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RE:WIRED

By Alex Keller



MOGZILLA

RE:WIRED

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Recap



It's been months since Ludwig confronted his father in the Superbus' palace and he still can't believe what happened.

Almost a year before, Ludwig was living happily with his father, Mandrake; making strange contraptions in their castle. Then the HELOT had been designed, a machine that acted like the perfect slave, and Ludwig's life collapsed.

His father went crazy with the power the HELOTS could bring and started to build a HELOT army.

But that wasn't all. Ludwig overheard his father mention a brother he never knew existed, and their housekeeper accidentally let slip that his brother was still alive and being kept hidden in the castle by his father! Mandrake von Guggenstein had been lying to Ludwig for years.

Ludwig found his brother Hephaestus, a poor deformed giant, in the castle's cellars and brought him out from the darkness. Knowing they could no longer stay with their father, the two managed to escape.

Furious, Mandrake chased the brothers for months with his new HELOT army.

Sick of running, Ludwig eventually turned the tables and brought his father to justice.

Now as Mandrake von Guggenstein waits for the day of his execution, in a faraway villa another prisoner awaits his fate...

Chapter Three
Execution of the Past



In the square below, Ludwig watched as the doors were thrown open by the palace guard. Towards the front of the square, people were clambering to get the best view and crushing those around them while the guards pushed them back. Then the crowd fell silent and stared. Out from behind the doors came two rows of guards, rifles in hand, masks covering their faces. They marched to the edges of the human corridor that led from the palace to the gallows, stopped, turned, and stood looking into the people of Beacon. Behind the guards came an ugly tractor. It trudged along on caterpillar treads, pouring foul, black smoke into the air. It was driven by a hooded man and on its back was a cage. In the cage was Ludwig's father.

Ludwig realised he was holding his breath.

Mandrake sat on a stool in the middle of the cage with his long dark hair hanging down in knots, hiding his face from the crowd. He looked even thinner than Ludwig remembered if that was possible.

The tractor moved on towards the gallows where Ludwig could just about make out a noose swinging in the light breeze. It sent a shiver down his spine and Ludwig bit his tongue. Suddenly he wanted to shout out; to do something that would delay this terrible event; but he knew this had to be done and done publicly, so all would know the man of their nightmares was dead and they could live again.

The tractor stopped and the hooded driver reached down and pulled a lever. A clawed arm unfolded itself from the tractor's rear that extended, hooked on to Mandrake's cage,

and hauled it up onto the platform. Ludwig recognised the mechanism. He had built it with his father five years ago. He had been told it was to help dockworkers unload the ships. Perhaps it had even been used in such a way once.

After Mandrake had been set down, the hooded man stepped off the tractor and walked up the steps to take his place. Then he waited and the crowd fell silent.

There was a buzz of static that echoed around the square, followed by councillor Pashymore's voice.

'Citizens of Beacon,' said the councillor. 'You are all here to witness the execution of Mandrake von Guggenstein, traitor and murderer.'

Ludwig saw councillor Pashymore had an ampliphone in his hands that let his voice travel in such a manner. He listened on as the crowd opened up with a bloody, deafening cheer.

'Mandrake von Guggenstein,' he continued, 'The charges against you are thus: you conspired to overthrow the government and take Pallenway and its capital, Beacon, for yourself. Through doing so, you were responsible for the deaths of a great many people. I am told a list of those recorded as perishing due to your actions or through the actions of your HELOTs has been read to you every day of your incarceration, and I am satisfied you are fully aware of your crimes. Do you have anything to say before the judgement is carried out?'

The hooded man next to Mandrake's cage had another ampliphone in his hand. He placed it on the ground next to his prisoner and Mandrake reached down, took the ampliphone, and lifted it to his mouth.

'No. I do not.'

Ludwig looked across the square and saw the crowd was annoyed. They expected more. Mad ravings; cackling laughter; anything. This was the man of their nightmares after all. To

just say "no" wasn't right.

'So be it–' began the councillor.

'Wait,' said Mandrake, holding up a hand.

