

From the Desk of the Thanaturge
Entry #1

My new lab assistant arrived, today. He seems reasonable. His strength and bone density are both very high, and should be useful for experiments that need more brawn than brains. He is not overambitious, and seems content to perform my commands with little to no questioning - and when he does question me, it's not out of arrogance; he seems to want to learn.

This is encouraging - while I have no interest in apprenticeship, being able to explain my reasoning from time to time should give me the opportunity to reflect on my own actions and augment my work. Plus, he may even give me a valuable new perspective with regard to other ways in which to perform my experiments. After all, I often overlook the simpler solutions in favour of unnecessarily complex ones. The curse of a superior intellect, I suppose.

His name is Draal, and I have sent him on an errand to gather certain materials I need to perform a summoning ritual later tonight. I intend to consult with a particularly loyal Djinni by the name of ██████████, whose insight has proven incredibly useful over the years. Her desire for arcane experience outweighs that of her need to return to The Essence from whence she came, so she is usually more than happy to help me with my tasks.

It is this reason, in fact, that I have taken so long to find need for a lab assistant. ██████████ recently requested a large leave of absence to recuperate her spirit, so for the past several weeks she has been allowing The Essence to recover her vitality in that formless plane about which I am so curious. I had been hoping to let her stay there for a time longer, but certain events have recently necessitated her input and that of a dogsbody to procure me the reagents and minerals I otherwise would have requested from ██████████.

The ghost visited me last week, seeking help.

Her name was Aubrey, before she died. Somehow, she is able to remember being human. Unlike the rest of us, whose memories died along with us (save that vague understanding of our past form and world - and often a vivid memory of our final moments), Aubrey remembers her name, the sights and smells of the Human Realm, and most curiously she claims to be able to feel the dirt under her fingernails and a visceral 'hunger', the sensation of which is foreign to me.

Academically, the concept of hunger is one I understand, but I do not remember it from my time as a human. Only by studying the dogs who insist on devouring our brethren am I able to see its effects on the psyche.

Aubrey has been dead for several weeks now, and has been drifting through my lab from time to time. At first, this bothered me; the last thing I want is sensitive information to leak - especially my Djinni's name. I do not want another mage to be able to summon her and command her to reveal my secrets. At any rate, as time went on it seemed Aubrey was purely interested in the metaphysical properties of our afterlife much like I am. While I requested she not enter my lab uninvited, I frequently hear a call from outside the door like the one I received last week.

"Your Supremacy," it came muffled from the entrance to my laboratory. "I most humbly request an audience with you."

I recognised the voice as Aubrey's, draped a sheet over my work, and pulled open the heavy double doors to beckon her inside.

"Aubrey. It's good to see you. What can I help you with?" I asked her.

As Aubrey entered, her translucent form captured some of the torchlight from the walls either side of the entryway. I could immediately see that something was wrong.

All ghosts I have studied share the same basic traits:

- Translucency:

A ghost does not inhabit a physical form, they are pure animus existing as a manifestation of their mindspace, and the combined belief of others. Unlike a tulpa, which is conjured entirely by an external entity, a ghost exists in its own right but is unable to manifest to one who does not believe in its existence. Fortunately for ghosts, death and the subsequent revelation of an afterlife populated by skeletons tends to open one's mind somewhat.

- Incorporealism:

For similar reasons as that resulting in their translucency, a ghost is unable to physically interact with a large portion of this plane. While it is my belief that the 'physical' aspect of the Necrozoic Plane of Spiritual Disentanglement is simply a more 'concrete' manifestation of collective consciousness, the fact of the matter is that a ghost lacks its full animus and therefore is unable to interact with its surroundings to its full potential - it is also the case that many ghosts simply cannot be led to believe they have the power to create a form of their own through sheer force of will; not to mention the lack of belief on the part of all other contributors to the collective consciousness. I hope to change this someday, but it's difficult to perform sociopolitical miracles when one is busy fighting a perpetual civil war.

