

FOR SCIENCE!

by Sam Kurd

According to the weatherman's morning forecast it was *supposed* to be a dark and stormy night. Unfortunately for Doctor Von Übel the weather had other things in mind; this serene late summer night was quite unsuited to his dark purpose. It was most intolerable. Tonight was to be the culmination of his academic life's work, the pinnacle of his young life's achievement, and it all depended on a thunderstorm that simply refused to turn up. As he stood on one of the many balconies of the castle he'd rented for the month he scanned the horizon for the slightest sign of a cloud. There was none. A glorious full moon shone in the crushed velvet sky and the stars twinkled merrily down at him; he cursed them bitterly. He made a mental note to send a very strongly worded letter to the Meteorological Office as he stalked inside, slamming the door behind him.

Übel's hunchbacked servant slunk out of the shadows of the drawing room, carrying a tea tray over to the ornate chair the young scientist had flumped into in despair. Unfortunately one of the servant's legs was slightly shorter than the other, resulting in a snail-trail of tea across the carpet. By the time it reached Übel there was hardly any left in the cup. He dismissed it with an angry wave.

"Blast and confound this weather," he said, tugging at his wispy hair. "It's like God himself has set his will and all of his forces against me!"

"Quite so, sir," came the reply. "Tea, sir?"

"No no, I don't want tea. I want thunder! I want lightning! This was to be the greatest night of my life, the night I was to prove all those fools and naysayers to be the witless braying mob I know them to be! I have a corpse lying on a slab in my laboratory and if I don't

have my thunderstorm by the end of this week it'll be too rotten to resurrect! Damn it all, I just want to change the face of the scientific world as we know it, is that too much to ask, Igor?"

"Fred, sir."

"What what?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, my name is Fred, sir," said Fred, patiently. Übel leapt from his chair with a cry and smacked the tea tray out of Fred's hands. It fell to the floor with a clatter as Übel shook Fred by the lapels of his butler's uniform.

"Blast you, Igor, I don't pay you to contradict me!"

"Quite so, sir. Igor it is, sir. May I fetch you another cup of tea, sir?"

Übel released Igor-Fred with a sigh and fell back into his chair with a depressed moan, head in his hands. He started to sway dramatically. Igor (who knew which side his bread was buttered on and thus would just have to get used to his new name) patted his young master on the shoulder.

"There, there, sir. Perchance the weather will be favourable and we can instil new life into your dread monster tomorrow night?" he offered helpfully. "I'm sure we can find some other means of occupying ourselves in the meantime. Perhaps you could indulge in a little light werewolf hunting?"

"No, it hasn't been the same since Papa accidentally shot dear beloved Fluffy. Such a tragedy. I can hardly bear to look at a shotgun these days without thinking of her."

"My condolences, sir. Perhaps we could spend a diverting evening in your library consulting eldritch tomes that we might use to summon

forth an ancient evil from the nearby ocean that shall devour the world in a festival of fire and blood?"

Übel shook his head dejectedly. "No, Igor, I did that in my first year in Medical School. Some school chums and I summoned Dread Ixchulcab on a dare. He was a big squelchy squid-like thing. Stank to high heaven of course. And did he devour the world and usher mankind into a new era of insanity and chaos? No he bloody did not, he just sat in my bathtub demanding fish. I couldn't shift the blasted thing! In the end I had to bludgeon him to death with a shovel. That was the end of my dallying with the occult arts, Igor, from that day forward and to my dying day I was, am and ever shall be a man of science. SCIENCE, I say!"

Lightning failed to flash as Übel shook his fist and curled his lip in the dramatic manner he had been taught at Shelly's Medical School For Excitable Young Men¹. Desperate, he tried a mad cackle and rolled his eyes a bit. Nothing. He glanced at Igor who, obligingly, did a little subservient wobbly dance and gnashed his teeth. Still nothing.

"I'm sorry, sir, I tried," he said. Übel nodded and bit his lip². "Shall I bring you the papers, sir? Perhaps a flick through The Transylvanian Times or The Innsmouth Chronicle will lighten your mood?"

Übel nodded and dismissed his servant, telling him to bring the papers to the lab. Once alone, he held his head in his hands and wept. Wept for the beauty of the stormless night. Wept for the cold body on the slab who would not know life again. Wept for his failure at proving everyone wrong. Wept for all the derisive laughter, the pointed fingers, his father's disapproving glares. He slipped out of his chair and tumbled to the floor, grasping and beating the luxurious carpet with his fists.

