Haunted Circuits

by

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Another Place.

Another Time.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Marcus and the Vampire make their way across the empty
landscape, lit by moonlight.

Marcus (20s) is of average build, dressed in a medieval
cloak, with a small satchel across his shoulder. He carries
an oil lantern before him.

The Vampire leads the way, but needs no light. She is
feminine, pale, of indeterminate age. Her round eyes are
large in her head, her dark straight hair framed by a dark
hood.

                    VAMPIRE
               (vague European accent)
          Where we go, the Grandioza
          Tombejo... Not a welcome place.

                    MARCUS
          I'm aware.

They continue in silence.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The two travelers sit and rest. Marcus drinks from an
animal skin canteen. He offers it to the Vampire, who
refuses.

                    VAMPIRE
          We go there for your father, no?

                    MARCUS
          That's right.

They sit in silence for a moment.

                    MARCUS (CONT'D)
          My father... He left when I was a
          child.

                    VAMIPRE
          Abandoned you?

                    MARCUS
               (defensively)
          I don't see it that way. He had to
          leave when his studies demanded
          it.

The wind picks up. The moonlight, coming through the forest
canopy, dances across his face.

                         MARCUS (CONT'D)
               All these years, I've studied as
               well. To be more like him, I
               guess. To know the science that
               took him away from us.

The Vampire stares at Marcus like a cat watches an insect.
Interested, but without understanding.

                         VAMPIRE
               I have no memory of my father.

Marcus gives the Vampire a look.

                         VAMPIRE (CONT'D)
               It was another time. Before I
               turned, all is shadow. Now I serve
               the Alchemist. All is for him.

                         MARCUS
               He is a father to you, in a way.

                         VAMPIRE
               Perhaps. He makes sure I do not go
               hungry.

Marcus grunts.

                         MARCUS
               All the blood you can drink, eh?

The Vampire eyes Marcus' neck. She smiles, revealing
pointed teeth.

                         VAMPIRE
               Yes...

Marcus looks away, unnerved.

                         MARCUS
               And yet I'm forced to trust you.
               To trust the Alchemist. To lead me
               to my father.

                         VAMPIRE
               That is the agreement. You of
               course will return to him with the
               knowledge -- this "science" -- he
               asks for.

                         MARCUS
                    (Non-committal)
               Hmm. We're close?

                         VAMPIRE
               Not far now.

The two prepare to move on. Marcus opens his satchel to
reveal his palm computer. The screen glows green: "FIND ME.
FIND ME. FIND ME."

EXT. GRAND CEMETERY - NIGHT

The two approach the cemetery gates. The wind is picking
up. Marcus steps through, but the Vampire holds back.

                         VAMPIRE
                    (nervously)
               I go no further.

                         MARCUS
               What? I need your protection. That
               was the deal.

                         VAMPIRE
               No. No. Only TO cemetery.

                         MARCUS
               The Alchemist will be displeased
               when I return.

The Vampire is distressed. She looks into the graveyard.

                         VAMPIRE
               You find your way back, no?

A scratching noise from the cemetery catches their
attention. A short distance away, somewhat hidden by a
monument, a rat-like CREATURE the size of a dog is digging
at the earth.

                         MARCUS
               Your master would not react kindly
               if I came back injured.

The creature looks up, sees them. Its rodent features
twitch hungrily.

                         MARCUS (CONT'D)
               Or not at all.

The Vampire sniffs the air. Tastes it. Considers.

The creature steps towards them. Snarls.

Suddenly a previously unseen SECOND CREATURE charges from the nearby underbrush, climbs a gravestone and leaps towards Marcus.

The Vampire shifts slightly, then moves with supernatural speed, halting between Marcus and the creature. The Vampire snatches the creature out of the air and bites into its throat.

The creature squeals in pain, spasms, then falls limp as the Vampire drains its blood.

The first creature sees this and backs away, slinking into the shadows.

The Vampire lowers the dead thing, blood running down its chin.

>   VAMPIRE
>   I can perhaps stay with you a
>   little longer.

EXT. GRAND CEMETERY - CRYPT - NIGHT

Marcus checks his palm computer. The screen glows, showing a proximity alert. He approaches the entrance to a large crypt.

Marcus unstraps a utility knife from his belt.

The Vampire takes one last drag from the creature's throat before tossing it aside.

>   MARCUS
>   Satisfied?

>   VAMPIRE
>   Never.

She eyes Marcus' neck again. Marcus appears not to notice.

He begins cutting at the undergrowth to reveal the door to the crypt.

>   MARCUS
>   Help me with this, will you?

The Vampire is not interested. She holds some vines back half-heartedly as Marcus pries at the crypt door.

                    MARCUS
          Let's get inside before more of
          those things show up.

The Vampire's gaze travels across the cemetery.

                    VAMPIRE
               (foreign language)
          Diabla estaĵo!

Marcus looks up. Emerging from the darkness is an enormous
rat-creature, as big as a horse.

                    MARCUS
          Hurry, help me!

The Vampire looks at the crypt entrance, thinks twice.
Turns to look at the creature. She makes a gesture of
farewell to Marcus.

                    VAMPIRE
               (Foreign language)
          Bonŝancon.

She moves off with supernatural speed, leaving Marcus
alone.

                    MARCUS
          Damn you!

The creature locks eyes with Marcus and begins charging
ahead.

Marcus squeezes through the entrance.

INT. CRYPT - NIGHT

Inside, Marcus tries to pull the door shut. The creature
hits the door, then its arm and snout push through the
opening, grasping and biting.

Marcus hacks at it with his knife. The creature retreats
just enough for Marcus to pull the door shut. Outside, the
creature screeches in frustration.

Marcus lifts his lantern, adjusts the wick for more light.

