DARK HARVEST THE LEGACY OF FRANKENSTEIN TALES OF PROMETHEA

Dark Harvest: The Legacy of Frankenstein Created by Iain Lowson Cover art by Jan Pospíšil Logo by Sara Dunkerton Edited by Matt Gibbs

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This book is dedicated to all Prometheans everywhere.

From Hawaii to the Philippines, from Poland to Japan, from Brighton to Aberdeen.

Thanks to all of you we have all of this.

Here's to a whole lot more!

About This Promo

The following story is just one of thirteen you will find in the full book, 'Tales of Promethea'; an anthology of short fiction set in a alternative version of Romania where Victor Frankenstein is king. Promethea is a dark, wonderful, terrifying and beautiful place. At once familiar and alien, you'll find no heroes or villains in Frankenstein's Promethea - just people trying to survive as best they can, all the time seeking to avoid the Harvest.

The full book contains stories by: Iain Lowson, Andrew Harman, Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan, Greg Stolze, James Desborough, Kate Harrad, Magz Wiseman, Matt Gibbs, Stuart Boon, and Tim Dedopulos.

Introduction

What if Frankenstein got it right?

What if Victor Frankenstein had embraced his discoveries rather than seeking to destroy them?

Rejected by his peers and his family, hunted by the Creature, Victor slips into the background of history. Manipulating people, events, whole countries, Frankenstein slowly plans and executes his revenge.

Carved out of the Balkan conflicts of the mid-1800s, Victor Frankenstein hijacks the unification of Romania and creates his own country - Promethea. Though established on high ideals of equality and scientific advancement for the good of all, in Promethea and beyond, the reality is very different.

Creating Promethea saw Victor make deals that compromised the integrity of his vision. Almost entirely walled off from the rest of Europe, Promethea is a nightmare where some of the rich elite feed off the beauty and strength of the poor. While incredible advances across all scientific disciplines promise a bright future, the land is blighted by a new feudal regime – the Harvest.

Even as Frankenstein moves to bring Promethea in line

with his original vision, so he is stalked by the Creature. Seeking to destroy all of his creator's works, the Creature and the resistance movement he leads often find they share Frankenstein's goals. Both Victor and the Creature know that Frankenstein's gift must never escape the fortified borders of Promethea, bringing the dark harvest to all the world.

Way Out By Iain Lowson

When the dogs started barking, she knew it was all over.

Brânduşa was so very tired, cold and hungry, scared and sore, she just slumped to the cobbled ground, sobbing uncontrollably. Around her, shouting quickly filled the narrow alley. She was roughly pushed aside, a hapless bundle of rags tumbling away. Her arm splashed in a stinking puddle. Someone grabbed her, dragging her up. She flailed weakly.

'Come on! Up! It's all right. We're almost there.'

Baffled and a little panicked, Brânduşa looked around her, wild-eyed. There was a man holding her up. Who was it?! It was... It was... Vasile? He was doing his best, but failing, to hide his own fear. He pointed up the dark alley, insisting she look.

'There was a man. The dogs, they didn't like his smell. He must've been... Well, you know...' Vasile didn't want to use the word aloud, so whispered it instead. 'Augmented.'

Chilled further, her skin crawling, Brânduşa looked where Vasile was indicating. Moonlight and the glow of a

lamp hooked over a nail in the wall allowed her to see there was a skinny little man standing between two big men. They were grim faced, implacable, and armed. Resistance men. The skinny little man was pleading with them, his voice so broken with emotion and wet with tears and spittle that his words were lost. To one side, the man with the two dogs was crouched down beside them. He was holding their collars tightly but, despite his size, he was struggling as the dogs, growling and snapping, fought to be freed, to leap on the poor little man and tear him apart. One of the Resistance people pushed the skinny little man back. He wouldn't leave. He kept pleading, begging, tugging at them. He was pushed back a second time, but this time the man with the dogs stood up and walked them forward. He held their collars high, while they strained on their back legs, their mouths full of glittering teeth and frothing drool.

The little man staggered back from this, still crying, still wailing, but now he began to walk down the short line of waiting people, men and women all in the same pitiful state as Brânduṣa and Vasile. All were refugees, all dreading that their fate might be the same as the little, skinny man whom they now flinched away from. He stumbled off down the alley. One of the Resistance men let him get a little way away and then soundlessly followed. While the others had turned their attention back to the man with the dogs, Brânduṣa, last in line, watched the fighter walk by. He drew a large hunting knife as he passed, eyes set on the skinny little man ahead of him. The one who had failed.

Her fear redoubled. What if the dogs were to bark at her?! The others were passing by, one by one ushered past

the dogs to cross the dimly lit threshold of a house backing onto the alleyway. They were safe, for now. They had passed. What if she didn't? One more went past the dogs. They growled a little, and the man was told to stand still. The dogs sniffed at him, but then grew bored. The man was allowed to go, the relief clear on his face, his thanks effusive and ignored.

Then the next... And the next... Then it was Vasile. He turned to Brânduşa and smiled.

'Watch. It's fine now. You'll see!' He walked down towards the guards, turning back and smiling as he reached the dogs.

'See?' he said, holding out a hand to the dogs.

One of them snapped at it, making the two Resistance men laugh cruelly as Vasile quickly pulled his hand back. He smiled again at Brânduṣa, but it was a weak, nervous smile. He began to walk to the door, beckoning Brânduṣa to follow, past the dogs. The two Resistance men were looking at her, expectant. She took one step forward.

