Avenues of Action: Voodoo:

Power was an idea long lost in the figureheads and democracy of the modern world. Power was what stabilized society—it was what constituted standards and instruction to increase material and intellectual efficiency. The idea was a simple one for Dr. Martin: there were those who progressed the world; and those who did not. There were those who deserved to live; and those who did not.

History had clearly shown him thus far. The priceless piece of machinery in front of him was inconceivably created thousands of years ago. A long lost totem of science cast away by the society of the day—Dr. Martin would revive it.

He smoothed his lab coat and ran a hand through what was left of his thin streaky hair. Bleak walls stared back at his bloody gloves and wild eyes. The journey had not been an easy one, but it was almost complete. Then, Dr. Martin could fulfill his purpose. Take back what was stolen from his people: power. The world had rejected them, so he would reject the world: progress.

They were painted purple. Why were they painted purple? *She must have done them tonight.* He dabbed his finger in the fresh polish and rubbed it between his fingers. Twenty more minutes and it would be dry enough to scrape off. *Just get the hand.*

His fingers continued down from her nails and laced with her own. He squeezed, but she did not squeeze back. She had never squeezed him back. *Cold.*

Her hand was white and still, but captured such fascinating power in the eyes of the man. The fingers were so divinely proportioned. Flopping and bending in such a luring way; he had been hooked years ago. Down the knuckle line and over the palm he traced the lines through the Simian crease. *Who knew our ancestors could make something so beautiful. So perfect.* His eyes were enthralled, but his heart was unmoved. *Just get the hand.*

The small hand-held circular saw was lifted from his compact black bag. *It needs to be clean. It needs to be perfect.*

The woman wouldn’t feel a thing. She had drawn her last breath minutes ago. She would not suffer, because he had been kind. He had been caring. She would not suffer, *because he was a good man.*

The switch flipped and the saw buzzed. It sprayed chunks of blood and bone as it grinded through her sinews. His face was expressionless as the hand was carefully lifted and placed into the black bag. His eyes darted at the thermometer inside it. *Cold. Ice cold.* Unfaltering, he turned towards her other side. *Just get the hand.*

Pascal’s hiring of head detective had been a very controversial one among his colleagues. Of course, he understood why, but he also knew that it would make him better than any other potential hires. The higher-ups knew of his past profession, sure, but Pascal had managed to hide most of it. He needed the job, and he needed the action.

As his lunky 6’4” frame lumbered up the small apartment stairs he could only imagine what he would find. Heart attack? Suicide? Nothing? Victoria’s neighbors had alerted the police after not hearing from her for a couple of weeks. Supposedly, she had been very chatty to others on her floor and her sudden quietness had seemed very odd to them. However, Pascal had come to see that in cases like these, usually the “victim” was just out of town and forgot to say goodbye. He also knew that having the head detective check out a missing persons case was also odd. But it was one of his first days on the job and he needed some field action.

He arrived at Victoria’s apartment and another officer swung open the door for him, beckoning him through the gates of hell.

Upon first glance Pascal would have thought the crimson carpet to be normal had he not seen photos of a white one from a couple of weeks ago. Yet, it did not take long for his eyes to drift to the source: a bloody heap that was hardly in human form. It was twisted in such an incongruent and broken way such that it took several seconds for the team to realize that the body was missing its hands. Large stumps that had clearly been the source of the blood and which nearly caused one of the officers to stumble back and out of the room.

Pascal stared at the mess as his voice boomed over the chaotic silence. “I want every man, woman, and child out of this apartment in five minutes! This whole block is a crime scene; so I want you to seal off every door, window, and toilet until we find some evidence. Now get me on the phone with forensics and get moving!” The officers stumbled about hastily throwing up police tape anywhere they could while trying to get the wretched smell of death out of their bodies. “And find me those goddamn hands!”

Sierra watched the toothpick as it swirled through the drink creating an underwater vortex that matched the conical shape of the glass. She stared at the toothpick, blocking out the noise and lights of the bar. *Focus.* But she couldn’t. She never could.

A look at her purse. *No.* She jerked her head away and scanned the bar. It was a slow night. Two men at the counter. One in a booth. A group of women at a table. *It’s easy. They don’t even see you.* She tried again to stare at the toothpick. A swirl. Another one. It was hypnotic, but it wasn’t hypnotic enough. She couldn’t take her mind off the purse.

She swigged the Manhattan dry and got up from the counter. One more scan and she was off to the bathroom. *No one would know.*

He looked up just in time to see her foot cross into the bathroom. A glance at his watch. A sip of his drink. *Just wait.* He was eager, but he was logical. The soft bar music continued overhead. He scanned the room. Two men at the counter. A group of women at a table. *No one will know.* He glanced at his watch again. *She’s had enough time.*

He got up from the booth with his small black bag. Smoothed his suit. Adjusted his hat. He rubbed his hands and strolled towards the bathroom. *I am a businessman. She is just another client.*

Inside, the bathroom was clear. The white tile showed no trace of Sierra. *She is here.* The man looked into the dirty mirror and his dirty face stared back. He felt grimy, but it was necessary. No one would know who he was. *Just get the foot.* He continued on towards the stall and swung the door open. He smiled. There she was. She stared at him from the toilet. Limp and lifeless. Her purse was open, revealing the drugs. White powder was chalked across her nose. Not her powder, but his.

