

HOMUNCULUS

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INT. TENT - DAY

DERRICK, 13, a dusty urchin, peers over his notebook as he sketches with charcoal. His desk has several open notebooks. He copies a delicate symbol from the pages.

KIMBER (O.S.)
Hey, Derrick! You still doodling?

He glances over his shoulder. He pockets the notebook and tugs a threadbare beanie over his head.

EXT. DIG SITE - CONTINUOUS

Excavation sounds fill the sunbaked, rocky desert.

Derrick exits the tent and looks past KIMBER, 27, strawberry blonde, to the middle of camp. He sees a huge stone under a cliffside marked with the same symbols he'd sketched.

Kimber ribs him and wipes sweat from her brow.

KIMBER
About time. I've never seen Vincent wait for an apprentice like this.

DERRICK
He's waiting for me?

KIMBER
Yeah, he said you're finally more useful than you are incompetent.

Derrick blushes and kicks at the orange dirt.

KIMBER (CONT'D)
Kidding, genius. He wouldn't keep you on if you were incompetent.

They stop in front of the door. The symbols glow purple.

VINCENT, 50s with dark features, stands before it in a proud stance.

KIMBER (CONT'D)
Here he is, sir. And in one piece!

Vincent scowls at them.

VINCENT
Alright, apprentice. Are you ready?

DERRICK

Me? Y-Yes, of course, master.

Vincent throws his arms out. The door activates with a flare.

Kimber covers her face. Excavators gawk. Derrick's eyes widen.

The doors GRIND as they open, revealing a dark tunnel.

VINCENT

Come, apprentice. This is the moment we've been preparing for.

Derrick follows Vincent. He pulls out his notebook.

INT. TEMPLE ENTRANCE - DAY

Vincent strolls, confident, into the dusty, cobwebbed tunnel.

VINCENT

Relish these first steps, apprentice.

Derrick opens his notebook and compares the pages to thin etchings on the walls.

DERRICK

What does this all mean?

VINCENT

You don't recognize it?

DERRICK

Not all of it.

VINCENT

What do you see?

Derrick examines his work and the runes.

DERRICK

They're old. First century? They tell a story, early magic and beasts? And these are -- a warning!

The walls RUMBLE. Derrick flips pages.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Come on, come on. 'Step', and this -
- it means closing! It's a trap!

Derrick turns back as the stone door slams down, leaving Kimber outside. Darkness plunges over them.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Oh, no. No, no! By the gods, we're -

-

A light flickers. Vincent places an illuminated hand on Derrick's shoulder.

VINCENT

Do not give in to fear. I have ventured to this place many times.

DERRICK

Right.

VINCENT

There is a way out within the temple. Follow me, apprentice.

Derrick trails after in the only light in the cave.

DERRICK

Where are we going?

VINCENT

The main chamber. Can't you feel the magic? Cast something, apprentice.

Derrick focuses on his hands and a light appears between his fingers.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I've dedicated my life to unlocking this temple's secrets, the origin of all magic, where the realm of the gods bleeds into ours.

INT. TEMPLE MAIN CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

They reach an elegant, glass-roofed chamber covered in carvings.

The light dissipates from their hands. Derrick gawks.

VINCENT

Look around, apprentice. There is much to understand on these walls.

Derrick studies the runes, notebook in hand.

DERRICK
I've seen these in your journals.

VINCENT
I've told you not to poke about in
my writings.

DERRICK
N-Nothing that you haven't told me
about already, master! I just
copied the runes, I promise!

VINCENT
Then what do these runes tell you?

DERRICK
I don't know, master. I see 'magic'
and 'human' but --

The runes tell a story, each more aggressive than the last.

VINCENT
This is the creation of man. This
rune means 'god.' And this one,
'blood.'

DERRICK
Oh. That's-- gross.

VINCENT
Blood is what differentiates
mortals from gods. That is why we
must die, to share that blood with
them in the afterlife.

DERRICK
What does that have to do with
magic?

VINCENT
Search. Tell me what you find.

Derrick reads more runes on the opposite wall.

DERRICK
Oh, these talk about 'mana.'

VINCENT
Some say mana is what flows in the
veins of the gods. It's potent
here.

DERRICK

The gods? You mean, the gods are here?!

Vincent shakes his head.

VINCENT

We are close. We have the time, apprentice. Would you care to see?