Behind her, rushing footsteps. In front of her, the two previously impassive Resistance men reacted, showing a mix of fury and fear. The dogs were set free, and bounded toward Brânduşa. She shrieked, turning in a rush to flee, but was thrust back against the alley wall by someone much larger than she crashing into her. Arms went around her, and a great dragging weight bore down. She struggled, squealing and gasping, pushing and flailing. The dogs, barking and growling, bounded past. She heard someone talking, a guttural whisper.

'H... Help... Me! Help... Me...'

With a thrill of horror, she realised it was the Resistance knifeman slumped against her, clinging to her for support.

Reaching to help him straighten, Brânduşa saw her hands were wet and warm. In the cold air, the blood steamed on her hands, her clothes, and on the growing pool on the ground. She looked into the eyes of the Resistance man, seeing the desperation there, seeing the life go out of them. He slid down her, crumpling to the ground to lie in blood and filth.

Brânduşa stepped back from the corpse, slipping in the stinking gore that flooded from the dead man's torn innards, spilling from a ghastly tear in his stomach. Her mind was refusing to comprehend what was happening, but a part of her was able still to process sound. Dogs, yelping and growling, snapping and biting. She looked.

It was the skinny little man. A dog died as she stared, eyes wide. The skinny little man simply pushed his suddenly sharp, skinny little fingers through its neck. It shook and jerked as he cast it aside. He was grinning, moving like a rickety puppet, his red stick fingers flickering and twitching. The last dog crouched, snarling. The skinny little man snarled back through his rictus grin.

Someone grabbed Brânduṣa, dragging her back. She shrieked again. The skinny little man snapped his head around. Now he was grinning at her. The screams died in her throat. The snarling dog leapt. The skinny little man span back, slashing out with his hands. Blood sprayed through the air as the dog yelped in brief mortal agony.

'Come on, woman! Move!'

It was one of the other Resistance men, the dog handler. He was dragging her back. She felt paralysed, her body an alien thing in which she was trapped. The other man stepped forward, between her and the deadly, skinny little man. Fire and thunder bloomed in his hands,

illuminating charnel house horrors. In the narrow alley, the skinny little man was blasted back, tumbling like a thrown toy. When he stood again, his grin intact, his remaining eye glittering, it was too much for Brânduşa. She heard voices, shouts, more gunfire, and then nothing at all.

Rumbling. An engine struggling, choking, fighting back. Bruised. Her body, bouncing gently as a cold floor bucked under her. Wet. The water dripping and splashing on her face. Rain? Sore. The light on her face, in her eyes.

Brânduşa woke. She started up, looking around her, frantic as a tumble of images of death and darkness blasted her mind. There were others, some dozing in their seats, some looking at her, baffled. There was Vasile, smiling broadly.

'Ah! Good. I am very glad.' Vasile smiled around at the others. 'She is awake. Isn't that good?' When nobody reacted with the enthusiasm he clearly felt, Vasile's smile barely faltered. He shrugged at her, slightly theatrically.

The chubby, short man seemed to feel his duty to the others around him was to be permanently cheerful. The only thing that bothered him was the state of his dark hair and the condition of his clothes. He had apologised for both as his opening, conversational gambit when the group had first been brought together in Predești. He'd latched on to Brândușa because she'd smiled back when he spoke to her. She didn't mind. His good-natured prattle, though out of place, was a mundane distraction she needed.

'You are a farmer now,' he began before quickly correcting himself. 'Well, a farm worker. We are in a

truck.' Vasile shrugged again, chuckling. 'Obviously.'

He helped Brânduşa sit up and move out of the way of the dripping water. It was raining softly outside, almost a thick, foggy drizzle. The canopy at the back of the truck was threadbare at best and full of holes. Brânduşa was relieved to see no sign of the Resistance men. She looked at her hands, at her clothes. Both showed rusty red evidence of the horrors of the night before. The cloth of her dress and her thick shawl were crusted hard in places. Brânduşa stared at the dried blood, rocking back and forward. Vasile put a hand on her arm, seeking to comfort her

'They killed him,' Vasile said, sombre. 'After you passed out. The other man, the one who fell on you, he probably saved your life. When they shot the agent... That thing... When they killed him, well, it was... It was all a little crazy.' Vasile pushed his free hand through his greasy hair, he wasn't smiling now, 'Everyone was running around but no one really knew where to go. People were left behind, I think. You almost were. The agent, he... He didn't die easily. He... The men shooting...'

He faltered. Brânduşa's heart went out to him.

'You came and got me,' she said. 'Despite everything that was happening. You came and got me.'

Vasile nodded, smiling through the tears that were falling now. He has stayed strong maybe too long, Brânduşa thought to herself. She shuffled over and, hugging his arm, leaned her head against his shoulder.

'So,' she sighed, 'I am a farm worker now.'

Vasile just patted her hand. The truck continued on. After a while, Brânduṣa dozed.

* * *

The group of refugees worked on a farm near Cetate. Before the truck arrived there, it had stopped to pick up other small groups of workers. In ones and twos they boarded. Before that, the truck had stopped briefly to allow the Resistance men to hand the vehicle on to a contact. One of the men, the dog handler from the previous night, had passed out travel documents and work permits. He said only that they shouldn't talk much to anyone else until they reached the farm. Once they were there, they would be contacted individually and given further instructions.

