

CHAPTER I

"Stern and white as a tomb, older than the memory of the dead, and built by men or devils beyond the recording of myth, is the mansion in which we dwell."

Clark Ashton Smith

Gouroull waited, crouching on the snowy sward as darkness slowly crepted over the steppes. Two humans approached, one carrying a rifle, the other unarmed. They spoke Russian, a language Frankenstein's most terrible creation understood, having learned the odd tongue in recent decades. Human communication was a tool—another weapon in Gouroull's arsenal as he wandered the Earth in search of his destiny.

"...is nearby. This much I can assure you," a gruff, deep, voice said in Siberian accented Russian. "That is all I promise. The rest is in the hands of the Lord and the spirits dark and light."

"Spare me your mumbo-jumbo, my good sir," a second voice replied. "The great Victor Frankenstein proved there is no God save man, and science is his religion. The rest is all fiction."

The accent sounded odd, as if the speaker found Russian pronunciation difficult and unpleasant.

"Is that truly what he and your good self truly believe?" the first asked.

"Of course! Any right-thinking man capable of rejecting superstition would feel exactly as I do. Baron Frankenstein wrote a very telling statement that I never forgot. This is the passage he wrote in his diary during the days of creation. He left the book, as well as his equipment, in a sad little town in Ireland called Kanderley. Can you imagine it? A work of genius disproving all religion abandoned in a misbegotten hamlet filled with bog-trotters and other lesser creatures."

"No," replied the first voice.

The second man stopped walking and exclaimed: "He wrote these telling words: *No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.* There you have it, sir! The truth in its purest form. That is science and the denial of creators and ancient foolish beliefs."

"There is a second explanation you have not considered," the first man said, his voice not hiding his amusement.

"What is that?" the second man asked.

"Simply this—Victor Frankenstein, while a genius in science, was misguided in every other area of life and the universe. He was insane, despite finding new paths in God's creation."

"If you were not my only way of finding my way back to what you Russian call towns, I should shoot you were you stand," the second man shouted. "How dare you? How dare you besmirch the name of the great Victor Frankenstein?"

He stopped a few feet from Gouroull's location.

"I am not Russian, sir. I am Siberian," the first man replied.

His response sounded bored, as if these were words spoken to deaf ears.

"Who cares? All of the countries after Germany are just as bad as the blacks and Jews. None of you are part of the true root races. You are all off-shoot bastardizations of the Atlanteans, the weak fourth race who mated with the unevolved sub-humans of the Earth."

Tired of listening to the ranting, Gouroull stepped from his hiding place and stared at the two men. His yellow phosphorescent eyes pierced the glowing gloom like twin flames—an inhuman, alien, aspect that froze both men mid-step. This provided Frankenstein's monster a moment of quiet, allowing an examination of both humans.

The taller of the two stood several inches above six feet. He possessed broad shoulders, a thick, tangled, black beard, and a wild mane of dark hair that flowed across his shoulders. The face beneath the beard possessed the heavy features of a typical peasant of any region from the Urals to the Mongolian borders. The most striking feature were his eyes, deep-set, dark and possessing a depth that appeared bottomless.

The second man was altogether different, and not in an advantageous way. He was a full head shorter with a narrow, almost emaciated frame, pale, sallow skin, and astonishingly long, bony fingers. This man possessed a weak, almost non-existent chin, a thin nose, small, narrow eyes, and a full mouth twisted in a disapproving mow. In his long, claw-shaped hands was a rifle made from highly polished wood and gleaming metal.

"Oh," the second man said, started by the sight of Gouroull, nearly dropping his gun, "Oh, my!"

"I did warn you," the taller man rumbled.

He stared up at Gouroull with open interest and, surprisingly, little fear.

Gouroull made no move, but watched both humans, his alien orbs gazing upon them with unblinking concentration. He towered over both men and his breadth of shoulders was nearly as large as both standing side by side. Frankenstein's most lethal creation was a titan compared to even the largest humans, a fact that frightened them nearly as much as his inhuman aspect.

"You are as astonishing as all reports have claimed," the smaller man said, his words rushing out in a flow of English.

