

GODS AND MONSTERS

by 61215

INTRODUCTION: “GENESIS”

“When God and the Demon battled above the newly created world the creatures below looked up in horror. The conflict destroyed the beauty before them. Some fled, some passed, some aimed to help but found themselves unable to. Time passed, thousands, millions of years, and God and the Demon grow tired, inattentive. Both sustained wounds and blood spilled out of them, dropping onto the earth below. As God’s blood landed on the dirt it became something new, something special, a figure made in God’s image. The first human walked the earth that day so long ago. The demon bled too, but as the drops hit the ground they become something else, something worse, unsightly creatures not meant to walk the earth. That was the day these beasts appeared, the final trick up the demons sleeve to taunt God and torment His creation.”

The priest paused his monologue, looked up from the script he had written the night before, and glanced upon the people in his church, like a farmer looking over his sheep, like god looking over his creation in the story, and he was pleased to see them cheering, praying. They had been riled up by the sermon. It gave them hope, fear, anger, and unity. Speeches like this had been a staple of Priest Mark Simmons days at church for years. It revived the community, drew people back into his house of god at a time when many turned their back on the faith. Sunday mornings became events for the people, and even on weekdays the building was full. Many priests across the country saw what Simmons had achieved and tried to copy it, put their own spin on it, and it worked for them just as well. They played into the fears and the anger that people already felt. The world was changing; the people did not like it. They protested, they voted, they wanted change and did what they could to make the change they wanted to see happen, but small communities spread out around the country, marches with few people, they did not get

the attention they needed. The churches gathered the people. The groups appeared bigger, more people saw and heard what they had to say, and many agreed.

“These monsters do not belong here,” the priest continued. “We, the people, have to stand against this! Our politicians are listening, but they do not do enough. They take the demons, capture them, as they say, but they refuse to do what is necessary. They hide these creatures from us, from our sight, but what for? They are a stain on God’s creation that needs to be cleaned!”

The people cheered, stood up from their seats, clapping, repeating the words. Young children that were brought along by their parents looked up in confusion. They did not understand what had gotten the adults around them so up in arms. They did not understand what the older man in robes standing in front of the crowd was saying. The words made sense, but what was he talking about? What was he so angry about that he needed to shout so much?

“In times like these we need to come together. Show our strength, our numbers, and that we demand change! Go out there, spread the word, show others the truth and what has to be done to save our world!”

The people cheer one final time, louder, more enthusiastically. Priest Simmons thanked the people for attending the sermon, sent them out with a message and a clear request. Spread the word, get people to come to the church, grow our community, for a good and just cause. The people started moving toward the door, the priest watched his sheep go out onto the field to grow his flock. He packed up the books he had been reading from, the script he had written, and moved over to a side door, and disappeared into whatever small room was behind it. The church emptied out. It grew silent, cold, and the doors closed behind the last person.

Anthony walked down the stairs of the church holding his mother’s hand. He, like most other young children, did not understand much of what was talked about during the sermon. His mother looked happy though, so it must have been good, and he was only eight after all. The church was a boring place to him. The only reason he was there was because his parents dragged him to the sermons every Sunday. And his father had not

been there for weeks, so why did he have to be? Samantha, his mother, did not give him a satisfying answer to that question. Church is good she always said. It is important. Anthony disagreed, but that did not mean anything to the adults. He was too young to understand after all, but then why did he have to attend?

“Mrs. Palmer, good thing I’ve spotted you here,” a man said, as he approached Anthony and his mother. It was Mr. Hinkle, a friend of the family. Referring to people by their last name was a little quirk of his. He was the one who convinced Samantha and her Husband to attend one of Priest Simmons’ sermons a little more than a year ago.

Anthony did not like him. Not just because he was the reason why he had to spend hours listening to some old guy talking nonsense every week, but because the man had this air of smugness to him. He talked as if he had been in the church even before it became more popular, and he clearly thought that it made him better than others. Hinkle would often talk down to others, especially Anthony and the other kids at church. He would complain when the children did not understand something, when they had questions that were too simple in his eyes. And the sermons were all he ever talked about. *Everywhere. Always.*

“Oh, Karl, good to see you,” Anthony’s mother replied to the man. “We were sitting further at the front, so it took a while to get out. I think the church was even fuller today than last week.”

