



While the workers of the city, those not yet succumbed to the plague of the epidemic tuberculosis, repaired the outer walls of the city and attempted to rebuild the many devastated houses, Jakob continued his efforts to make a horse construct, while using Hessel's expertise in anatomy and the dismantled corpse of a real horse as the blueprint.

Ciana and the Wight had not left his side since sudden attack two days prior, but it seemed that no additional ambush was to come, but, then again, the man they had faced had been an army by himself.

"His name is Nøgel," Ciana told Jakob, while he was finishing up one of the back legs of the construct, its tibia made to be twice as strong as that of a normal draft horse.

Jakob inclined his head slightly as a sign that he was listening, but in truth he cared little what the names of Grandfather's servants were.

The front part of the horse construct was mostly completed, though he was sure there would be some complications once all the parts were assembled and made to function as a whole. After all, he was very unfamiliar with equine anatomy and had several times been shown an error he had made by Hessel's observant eye. For the most part though, the Wight had just let him work, only aiding when asked. It meant that the work would take longer, but the end result would be, for the most part, entirely Jakob's achievement.

"He was a Rose-Gold Adventurer as well! Why would he attack us like that?"

Hessel answered this time, perhaps sensing Jakob's need to focus on the construct.

"Father wields many leashes, even now."

"I did not expect your return so soon."

"Spare me," Nøgel told the Spider. **"I need to be fixed."**

The Underking looked down at his crippled figure, though he himself was in a far worse state, seeming more dead than alive. *"To tamper with the Gift of a Great One would be sacrilege."*

"You hold nothing sacred! I told you what I required and you will deliver it to me!"

One of the Underking's countless arms moved ponderously around before reaching the chin of the Fleshcrafter and tapping his thin lower lip in thought. *"It seems my apprentice has grown very strong indeed."*

"You did not tell me he was also accompanied by a Chosen of the Keening and your reborn Wight!"

"I would have thought that one with so illustrious and famous a reputation as yourself would find no equal in this world. But another Chosen, you say? Perhaps you have been abandoned by the Keening in favour of this new man?"

"It was not a man, nor even human. It was one of those disgusting demon half-breeds."

The Underking froze, his tapping halting at Nøgel's words. *"An Elphin?"*

"Who cares what they call them. Repair me so I can retake my rightful place as the Keening's Hand!"

"No. I have a better idea." One of the countless arms snaked around and grabbed hold of the severed arm that lay by Nøgel's feet, then the Underking moved further into his sanctum and the Rose-Gold Adventurer had no choice but to follow his whims. He doubted the Fleshcrafter would betray him now, after all he had done for him, but the possibility was there, given the Entity that the Old Spider served, which was why he still remained cautious as he followed behind the patter of his dozens-upon-dozens of limbs across the sewer floor.

"Thoughts?"

Harmlig sat on his usual stool, having just told Goddard, Heskell, and the strange blue-winged woman his idea to spread his cure for the epidemic to the remaining populace of Hesslik.

The woman looked to the other two for guidance.

Heskell grunted something then spoke in that bizarre language he had heard Goddard use on several occasions. The Necromancer nodded thoughtfully, then said, so that Harmlig could understand it:

"Spreading it via the water will dilute your formula. Spreading it through food will only last as long as the food. If you spread it through the air, however, it should affect the most people possible and not be limited by an auxiliary delivery method."

"Won't people be alarmed if they see it in the air?" the woman asked genuinely. He found he rather liked the cadence of her voice, though she seemed very guarded, as she had only responded to his attempts at conversations with curt and brief sentences over the last few days she had stayed in the charnel house with the Necromancer and his servants.

"**Spread with mist,**" Heskell suggested.

"That's a good idea," Harmlig commented, "But I'm no sorcerer, and none of you have a mastery of water and air, I'm guessing?"

"There is another way, though the ritual requires a lot of ingredients."

Heskell looked to Goddard and asked something in their secret tongue, to which the Necromancer nodded in confirmation.

Over the next few days, they gathered the ingredients required for the ritual: sweet honey; fragrant flowers; a decayed head; acrid bile; tar; wood ash; candles made from odourless tallow; a bucketful of stagnant pond water; as well as two male youths that the blue-winged woman somehow spellbound to her.

With all the ingredients gathered, they met on the outskirts of Hesslik, within an abandoned house near the outermost wall of the city. Harmlig had brought along the vat of bacteria he had uniquely grown and nurtured to combat the parasitic epidemic over the last few months of study. He had carefully conditioned and evolved the bacteria in such a way that they specifically targeted the parasites responsible for the sickness that plagued the city, but it would only work to stop the disease if he could somehow administer it to both those infected with it and the rodents and other critters that bore the fleas responsible for spreading it in the first place.

With their strange ingredients arranged in a circle, each equidistant from the next, and the two spellbound young men each in a circle of their own, Goddard took the vat from Harmlig and placed it in a different sigil that was inscribed with Demonic script that seemed to include a sort of instruction of some sort, though his understanding of the language lay not so much in reading, but more in speaking,

given many Magisters predilection to using the language for certain incantations and covert communication with their fellows.

After the area was covered in blood-red sigils, lines, and circles, Goddard got down on his knees before the large painting and began to chant:

“Gluttonous One, scent these eight offerings brought to thee,”

“Doth thy maw salivate to savour these earthly morsels?”

“Saint of Indulgence, taste these eight offerings brought to thee,”

“Doth thy tongue flick the air and wet thy lips?”

“Take these lives and their blood as toll,”

“Feast on these offerings plated for thee,”

“Give us thy buzzing horde for our simple task,”

“This is a Table of Plenty in exchange for a fee.”

With a warm yellow-brown glow tinged with red and green, the linework set aflame and suddenly the two spellbound figures started writhing as their bodies began expanding from within. There followed a muffled buzzing of a millions tiny wings, before both of the youths vomited forth a deluge of tiny flies, which circled the eight offerings, until they formed a dome that obscured the objects completely. After they lifted away, there remained not a single scrap within the circle and they quickly set to devouring the two youths next, reducing their bodies to nothingness in mere seconds, the buzzing of their wings so loud that Harmlig feared he would never heard anything but *that* sound ever again.

After their meal was done, the flies began circling the vat of bacteria he had brought, and he could only watch anxiously as they formed a dome around it and then suddenly took to the air, leaving behind an empty vat as they flew across the city, ostensibly to deliver the waterborne bacteria to all they encountered.

“I have no idea what I just watched,” he confessed.

“It is called *The Table of Plenty Ritual* and it invokes the Gluttony of the Fourth Saint and allows for the brief control of a horde of his Gorgeflies after giving him a feast of eight unique tastes and scents.”

“I am not sure how a horde of flies will accomplish my plan to spread my cure,” he admitted.

“Gorgeflies are no different to imps,” Goddard told him. “They will complete their given task, have no doubt about that. It is said that, once, a King built a city overnight by using this ritual.”

“I suppose I will have faith and see what the morrow brings.”

Though he was surprised to receive the news, when he awoke the following morning, he still did not know if it was simply a coincidence or what, but overnight the new cases of the typhoid parasite had plummeted to none, from a steady few hundreds.

Day after day, he inquired the Mayor and his aides about new cases, but the answer remained the same.

Even two weeks later, there had not been another new case, and he had to admit by then that not only had his cure worked to halt the spread and new infections, the bizarre delivery method the Necromantic Summoner had developed had worked flawlessly.