact, his experiments were deemed as "crimes against humanity" though McMourning considered them nothing short of revolutionary and inspirational. Doctor McMourning, in fact, pursued the work of his old professor so doggedly that a report from Scotland Yard, though vague and clearly misrepresentative of the facts, so inspired McMourning that he, too, fled the Old World to take up residence in Malifaux. Now, like the professor that gave birth to a science of longevity and staving off death, itself, the law had come knocking upon his door. The narrow minds of the simple man sought to judge what it could not possibly comprehend, he thought. "Doctor!" Nicodem barked, shaking McMourning from his reverie. Those times were long gone and the old professor surely devoured alone in Malifaux's wilds. "Stay focused," Nicodem said, clearly annoyed. McMourning understood. He had little use for the living. They were all a mere irritation to him. Ironical since his own research was focused on bringing an eternal life from the ashes of death, to give back what must be taken from all living things. The thought reminded him of the key piece to the unsolvable puzzle. "What of your new prodigy? What's her name?" "Kiri." "Hmm. Whatever. Have you implanted a spirit into one of our empty vessels?" "No." Nicodem cursed beneath his breath, irritated at the string of setbacks that kept them from initiating plans that should have already ensured their freedom from the vigilant probing of the Guild and any other eyes that sought to keep them from their destiny. "Keep working on the Guild autopsies, then. We need something that can properly challenge those who oppose us. Give me that and you will have the place to conduct the research you wish, unimpeded. Now, what of this problem with the Inspectors?" McMourning waved his hand as if brushing aside a fly. "I'll kill them. Dress them up like the autopsies that went missing. Two birds, one stone, that sort of thing." Nicodem couldn't help but roll his eyes that time. "There will be a paper trail. More inquiries about why these Guild officials went missing." "Ugh! Yes, you're right. What a nuisance they are." "You will, no doubt, use them to conduct the next wave of experiments. Will you not stop until Lady Justice, herself, comes to ask you some questions?" McMourning looked surprised, assessing whether Nicodem were serious or joking. Then he remembered who he was addressing. "Justice? Have you not heard?" "What?" "The Lady is in the infirmary across the street." Nicodem nearly staggered. Eyes wide he asked, "Here? She's wounded?" McMourning rolled his eyes, then, mocking Nicodem. "I'd say. She's only regained consciousness once since your Observatory fell on her. You nearly killed her." "Really? That was months ago. She's still comatose? I assumed she escaped unscathed. I thought she was indestructible. And I nearly killed her." "Nearly.

Don't get too proud of yourself. You blew her up and your whole complex fell on her and she still breathes. But, yes, she suffers. One side of her body is crushed and she struggles even to breathe."