“Yes, it’s good to see our community is growing. Shows that our efforts are not in vain.”

He paused briefly before stepping a bit closer to her and leaning in.

“Did you get my e-mail?” he whispered into her ear. Anthony could not hear it, but it sure made the man look even more weird than he already did. This was suspicious. What could he have been so secretive about?

The two adults kept talking quietly, clearly discussing something, but the boy could not hear a thing. He was getting bored, impatient. He let go of his mother’s hand. She did not seem to care much. He started tugging on the skirt she was wearing. She did not react.

“Mom,” Anthony finally said after nothing else worked, “can go home now? Leon said he wanted to come over later.”

“Right,” she said looking down at him. “Sorry Karl, but the boys arranged a little play date for later, so we really should get going. I think we’ve covered the most important parts now anyway. Give me a call if you need anything else.”

“Will do, thank you for your time, Samantha,” Mr. Hinkle said.

“Bye Karl. See you next Sunday at the latest.”

“Looking forward to it.”

Finally, they were going home. Anthony couldn’t wait to spend some time playing with the game console he had gotten for his birthday a few weeks ago. And he would have someone else to play with, since his friend was going to come over later. His parents were never in the mood for games anymore. They were busy, and a little on edge whenever they were at home. Anthony did not understand it, but he certainly noticed.

They got to their car. His mother opened one of the back doors and lifted Anthony into his safety seat, before getting into the driver’s seat herself. Most people had left the church’s parking lot at that point, so she reversed out of the space she had parked in and drove onto the road.

It was not a busy day. Most people probably spent it at home, relaxing or enjoying the free time with family. That is how the Sundays were for most of the kids in Anthony’s class. He was sometimes jealous when he heard the other children talk about how long they would get to sleep on Sunday mornings, the things they got up to. He remembered a time when his Sundays looked like that too, and he wanted that back. At least the drive home was not too long.

Anthony stormed through the door to the apartment and sprinted through the living room to get to his bedroom, not acknowledging his father who sat on the sofa with his legs on the small table in front of it. The boy pressed the power button, the console whirred to life, the disk drive spun up, and the game started playing on the small CRT TV that Anthony was allowed to keep in his room.

Samantha came in shortly after. She had stopped outside of the apartment complex to smoke a cigarette. She had only started smoking a few months ago. Anthony had asked her why, but she was defensive and

seemed a bit angry that he asked, so he dropped the topic and decided to not bring it up again.

“Frank,” Samantha said coldly, addressing her husband as she came into the living room.

“Sam,” he replied.

“People keep asking me why you’re not coming to church anymore.”

“You know why.”

“Oh, give it a rest, what is it with you? I don’t know why, because you refuse to properly explain it.”

“I’ve told you multiple times now! I was fine with it at first, and I agree with a lot of it still, but it has become too extreme. I just can’t – “

“What has? We’re not doing anything different.”

“Oh, come on Sam, they’re talking about wanting to kill these things. That wasn’t part of how this started!”

“Don’t shout like that, he’s not supposed to hear this,” Samantha said a bit more quietly.

“I don’t care at this point. I’m tired of playing happy family. We both know that we can’t keep going like this forever.”

“Not this again. What do you think the people will – “

“I don’t give a shit about what other people think. What I care about is that you’re dragging our son into this genocidal cult!”

“Don’t you dare talk to me like that.”

“Whatever. I’ll be in my office. Have some stuff to prepare for work tomorrow. Don’t bother me.”

Frank left the living room, slamming the door to the office shut behind him.

Anthony had heard screaming matches like that many times in the last months. He felt bad. Clearly there were issues in the family, but no one wanted to talk to him about it. He just held onto his controller, pressing buttons, moving the control sticks around to make the little character on the TV screen jump and run around.

The door opened and his mother came in. “Come on,” she said. “We need to pack some stuff for you.”

“What?” Anthony asked, looking up at her as he sat on the ground.

“We’re leaving”

PROLOG: CATALYST

September 10th, 2009. 9:36 in the morning. Downtown Los Angeles. A rundown apartment building that barely looks lived in. A dark green car pulled over and reversed into a parking space on the side of the road. The driver side door opened, and a man stepped out, closed the door, and adjusted his coat as he walked up to the front door of the building.

