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 him bedded 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 not 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 jowl squivering. “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 oracknowledge 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 weapons 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 labin 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 lawhad 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. Ironic 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?” “Kirai.” “Hmm. Whatever. Have you implanted a spirit into one of our empty

vessels?” “No.” Nicodem cursed beneath his breath, irritated at the string of set backs 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.

“Keepworking 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? Iassumed

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 a 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 theGuardsman 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 onthe 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