The papers were collected by one of the gang bosses at the farm as soon as the workers arrived. Brânduşa never saw the forgeries again. She never knew who was Resistance and who wasn't. The men and women were separated into different accommodation blocks, but mixed freely at meals and in the fields. There, they weeded fields of a crop Brânduşa didn't recognise. She had been a city girl. Vasile stayed by her, chatting with her, as often as he could. He was the only other person Brânduşa spoke with to any significant extent, so much so, that all the others assumed they were a couple. This turned out to be a good thing, as it meant the single men stayed away.

For two weeks they refugees laboured away with everyone else. Brânduşa had started to enjoy the simple, oddly satisfying tasks. She was fed, housed and it felt safe. One day, she spotted an official had arrived at the farm. Abruptly terrified, she had watched the man from the shadows of an outbuilding. Sitting on the porch of the main administration building, he was talking with the foreman as he checked through reams of work permits and other paperwork. It was all so... So normal. Finding

herself oddly frustrated by this, Brânduşa expected the official to draw his gun at any moment and start the killing. Instead, he finished his cursory check, shook hands with the foreman, climbed onto his bicycle and peddled away.

Unsure what to feel, Brânduşa turned to leave, but immediately walked into someone who had come up behind her, unnoticed. It was one of the work team leaders, a tall, heavy man with a thick beard and a distinctly Hungarian accent that marked him as being from the north of Promethea. He took a firm grip of her shoulder and held her at arm's length. His face was not friendly, and Brânduşa's relief at the departure of the official was driven from her by a thrill of fear. Suddenly, the man chuckled, clapping her on the shoulder.

'Don't worry, little bird,' he said, smiling and winking conspiratorially. 'You will fly this cage soon enough.' With that, he brushed past her, heading for the foreman's office. Still shaking, Brânduşa watched him go.

She told Vasile what had happened that evening as they ate their meal outside. The crop they had been tending was a late one, but the early Autumn weather had been kind. Even at dusk, it was still comfortable enough to eat outside and watch the stars appear in the darkening sky. To the north and west the terrain rose to meet the distant mountains. The far off mountains to the west at least were Bulgarian. To the north, the Transylvanian Alps felt like a looming threat. The land around them to the south and east was flat, and it was south that they looked to as they ate and talked. In that direction was the Danube, a dark line in the distance, with freedom beyond.

'Well,' Vasile breathed. 'It is good to have some kind of

news, don't you think?' Brânduşa shrugged, but Vasile laughed quietly at her, 'What? You are so enjoying the farming life?'

She scowled at him, but spoiled the effect by smiling a little. 'I don't know. Sometimes, yes. It's very... Certain. Normal. Predictable. After... After everything... Sometimes I want things that are normal. Safe.'

Vasile nodded, gazing south into the gathering night. 'Yes. Perhaps... Perhaps we shall become farmers on the other side. We can grow our own potatoes.' He looked sideways at Brânduşa, nervously, 'On our farm.'

'Our farm?' Brânduşa sighed. 'Vasile...'

He shrugged, self-conscious, 'Well, I just thought...'

Brânduşa laid a hand on his arm, a sad look in her eye, 'Vasile, we can't think such things. We can't.'

'Can't I have hope?' he asked.

Brânduşa drew her hand away, shrinking into herself, a dark huddle of dark clothes. She shook her head. 'I don't have hope', she said. 'I don't want hope.'

Vasile looked at her, his eyes sad, 'What do you want, Brândușa? What can I help you to find?'

'I just want to be away from this place. From Promethea. Far away.'

'And after that?' Brânduşa shrugged, the motion almost lost in the shadows of her heavy shawl.

'I don't know,' she admitted. 'I don't believe in an after. Not yet.'

Vasile contemplated this for a while. He grunted, nodding curtly. He reached over and dragged one of Brânduşa's hands from the folds of her clothing, holding it tightly.

'I shall believe hard enough for both of us.' He patted

her hand then, releasing it, he stood and walked off.

Brândușa said nothing, and did not look to see where he went.

In the morning, Vasile was gone.

It wasn't until her work gang came in from the fields that Brânduşa first noticed. She idly looked around for him at first, wondering if she should apologise for her gloomy mood of the previous night. When she didn't see him outside the mess hall, she went in to search for him. By now, her heart was beating faster. Telling herself she was being foolish, she sought out one of the men she'd previously seen Vasile talk to. He casually admitted, that no one had seen him all morning. A few others at the table butted in to agree, with one saying that Vasile had been called away early in the morning, before he'd even finished dressing.

Brânduşa's self-imposed isolation from those around her suddenly left her feeling terrifyingly alone. Muttering her thanks, blood pounding in her head, she fought with herself not to run from the suddenly claustrophobic hall. Forcing herself to walk, she made for the foreman's office. Along the way, in the gap between two buildings from where she'd watched the government official just the day before, she had to stop. Leaning against one wall, her breath was fast and ragged, her thoughts coming in a cold rush.

Was this how it was supposed to be for those seeking to escape Promethea? Would she get summoned in the early morning? Called away in the dead of night? Did the last, desperate journey begin like that? Or was this something else? Should she ask about Vasile's disappearance? Would

that bring it all crashing down? Would there be an investigation? What attention would she call down on herself? Was this it? The beginning of the end? All those questions rushed at her, but no answers came to her defence. No answers at all, save one terrible vision she couldn't push past. She knew the penalty for Resistance involvement. In her mind's eye, she could see the Evisceration rack waiting for her. Images tumbled through her mind, fractured, red and violent.