The elevator was broken. He needed to get to the fifth floor. He sighed.

Walking up the stairs he looked out of the windows that faced the small yard that the building had walled off from the rest of the world. A thick layer of fog blocked the man's sight, but he noticed the brown dry blades of grass on the ground. The place was not being looked after. Then again, why should it have been? The rest of the building and the city around it were not much better. He reached the third floor, tired. The man leaned against a wall, looked around, smelled the stench coming from the torn open trash bag that laid in the hallway. Time to move on.

Fourth floor. Only one more to go. There are worse ways to start a day, the man thought. Then again, he knew what he would find once he got to his destination, and he was sure it would make his day worse.

"There you are," another man said as he spotted the first one coming up the stairs. He turned around, talking to someone in the apartment he stood in front of. "Our detective is finally here."

The detective walked up to the other man. "So, what's the case exactly? I've only been told it's a homicide."

"Right," the other man said, "I think you should just have a look yourself."

"Sure, lead the way then."

The other man, officer Hernandez, lifted the yellow tape blocking the doorway a bit so that the two of them could duck under it. The apartment

was small, only two rooms, about forty square meters overall. It was clean. No sign of a break-in, a struggle, everything looked perfectly fine. Suspiciously so, the detective thought. Other people from the police department were working inside, photographing, and collecting potential evidence. Hernandez and the Detective walked through the first room, a combination of kitchen and dining areas, and into the second. The bedroom was pristine too, except for one part. On the bed laid the bodies of a man and a woman, one on top of the other.

“Yeah, this isn’t quite what I bargained for,” the detective said.

“By the look of it they were stabbed while having sex. At the same time. Perpetrator must have used some kind of sword, or a very long knife at the very least. Went clean through both bodies.”

“Looks like it,” the detective said. “Any traces?”

“We’ve collected some pictures that were spread out all over the floor. Those were taken after the murder. Just different angles of the corpses as they are here. Doesn’t look like the bodies were touched or moved postmortem. Those don’t reveal anything new as far as we could tell. Might be worth looking at them again though.”

“Anything else?”

“Well, I’ve kept the best for last,” Hernandez said as he grabbed a small plastic bag that laid on a dresser behind him. “A glove,” he said proudly. “There’s also a hair stuck to it. Could be from the perp, could be from one of the victims, we’ll know once the lab has gone over it.”

The detective looked surprised.

“Is everything alright?” Hernandez asked, noticing the detectives changed facial expression.

The detective stepped out of the apartment building and walked toward his car. He had been taking on every homicide case he could for months now. The city of Los Angeles had a problem.

A lethal problem.

A serial killer problem.

At least he thought so. Joe Rogers was the best detective the city had to offer. During his, at this point, almost 25-year-long career he had only seven unsolved cases on record, and five of those were from the last few

months. Those five unsolved crimes, he claims, were all committed by the same person. His colleagues doubted his theory, but at least Rogers took all the unpleasant, brutal cases and solved most of them in record time, so no one wanted to complain.

“Detective!” Hernandez ran out of the building shouting. Rogers was still looking for his car. Where had he parked it?

“We’ve got something else,” the officer continued.

“Tell me about it while we drive,” Rogers said. “Looks like I got towed.

Hernandez’ car was cluttered, but not messy. He had trinkets everywhere. On the dashboard, hanging off the rearview mirror, the seats had novelty seat warmers draped over them. All dogs. Puddles, Bulldogs, Labradors, any kind of dog you can think of it was there. As pictures, drawings, figures, stickers, stitchings.

“So, you’re a dog person I see,” Rogers said after taking everything in. His brain needed a few minutes to process it, more than any crime scene he had ever been to.

“Sort of,” Hernandez said. “I’m actually allergic, but their just so adorable. How could you not love them?”

“You’re allergic?”

“Yeah, but I want dogs in my life, so collect all this stuff. I guess you could call it a hobby of mine.”

“Hairless dog isn’t an option?”

“The fur isn’t actually the problem. It’s proteins in their saliva, urine and even the skin.”

“Didn’t know that.”

“Few people do I think.”