Ah, thought the crowd. Here it comes…

'I wish to apologise to my sons. Ludwig, Hephaestus, I hope you can hear this. I am so very sorry; truly I am. I hope some day you may find it in your hearts to forgive me. Please, live well without me. That is all.'

Ludwig felt his throat tighten and he jumped when Pashymore put a hand on his shoulder. Even the crowd looked uncomfortable.

'I- I will make sure they hear,' replied Pashymore. He turned, lent down, and moved the ampliphone away from his mouth. 'Ludwig, are you ready?' he whispered before glancing at Matilda.

Ludwig nodded but didn't say a word.

Pashymore lifted the ampliphone back to his mouth.

'Executioner, do your duty.'

The hooded man looked up at the balcony, saluted, then took an iron key from his coat and went over to the door of Mandrake's cage. He unlocked it and Mandrake stepped out. The executioner heard the crowd drawing breath but to his surprise, when he turned back around, they were no longer looking at him or Mandrake. He followed their gaze to the other side of the square.

At the far end of the square was something truly awful. A great mechanical skeleton stood over the crowd so big it nearly filled the main entrance to the square. It was perhaps twenty feet tall and hissed and spluttered. It started to move and as it got closer, the executioner could see a pale figure on its front tied to the machine with metal bands. It was at this point the executioner started to whimper.

The crowd fell back, too shocked to even scream at first. Ludwig watched in horror as the machine strode through

them, not caring where its feet came down. As it got closer, he could see the machine more clearly. The figure strapped to its chest appeared to be dead if that was even possible. Ludwig spied wires pouring out from the corpse and into the machine. Occasionally the body would jerk as if shocked, throwing its head from one side to another; but otherwise its limbs and head hung loosely, simply swaying with each step like some kind of gruesome decoration.

As it made its way towards the scaffolding the crowd found their voices. Their screams were louder than their earlier cheers.

Ludwig turned. There was a commotion behind him. In the viewing chamber, the guests were either fleeing or simply staring, dumbstruck with terror. Then he saw the Captain and his old friend Sir Notsworth running towards him.

'Ludwig! We must go!' shouted Sir Notsworth.

'No... wait,' said Ludwig. For some reason he wasn't scared. He looked back and saw the machine moved with purpose; it was only here for one thing. Ludwig watched as the machine knocked the executioner aside, reached out, and grabbed his father before striding out of the square at great speed, leaving a trail of badly hurt people in its wake. The only words Ludwig heard over the screaming were from his father, whose voice had echoed over the square through the ampliphone.

'Grilsgarter?'



Chapter Four
Getaway



Hephaestus was standing on the deck of the *Kamaria Pili* when he heard cries coming from the far end of the dock.

'What's going on?' asked the boy Hephaestus had met earlier, his head popping up from one of the hatches that led below.

'Wait here,' said Hephaestus. 'This doesn't sound good.'

Hephaestus ran down the *Kamaria's* gangplank and along the wharf towards the point where Thelick Street met the docks. When he got closer, he saw people pouring out of the street in a panic. Some even jumped into the sea without pausing while others were simply pushed into the water by those behind, desperate to get away. Moments later, a great machine stormed out the street and onto the docks, knocking down anyone nearby. In one of its claws, Hephaestus saw a person. He looked closer.

Oh no!

Nearby was a ship, its engines running. Hephaestus watched as the machine jumped off the dock and onto the ship's deck. The ship's engines roared as the machine landed and Hephaestus heard a loud thud when its feet touched down. The ship then made its way out to sea while Hephaestus looked on, helpless; he could do nothing but watch as the evil-looking machine looked back at the chaos it had caused.

'What happened?' asked the boy, appearing at Hephaestus' side.

'Something terrible,' replied Hephaestus. 'I have to go home.'



'Has your father *ever* mentioned someone called "Grilsgarter"?' Councillor Pashymore shouted at Ludwig. They were back at Matilda's house now and the Councillor's earlier kindness had now gone. Now he was an inferno of rage and anger.

After his father had been taken, Ludwig had been carried all the way home by Sir Notsworth, who wouldn't let anyone else touch him, even the Captain. Unfortunately Sir Notsworth had forgotten Ludwig was getting older, and between Ludwig's struggling and his size, this had been too much for the explorer, who was now sitting wheezing and spluttering in a corner while the councillor interrogated Ludwig.