Which side?" "It matters?" "She swings the sword with the right." McMourning nodded. "That's the crushed side." Nicodem nodded, pleased by the discussion with McMourning after all. "Well, then. I'll depart, out the back way, of course. You have visitors, and I wouldn't like to keep them waiting any longer." In fact, he heard the clack of their boots upon the wood beyond the chamber door and Sebastian's voice echoing down the hall, ensuring McMourning wouldn't be taken by surprise. Nicodem tipped his hat to McMourning as he slipped through the narrow secret door hidden behind a shelf of books, beakers, and other lab equipment. As he pulled the shelf closed behind him, the main door to the chamber opened, and McMourning stood stoically beside the partially dissected remains of the abomination hauled back to his lab from the open pit within the bayou. The two Inspectors brushed past Sebastian in a huff, but he merely smiled and nodded at each as they passed. The Death Marshal, wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his brow, leaned his shoulder against the opposite door frame, too close to Sebastian for comfort. The assistant seemed not to care and smiled absently at him, too, licking his lips audibly, nodding happily at the officer. The Death Marshal turned to regard him, the upper portion of his face obscured in shadow. The lower part, however, caught the light briefly as he slowly returned the nod to Sebastian, and it was oddly discolored and gray, with thin tendrils of flesh pulled taut from cheekbone to jaw and exposed musculature beneath, as if part of the skin had rotted away. At first, the assistant suspected leprosy, but realized this Death Marshal was not fresh off the Guardsman line, rather, a seasoned veteran of the position that had come into contact with too much necrotic fluid, charged with the acidic chemicals and magics that allowed a Resurrectionist to infuse a corpse with more than mere mindless shambling, but with the brief inclination of emotion that Nicodem demanded. Bringing a Death Marshal was warning enough, but this one might be one of the highest of their ranks. Perhaps had been elevated to the command of the department while Justice and the Judge recovered. "Doctor McMourning," one Inspector began. "The leads you had given us turned out to be dead ends, I'm afraid." McMourning stood emotionlessly beside the corpse on the gurney, eyes fixed upon him. "Questions keep us coming back to you, it seems. Oh, yes, you've been very helpful in leading us to new suspects, but they have a tendency to give us one dead end after another. Any idea why that might be?" McMourning raised his eyebrows and cocked his head to the side. The beginning of that mischievous grin tugged at the corner of his lips. "Dead end, you say? Dead end. I find that interesting." He reached out and lifted the scalpel from beside the partial head of the corpse. Casually, without hurry, he stepped forward toward the Inspector. It was likely because of the casual manner in which he moved that none of the men reacted at all. He showed no sign of aggression or of fear. He simply held the instrument of his office and even the Death Marshal, eyes upon McMourning throughout and trained to suppress any danger before it might get out of control, failed to react, leaning, still, against the door frame opposite Sebastian. As McMourning reached the Inspector, his arm slashed from its position at his side up to the Inspector's neck, the long but narrow blade slicing easily through his throat so deeply that the blade struck the spine at the back. A thick stream of blood sprayed to his left from the severed jugular, but the motion of the blade up and through the left sent a trail into the face of the second Inspector, causing him to jump and shriek. At the sight of the blood,

McMourning became a blur, dropping his arm quickly. The scalpel flew through the room, striking the Death Marshal in the shoulder as he, too, came alive. He had begun pulling the gun from his holster but McMourning's scalpel severed enough of the nerve that his entire arm fell limply at his side. He was no coward, but no fool, either, and with the experience of the office behind him, he knew exactly what he faced in that dissection lab. He jerked back, to flee and gather the reinforcements necessary to bring this villain to proper justice, but as he moved through the entry, Sebastian reached out and grabbed the scalpel still protruding from the officer's shoulder and pulled him to a halt as if it were a leash. The Marshal howled in unexpected pain as the narrow blade twisted deep within his flesh. His other arm came up to bat the fleshy man away, but, much faster than he could have predicted, Sebastian had the scalpel out of his shoulder and sliced cleanly through the officer's throat. Like the Inspector, his head lolled back, away from the deep cut

and he fell lifelessly, his hat at the feet of Sebastian, still smiling vacantly as if nothing were at all amiss. The second Inspector trembled between the two corpses, bleeding out on the floor, the dark pool enveloping his feet from either side. He bore a firearm, but was too shocked to remember it, instead, standing in place, eyes wide and lower lip trembling. McMourning stepped over the body at his feet, his boots slurping at the sticky blood around it. He put his open palm against the man's face, above the nose and fingers stretched out across the breadth of his head. He pressed the man back against the wall and down into a crouch. The Inspector gibbered incoherently and tears came to his eyes. Not exactly the image of the pinnacle of manly bravado the Guild liked to project of its law enforcement. McMourning's grin was broad and his eyes sinister as he spoke down to the man below him, now powerless and stammering for mercy, knowing he would soon be dead. "Let me see," McMourning said. "Those missing autopsies that's caused all this fuss...you remember them, Inspector?" "Y-Yes," he stammered. "One was killed by a sword, through the jugular. Say, just like your friend here. I remember that. But the other Guardsman – how did he die, again?" The man's eyes darted back and forth in confusion and mounting panic. "B-Bludgeoning. To the h-head. P-Please don't do this. I—We can work out a deal." "Yes. That's right." He did not take his eyes from the Inspector but held his hand back toward Sebastian, palm open. Sebastian was already approaching him with a large wooden mallet. It didn't seem possible, but McMourning's smile widened, now bright and toothy, as he took the mallet from his assistant. The smile spanned his entire face. "Bludgeoning to the head." He grunted and the mallet came down heavily upon the Inspector's head.