By now, Brânduşa was slumped on the ground, her head resting on the rough wood of the wall. The panic attack rendered her all-but insensible, so she barely felt herself abruptly dragged to her feet. She was held by the shoulders and shaken like a doll. She moaned, eyes rolling. Was someone speaking? Sharp pain suddenly exploded in her face, the sensation forming a path her consciousness could follow back to harsh reality. A great bearded face hovered inches from hers, with concerned dark brown eyes making a lie of the otherwise angry expression. That, however, was not uppermost in Brânduşa's mind.

'You... Slapped me,' she said simply, her hand to her red, pulsing cheek.

The man let her go, and said, 'Are you ill?' It was the same man from yesterday catching her in the same place.

'I... No. You slapped me.'

'Are you ill, woman?!' the man hissed, glancing around. Brânduşa shook her head, 'No, no. I just...'

'Then shut up and go back to your work.'

The man shoved Brânduşa away from him. She staggered back, confused, afraid. She moved no further. The man shook his head.

'Go. Back to work', he growled, glancing behind him

then back to her. 'He was sent to work on another farm. Do you understand? Another farm?'

Brânduşa could only stare. The man rolled his eyes and shook his head. 'You will see him again soon,' he said in a frustrated whisper. 'Don't come back here again.'

'Th... thank you. Thank you,' Brânduşa stammered as she stumbled away, still dazed.

The man watched her go. He winced when she blundered into another worker, mumbling apologies as she made her way unsteadily toward where the last stragglers from her work gang were heading back to the fields.

'Not a chance,' he murmured to himself, shaking his head sadly.

She was taken from her work gang while on a water break in the middle of the morning. It wasn't the man with the beard. She never saw him again. The work gang leader simply told her to come with him. He refused to answer her questions as they walked away. The rain, continuous since early morning, had turned the paths back to the farm complex to mud, and Brânduṣa slipped and slithered in her outsized work boots as she struggled to keep up with the man.

He'd got quite a lead on her, and was talking quietly but intensely to an old man in a tall, woollen hat when she caught up with him near a side road into the farm. A cart and horse were by the open gate, already turned around and waiting to go. The work boss handed the old man something and then turned and walked back, passing Brânduşa without a word.

The old man in the hat beckoned to her. 'Come on,' he called. 'The rain is getting heavy. I want to get moving.'

With that, he clambered up onto the creaking cart and waited, his back to her.

The rain fell harder, as though to underline the old man's prescience. Huddled in her wet, heavy, dark clothes, the only constant in her fractured life, Brânduşa Grul stood alone in the yard. When she finally gathered her resolve and moved, the mud sucked at her feet, the very ground seeking to bind her. The old man glanced back.

'Wait,' she called, surprised by the urgency in her overly loud voice.

She stepped out of her boots, stooping to pull them from the mud. Barefoot, Brânduşa ran to the cart, throwing the boots into the back where they clattered into a pile of low wooden boxes, stirring up a stench of fish that not even the heavy rain could mask. She clambered up onto the seat of the cart and sat, breathing heavily.

Both the old man and the horse were looking at her. Both seemed curious, amused even. Brânduşa flicked a smile at the old man.

'I'm ready,' she said, nodding to where a rough track wound vaguely south. 'Let's go,' she added, impatient.

The old man chuckled, a broad smile crinkling his beardless, heavily lined face. Brânduşa could see he had few teeth left. He shook the reins a little and, with one last long look at the odd woman sitting next to his master, the bony old horse turned to the matter at hand and plodded off.

It took the rest of the morning for Brânduşa to get used to the smell from the boxes and for the cart to reach the Danube. The rain had stopped just an hour or so after they left the farm, but Brândusa and the old man, Gavril,

were cold and wet. The view did little to cheer Brânduşa. While the river and the green lands beyond were a sign of hope, those who held power in Promethea had done all they could to ensure those hopes would be dashed.

An earthwork gouged a furrowed scar across the land, stretching off east and west as far as the eye could follow it. So fresh was the great embankment and the trench before it that the grass had not yet fully covered it. There was a towering heavy chain-link fence running along the top of the embankment, mounted on stout metal columns sunk deep into concrete foundations. At regular intervals, always each within sight of the one before and after, there were guard towers straddling the fence. Some were clearly manned, their shutters raised. Others, shutters down on all four sides, were less obviously occupied. Still, Brânduşa didn't trust there was no one inside. She was convinced shadows moved there, watching her.

The old track they had bounced along for so long soon joined the hard pack military road that ran alongside the fence. They had to bump across the military railway line to reach it. The railway tracks had simply obliterated the old road, making getting to the new one a struggle. Both Gavril and Brânduşa had to climb down, and the old horse made heavy work of dragging the ramshackle cart over the shining steel track and muddy, churned-up ground beyond onto the new road. It was a wide thoroughfare, and well made, but Gavril pointed out that they still might have to bump off to the side if one of the larger military trucks demanded to pass by.

'If we're lucky, we won't get stuck,' he grumbled. 'If we are lucky.'