Vincent touches a rune. His veins light up purple. He casts a spell to open a door. Vincent enters and descends a staircase.

INT. LOWER CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

At the bottom of the stairs is a dirt and stone stage surrounded by gems protruding from a rune-covered wall.

VINCENT

Approach the stones, apprentice.

DERRICK

There's one for each god.

Derrick runs ahead. He scribbles in his notebook.

Vincent watches Derrick. Purple mana flows around the room and toward the center. Derrick sees it surge around the gems.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Um, master?

Behind him, the mana funnels into Vincent's body. He glows and floats. Air swirls and rips off Derrick's hat.

VINCENT

Feel this power that can only be harnessed by a god! Blood for blood, I can become as they are!

A bony mummy's hand emerges from the gem and clutches Derrick's shoulder. The corpse is Derrick's size. He shrieks.

Another, bearded and taller, grips his side and tugs his clothes. Derrick struggles out of their grip.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

A sacrifice gifted in magic is the final piece, apprentice! Your blood will serve a new god!

DERRICK

Master Vincent! What's gotten into you? This can't be what you want!

The magic consumes Vincent's body. He ROARS.

Derrick sprints up the stairs. As he climbs, shamble toward Vincent. Their bodies turn to stone as they merge with him.

INT. TEMPLE MAIN CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Derrick collapses. The door seals shut behind him. His notebook flies from his hands.

Derrick is out of breath. Tears and sweat stream through the dirt on his face. The room spins around him.

His eyes widen as his vision focuses on the runes again.

DERRICK

Mortal blood. Ancient. Ritual sacrifice. Power. Great power!

Derrick stops at the last rune, stumped. His notebook is open to the last page. On it is a smudged sketch of that rune.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Homunculus. That's the power Vincent wants.

He looks back at the tunnel and the runes over it.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

Of course! Hidden stairs. I know that spell, I can--

A GROWL makes the walls RUMBLE. Derrick closes his eyes.

He opens them with determination. He touches the rune Vincent had used and opens the door again. Magic fills his veins with light.

INT. LOWER CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Magic surges around the monstrous creation of stone. In the head of the creature, Vincent's eyes glow.

Derrick steps onto the floor. The homunculus turns to him.

Derrick retrieves his hat from the floor.

DERRICK
I won't let you do this, master!

VINCENT
You believe you have a choice.

DERRICK
You're the one with a choice. Stop
this. We can go back--

VINCENT
Stop? You dare to challenge a god!

DERRICK
I'm not talking to a god.

Vincent's homunculus ROARS and lunges. The magic in Derrick bursts out and away from him.

The world goes purple and bright around a normal-looking Vincent and pristine Derrick. They lock eyes. Vincent SHOUTS.

Derrick floats through the magic toward Vincent.

Mana surrounds Vincent's hands. Derrick grabs them and interlaces their fingers. Magic seeps through their veins.

Derrick and Vincent push against each other.

Vincent rages. Derrick squeezes his eyes shut as Vincent nearly overpowers him, and tears of pure light stream away.

Vincent softens. Derrick knocks Vincent's grip loose. Vincent tumbles back. All the magic surges into Derrick's body.

A burst of bright white light consumes everything.

EXT. EXCAVATION SITE - EVENING

The pattern on the stone door fills with white, RESONATING light. It opens.

Kimber and the crew rush to it.

Derrick stands at the entrance. Kimber reaches for him.

KIMBER
Genius! I've never seen the door
close like that. What happened?!

Derrick stands straighter.

DERRICK

It's a lot to explain. Vincent
tried to use the temple's magic
but, instead--

Derrick reaches into his pocket and pulls out a fat, black
rat.

KIMBER

Instead he turned into a rat?!

DERRICK

I contained the magic, but when it
was over, I found him like this.

KIMBER

Okay, so, you harnessed godlike
magic, and you're just-- fine!?

She pinches Derrick's skin, pulls on his eyelids, and combs
through his hair.

DERRICK

I'm alright. But we can't let the
temple fall into the wrong hands.

KIMBER

You mean like, protect it?

DERRICK

Vincent's the only one who
understands this place. If anyone
will know how to fix this, well--

The rat sits still in his hand, calm if not a bit sullen.

KIMBER

Do you think between unravelling
the secrets of magic and turning
Vincent back into a human, you have
time for a bath?

The rat SQUEAKS. Presumably in agreement.

Kimber and Derrick head back to the excavation tent.

THE END.