He surveys the inside of the crypt. There is evidence of
water damage, some crumbling stone and algae growth.
Alcoves containing caskets line the interior walls.

Scanning with the palm computer, Marcus moves around the room. Each alcove opening is marked with a digital symbol resembling a QR code.

Marcus scans each one in turn, until the computer beeps affirmation near a casket on a lower shelf. He pulls out the coffin, dropping it a few inches to the floor.

Marcus takes a deep breath. This is what he came for.

He lifts the lid to reveal the form of a decaying man. The skin is taught and flaky, eyes sunken, lips pulled back revealing perfect teeth. He was buried in a suit and tie, now shabby with decay.

Marcus is still for a moment, taking it in.

                    MARCUS
          Been a long time, hasn't it, Dad?

He takes a data cable from his satchel, plugs it into his device. Marcus feels along the base of his father's skull and finds the data port. He connects the other end of the cable, tying his computer to the synapses of the dead man.

The palm computer emits a series of whirring blips.

A green glow flickers behind the dead man's eyes.

The computer screen displays "BIO-OS LOADING."

                    FATHER
                  (Electronic)
          Hh -- hhh -- hel -- hello.

Tears of joy run down Marcus' cheeks.

                    MARCUS
          Dad! Can you hear me? I'm right
          here.

The "dead" man struggles to sit up.

                    FATHER
                  (Electronic)
          Hel -- hel -- hello. Hello.

A digital click. His voice becomes clearer.

                    FATHER (CONT'D)
                  (Brightly)
          Hello world!

As he raises up into a sitting position, the skin of his
face sloughs off, revealing a plastic and metal armature
beneath. The "man" is actually a robot, a cyborg with
decaying flesh. His eyes glow green ominously.

                    FATHER (CONT'D)
          Thank you for choosing X.S.ONE
          systems. Welcome to a world of
          service possibilities.

Marcus' face shifts to disappointment.

                    MARCUS
          Damn. Must be a RAM issue. Dad,
          it's me, Marcus!

He looks at his palm computer. The screen reads "MEMORY
MODULE NOT FOUND."

                    FATHER
          Greetings, Marcus. Please choose
          from the following options.

                    MARCUS (CONT'D)
          No no no no...

On the computer screen: "CHOOSE: (A) INITIALIZE (B) FORMAT
(C) DEMO"

Marcus checks the data port on the robot's skull. It's
oozing a biomechanical goo. Marcus yanks out the cable,
prompting a spark of electricity. The robot's eyes continue
to glow.

                    FATHER
          Perhaps you'd like to enjoy demo
          mode. Here are some questions you
          can ask me. What is the weather?

Marcus taps away at his computer.

                    FATHER
          What is for dinner? What is the
          score of my favorite sports game?

                    MARCUS
          Maybe I can dial in wirelessly...

Marcus sends a wireless signal, marked "HARD BOOT" on his
screen.

                    FATHER
          Perhaps a trivia game? You can
          choose from geography, history,
          math, or literature.

                    MARCUS
          Dammit!

He continues to scroll furiously on his screen.

                    FATHER
          Marcus, I notice it's rather dark
          in here. Why not turn on some
          light? Why, hello! Marcus, will
          you introduce me to your friend?

Marcus looks up quizzically.

                    MARCUS
          What?

There is a loud THUMP. Marcus turns swiftly to see the body
of another robot corpse dragging itself towards him.

                    MARCUS (CONT'D)
          Cripes. The wireless boot!

Across the crypt, more movement. Another zombie-bot pulls
itself out of an alcove.

                    FATHER
          Sure, I can provide information on
          that. In the event of wireless
          activation, an X-S unit may start-
          up in protection mode.

Marcus grabs his knife, holding it out for protection. The
zombie-bots approach slowly, emitting unsettling electric
groans.

                    FATHER (CONT'D)
          This is useful in cases of home
          security. Any persons not
          previously imprinted will be
          considered intruders and dealt
          with accordingly.

Marcus gives the first zombie-bot a kick, shoving it a few
feet, rolling it onto its back.

Marcus reaches down to lift the father-bot's torso.

                         MARCUS
              C'mon, Dad. Let's get you out of
              here.

The robot's legs are loose. Marcus wrenches them off, then
loops the bot's arms around his neck. He stands up,
essentially carrying the upper half of the bot as a back-
pack.

                         FATHER
              I am experiencing an error. I am
              no longer receiving signals from
              my legs.

                         MARCUS
              That's all right. You won't be
              needing them for now.

The zombie-bots approach again. One crawling, one
shambling. Marcus swipes at the shambling one, knocking off
some fingers. He shoves it out of the way and makes it to
the door.

He pauses to listen, but all he can hear is the grunts of
the zombie-bots.

                         MARCUS
              We'll have to chance it.

He pushes the heavy door open a crack, about two feet. The
coast is clear?

Marcus looks behind just as the zombie-bot shambler bears
down on him. Marcus ducks as it grasps for his neck. It
continues its electronic groaning.

Just then, the talons of the enormous rat-creature reach
into the crypt, grasping the zombie-bot. The rat-creature
pulls its quarry out into the darkness.

                         MARCUS (CONT'D)
              Good-bye, beautiful.

There is the sound of crunching and gnawing. Marcus, still
carrying the father-bot, moves stealthily out the door.

EXT. GRAND CEMETERY - CRYPT - NIGHT

The oversized rat-creature is preoccupied with its kill,
tearing into the fleshy zombie-bot. Marcus and his father
scramble away.

                    FATHER
          I continue to operate at reduced
          capacity in demo mode. Please
          format me for expanded use.

                    MARCUS
          Yeah. I'll get you back to your
          self, Dad. Let's pay another visit
          to the Alchemist.

The two leave the cemetery, walking off into the night.