Councillor Pashymore grabbed Ludwig by the shoulders and shook him. 'Listen to me, boy! Has he ever said anything?'

'No! Never!' cried Ludwig. 'Let go of me!'

'Leave him alone! You'll hurt him!' cried Ludwig's grandmother.

'Are you sure?' asked Pashymore, still holding Ludwig tight. 'I don't suppose your father got bored one day and decided to make that thing for fun? Azmon knows what other nightmares have been thought up in that twisted head of his!'

'No! I told you!' shouted Ludwig, pulling away. Pashymore went to grab him again but he slipped through the councillor's fingers.

Councillor Pashymore turned to the others.

'None of you?' he bellowed. 'None of you have heard of this "Grilsgarter"? Not one? I find this hard to believe. Matilda. I thought you had been watching him for years!'

'Mandrake moved around a lot before he went back to Little Wainesford,' she replied as calmly as she could. 'He could have met all sorts of people on his travels. What about

you? He worked for your government before the HELOT attack. You kept that quiet enough.'

'That was nothing to do with me,' said the Councillor sharply. He paced around. 'Matilda, that... thing was a corpse! Has he got an army of them too? Should we just lay down and wait for the worst?'

'I have no idea who or what it was, Councillor. Nor do you. Don't jump to conclusions. However, I do know that if he had an army of them then why would only one turn up? It doesn't make sense.'

Pashymore slumped onto a chair next to Sir Notsworth whose cheeks were finally starting to lose their redness. The Councillor held his head in his hands. 'Your blasted son is loose again, Matilda. Beacon has barely recovered from his last attack.'

'We will get him back,' she replied.

'You'd better!'

The front door swung open and Hephaestus stepped in. 'I saw father!' he called out frantically but he stopped when he saw the other's faces. 'I guess you know...'

'What did you see, mate?' asked the Captain.

'Not much. Some kind of machine ran to the docks and onto a ship. It sailed away before I could do anything.'

Pashymore looked up. 'He's left the city?' he groaned. 'We've got no chance of finding him now.'

'Not so fast, mate,' said the Captain. 'Hephaestus, did you notice anything about the ship? A flag maybe, or a name?'

Hephaestus shook his head. 'No.'

'Maybe he won't come back,' said Ludwig. 'Maybe he just didn't want to die.'

'I'm not counting on it,' said Pashymore, 'and that's not his decision to make. No, I need your father on the end of that noose and so does the city. I'm sorry to be harsh, boy, but that's the long and short of it.'

'We'll ignore your unfortunate turn of phrase,' said Matilda, coldly. 'As we know you are under a lot of pressure.'

'Pressure, Matilda? That's barely the half of it! Your son murdered all the other Councillors! I'm the only one left! Can you imagine what that's like? What should I do? You tell me. I've half a mind to resign and go and live out the rest of my life in a cave half way up a mountain. Beacon will be a wasteland before long, your son will see to that.'

'We don't know what's going on,' Matilda replied. 'But we do need to get him back. If that machine is another type of HELOT we haven't seen before then we are all in very serious danger.'

'I don't care,' said Councillor Pashymore. 'I'm going to put a bounty on your son's head. 'I'll put a price on him so high that every hunter from here to hell will be after him. '

'If you must, Pashymore,' said Matilda quietly.

Then she called for her butler to prepare the coaches. 'Where are we goin'?' asked the Captain.

'Little Wainesford,' Matilda replied. 'If this Grilsgarter is someone from Mandrake's past, a clue to his whereabouts may be there. We have little else to go on. If we don't learn anything at the castle, I can speak to some people on the continent, but it could take months to hear back. This is the best way.'

'We could try–' began the Captain.

'No,' said Matilda. 'Not him.'

The Captain nodded. 'As you say.'

'We will leave at first light tomorrow.'

'Do what you like, Matilda,' said Councillor Pashymore. 'But I want him back, dead or alive and as soon as possible. Remember: if you don't get him, someone else will.'

He got up and walked out of the mansion, saying nothing more.