The man had studied Sierra for the past month. He had gotten to know her really well: favorite restaurants, movies, bedtime, clothes—everything. He wished he had talked to her before. Introduced himself. She may have been nice. *Too risky. Just get the foot.*

He removed her slip ons. He reached into the bag and pulled out the small hand-held circular saw. It had been scrubbed clean since its last use. It had to be perfect. Everything did. *For her.*

The thermometer stuck out from inside the bag. *Cold. Ice cold.* He gripped the saw and got to work just below her ankles.

Ten minutes later he was walking out of the bar with his little black bag—five pounds heavier.

Three drinks down and Pascal still couldn’t get the bloody stumps out of his mind. Who the hell wants an extra set of hands? He couldn’t suppress a chuckle; whether it was from the sheer abnormality of the situation or the nerves he didn’t know. Less than a week on the job and he was faced with a murder. *My damn luck.*

The past few days had yielded no results. As head detective he had been stuck writing arbitrary paperwork that despite its legality, didn’t do anything to further the case.

So here he was; banging on the restroom door of the dingiest bar he could find to get away from the press. Drunk as a skunk with an overflowing bladder and the men’s door wouldn’t budge. *To hell with policy!* He burst open the women’s door and rushed towards the farthest stall. He could already feel the alcoholic bile coming up. He flung open the stall door and opened his eyes on the wickedest site in his career.

Last weekend’s spectacle was hard to beat, but tonight’s took the cake for detective Pascal. An upside down woman was stuffed into the stall’s toilet, seemingly unharmed, yet lacking any substance where a normal person would have feet. Her whole body was streaked in blood from the upturned position and carefully positioned in the stall so that if one had not entered, one would not know.

Pascal looked on the scene as a true detective would. He had overreacted at the apartment because his team was there; they had to see he was truly alarmed or they wouldn’t trust him. But here, he didn’t waver or scream or run. Instead he stared. He stared into the heart of the girl, and farther into the soul of the killer. Pascal knew very well how they operated. What they wanted. He knew the game inside out, because he had played it.

The results couldn’t have been better for Dr. Martin. He walked over to the lab station and observed the specimen from outside the thick metal box. He had exposed it to his creation and it was maturing quite nicely.

Quick and effective: that’s all Dr. Martin needed.

Cleanliness was clearly not the goal as Dr. Martin washed his bloody hands in the crude metal sink, cleaning away the dirty hours on end that he had nefariously toiled with dissimilar studies until he had found one that was predominantly more irksome than the rest. Dr. Martin was getting close—very close.

Suddenly, he jolted from a knock on the door. *Perfect.*

He strolled over to the door and slipped a piece of paper through the mail slot. The recipient would get him what he needed. He always did.

Detective Pascal chewed at his fingers as he reviewed the case’s notes. *Taking hands and feet? For what? Terror?* If it was for terror the murderer had surely gotten that. Barely anyone used public spaces in the town anymore and everyone had barricaded their houses to some ridiculous extent. *Surely he’s not eating them?* He continued nibbling at his fingers.

So Pascal didn’t know *why* this was happening, but that wasn’t necessary. He just needed to know *where*. The police had already done thorough security checks on all the residences in town—no need for warrants, the people actually *wanted* their houses searched. They didn’t mind it if it was going to stop the rampage.

Police had also significantly ramped up surveillance on public grounds so another bar murder wouldn’t be feasible. For Pascal, the government had gotten way too much control over the past few days, but he wasn’t here to complain if it made his job easier.

*So we need to find somewhere that nobody sees. Somewhere hidden or abandoned. But how do we know where to look if we think we know where everything is?*

He stared at the grocery list. *This should be fun.* Although, not many stores were open this time of day, and they were certainly hard to get to.

However, he had spent years in the business and knew how to find a vendor when he needed one. And his Master was the best one yet. He was higher than man. Somehow he knew…more. And to be His servant was a privilege he would die for; and a privilege he would kill for.

By nature he was a farmer, and like a farmer his crops didn’t grow well in the winter; but that’s why he kept a stockpile.

Late that night he lay in bed listening to the whispering wind outside the window and trying to calm his indubitably exorbitant nerves. For any normal man, the task ahead of him would be grim. But for someone of his experience and position, it was merely something that had to be done.

He silently rolled over in bed and stared at the breathing mass next to him. The town knew her as his wife, sure, but really she was a tool—an investment at that. He stared gravely at her as his mind clawed at the hollow mausoleum of his heart, cold with death.

At last, the small knife rose from his side and sliced through the air as it found its fleshy target. He had placed a bet; it was time to cash in.

