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THE VIGNETTE REVIEW

The Judicious Use of Words by F.C. Brown Cloud

The unkempt doctors Sandra Bellington and Gregory Flute, amateur tinkerers both, formerly professional academicians with Ph.D.s in geology and demonology, respectively, constructed a bilious hate machine from sticks, twine, knives, mud, semantically-corrupted circuit boards, and, when the need for this arose, their own blood. The machine is capable of only limited motion; it has a mere three pints' worth of blood in its composition. Freely-given blood, that is, as required for animation. An additional quantity of inadvertently-donated blood has dried in smears across the machine's surface. The sort of decapitation, to say nothing of the dismemberment, that can be effected by a machine of the aforementioned composition will inevitably be rather messy.

Diagrams appear regularly in *Modern Golem* (thirty-nine ninety-nine for a year's subscription, although the newsstand price is much higher) for contraptions featuring heated steel, high-rpm threshing blades, combination solar and sanguithermal power. Those might be capable of inflicting self-cauterizing wounds. Would mean less mess. But not only did Sandra and Gregory not have access to a sufficiently well-stocked newsstand — there's no profit to be made selling magazines this deep in the forest — there are unavoidable qualitative differences between an animated protector built in a university laboratory and one slapped together from raw earth and the detritus of abandoned campsites.

Golems are lent life by words; indeed, each year's September issue of *MG* is devoted to linguistics. The first recorded golem (it is of course possible that the field of leximancy has a rich prehistory, but mightn't we expect documentation for even the earliest developments of an occult art requiring the written word in its practice?) was quickened by the word "TRUTH," or rather the Hebrew word "EMET," which means this. The resulting creature was disappointingly literal. That small-mindedness led to problems with its control. Extreme detail was needed for every command.

By way of contrast, the bilious hate machine constructed by Dr.s Bellington and Flute is inscribed with the word "JUST." It can act upon its own.

F. C. Brown Cloud teaches creative writing at the Monroe County Jail and corresponds with inmates across the Midwest for his work with Pages to Prisoners and as director of the Indiana Prisoners' Writing Workshop. He's published short fiction, creative nonfiction, and research articles in *The Weeklings* (forthcoming), *Literary Orphans*, *Bartleby Snopes*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Molecular Membrane Biology*, and *The Journal of Cell Biology*. Brown Cloud received his B.A. from Northwestern and his Ph.D. from Stanford. Find him in Bloomington, Indiana or at fcbrowncloud.com.

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