

HOMUNCULUS

Written by

Elizabeth Kaye Daugherty

Brookings, SD

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.