

# Raising Dead

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*I heard a story, once...it was about a powerful magician of sorts. He had obtained the power of creation, and as such, decided to craft creatures in his likeness, but because his was a power born of Earth, those creatures, which looked human enough, were impervious to fires.*

*Truth, it was an odd story, but there is more, you see.... Those creatures often found themselves in the midst of flames for one reason or another. This led to them to the discovery that they were unnatural. Inevitably, they returned to their master asking why it was that such an oddity was prevalent.*

*"Because I have created you. You are not human." Such were his responses, and more often than not, those creatures went mad from learning the truth...hmp, truth.*

*It is has always been about truth, and perhaps it is why I like this story so. Now, here's my favorite part. One day, that powerful magician found himself chased from his home, due to awful practices no doubt, and so he set up a camp. While sitting at the campfire, a creature, we'll say it was a wolf. I am partial to wolves...but that is another story for another time.*

*Anyhow, this wolf attacked, and the magician fell into the fire. To his dismay, it did not burn. You see...he, too, had been created, but by whom? He had no way to learn such.*

*Why do I like this story? I like truth. It never plays out the way we expect. It is not a pure light. It is not epiphany. No, my, no.*

*Often, truth is a dark and murky thing; a veil of sorts, which we must learn to wield in ways proper to the culmination of our very own and personal life experiences.*

*What is my truth? Well, let's say...death is not the end, and leave it at that.*

He calls himself a necromancer

Gaulder ran across the valley of ash enroute to Cormaire's lair. T'was valley was rife with death. Ancient bones, or cinders thereof, remained strewn about the gnarled and blackened trees. Puffs of ash kicked up behind the man's wake.

Cormaire, the necromancer—as he called himself due to his practices involving unlife—hid away deep in the valley of ash. His lair, a cave beneath the putrid land, was denoted by a wicked entrance. The cave mouth was carved from a lone stone, which stood near the center of the valley; a stone chiseled to resemble a disfigured and pear-shaped head. Rows of teeth lined the maws of the head—the actual entry.

Ducking his head to enter, Gaulder clutched a bundle of gray cloths; an item master Cormaire required to create a revenant was ensconced within. Being an apprentice meant being a liaison of sorts, and because Cormaire was unable to travel into town—it was an unworthy risk to his life—Gaulder ran errands in exchange for knowledge.

The young man in tattered, dark clothing worked his way through the labyrinth of stone corridors. Each hallway was alighted by torches perched in sconces. Eternally, they burned. Finally spilling into the sepulcher, the apprentice spotted the bent, aging necromancer pulling entrails from a recently deceased.

"Master," Gaulder called.

"Mm?" Cormaire mumbled without giving his attention.

Instead he dumped the viscera into a bronze bucket.

"It was no mean feat, but...I have it," Gaulder announced with a smile.

"Yes. Bring it into the light."

Gaulder swallowed hard. The master was neither pleasant to work with, nor look upon. Mostly, the man was covered in dark robes. Even with the hood pulled low over his face, the wizard exuded power, and a foul odor. Gaulder approached the stone worktable where the dead subject lay with chest cavity open.

"Here," Gaulder whispered, placing the bundle adjacent the body.

Cormaire waved his apprentice off before unwrapping the bundle. Amidst the gray cloths was a polished piece of amber the size of a child's fist. Encased within was a dried, angel trumpet flower.

"It was not easy to obtain."

"Powerful items seldom are."

"How, how does it work?"

The old man walked around the worktable. A plethora of ancient tomes sat on rotting shelves behind him. Candlelight flickered. Cormaire drew back his hood revealing deep wrinkles. He smiled like a Cheshire cat; his teeth surprisingly clean. The apprentice shuddered.

"Revenants, my boy, are particularly difficult to raise," Cormaire explained. "Firstly, the body must have perished from unnatural causes, and the bloodier the better. Next, as you just saw, the entrails, gallbladder, and bladder must be removed. Then, the cavity is stuffed with chaff bound in burlap...this is to keep the body dry.

"Now, we prefer as little trauma to the brain as possible, lest our raised be a simpleton. Furthermore, I prefer to add multiple adrenal glands. These can be obtained from any dead person, so long as they are not overly decayed. Splicing the glands into the body is a rather simple task, and it provides our revenant with boundless strength and endurance.

"Finally, the dried flower encased in amber is used to tie the deceased's spiritual nature to the aether; the...between, if you will. If this is not done, a revenant will be unable to follow the orders of the necromancer--"

Gaulder made the mistake of interrupting by saying, "But, master, the others didn't require--"

The master's eyes turned fierce. A furrow creased his brow, and his jowls sank at the corners. The dread immediately filled Gaulder's heart. He looked away.