Silence.

Awkward silence.

The car’s radio was turned off. Occasionally the clicking of the turn signals filled the auditory void that the conversation left behind.

“So,” Rogers finally said, “you had something else to tell me relating to the case?”

“Ah, yes I do,” Hernandez said excitedly. “I’ve been following your work for a while. I know your serial killer theory isn’t public, but word has gotten around the department. Do you think this case is connected to that too?”

“The pattern fits. Similar photos have been found at two other crime scenes I’ve investigated and connected to this larger case. My main link between all of them have been the victims though. Always couples.”

“Say, why won’t the department publish anything about this?”

“No one wants to start a panic. The mood in the city is bad enough as is, and as long as we don’t at least have a solid suspect, some people might use this to stoke the fire.”

“Right, the protests. Do you think it could be one of them?”

“Could be. Just as much as it could be a human.”

“I guess, yeah. Tho you have to admit that there have been more and more dangerous ones recently.

“Have there now.”

“You had more info for me,” Rogers said, trying to avoid another awkward silence.

“Of course, sorry, I just get sidetracked really easily sometimes. You know, my Ma once said that I should – “

“The info please. We’re almost at my stop,” Rogers interrupted.

“The wounds look charred. I wondered why there was so little blood. Shouldn’t those bed sheets have been soaked? So, I took a closer look. Really gross, wouldn’t recommend. Anyway, the wounds definitely looked burned, and my guess is that whatever was used to kill them must have been burning hot. Though I do wonder how and where you would efficiently heat up such a large blade and then break into the apartment fast enough before it gets too cold again.”

“That is interesting. I’ll look into it. Maybe I’ll look at the crime scene again tomorrow to check it a bit more thoroughly myself.”

“Sure, but the bodies will have to be moved until then. Can’t let those stay there for too long.”

“Yeah, yeah. Alright, this is my stop. Just pull over and let me jump out.”

Hernandes stopped at the side of the road and Rogers got out of the car. They said their goodbyes and the officer drove off. Maybe he was going to grab something to eat. It was almost noon after all. Rogers turned and walked a few blocks. He had intentionally given Hernandez a false destination. He did not want him to know where he would go next.

Ricky's had been Rogers' go to bar for more than a decade. Hidden away in a small ally, unseen from the street, it never had too many customers, but it had its regulars, and they kept the place going. The detective was one of those regulars. As he approached, he saw a familiar face standing next to the door, smoking.

"Got one for me too," Rogers asked the man as he got close.

"Here you go," the man said, holding a pack of cigarettes toward to detective.

"Thanks, you're a life saver. Left mine in my car."

The man standing there had been a fellow regular, though only for a few weeks. He was unnaturally pale, had white hair on his head despite looking like he was only in his late twenties at most. The black hoodies he always wore only served to contrast his skin color. Some others in the bar had started to call him "the albino" but Rogers was not one for nicknames like that. He had befriended the pale man the first time he came to the bar. Embarrassingly, the detective never managed bothered to ask the man for his name, and at this point he thought it would be too awkward. It had never been an issue so far, so maybe it would not be a problem anyway.

Rogers pulled a lighter out of a pocket on his coat and lit a cigarette.

"Rough day at work," the man asked.

"Could say so," Rogers replied while exhaling smoke. "I'll take care of it tomorrow. Got other stuff to take care of today."

"Oh, more important than solving another big murder case?"

"I don't remember telling you it was a murder."

"What else would it be. You haven't taken another kind of case in ages."

"Right, I guess you got me there."

“Maybe you should take a break some time. When was the last time you went on holiday?”

Rogers ignored that last sentence. He had told the man a lot about his cases. He was not supposed to do so, of course, but he needed a place to talk about his struggles, and the bar was the only place for him to do so recently. The alcohol also made it easier. However, he had never mentioned his assumption that some of his recent cases might be linked, at least as far as he knew.

“How about we head inside? Shouldn’t be too busy yet,” the pale man said as he tossed the remains of his cigarette into the trash can next to the door.

“Sure.”

