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***Way Beyond Frogs*, 2026**
Text work

8 January 1742, Bologna

In the biting cold, a city ablaze. Carnival. Wine floods gutters, thousands dance.

Strutting in finest garb, masked, the body a mount for the wig; traversing Piazza dell'Accademia, dodges, weaves through blizzards of confetti pressing on towards the university—Palazzo dell'Archiginnasio. Ticket in hand.

Palazzo, interior: ornate, square-set chamber encased in cedar, centre a white marble slab. Damask hangings and velvet drapes, shadows cast from chandeliers, innumerable beeswax tapers. Discordant whine of a violin, tuning. Dead air. Audience, in disguise: Arlecchino, Colombina, Pantalone, Il Capitano, Innamorati, Il Dottore, etcetera. Expectant stillness, revelry halted. All eyes on the marble table, a corpse laid out.

With the first cut of the anatomist's blade, the systematic dismantling of the human form begins. An inquiry spanning fifteen days, its sequence dictated by the pace of rot. Begin with the abdomen, empty it—viscera go first. Raise the blade to the thorax; heart, lungs, superior systems of the throat and brain. Conclude when muscles and bones are bare.

From the neighbouring church, throughout: singing of masses for the dissected. The anatomist pays for the prayers.

An alignment with Carnival for practical reasons. Winter is the agent of preservation. A festival of misrule is a moral safeguard. The use of masks permits. A concealment of faces comes to witness true nature, a play on demise as the city screams life, and an effort, concerted, through reason and science, to contest mortality. Now desecration is sacred. Now the transgression is death.

17 January 1803, London

A sharp morning to hang. Newgate Prison. In the air: George Foster. Strung up for the murder of wife and child. Cut down warm, rushed over to the Royal College of Surgeons. On cue.

In the pit stands Giovanni Aldini, physicist. Nephew to Luigi Galvani—he who saw a spark within the twitch of a dead frog. Aldini has overleaped his uncle, Aldini has gone beyond frogs. Uncle's treatment he applies to corpses. An electrical dance across Europe, galvanisation on tour.

No scalpel in hand, but a battery. Massive, primitive: 120 plates of zinc, 120 of copper. The room thick with ozone and blood.

Conductive wires on the dissected thumb. The circuit snaps—a first jolt, a forceful clenching of the hanged man's hand. No stopping at the extremities. Affixes wires to the ears and mouth. A pulse shoots, the jaw begins to quiver, the adjoining muscles contort, a grimace, then a wink. Surge, awe and panic through the stalls. Finale: application of rods to the rectum. Contractions so violent that the corpse appears to draw breath, struggles—as if—to stand.

Hereby erupts an insatiable demand for the human frame. Countless subjects needed. A profound scarcity of (legal) supply—a school can't live on gallows alone. In London, thousands dissected, annually.

The inevitable emergence of a sprawling black market; the birth of an industrialized underground. The dead a commodity, traded in the dark. New trades come to light. Body snatchers. Grave robbers. The era of the resurrectionists.

A short walk from St Pancras churchyard to the backdoor of Surgeons' Hall. The anatomists hush and pay. The cemetery haunted by merchants, hawking fresh death. Two willows frame Wollstonecraft's headstone. Her child stands at her grave. From these vigils in the damp earth, a new narrative is born—a story of ozone and blood, published the very year that the patented iron coffin goes on sale. Slogan: SAFETY FOR THE DEAD!

20 March 2026, Edinburgh

Three stabbing notes. A flick up, a flick down, a shriek. A jagged flourish on the organ's higher manual. DA-da-DAAAAAA… trilled octave rises like a curtain. After the opening turn, nothing. Then, from silence, a rapid cascade. The pedal follows steadily, a low, murky bass reverberates off the walls, a sweep of the church's properties.

Ambient lights flick off. Gone, the church's high vaulted ceilings, gone its pointed arches. Spotlights on an apparatus of dark metal: a skeletal geometry of levers and pulleys, with a central crossbeam that pierces a suspended iron circle and extends into the space. Strobe lights start. Fog rises from the depths and swallows the base of the mad-lab machine. Green lasers slice the haze. A gurney emerges from behind the central gearing, feet first, into the room. A supine figure, wrapped and rigid, glides along the crossbeam. Motionless. More smoke billows, the air turns a shade radioactive. The figure is over the void, held by chains and rods. The gurney descends. Blue-white sparks brighten into an arc. A stir. Then, the monster jerks awake—eyes wide, head snapping—and conducts a frantic scan.

Interval: outside, the queue snakes round the church, whose curvilinear tracery and circular windows are lit by green LED. A neon sign on the stone facade reads:

THE WORLD FAMOUS FRANKENSTEIN & BIER KELLER.

Not an extraordinary pub, not in Edinburgh. The town theme is gothic, the dark history of its churchyards animated for tips. Nineteenth-century capital of anatomy and epicentre of medical research. A corpse market so lucrative that it transformed the architecture of death. Watchtowers and 'mortsafes'—cage-like iron enclosures, some large enough to walk into—built on cemetery grounds. Such safeguards against digging had an unintended consequence: turned a body snatching wave into a killing spree. Murder to supply the dissecting demand, a bypass around the bottleneck impeding scientific progress. This forced a legislative pivot: The 1832 Anatomy Act requisitioned the corpses of the poor, transferring the penalty of dissection from homicide to poverty.

Back inside. House lights up. The monster flat on the gurney, again. Chains creak as the platform pulls. A short slide along the crossbeam, through the metal casing, and back into the church wall. The end. Movement towards the bar. An EDM beat drops. A two-or-three-pint wait, and the organ sounds, the room goes dark. Revival starts again.