"Are you finished trying to tell your master what you think is correct?" Cormaire hissed.

Gaulder nodded emphatically. The necromancer's demeanor relaxed, and he continued his lesson.

"Revenants are refined creatures. They are unlike the boorish zombies, or ghouls, which any inexperienced Necromancer can raise. Revenants need a connecting link between the world of the living, and the world of the dead."

"What purpose do they serve?"

"Ah," Cormaire nodded, approvingly. "A most intelligent question. Revenants nearly pass for the living. With the proper series of incantations, this...young thief, here, can certainly be mistaken for a drunken ne'er-do-well."

"And what will you have him do for you?"

Cormaire grinned again.

### Stealing immortality

The necromancer worked tirelessly over the corpse. Having recently implanted new adrenal glands, and stuffed the body with chaff, the only remaining aspect of the physical changes was the addition of the angel trumpet. Gaulder kept his eyes on the entirety of the proceedings. For the most part, Cormaire gave few, verbal instructions.

“Man’s connecting link is an unseen force,” the wizard started. “It protrudes from the abdomen; four fingers’ length down from the navel to be exact. This force is what we all use to read the world around us, and as such, the angel trumpet is placed there.”

Gaulder maintained a focused gaze on the master. “What do you mean by read the world?”

“The universe is magic...all of it. The physical body, too. Magic is a delicate force, not in that it can be destroyed. No, my, no. It can yet be disrupted. Altering natural flows leads to unnatural consequences.”

“Like bringing the dead to life?”

“Aye.”

Cormaire gingerly slid the amber containing the flower amidst the burlap sacks containing chaff. Then, he removed the chest retractors from the corpse. After that, he went about reconstituting the ribs and sternum. To reform the bones, he created bone meal in a mixing bowl. The whole formula consisted of powdered, bovine femurs, pinesap, and human blood.

The necromancer placed the bone meal at every severed juncture by way of a round tipped horsehair brush. Then, he meticulously wrapped thin, copper wire around every area to hold the bones in place. Suddenly, he left the sepulcher through a back door behind the rotting bookshelves. Gaulder remained in thought while looking over the corpse.

*I hope this is worth it. Certainly, this place is a wealth of knowledge, but what good is all this knowledge if it does not yield power? Furthermore, what good is power if it leaves one in such a state as Cormaire? He is alone, feared, hunted, and quite obviously, in fear of the world around him.*

His were the mental ponderings of a man with little to lose. Gaulder was only twenty-four, but had little use for a normal life. His parents died while he was a boy, and he had no other family. *What was I supposed to do, become a thief? It didn’t serve this man well. He hanged for stealing a belt. Soon, he will serve master Cormaire as a creature of the night. I can’t help but think of that story...the man who turned out to be nothing more than a creation....*

His thoughts trailed away, yet he kept his gaze on the corpse. Candlelight cast dancing shadows from the remnants of bones and other tools in the cavernous room. As hours passed, and the bone meal dried, Gaulder busied himself with pouring over the arcane texts. It was rare to ever see Cormaire doing the same. *How old is he now? Two-hundred something...?*

The texts revealed little of which Gaulder did not already know. Mostly, they provided detailed rituals for healing. Cormaire simply applied the practices in a contradictory way. *If one knows how to heal, he knows how to damage.* Other texts held

incantations for menial magics such as casting spells of fire, or spells which reveal peoples' tracks. *Useful for a man of normality, but I am seeking much more than that.*

He had not noticed Cormaire's return. The old man stitched the corpse's skin back together with cat intestines.

"Come here, boy," the wizard demanded. Gaulder shut the tome and placed it back on the shelf before approaching. "Listen to my words, and know them."

He was never one for repeating himself. "Oh, darkest of rituals...." Then, he paused for a moment, his open hands raised on high. "Let it be known there is no final resting place. Grave servitude is what I demand."

The area around Cormaire's form started to darken. "Take into your form this air. It is not wind, but the breath of life; my breath."

Gaulder cocked his head to the side. For the first time ever, as he had witnessed raisings before, he noted an ephemeral tendril slowly emerge from the deceased's abdomen, the place where the flower rested. It gave a subtle, indigo glow. During Cormaire's pause in the incantation, and while the tendril continued to emerge, another tendril—one from the necromancer—came forth. It was black as night.

"What was yours to command is now mine—your life, your thoughts, your needs." Still, the space surrounding Cormaire grew darker. It was as though the darkness was consuming him. Gaulder scarcely saw his master anymore. He was little more than a gritty voice. "Facets of life. Mere reflections of the soul are mine to manipulate. Rise. Rise. Rise! I command it!"