His accent was alien to Gouroull's ears. He spoke with the long vowels and measured tones of someone hailing from England. Yet his pronunciation was oddly accented, as if he was imitating this style of speech.

Stepping closer to the massive Gouroull, the smaller man smiled broadly, causing his lips to disappear. He possessed large, uneven teeth and bright red gums that appeared too large for his mouth.

"My name is Craig Samuel John Jones, and I have spent a lifetime studying you and your magnificent creator. I first learned of your existence when I was a mere child visiting Switzerland. You killed a relative of the idiots we visited, and they had a poster of you in their library. I stole it and then researched your amazing travels. I bought all the items remaining in the castle at Kanderley and even found the great Victor Frankenstein's notebooks! I went to Cround Island and searched for Doctor Pilljoy's equipment. I have spent all my days and nights searching for you, Gouroull. You are my reason for living! Now, follow me and I shall show you your new home," he added, gripping his gun and practically vibrating with joy as he spoke.

Gouroull made no move, standing so still he appeared to merge with the growing darkness that blanketed the forest. Slowly his black lips peeled back, revealing razor sharp teeth that glinted in the dwindling sunlight.

"I do not believe he is interested, my friend," the larger man said, shaking his heavy head.

"Why would that matter? I am Craig Samuel John Jones of the Mayflower Joneses, and what I want, I get. You there, Gouroull! You need wander no more! I have a small mansion I use to store all my Frankenstein items. I have a room set aside for you as the jewel of my collection. I think the bed shall fit, though I shall order a larger one if it does not. Then, we shall..."

Jones's statement cut off as Gouroull strode forward and now stood mere inches away.

"Now, now!" Jones cried, stepping back. "You must learn manners! Standing so close is not acceptable in modern soc..."

Gouroull's massive mitts closed around Jones's shoulders and lifted the smaller human off the ground without any visible effort. The monster's massive head lunged forward, straightening seconds later. His grotesque dark lips and enormous jaw ran with a viscous crimson fluid that dripped wetly across the ragged tatters that covered his gray-skinned form.

Jones shook in Gouroull's grasp, his mouth opened in a silent scream filled with agony, his every muscle taut and quivering with the agony of the monster's horrific assault. His eyes moved wildly for a moment, then froze and turned glassy as he died seconds later.

Tossing the body aside, Gouroull glanced in the taller man's direction. The other contemplated Frankenstein's monster with frank, unafraid appraisal. The dark eyes locked with Gouroull's amber orbs, staring into the depths, barely blinking for several moments.

"That fool," the dark-eyed man said, "spent the last two weeks regaling me with tales regarding your exploits. You seek a mate? A young of your own?"

Gouroull lowered his chin slightly, the movement easily missed or mistaken as a trick of the lengthening shadows. Craig Jones's blood slowly dribbled down his face, a slight splash of color across the pale, inhuman skin.

"That is natural," the other man replied and smiled.

He possessed large, square teeth that looked grotesque as he grinned.

"Perhaps I can help you," he added. "I shall tell you my thoughts and, if they are acceptable, we can help each other. Is that satisfactory?"

Once again, Gouroull dropped his chin less than an inch and stood waiting for the latter's reaction. His stillness unnerved man and beast, yet this dark-haired Siberian appeared accepting. This factor alone was cause for interest and some concern.

"Excellent," the dark-eyed man said, nodding his shaggy head. "Do you have a name you are called? I discount much said by the dead man you tossed beneath the yew tree."

"Gouroull," Frankenstein's most lethal creation intoned.

His whisper resembled that of rocks clashing rather than the speech of mankind.

The other clapped his hands together and guffawed. "That is what Jones said, I did not believe him. Many madmen and women tell tales to wandering pilgrims such as myself. Very well, Gouroull, my name is Grigori Yefimovich. Most men and women I meet prefer to call me by my surname. It is a good name, so you too may call me, Rasputin."

Without waiting for a response, Rasputin turned away and led Gouroull back down the path. He never looked back to see if the later followed, his long stride carrying him away from the corpse of Craig Jones.