

Crush [as published in Mimicry issue #4, Autumn 2018]

venturing with my posse of apostates and mercenaries I find the golem in a field
failing to scare corvids from the barley / the townsfolk say if I can move it I can
take it

I survey my hulking metamorphic odalisque / mantled in guano / my golem
strikes a thousand-year pose / clenching their cold knuckles to punch space
vacated by a forgotten war

a fresh clutch of eggs shelter in the clumsy pit of the golem's ear / on the crude
lobes of which I trace fingerprints / relics of the long-dead priests who pressed
and pinched this raw clay anthropomorphic

respectfully I scrape off the crust of lichen and pigeon droppings / reactivate the
golem with a whisper of the right words / and the assistance of a magic wand
conveniently located in a nearby cavern

my golem shudders animate / splendid as a waking volcano / sneezing feathers
and bird shit

complaining of however many centuries / of chirp and caw and caked
cloaca dribbles

their voice is slow as lava / I feel it pool hot in my stomach / and settle there

I learn this golem desires nothing except to serve their master / and to never
again suffer another bird

I ask their name and they make an unpronounceable sound / like the curdling
clink of cooling obsidian / so I call them the ultimate war machine / they hurl
rocks into my enemies and when they beat the earth with their fists / I feel the
world quake under me / this is how I know I have fallen in love / but also onto
the ground

their hollow eyes glow righteously / with the holy texts searing in the cavity
behind their face / I so want them to like me

on the anniversary of their awakening I choose them the worst possible gift / the
winking merchant promises hours of fun for the sky-rat hater in my life / so I
buy the uncrushable pigeon

as planned I open the cage and the pigeon alights upon the golem / they clap the
bird between clay fists then open their hands / to inspect pancaked grey down

matted with gore glisten / the ultimate war machine's stone face doesn't move /
but I almost see new cracks smirk satisfaction

only to watch the uncrushable pigeon unfurl from flattened / to bob and coo in
their hands and resume its pecking / at the innermost crevices of the ultimate
war machine's palms / parts of them even I cannot touch /because they will pulp
me with one glittering micaceous clench

despite a series of painful and increasingly inventive deaths / the pigeon will not
leave / we depart in the night while it sleeps / its homing senses lead it back to
the golem / they are so magnetic / hematite veined

in light of my faults / the golem's esteem of me plummets to hostility

I have to etch new glyphs onto their iron collar to keep them with me / but even
in homonculoid compliance they're all stomp and bellow / the comely hunch of
craggy shoulders somehow flintier / serrated edges glint from each new fracture
against pacification

I ask the ultimate war machine the name of the God that made them / they say
they do not recall

I begin filling in their fissures with crystals from our quests / chipped amethyst
raw emerald citrine like frozen honey / quartz whiter than forked lightning /
they do not resist

their eye sockets beam amber to illuminate our way down the deep roads / I ask
them another word for holy light and they say light with strings attached

after the uncrushable pigeon has been disposed of in a lava pit / I promise to
take the ultimate war machine to a truly birdless place / eventually our roving
warden band traverses many lands / to the shifting dunes where nothing warm-
blooded can live

our caravan makes camp at the edge of the desert / only my golem keeps pacing
forward with me / then carries my body

until I make my parched command / for them to lay down with me in the dirt /
roll on top of me

they tell me I don't tremble like most animals