The work. For the past 10 years, the work. Always reading, always researching, he had attended conferences, seminars, cocktail parties and operating theatres. He had engaged the services of locksmiths, cutpurses and body-snatchers. He had even wielded a shovel or two in a graveyard himself, casting around furtive glances to make sure the local constabulary were nowhere to be seen. All for the work, the work, the damned bloody rotten blasted beastly work!

Well no more.

No more the work.

No more the sleepless nights stitching clammy grey flesh together. No more the shunning of human company in the name of science. No more the moving from castle to castle, stately home to stately home. Well, perhaps the stately homes weren't so bad, but no more of the rest of it!

He rose to his feet and fled to the spiral staircase that twisted down to the depths of the castle. Pausing only to grab a flickering torch from a wall bracket he took the stairs three at a time, fire in his soul and spring in his step. His mind raced with visions of all the things he'd forsaken for science. Family. Love. Companionship. He'd pooh-poohed them all. And for what? Recognition by and admiration from the fools he was setting out to prove wrong? He saw it all now. How hollow his life was! How empty and devoid of all worth! How wasted!

He kicked open the door to the lab and stepped inside. Shadows danced in the corners of the room as he stalked across the floor to the colossal slab on which lay the source of all his frustrations. Wires zigzagged up to the ceiling, attached to various technical and archaic machinery that fizzled impatiently. Beakers and flasks sat on tables, colourful liquids bubbling away. Übel didn't need them for his research, he'd been told they gave a lab just the right look, so

naturally he'd had to have them. They had been expensive. He glared at them, then swept them off the table. They shattered, sending shards flying everywhere. He felt no better. The useless flasks were not to blame for his current predicament. He advanced on the slab, torch held high.

There. There it was. Lying on the cold stone slab, an altar dedicated to the gods of science, was the source of all his troubles. The corpse. After years of research and months of organ collection (not to mention preservation), he had lovingly stitched it together. It was not a hobby, a model kit that he frittered away his spare time on. It was a gestation period. He had brought this hideously perfect beast to term, and tonight was to have been its birth. In a manner of speaking, of course.

He held the torch close to the body, casting a critical eye over it. It looked oddly peaceful, lying there waiting to be reborn. Give or take the odd bit of gnarled skin that came from a burn victim; as time had pressed on Übel had found himself in less and less of a position to be picky about his materials. Mind you, now that he looked at it, some of the stitch work was *marvellous*. Around the fingers there, look, that had been particularly tricky. He felt an odd swell of pride as he gazed down upon his creation. It really had taken such a long time to reach this point, so much strife; to have it be for naught would be intolerable. And that stitch work was simply far too good to consign to the flames. He ran a trembling hand along the seam that connected his creation's neck to its body and he shook his head. No. No, he would be a fool to destroy this, his perfect creation. That would truly render his life meaningless and wasted. He must give it life, he must; and he would. Somehow. He would.

He could hear Igor shuffling towards him, could hear the 'slop slop' of more tea hitting the flagstones. It reminded him of rain, damnable non-existent rain ... and it tickled an old memory at the back of his brain. An idea started to suggest itself ... not much to go

on, but perhaps, perhaps...

He turned.

"Igor," he said, a slow smile threatening to surface on his lips. "Never mind the tea, dear fellow. Be a good chap and run along to my study. In my desk, second drawer down, you'll find some invention schematics I came up with as a boy. Childish nonsense and rot, of course ... but still ... I think I may have the answer to all my problems. Fetch me all the diagrams and notes to do with my old weather-control machine idea. If I can't have the thunderstorms I've been promised, I'll simply have to summon my own!"

Igor nodded. "Quite ingenious, sir, I shall fetch them straight away."

As Igor left the room, Übel turned back to his monster. Oh yes. He'd have his thunderstorm all right. If it meant going without sleep or food, he'd have it by the end of the week. For his creation. For his reputation. For his life.

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1 A very specialised school for scientists of the old-fashioned variety. Their motto: "Gloriae Scientiae! SCIENTIAE!!!"

2 His own lip, that is. Not Igor's. That wouldn't have been a very nice thing to do after Igor had apologised.