Brândușa couldn't stand to look at the fence as they

rumbled down the road beside it. She felt like it would fall across her, holding her down, keeping her pinned until she could be collected. The open towers with guards in them were frightening enough, as the guards waved to Gavril as they passed. Brânduşa was more scared of the shuttered towers. The slit windows seemed to scowl down at her, and she shrank in on herself each time they passed one. Eventually, Gavril couldn't take any more.

'Brânduşa, you must relax,' he said, an air of irritation in his voice. 'You will not survive getting past the base.'

Immediately Gavril regretted his choice of words. Brânduşa's eyes went wide and she looked around wildly. The old man reached out and grabbed Brânduşa hard by the arm. He looked straight in her eyes.

'Look at me. Listen! Look at me!'

Brânduşa was panting, but did as she was told. Gavril released her, sitting back.

'We are going to be passing a small base. They have them every few miles, right along this fence they are so proud of. We do not have to go in, but there is a check point we must pass to get through to the other side, to the river.'

Gavril turned back to watch the road ahead, correcting the path of the cart a little. He went on, 'We have very good papers. Even if they stop us, it will be no problem. Okay?'

When he got no reply, he looked at Brânduşa, one eyebrow arched almost comically. 'Okay?' he stressed.

She nodded, shivering.

Gavril shook his head. 'I tell you something,' he said. 'I never told anyone this. I... No, I tell you something else first. You need to realise,' Gavril said cheerily, 'No one

cares about you.'

Brânduşa was surprised to find that she was a little hurt by his words.

Her companion nodded, smiling. 'It's true. No one cares. They don't know who you are. All they will know is what is in the papers I have.' He patted his pocket, then prodded himself in the chest, looking proud. 'Me they would care about, if they didn't run and hide so fast from the smell of fish.'

Gavril left the obvious question hanging in the air for a minute or so. Eventually, when it became clear that Brânduşa wasn't going to rise to the bait, he sighed theatrically.

'Okay, I will tell you. Since you ask over and over.' He looked around, in case someone might be spying from the roadside before telling his tale. 'I fought once, against them,' he said, waving in the direction of the fence. 'Killed a few too. They find out, come to my house. I wasn't there. I came here.' He nodded, grim-faced. 'Now,' he intoned, voice dropping to a whisper. 'Now, I am a fisherman.' He looked around again. 'And do you know what?'

Tentative, Brândușa shook her head, 'No... What?'

'I hate fish!' Gavril bellowed at the top of his voice, going so far as to stand a little as he did.

The horse looked back and whickered in irritation. Brânduşa looked about her in panic. Gavril laughed uproariously. Brânduşa thumped him on the arm, but he kept laughing. She hit him again, and then sat sulking. Gavril, still chuckling, noticed Brânduşa had stopped shivering.

As they travelled, the bright afternoon sun dried them.

Gavril took off his hat, stuffing it onto a post sticking up beside him. Giving Brânduşa the reins, he stripped off his sheepskin coat and shirt, turning to drape them over the side of the cart. His whip-thin body was as weathered as his face, but still showed some of the sinewy strength a hard life bestows. A few scars gave credence to Gavril's earlier story.

Gavril caught Brânduşa looking and smiled slyly. He took the reins off her. 'Restrain yourself, woman,' he grinned.

Brânduşa chuckled, shaking her head. 'I will try.'

Gavril nodded, sagely. A moment of silence. He sighed, 'It is hard, I know. I am sorry.'

Brânduşa laughed for the first time in forever.

Gavril smiled. He looked at her wet clothes. 'You should do the same,' he said, then caught himself. 'Well, not quite the same.'

Brânduşa's smile abruptly faded, and she huddled into herself, clinging to her shawl, staring fixedly ahead. In his head, Gavril cursed himself for a fool. They clattered on, the river, cart and horse making the only sounds.

After a little while, Brânduşa slowly took off the shawl, draping it over the edge of the wagon beside her. She looked shyly at Gavril. He pretended not to notice. Later, Brânduşa awkwardly hid under her shawl, fumbling her shirt off and drying that. Gavril made a point of keeping his eyes on the road. If his passenger had secrets, that was her business. He could guess, he thought, of what might have happened to Brânduşa and he didn't pry. If nothing else, he didn't need to hear another terrible tale of cruelty and violence.

* * *

It was late afternoon. The base looked huge to Brânduşa, and no amount of reassurance from Gavril that this was a small example made her feel any better. The base straddled the fence much as the watchtowers did, with the barrier fence seeming to both split and duplicate itself to sweep around and protectively encircle the huts and other buildings that made up the facility, before reforming as a single entity to continue on into the distance. There were two watchtowers on diagonally opposite corners to monitor the area within and without. That was all Brânduşa could see to begin with.

The road looped around the base. Beside it, on the opposite side of the road, simple platforms on both sides by the railway lines waited for supply trains to make their deliveries. On Gavril's insistence, Brânduşa studied the base as the cart passed slowly by. He'd told her to see if she could spot the secret. He also told her it would be less suspicious for her to gawp at the facility than to cower away from it.

The buildings inside the fence were all of wood, save for the largest building roughly in the middle. Its lower level was built of brick, though the upper levels were wood. All the other huts were the same size and basic design, pointing to their prefabricated origin. Gavril nodded subtly to the large building.

'Augment facility,' he murmured. Despite Gavril's earlier warning, Brânduşa shrank away.