- Partial dumbness:

It is my theory that due to the partitioned animus of a ghost, part of their animus resides elsewhere in an external form. I have yet to study one of these, as I have never found one, so this theory remains unconfirmed. Nevertheless, I believe this is why ghosts sound so muffled, and are often simply too quiet to hear at all. They don't exist in full, so their power of speech is as muted as their power of presence: their voices, too, are translucent.

- Fading:

As a ghost usually exists in multiplicity with itself, its animus is severely weakened and continues to drain over time; like a wound unable to heal properly, the animus will bleed out and the ghost will become dimmer and dimmer until it disappears entirely. Perhaps if a ghost is able to reform itself, it will be able to last longer, but it is my suspicion that a ghost's psyche is likely far too damaged by prolonged periods believing in its incorporeality. I believe the only way to "cure" ghostism is by animating the inanimate with the animus of a whole ghost - unfortunately, no ghost I have ever met seems to have a complete animus.

- Agelessness:

The most striking aspect of a ghost becomes apparent over time. They do not age the way we do. Whereas a skeleton will arrive in The Necrozoic Plane of Spiritual Disentanglement as a newly deceased human being complete with flesh, and undergo a period of decomposition until they are rendered entirely ossean, a ghost will remain in the form it took at its point of creation. Due to this, I believe it is the trauma of death that creates a ghost - and/or the psyche of the individual in their final moments. While no ghost has confirmed this to me, I believe it likely that one would be able to choose ghosthood at the point of death if they felt suitably motivated to do so. In my experience, however, it is much more common for a ghost to form due to trauma - or indeed, surprise - at the moment of their demise. This was certainly the case with Aubrey, who was murdered by her brother; as evidenced by the bruising on her throat and the three bloody stab wounds in her abdomen.

These five traits have been present in every ghost I have come to study over the years. Until now. As I gazed upon Aubrey's semi-illuminated visage, it became

apparent to me that she was decomposing, just like we skeletons shortly after our disembarkment of Charon's wild ride along the Acheron.

"What's happening to me?" asked the ghost, and at this point I recognised a tremor of fear in her foggy voice. "I feel so hungry... and my hands, they're... changing..."

I looked at Aubrey's hands, and they had indeed begun to wither and form gnarled bony protrusions where once was flesh. I was shocked, of course, but unperturbed by her appearance. Anyone who spends time greeting new arrivals at the Bone Docks sees this kind of thing all the time, pre-integration into Boneva. Indeed, when the skin begins to dry and the corpulence recedes it is a cause for celebration amongst the Bonevan community. In this case, however, there were more pressing matters.

"This shouldn't be happening," I replied, suddenly pensive. "What does it feel like? Are you in pain?"

"Less than usual, to tell the truth." She responded. We both knew that was a bad sign; until now it has been apparent that a ghost is the mere image of a person at their time of death, and so they are frequently left in constant pain as their wounds refuse to heal. Ghosts feel everything they felt during that final of moments and while the pain had been quite severe for her, it was a mercy that shock had set in and dulled the pain immediately after the first penetration of her stomach with her brother's jackknife. "My wounds have dulled even more, like the nerves have broken down. There's a new pain, though; a dull ache around my entire body. It feels like I'm falling apart."

I nodded, grimly. She wasn't wrong.

"I will try to get to the bottom of this. I must consult with the spirits and see if they can offer any insight. Is there anything else you can tell me, before I get to work?"

Aubrey averted her eyes for a moment, then returned her gaze to me. She nodded. "There is one more thing. I can feel something... moving me. Something I'm not controlling. I feel the earth beneath my feet, like footsteps, but I know I'm not taking them. Something, somewhere, is moving; something that's me, but not..."

I couldn't rely on ████████ for more than a consultation right now, and so I advertised the lab assistant position. Now, a week later, I am ready to call ████████ and get to the bottom of Aubrey's ordeal.