At the climax of the spell, the body on the table stirred. Cormaire grew silent, and the darkness diminished. Both men's tendrils returned to their bodies.

"Stand, revenant," Cormaire demanded. The man came to his feet. "Gaulder?"

"Sir?"

"Did you see it?"

"The connecting link?"

"Naturally," Cormaire replied.

"I did, Sir. I thought they were going to touch, but..."

"Nonsense. I could not possibly affect his connecting link with mine. I can, however, affect the world with my link in a manner which causes the world to affect his link."

"Perplexing," Gaulder commented. Cormaire shrugged with indifference. "Now, you send this monster to secure the life stone from Etmire Abbey?"

"Certainly. He is ready."

"If I may, master," Gaulder pried. "I fail to see the need in sending one undead thief to steal what can be taken by force with a legion of lesser zombies."

"Revenant," Cormaire called, momentarily ignoring his apprentice. "You will look into my memory and know this location."

The old man walked to his creation, placed hands on his face, and brought his eyes close to the monster's. They looked into each other's eyes for a moment.

"Do you see it?" The monster nodded. "Now, you will look into my memory and see the item I require. Do you see it?" Again, the monster nodded. "You will utilize your experience as a thief and recover this jewel. Though you were weak and slow as a man, you are quick and strong as a monster. Go!"

The revenant groaned and darted out of the sepulcher like a mountain cat. Gaulder remained staring at his master, knowing full well that, in time, an answer to his question was coming. Finally, Cormaire turned to him.

“It does not do well to bring down a wall to smash a gnat. Subtlety, my boy.”

“I don’t understand,” Gaulder complained. “I wish to...but what good is all this power, and what good is immortality, if you are to remain in this dreadful place?”

Cormaire nodded slowly for a moment. He drew back his hood, sat down on a wooden chair, and looked up at the ceiling. Gaulder was slightly nonplussed and cocked a brow.

“It is often I ask myself such simple questions,” the wizard answered. “Working with unlife is not about power...not as misunderstood by so many, who wish to rule kingdoms. It is about control, mastery.

“I started on this path many years ago. I cannot recall a time in which I did not wield magic, but raining fire upon nonexistent enemies was never my concern. Mine was a quest to unravel the mysteries of life and death.

“What dusty tomes I perused in the great library called Lycaeum provided little knowledge, yet we have all—or rather those of us who deal in magic—have all come across a zombie or two, so I ventured off in search of necromancers. As you no doubt have found out yourself, it is difficult to track one down. I found an old man by following a ghoul back to his lair.

“This old man, his name was Baulder, was in need of an apprentice, a liaison, if you will, into the common world. Over time, many necromancers are hunted down and slain by stalwart warriors or priests who claim to aid the forces of good, but what is good, really?

“I recall asking Baulder why he worked alone. Because a den of necromancers exudes too much power, and whole townships will unite to slaughter them. That is what he told me, and that is what you need to know. Certainly, working closely with a necromancer has its benefits; raising many undead without the constriction of time, but then those items required in doing so are quickly depleted.

“It is simply safer to work alone. We are often calloused individuals anyway. Most of us prefer the company of our creations. Necromancers, in general, do not strive for power, but control over our own destiny.”

Gaulder scrutinized his master in reverie. “Is this why you seek immortality?”

“In part, yes,” Cormaire replied. “At its core, mine is a desire to create the perfect rendition of man; an undead who is not dead...a simulacrum, like the wizard in my favorite story. As it stands, these creatures I have made do not question the world around them. They have no recollection of lives past, or concerns of the future.

“Gaulder, my boy, what has brought this line of questions?”

The apprentice smiled, shrewdly. “I’m an orphan. All of my family has been slain. I have witnessed nothing but death and despair my whole life, yet there is a legacy from ages past. By sitting in darkened corners, and listening to those who are unaware of my presence, I have come to learn that my own family was comprised of great necromancers. There is nothing else for me to do with my life.”

“Yes,” Cormaire whispered.

“Tell me more of this simulacrum.”

“Clean up this mess, and I will tell you.”

Gaulder nodded before busying himself with sopping up blood. While he grabbed a bucket with clean water and some cloths, the master related his knowledge of creation.

"The simulacrum is a living being, though composed of pieces of the dead. His heart beats, his mind ponders, and his connecting link with the universe allows him to bend the forces of intent to his will as does that of the living. Moreover, this creature can be altered time and again in any fashion.

"A powerful necromancer can provide his simulacrum with additional organs, limbs, inhuman appendages, and anything else imaginable. The problem lays in the very essence of living. To clarify; an undead has no soul. It is dead, yet the body remains functioning because of the creator's will and magic. Given enough time, any zombie will rot away. Even my revenant will eventually fall to pieces.