The cart came around the side of the base and Brânduşa saw the crossing point. Wide gates in the fence stood open, and there were guard huts to either side. Only one was occupied, and that guard barely nodded as he raised the swing barrier to let the cart pass by. Brânduşa

was amazed, trying hard not to show it. They rode on for a few minutes before Gavril finally broke the silence.

'Well,' he asked. 'Did you work out the secret?'

Brânduşa was confused. 'I... Well... No, but how did we get past the guard so easily? I mean, why didn't he even look at the papers?'

'Pah! Mihai never bothers with papers.'

'You know him?' Brânduşa's heart fluttered. What was going on?

'I bring fish to the soldiers now and then. They know me.' That said, he grunted. 'Well, they know my fish.' He looked straight at Brânduşa. 'So? Did you work out the secret?' He was insistent, even slightly amused.

She shook her head.

Gavril grinned. 'How many soldiers did you see?'

'In the base? There were...' Brânduşa stopped abruptly. She even turned and looked back to the base before catching herself and sitting back around quickly. She was stunned. 'One. I saw one. Mihai?'

Gavril nodded. 'There are maybe fifteen, twenty soldiers in that base. The rest are out in the towers. Not every tower. Most though.'

Gavril's good humour passed as he talked. 'Don't get me wrong. They are very good soldiers. If anything were to happen, a train would bring more, or trucks maybe, and quickly. Many more soldiers.' He looked at Brânduşa. 'There are not enough soldiers to keep every base full in all of Promethea. But there are enough to keep us in Promethea. Unless...' he said, his smile returning. 'Unless we are very clever and bring them good fish.'

Gavril fell silent now, and Brânduşa watched the river for a while. Her mind was whirling with all the new

information. It was almost too much for her to take in. It felt to her that Promethea was suddenly that little bit more fragile than she had always believed it was. Now she knew a secret, it was less intimidating, now she knew its armour was tarnished. These thoughts kept her occupied and silent for quite a while.

As darkness fell, Gavril lit a lamp and fixed it to the side of the wagon that faced the river.

'The boats,' he said in answer to Brânduşa's questioning look, and started the cart off again. 'We're overdue a patrol,' Gavril muttered, half to himself, before addressing his passenger again. 'If we don't show a light they start to shoot. No warnings.'

Brânduşa was about to ask more questions, her alarm clear, when Gavril's attention was drawn to the river, as though on cue.

'Watch. Listen. You will see. We have no problems,' he said.

She heard the engine a moment later, a deep thrumming sound. At the same time as she first saw the approaching boat a bright light shone from it onto the water. That light quickly swept over to pick out the cart, blinding them. The horse stumbled, whickering, then plodded on. Gavril muttered curses under his breath, waving to the boat. He nudged Brânduṣa sharply, and she waved too. She stopped when Gavril did. Nonetheless, the boat kept the light on them the whole time as it passed, snapping off only when there could be no chance that it was in their eyes.

'Bastards,' Gavril said, his teeth gritted hard.

As the sound of the engine faded into the gathering night, the old man told Brânduṣa she should try to get

comfortable in the back of the cart. She did, but didn't think she'd sleep. As Brânduşa was climbing over the seat and pushing smelly boxes aside, Gavril had said that he would be leaving her at the crossing point in a few hours. In the end, Brânduşa surprised herself and fell asleep almost immediately, her head resting on Gavril's soursmelling woollen hat.

'We passed a foot patrol and two more boats,' Gavril informed Brânduşa when he woke her, the news cutting through the fog of sleep instantly. 'We are alright,' Gavril said, relaxed. 'Good papers.'

Brânduşa climbed back to the front of the cart, looking around her. The moonlight cast everything in pale relief, but all she could see was the wide, wide river. It was slow, deep and whispered in the darkness. While it had been full of promise before, Brânduşa was afraid of it now. However, off to her left some distance away, the lights along the security fence and in the watchtowers provided silent, sinister motivation to go on.

'In a little while, I will slow the cart down. When I tell you, get off, and go hide in the bushes by the river. I will not stop. Do you understand?'

Brândușa nodded.

'And you must be quiet,' Gavril added. 'That most of all.'

'Who is meeting me?' she asked, her mouth dry.

Gavril looked at her, surprised. 'Meeting...?' he began. 'No one is meeting you.' He turned back to the dark road ahead. 'They will have left you something to help you cross. Not a boat, before you ask. I don't know what.'

Brândusa was confused, scared.

'What do I do? I don't... I don't understand.'

Gavril put his hand on her arm, looking at her with a sad smile. 'It is up to you, Brânduşa. You hide in the bushes until a patrol finds you and you get shot. Or maybe worse. Or you swim. You swim and hope a patrol doesn't see you. You swim and hope you don't get tired and drown. You swim to the other side. Maybe.'

'What then?' Brânduşa asked, miserable.

Gavril took his hand away and watched the road again. He shrugged. 'No idea,' he said. 'I don't swim.'

She listened to the cart clatter away. She couldn't see it. The bushes she clung to were too thick, the bank she had slid down too high.

Her legs were in shallow water, and she was already very cold. One arm burned where it had scraped down a rock. In the dark, after stepping from Gavril's cart, their goodbyes said, she had rushed to the bushes he had pointed out as they drew near. She hadn't seen that they came up from below the level of the bank, and Brânduşa had half-run straight off the edge.

