



Cephas Continues

by Tony Graham

Drops of the thin gruel escape thoughtless lips, following ingrained trails down the wrinkled chin to fall upon soiled smock. Cephas – nursemaid, servant, bodyguard, golem – wipes the errant gruel from Lady Terris, eldest living scion of the Greater Noble House Kotar, masters of Mogadur.

Lady Terris is not disturbed by the activity. She continues to study the painting on the wall before her, a multitude of colored oils laid upon finest canvas depicting the ever-present storm over the Imperial Isle. Lady Terris has no thought to give for the tedious details of survival. Her concentration is complete.

Cephas stops chewing. The golem draws the masticated flesh from her jaws. Running a light finger along Lady Terris' lips, Cephas waits until they open, then slides the meat into the old woman's mouth.

“Cephas.”

The golem turns to regard the man fidgeting in the doorway.

“There is a task.” The man, Lord Tollora, beckons to Cephas. “An errand.”

Lady Terris makes no acknowledgment of the exchange. Nor does she react as Cephas rises and leaves.

Cephas follows Lord Tollora, grandson of Lord and Lady Terris, through marbled halls filled by all manner of beauty: statues, paintings, tapestries. Cephas, not beautiful, is all the more striking for the surroundings. Not attracting the eye, but not displeasing to it. The golem is plain. Solid. Stable. A figure of motion in a hall of still life.

Once there had been guards. Human guards. Once there had been all manner of human servants. Once the great halls of the Kotar had housed hundreds. Now its inhabitants numbered fewer than fifty. No one living in the halls was sure of the exact count. Cephas might know. But no words pass the golem's perfectly shaped lips.

Lord Tollora leads Cephas to the great doors of Kotar Hall.

A powerful figure awaits them. A warrior. Mercenary. Velinger. The stench of sour wine emanates from Velinger.

“So, you need another one already, eh?” Though Velinger speaks to Tollora, his eyes follow Cephas.



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“Cephas will accompany you and return with the purchase.” Lord Tollora ignores Velinger's manner. His drunkenness.

“This is a nice one. Haven't seen him before.” Velinger slowly circles Cephas.

“Cephas was created by my grandfather. His last great work.”

“What makes him so great?” Velinger stops to one side of the golem.

Cephas ignores the movement. And the conversation.

Lord Tollora tilts his head to one side, perhaps seeking a different perspective.

“Interesting that you think Cephas male. I have always thought her female.”

Velinger laughs. “Easy enough to check.”

Velinger grabs the hem of Cephas' tunic and lifts. With his free hand, he gropes between the golem's legs.

Cephas moves.

Velinger kneels, arm extended up in painful pleading.

Cephas holds Velinger's wrist. In the silence of the hall, the grating of bone on bone is clear.

Tollora's touch stops inches short of the golem's shoulder. “Dear Cephas, release him. Please.”

Velinger cradles his wrist and hand. Pain returns a new degree of sobriety to him. “I thought golems couldn't harm anyone of Kotar blood?”

Lord Tollora politely laughs. “Did you think yourself of Kotar blood? How foolish. Simply being of noble blood in the city of Mogadur does not make one of the Kotar. Perhaps you even have a distant ancestor, some cast-off bastard sired by one of my blood. Not enough, I'm afraid, for dear Cephas to recognize.”

Velinger rises to his feet, warily eyeing the golem.

“There is no need for you to return. Choose me a good subject.” Lord Tollora has already turned away.



The public morgue is cool and damp year round in Mogadur. Accessed by a series of brick passages and staircases, it lies some distance beneath the city streets.

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Kurbat moves his rotund bulk with surprising grace down the row of stone benches. “Quite a few customers today, yes. Old, young, strong, weak. So many visitors, nearly everyone sooner or later.” He pauses to examine a corpse, shakes his head, and moves on. “I know I've seen the perfect...” He stops. “Yes, here she is. Lovely. Such a waste.”

Kurbat pirouettes, hands spread in presentation.

The nude corpse of a young woman lays upon the bench.

“Note the musculature, she worked in a glass foundry. A strong, healthy woman of good reputation.”

Velinger does not remove the handkerchief from his mouth and nose. “I don't give a damn for her reputation.”

Kurbat places his hands over the corpse's ears. “Don't listen to him, darling. We all know you for a pure woman.” Kurbat giggles before returning to business. “Notice the hand. Well, lack of hand. Burned off. Clean wound, instantly cauterized, but the poor darling's heart couldn't take the shock. Will your client mind?”

Both men know it will not matter. This is not Velinger's first such visit.

“Wrap her up in something. Can't be walking the streets with a naked dead girl,” Velinger orders.

“Quite right. By all means, let's find some proper attire for a dead girl.” Kurbat stands unmoving.

Velinger drops a purse into one fat hand.

Kurbat moves cautiously around Cephas as he gathers a length of cloth with which to shroud the body.

“Is he trying to make another?” Kurbat watches Velinger from the corner of his eye as he wraps the corpse.

“Another what?” Velinger's thoughts are already elsewhere.

Kurbat nods his head towards the golem. “That one. Cephas. The perfect golem. Bane of Lord Terris.”

“You seem well informed, fat man.” Velinger's tone is one part curious, one part warning.

“My family traces twenty-seven generations of service to this city. We watch. We listen. We gossip.”



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Velinger places a hand on the hilt of the short sword at his belt.

“You needn't worry. Gold seals these lips.” Kurbat smacks said lips in satisfaction as he finishes his wrapping.

Velinger seems content with the assurance. “None of my business. I'm just an errand boy.”

The two men watch as Cephas effortlessly picks up the package and departs.

“Surprising to me how many would-be crafters think the old lord used human body parts. As if he were some necromancer instead of a Kotar. A master of Constructs.”



Cephas, burdened with the package, hears the shouting through the closed doors.

“Damn you! Ugly! Bitch!”

Cephas pushes the door open in time to see Lord Tollora swing the sledgehammer. The blow strikes the head with a loud crack, tearing it clear from the torso. The head rolls across the room towards Cephas as the torso topples.

Lord Tollora freezes at the sight of Cephas, like a small boy caught in ultimate mischief. He blushes, turns his back to the golem.

Cephas steps over the severed clay head to a table standing in a pool of sunlight. The golem gently lays the shrouded corpse down and turns to leave.

“Stay.” Cephas stops. “Please.”

Tollora drops the sledgehammer. He carefully approaches Cephas from behind. He reaches trembling fingers towards the golem's cheek, stopping just short. “Dear Cephas.”

Tollora clenches his hands together, trying to slow his breathing. “Another failure. I've tried everything. Everything.” Tollora looks away. “Why couldn't the old bastard leave notes! Is that so much to ask!”

Tollora realizes he is shouting. He turns a sideways glance at Cephas in embarrassment.

“Is it too much to ask, Cephas?” Again he reaches out to the golem, but stops himself from touching. “Dear Cephas, I just want... You.”

Cephas offers nothing in response.

Lord Tollora draws his hood over his head, squeezes himself into a corner. Kneeling, his



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shoulders shake with muffled sobs.

Cephas stands unmoving. More than statue. Less than life.

Cephas continues.



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