The building’s exterior looked run down, the façade had chipped off slightly, the sign above the door reading “Ricky’s Bar” was supposed to be glowing bright red, illuminating the dark ally around it, but the lights had been broken for over a year now. Occasionally they would flicker on before dying again, as if it was still clutching onto life. The door, it’s reddish-brown paint equally as chipped as the wall around it, opened with a creaking noise that overpowered the sound of the little bell that went off alongside. The interior of the bar had not fared much better than the outside. Wooden chairs surround a few wooden tables, some with tablecloths draped over them. Most walls were covered in pale yellow paint; some simply had the bricks exposed. The paint was, to no one’s surprise, chipped. The bar itself was decently clean, however. A few stools stood along one side, while a bartender cleaned a glass on the other, chatting with another guest as he does it. The pale man sat down at one of the tables, waiting for Rogers to get drinks for both of them. The detective approached the bar and leaned on the surface.

“Hey,” he called to the bartender.

“One moment,” the man replied, finishing his conversation with the other guest.

Rogers sat down on one of the stools as he waited. Behind the bar were shelves filled with liquor bottles, beer, wine, and every other type of alcohol one can think of, even some that were not legal in the United

States. Rogers, despite working for the police, did not care. Occasionally he even drank some of it himself.

“What can I get for you Joe?” the bartender asked as he finally walked over. He knew Rogers’ first name, which the detective was not pleased with.

“Two beers,” he ordered.

The bartender turned around, took two bottles out of the fridge, and placed them on the bartop saying, “Here you go.”

“Thanks,” Rogers said, grabbing the bottles and getting up from the barstool. On most days he would spend a few hours at this bar, so it made sense that some people there had learned his name. Still, he did not like it. It was a reminder of the problem he refused to acknowledge.

“A thank you,” the pale man said as Rogers sat down at their table. He sighed audibly.

“Say,” the man continued, “what has you more concerned than a new murder case? If I had a job like that, I wouldn’t be able to think about anything else.”

“You get used to it,” Rogers said dryly.

“Still, what’s on your mind?”

“Emily,” Rogers sighed. He leaned back in his chair and took a swig from his bottle, almost emptying it in one go.

“Right, feels like you’re letting her down again.”

“It’s part of the job I guess.”

They sat in silence, each slowly draining their bottles.

“Want another?” the pale man asked.

“It’s getting late, sorry. Maybe next time.”

Rogers got up and went to leave. The door creaked open again, but before leaving he turned to see his friend waving him goodbye.

Emily rushed out of school with the other kids who were all looking for their parents. She spotted her father standing near the gate to the school’s courtyard. She sprinted toward him, looking forward to spending the afternoon together, to tell him about how her exam went, but as she got closer, she slowed down. Her father had brought her suitcase with him, again. She knew what that meant.

“Again?” she asked Rogers with a disappointed look on her face.

“I’m sorry Emily, but work – “

“This was supposed to be our week!” she shouted, her disappointment turned into anger. “You do this every time!”

Rogers crouched down to take her into his arms without saying anything. He knew it would be pointless. His daughter pressed her face into his shoulder and cried softly. They remained that way for a few minutes.

“As soon as I’m done with this, I’ll spend time with you, I promise,” he eventually said.

“You always say this, but then you just get a new job.”

“Not this time, I promise. And this will be quick.”

“Really?”

He did not respond. Lying to his daughter about it more would only make it worse. If this case really was connected to the others, then he knew it would not be dealt with quickly, but he had let her down so many times over the last few months that he felt as if he had no other choice.

The two stood by the gate a while longer, waiting. Rogers had called Emily’s mother on his way to the school, so she could pick their daughter up and take her home.

“There she is,” Rogers said.

Emily simply nodded her head, still being unhappy about the situation. A tall woman with short brown hair and a thick coat that looked too warm for the time of year approached them. She was on the phone talking to someone.

“Amely,” Rogers said as she got close.

“One second Mike,” the woman said to the person on the other end of the line. “Hey honey, hope school was good today.”

Her daughter did not respond.

“All her stuff is in here,” Rogers said, rolling the suitcase toward her.

“Great, come on Emily, let’s go,” she said, grabbing her daughter by the arm and leading her toward a car out on the parking lot. Rogers waved after the girl, but she did not turn to look. He let his arm fall to his side again and went toward the nearby bus stop to catch a ride home.

It was time to get to work.