She'd cried out a little as she fell, but the cold of the river water had shocked her to silence. She almost couldn't bear to let herself down into it, but nor could she hold on much longer. She scrabbled with her feet and found that the water was shallow enough to stand in. The water lapped around her thighs, and she winced with each millimetre higher it went when a wavelet slapped at her. The lakes she had swum in, as a child, had never felt so lost in her past.

In the dark, Brânduşa tried to make out something, anything. Initially, she dismissed the very thing she'd been

looking for, still hoping for something more. In the end, when she inspected the heavy branch partly tangled against the bushes growing from the bank, she discovered it was tethered to the roots with twine. As her fingers inspected the knots, she found a small knife had been stuffed under a few loops of the string.

Clouds meant it was pitch black when she finally freed the branch. Before she did, Brânduṣa stripped her dress off and ditched her heavy shoes. She let the river take them as Gavril had suggested. Down to her slip, shivering so much she wondered that she could move at all, Brânduṣa tied her shawl about her waist. Next, she fumbled with numb, alien fingers to free the knife and cut the string.

It took a little manoeuvring to get the branch out into the river enough to float free, and Brânduşa was sobbing with cold and frustration by the time she succeeded. The current tugged at it and at her as she wrestled the wood. When the river finally took it, Brânduşa was pulled hard after it, splashing into the deeper water with another cry. This time, water in her mouth stopped it, leaving her choking and desperately holding on with one hand. When she managed to gain some kind of stability, she clung to the branch shuddering.

The chill of the water all-but robbed Brânduşa of logical thought. She could barely hold the branch, much less guide it or swim. She looked about her, aware for the first time of how fast the wide river was carrying her. She felt the power of the current and a thrill of fear chilled her further. If she hit anything, a rock or submerged branch, she would be killed. The Danube was the ultimate guardian of the border between Promethea and the rest

of the world.

Brânduşa began to feel again. The initial shock was passing. She tried swimming, tried to push the branch by kicking her legs, but it was useless. The branch was too heavy. It twisted in the current, threatening to entangle her. Brânduşa knew she had to let it go, before the deadly cold robbed her of the little energy she had left. In her head, she counted down. She reached the end of that countdown twice. She moaned, cursing herself, bitter and incoherent. Gasping, she let go with one hand, hoping to steady herself before letting go completely.

The branch tore free, and Brânduşa immediately vanished under the water. Though it was only for an instant, it was a dark eternity for Brânduşa. She fought and kicked and scrambled, the effort revitalising her. At the surface, she realised she could hear her own struggles and stopped, treading water as best she could. Her confusion was absolute. Only the pull of the current gave her any chance of working out where she should swim. She couldn't see either shore. Her whole world was the freezing blackness of the river.

Brânduşa began to drag herself through the water, all the time being swept on and on. Steadily, her world shrank, her conscious self becoming smaller and smaller. Eventually, when she could feel nothing, see nothing, all she had was the memory of the action of swimming.

She carried on. Perhaps. Was she swimming or just remembering? Sensation. A memory of a hint of sensation. More than a memory. It had a name. Warmth.

She woke. Her body ached, and her head felt like a great weight was surrounding and crushing it. Light was too

much, lancing through her brain like fire when she tried to open her eyes. Rough blankets covered her, so Brânduşa just lay back and let the world come to her. She felt the hard floor under the thin covering beneath her. It was stone, but not cold. The sensation felt luxurious against her bare skin, and she rejoiced in it for the handful of beautiful moments it took for the fact of her nakedness to fully register.

The rush of adrenaline cleared her head, and she sat up. The blankets almost slipped, but she clutched them to herself, pulling them up to her chin, making sure her shoulders were covered. Frantically, she cast around for her clothes, taking in the details of the small room she was in.

It was a cell. The floor, walls, and low vaulted ceiling were stone. In the corner opposite her, a brazier spilled wood ash onto the floor. A pitcher of water and a crude clay cup were close to her. There was a bucket nearby too. Light filtered through a horizontal slit window high up one wall. The heavy cell door was wide open, but little light came in that way. The man watching her had been able to sit in deep shadow. She missed his presence entirely until he stepped forward, his rifle held loosely.

He looked at her, silent, his face a neutral mask. Brânduşa gasped when she saw him, shrinking back even further into the blankets, abandoning the cup she'd been reaching for. She looked at him, her terror clear for him to see. He shook his head, his eyes sad.

'You got out,' he said. Brânduşa took a great breath in, unable to comprehend the news. 'You were found. Brought here,' the man with the rifle said, briefly glancing around the cell. 'Baba Vida. You're with the Resistance

now.'

Brânduşa's mind was awhirl. She had left Promethea?! The man turned and walked slowly to the cell door. He paused there, half turning to speak over his shoulder and destroy Brânduşa with just four words.

'We saw the scars.'

He closed and locked the door behind him.

The blankets slipped down as Brandusa wept, her head on her knees, arms wrapped tightly around her legs - arms that were not her own. A birthday gift, the latest fashion inescapably imposed. The scars looping over her shoulders were rough on her wet cheek, the future they implied inevitable. The Resistance allowed no Augment, however slight, to leave Promethea.

