



Jakob found it quietly comforting to once again have someone he could work side-by-side with and not having to fret that revealing his true nature would scare them off.

“You know,” Harmlig said, as he was cracking open the cranium of a recently-diseased adolescent boy to get to the brain within. “It is nice to have a work companion that does not judge me for my work.”

Jakob did not tell him that his thoughts were the same, but instead just grunted in acknowledgement, while he was laying out the bones of the freshest male corpses on his slab. While Wothram was a tireless worker capable of loading and ferrying a cart of corpses to the catacombs once every half hour, it was nowhere near enough to compete with the steady flow of new corpses. So Jakob was constructing another servant.

The previous few days he had been making the tallow candles of human fat that he needed, making more than enough, just so he had enough for yet another servant if the need arose.

It was fortunate that the basement of the morgue was so extensive, as it allowed for both Harmlig and Jakob to work their craft, while also staying clear of the hole in the backwall where new corpses arrived by the dozen every couple of hours.

After laying out the bones, he began to chant the Amalgam Hymn, and while working his way down the bones he was fusing together to reinforce them beyond the limits of human capabilities, he felt Harmlig observe him quietly.

He had just finished the longest of the sections, the torso-and-waist, when Harmlig came over with a cold cup of mead. Jakob took it gratefully and used the deeply-flavourful spirit to treat his tired vocal cords and throat muscles.

“It’s impressive how you can maintain a steady rhythm for that long. Tell me, can you breathe through your ears, Goddard?”

Jakob looked at the Magister, who was wearing a mask that he had made from the bones of two female hands. Harmlig had insisted that Jakob kept the appearance of the hands, rather than smoothen out the bones as originally intended. The result was that the design of the mask looked as though a bone spider was gorging on the lower half of his face. The vents were crude, but functional, and, strangely, when presented with the choice of what sort of scent-ball he wished for, Harmlig had said he would make his own, ending up with something that had a mixed scent of cinnamon and a pungent leaf that Jakob suspected was a lesser narcotic. But he would allow the Magister this vice, for it did not rule his faculties, only seeming to mellow him out somewhat.

“Help me lift it up,” Jakob told him.

The Magister let out a puff of vapour as he chuckled at the command, but obeyed nonetheless, despite the fact that they were equals in this place.

They both grunted with effort as they lowered it to the dirty floor, which Jakob had attempted to scrub clean for the ritual circle, though to no avail.

“Thank you,” Jakob said.

Harmlig clapped him on the back and returned to his study of the tiny parasites.

*“Where void rules, light the ember of Unlife.”*

*“Where void rules, sprout the seed of thought.”*

*“Where void rules, fill it with conscious noise.”*

*“O Eternal Serpent, Birthe Sentience!”*

Harmlig stood away a few metres from where Jakob knelt, his twisted face lit ominously by the white flames. He was clearly no stranger to such a ritual, but he doubtfully knew what the result would be, given the obscure nature of the rite.

The room went dark, after the corpse-tallow lights bent their flames inwardly and flooded the inanimate construct with life, before the dull light of their candleflames seemed to remember their ability to illuminate.

As the construct rose from the floor, its arms longer than those of Wothram, and its entire frame a head-and-a-half taller, Jakob called the golem to his side.

With both of the constructs before him, he painted a Necroscript sigil in the forehead of each of the two. He thought it looked similar to demonic Obedient Squire symbol, though it was a six-pointed star and half a complex letter within on each of them, so that they together formed a whole.

Then he recited the simple addition to the Birthe Sentience rite, which would allow his new creation, Mayhew, to absorb the knowledge of Wothram, such that the newborn Sentience would not start from scratch.

*“Sentience born anew, absorb from thy betters,”*

*“The knowledge once seeded and grown, now is harvested,”*

*“Imbibe of the fountain of experience.”*

The two sigils burst into pale light and then vanished. Visually nothing happened, but as Jakob set them both to the task of clearing out the oldest corpses piled high in the basement, it was clear that Mayhew was no fresh intellect, but rather a copy of Wothram, as, despite his taller frame, he moved in the same manner that Wothram had developed. It would take time for Mayhew to refine his motor functions, but it was better to give him a completed image and let him sculpt it to his liking, rather than to ask of him to learn it all by himself.

“I have no idea what just happened,” Harmlig commented. “But that was certainly impressive.”

“I gifted the servant with a facsimile of life, one which contains a constantly-evolving core.”

“You gave it a soul?”

“Not a soul, for it will never truly be alive. But from the outside, it may appear just like a soul grafted to a human-sized doll.”

Harmlig nodded, quite taken aback by the ordeal, but nonetheless fascinated.

Jakob was about to go to work, when a commotion from the nearby main street drew his attention. He ignored it until the Magister commented, “Another noble-born has passed, from the sounds of it.”

“Really?”

“They always do these long processions of mourning, as they take the bodies to their family tombs just beyond the southwestern wall where the nobles have their graveyard complex.”

Jakob let out a puff of vapour and began cleaning up the leftover tallow and wiping the charcoal drawings from the stone floor. It went without saying that, seeing as he was hired as an Undertaker, leaving behind evidence of ritualistic work was a bad idea.

“Wanna see who it is?”

“Why?”

“It may be Selvmon. That chubby bastard has somehow survived catching the disease twice, so he is due, if you ask me.”

“He did not seem affluent enough to warrant such a procession,” Jakob replied in something that might amount to sarcasm.

Harmlig chuckled. "I suppose you're right. Still, let's go take a look."

Jakob was about to argue that it was a pointless waste of time, but then he changed his mind and followed the Magister out of the basement that they had, for the most part, been living in for over a week as they worked and discussed theory.

It struck Jakob as peculiar that he had not seen Ciana and Hesel in all this time, but he supposed they were hard at work themselves, the Elphin seeking fame and fortune, and the Wight obligingly acquiescing to her desires.