"The simulacrum wields regenerative properties. It is unclear whether it ages, or eventually dies from such, but if a living man can attain immortality, why not the simulacrum?"

Gaulder wrung out bloody water from his rag before scrubbing down the stone worktable. "This is simply about pushing the limitations on man then?"

"Yes," Cormaire hissed. "I must discover this process, and I must perfect it."

"To what end?"

Cormaire leaned over in his chair, and rubbed the back of his head. "I cannot answer that. It is an ache in my very soul. I simply must do this."

Gaulder stood still. The wavering candlelight continued casting fiendish shadows about the dark lair.

"Have others achieved immortality?"

"Naturally," Cormaire replied.

"Where are they? Have you met them?"

Cormaire turned to glare at the apprentice. "No, but it does not do you well to question my judgment."

"Apologies," Gaulder said. "That was not my intent, master. I am but eager to learn."

"That is enough for now. When the revenant returns with the life stone, we will speak more."

#### A truth revealed

The revenant returned to the sepulcher in a poor state. Missing an arm, and with rotting face, it stood almost ready to keel over. In its remaining hand was an unremarkable, gray stone.

"Give it," Cormaire demanded. The beast ambled over and relinquished the stone. Cormaire's grin shown from under the edge of his hood. "Now, go consume flesh."

The revenant groaned and left the lair. Gaulder arched a brow while watching the proceedings. Cormaire brought the stone near candlelight.

"I had expected some kind of shiny bauble," the apprentice commented.

"The life stone is named so because it is a piece of the old world; a time before man. When the Gods walked the Earth, they did as they pleased, thus altering the world around them. They created oceans, and mountains, and creatures. It is said that one God



grew tired of the company of his brothers, and strove to create life as he saw fit. To do so, he crafted a magic stone from his own heart.

"It is just a story, but there is always some truth. This...this stone will most certainly do."

After finishing his recounting, Cormaire placed the life stone on the worktable. "Now, the incantation," he said, gazing at the stone. "It is the one I learned from Baulder."

"Your master knew how to achieve immortality?"

"He knew the spell, but lacked the location of the stone of life. His final instructions to me were to find it. I have spent many years in search...all for this very moment."

"I can't wait to see what happens," Gaulder remarked, facetiously.

Cormaire furrowed his brow at the apprentice, who only smiled in return. "Will of God," the wizard started with hands raised high. "The will of man." He paused to close his eyes and breathed deeply. "I call upon the forces of eternity. Time, the immaterial, and abstract, invade my presence."

Gaulder stared at the stone. Nothing of note occurred.

"Place the everlasting in my temporary vessel. Let it never come to pass that this body will age. Let it never come to pass that this body will waste away." A moment of silence persisted. Still, nothing happened. "Hm?" Cormaire wondered, aloud. He looked to his grinning apprentice. "You mock me?"

"Master..."

"What?" Cormaire grumbled, letting his arms fall to his side.

"Did you know Baulder had a son?"

"What are you babbling about?" the master yelled as he approached Gaulder.

"Yes...you were not his apprentice."

The muscles in the old man's face twitched with rage. "Explain yourself!"

"Baulder was father to Thaulder, and he, a father to Raulder...I was Gaulder, after Baulder's father, the first necromancer in my family history," the young man revealed.

Cormaire simply stood there, unable to utter a word, so Gaulder raised his left hand waist high and manifested a glowing ball of fire from his fingers. He flung the magic at Cormaire. When it impacted, nothing happened.

"You were born of Earth," Gaulder said, calmly.

Cormaire looked at his form; it was one impervious to fire. Then, he looked at Gaulder, and for the first time, noted the family resemblance.

"You are the first simulacrum ever created. I was charged to find my family's creation and see to it that no harm would come upon it."

"I-I," Cormaire stammered.

"Do you have recollection of your childhood?"

The necromancer remained silent for a moment then he whispered, "No."

"Do you recall a time when Baulder was not present?"

"O-only following the ghoul."

"In your time away from your master, you set the entirety of your life upon his goal. This was no...how did you put it? Ah, yes, an ache in your soul. This was your mission, and mine is to perpetuate my family's goal—to walk the Earth as Gods among men."

When he finished speaking, Cormaire dropped to his knees, and stared at his hands. Gaulder approached the worktable and reiterated the incantation of immortality. With each segment of the spell finished, the stone glowed brighter and brighter blue. With the culmination of the spell, the stone's light surrounded the young man before invading his body through the eyes. When he turned to face Cormaire, Gaulder's eyes shone bright blue.

"I am Gaulder, and now nothing will stop me from ruling this world."

He stood over his former master with clenched fists. Cormaire bowed his head humbly, finally realizing he had been chasing himself.

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