Biographies

Iain Lowson (Control, Way Out and Witness) is mostly to blame. Dark Harvest: The Legacy of Frankenstein was his idea. It's his fault. When not involved with all things Promethean, he has spent the majority of the past decade and a half writing official Star Wars stuff, with brief forays into writing for video games. If you really want to know all the gory details, have a look at his LinkedIn profile. That'll learn you... http://www.linkedin.com/in/iainlowson

Jan Pospíšil (Cover Art) started his art career as a concept artist for PC game mods almost seven years ago. Since then he's been creating incredible fantasy illustrations as a hobby. Still, there comes a time in every artist's life when hobby becomes full-on profession, and for Jan that time is now. You can see examples of his work on his DeviantArt page: http://merlkir.deviantart.com/ and you can read more about Jan and his paintings on his blog: http://janpospisil.blogspot.com/

Matt Gibbs (Scar Gang) is a freelance writer and

editor. He has worked on games such as Sega's Binary Domain and Ubisoft's Driver San Francisco, and is collaborating with a number of talented artists on comic and graphic novel projects. Alongside his freelance editing, he is the managing editor of Improper Books. Originally an archaeologist, he spent several years grubbing about in holes before turning to writing as a career. http://mattgibbs.net/

Sara Dunkerton (Logo Design), a 24 year old farm girl from Somerset, found her calling as an illustrator and animator during College. She carried this realisation through to university where she graduated in 2010. Out in the real world she had worked on illustrating comics for Bayou Arcana, Dark Harvest: Resistance, Sugar Glider Stories 2, Into the Woods: A Fairytale Anthology and an unofficial Doctor Who comic titled The Impossible Crossing. Ever with another project eagerly lined up she has loads more on their way! http://saradunkerton.blogspot.co.uk

Glossary

What is Dark Harvest: Legacy of Frankenstein?

The brainchild of writer Iain Lowson, DH:LoF is a detailed alternative history of Europe in general and Romania in particular. It was published as a role playing game (or RPG) by Cubicle 7 Entertainment in April 2011. Unlike many RPGs, the book was written with nongamers in mind too. As one reviewer said, "...this is the RPG that authors built". DH:LoF RPG puts the rules of the game in one place, allowing every reader to get caught up in the setting and enjoy the half dozen short stories that draw you in deeper.

More details, along with excerpts from the book, including a potted history of how Frankenstein created Promethea, can be found at: http://www.darkharvest-legacyoffrankenstein.com/

What is the Harvest?

When Frankenstein established Promethea, he sought to use his Gift, the science that developed the Creature and gave Frankenstein himself virtual immortality, to allow science, industry and learning to flourish. He saw no

reason that men and women whose genius could benefit society should be lost to the world through illness or accident. By establishing a national store of organs and body parts by Harvesting the newly dead, there would be no reason for the great and the good, or anyone else who could afford it for that matter, to be subject to the fatal vagaries of Fate. Emergency legislation allowed for the Harvesting of others when it was vital to save someone of significant value to society. Those Harvested in this way were not to be abandoned, but were to be compensated and 'repaired' at the earliest opportunity.

The beliefs of many of the people of Promethea clashed with the intent of the Harvest. The military and the authorities use Augmentation to create super-soldiers and deadly agents. Worse still, some in the elite of Promethea abused the Harvest legislation to Augment themselves out of personal vanity. Scars and delicate, skilful stitching have become high fashion in Promethea.

Augmentation?

Frankenstein's art allows the adding of Harvested tissue to living people to make them stronger and faster, or to boost their senses, their ability to withstand injury, and many other things. Frankenstein guards his science carefully, and it is not allowed to pass beyond the secured borders of Promethea. He's fully aware that the rest of the world is not ready to use it responsibly – the abuses within the borders of Promethea are proof of that.

How secure are the borders of Promethea?

By 1910, with the exception of certain mountainous areas to the north and those sections where the mighty

Danube runs, the border between Promethea and the rest of Europe and Russia is fenced or walled off. A dedicated military railway line runs along almost the entire border, and military bases of varying sizes ensure it is constantly patrolled. Only one overland route into the country exists — at Bors on the western border. A couple of heavily fortified ports are still used for international trade, with all others reduced to rubble. There is no Promethean navy, nor are there any civilian boats. Though rumours speak of airships and planes being developed in Promethea, no air travel is permitted. Even the Resistance does not interfere with the patrolling of the Promethean border.

Who runs Promethea?

Victor Frankenstein does, as its king, with the help of his Advisory Council. There are various Ministries who provide information to the Council and who run various day-to-day aspects of life in Promethea. The most powerful is the Ministry of Information, whose agents deal with internal and external threats, usually agents from the Great Powers of Europe, in association with the Domestic Security Forces, the DSF. The Promethean Military Forces, the PMF, are separate from the DSF, though they have a duty to supply troops and equipment to DSF operations. The Promethean Royal Guard are a heavily Augmented elite unit whose sole duty is the protection of Frankenstein himself.

What about the Creature?

The Creature is in Promethea, organising the resistance against Frankenstein's rule. As with Frankenstein himself, the Creature is able to play the long game. His plans are

subtle and are likely to play out over decades. Never in one place for long, the Creature comes and goes as he wishes. The Resistance, though constantly endeavouring to complicate matters for the authorities, are an additional barrier against Frankenstein's science escaping the borders of Promethea. It is often they who deal with agents from foreign powers; those who contact the Resistance imagining they will be an easy way to learn Frankenstein's secrets, or seeking Resistance help in getting into the country.