The penultimate experiment. If this proved worthy, the last remaining test was sure to as well. And once that worked…But Dr. Martin was getting ahead of himself. Through the amalgamation of wires and sensors, hooks and needles, it was hard to be sure whether the specimen was still there. But, oh yes, it assuredly was! And it would assuredly pull through. It *had* to. Years of theory, years of research, years of experimentation all boiled down into one pure, nuclear moment of truth.

Dr. Martin flipped the switch on a massive computer next to him. It whirred into life and started processing the state of the specimen, rapidly sending signals and sequences. This connection would be vital. It would be everything.

The night did nothing to hide the dark and defeated visage of Pascal. It seemed he was getting nowhere these past weeks. Past years even! Years and years of work to build up to his prestigious position…and it may have been all for nothing. He regretted his past, he feared his future, and he hid his present. He had tried so hard for his team, and most of them had quit. Maybe he just hadn’t been good enough. Maybe the position just wasn’t for him.

He kicked the dirt at his feet and shoved his hands into his pockets. Deep into the night he stared: into the sea of black where all men drowned.

“Pascal.” He jerked up and wheeled around, knocking into a brooding six-foot frame draped in white. Upon seeing this light cloth, he immediately fell to the ground and pressed his head into the dirt. Deeper, deeper into the dark earth; further, further from the white coat. He mustn't see; surely it wasn’t time.

“Pascal. It is time.” The figure held firm, merely staring down into the whimpering body at his feet. “I have come to very promising conclusions. Some of which were more than even I expected! My work is in its final leg, and yet there is one more test to be done—the most sacred of them all. I truly am thankful for all that you have done, and hope to conclude your service with your final nocturnal rite. It is time.”

Pascal was willing, totally willing for what was to come. But faced with it now, he could barely even bring himself to lift his head and peer into the dead eyes that would bring him back to his ancestors. He searched for them, but they were so colorless he lost them to the night; and soon all was lost to the night.

Majestic tales of old, unrelinquishing mystical powers were the only ones that Dr. Martin remembered from his childhood. People who could touch the world with their finger and unite what had divulged to chaos; to clean up and control the maddening dismemberment of a lost world. His work would bring to light what the world had lost thousands of years ago. He was on the brink of an unparalleled discovery so destructive, yet so vital to the salvation of the world; and it all came down to this test. This singular test which would announce whether his toils had been in vain or the portal to a new world.

He incumbently secured the hatch and watched on as the pathogen attacked the body of Pascal; as he would attack the world.

Minutes later he received confirmation from the computer: the pathogen had worked. The results of Dr. Martin’s success would be unprecedented. His pathogen worked in such a peculiar way that he calculated only three days to take over the world.

He couldn’t help but think back to his dreams as a medical student. Even from a young age Dr. Martin had wanted to fix the world. To do this, he recognized that he needed to understand how humans worked—and how to hijack them. His warped determination had proved very useful in maddeningly pursuing his toils in brain studies, as well as quantum entanglement. Quantum entanglement held power throughout the universe; the brain held power throughout humanity. To fuse the two would be…would it even work?

And so began his decades long work of learning how to quantum entangle the human mind; and the human body. If he wanted to control the world, he needed a hijacker that could easily spread fast. He had arrived at the creation of a mechanical pathogen that was quantum entangled both with his supercomputer, as well as himself. By entangling it with the computer, he would be able to source codes out to his synthetic pathogen by variant and write sequences for how each affected group of people should behave. The riskier half was entangling it with himself. However, he had gone over it many times. Once the host had accepted his pathogen, for a few seconds he was completely reliant on whether or not the synthetics made it to the brain. It would be like a stalemate, as either one could theoretically control the other, but once their sentience was hijacked, he would regain control.

His late servant had been crucial in breaking through. Power in the right place, just what Dr. Martin had needed. It was quite easy to theorize how to entangle limbs and less complicated human structures, the problem was finding specimens to experiment with. This was where Pascal had come into play. He wasn’t hard to hijack, although this time emotionally. Once a murderer, always a murderer. And Pascal had the resources necessary to accommodate his vile actions.

Dr. Martin wanted to feel bad about their last interaction, but he couldn’t. Not to such a blundering and ignorant fool. Dr. Martin wanted to try something even more revolutionary than modern voodoo: modern necromancy. Theoretically, his synthetics could hijack a recently deceased body because its mind was still fresh. And so he had convinced Pascal that it would be an honor for him to sacrifice his life for the cause. This experiment would take a little more time, however, he had more than enough bodily resources at his command. But really, Dr. Martin wanted sole power, and at that stage in the race, Pascal would know too much.

Now, Dr. Martin took a minute to look around his shop: various glass boxes of limbs he had experimented on; bloody coatings on almost every wall and piece of machinery; and of course the horrifying and viley dismembered body of Detective Pascal laid out in the middle. Dr. Martin barely even knew what to think. The pathogen was already on its way, spreading through carrier birds that he had manually infected. In a couple of minutes he would have control of over thousands of people, and growing exponentially every second.

All the work had procured a heavy appetite in Dr. Martin as he wheeled around, looking at the fridge. The grocery list seemed odd, yet promising. However, Dr. Martin knew there was no food in there, only a collection of discarded guts and limbs.