





A Story Told presents

# MAN or MACHINE: I.S.O.D.

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## EPISODE 1: UNSEEN

The March rain came down hard. It was early morning, and the New York City streets were covered in fog and already crowded with people rushing to work. The atmosphere was about to change. Just recently, the virus that had begun overseas made its way to the United States and around the globe, and the fear of a pandemic swept the world.

At the Museum of Natural History, everyone was preparing for the flood of patrons to roll in later that morning. Local folks, tourists, schools – it was always crowded. The curator of anthropology, Mr. Jarvis Smyth, walked in wearing his usual blue plaid sport coat with a dark green handkerchief in his breast pocket, gray slacks, and tanned leather wingtips, the toes and heels burnished with a dark polish. He was not a tall man, but he was not short by any means, a little overweight, and his gray hair was combed neatly to the right side. He had a matching mustache, but no beard, and the wrinkles on his face added just the right amount of sophistication and wisdom. Mr. Smyth went through the usual security protocol and made his way to the elevator that led to the offices. He rode the elevator up and then passed by his administrative

assistant, Justin Fentin, nodding as he walked by.

Once inside, the seasoned curator locked his office door and went over to his desk. The computer was locked, but his fingerprint on the keypad did the trick. Then, after he pulled up the information he was looking for, Mr. Smyth slipped a USB drive into the port on the tower and began to download the files. He put on a pair of glasses, touched the frame, and spoke.

“Okay, I’m in,” he said.

“Great,” a voice said, through a concealed earpiece in Mr. Smyth’s right ear.

He replied, “The disguise worked perfectly. These masks are next level, they really cling like skin, and the fingerprint appliques I made worked perfectly.”

“Even your voice is spot on,” the other person replied. “Great work, Binu.”

“You know it’s how I roll, Sol,” Binu replied with a laugh.

Yes, it was Binu Alexander, master of disguise, and on the other line was Solomon Matthews, both members of the Intense Special Ops Division of the Federal Department of Supernatural Research – ISOD and FDSR for short. Years of training had led the members of the ISOD team to be experts in their unique fields. They had all attended West Point together. Their parents, all originally from Kerala, India, worked together at the United Nations, so they were more than a team, they were like family.

The leader of the team was Sergeant Shanson Matthews, at six feet and two inches, he stood the tallest, and his muscular physique along with his flowing hair made it hard to not compare him with his namesake, Samson of which Shanson was a derivative. He also possessed moments of superhuman strength when given that ability by the Almighty God. First Officer Cynthia Carlson was next in command, and she specialized in all weaponry, keeping up with the latest military developments around the world, as well as being an expert in hand-to-hand combat. Then was Jenny Samuels who was unmatched in international espionage. Jessie Thomas was the best in the business at disarming any explosive and specialized in cracking into any safe or lock. Solomon Matthews, Shanson’s brother, was the IT specialist and code

breaker. No one could out-hack this soldier. He was a certifiable genius. And finally, Binu. He was, indeed, the greatest master of disguise. Not only had he worked with Dr. Ian Rich on the latest technology, which included retinal replica contacts, artificial fingerprint appliques, true-to-life makeup, and prosthetic skin to really capture the look of the person he was portraying. He also studied how to act, walk, talk, and convincingly display each person's personality, so that way he could never be discovered.

Binu pressed a button on the USB drive, and it began to transmit the information to his phone, which then uploaded it to Solomon's database. They had everything that they needed.

In the catacombs of the museum, where they stored all the new items that they curated before putting them on display, Shanson, Cynthia, and Jessie were ready to crack the twenty-ton vault door in front of them. They had stationed armed guards standing ready just in case anything happened. The code came through on Shanson's phone and Jessie began the sequence on the lock. It was manual, with pins and gears, not electronic. And it took a special touch to make each turn correctly. One more turn should do the trick. But wait – there was a second locking mechanism that they had not planned for.

Binu noticed this as well but the combination code in the computer was encrypted and he could not access it. Thanks to the USB drive and the link it created to his phone, Solomon began to hack into the museum system, while Jessie continued cracking the second lock the old-fashioned way. He placed a receiver over his ear and turned up the receiving frequency. Then, he lifted up a prayer to the Lord and went patiently to work. Somehow, it felt wrong praying to God to help him break into a safe, but he was doing it for a good reason. The item they were trying to obtain could bring great destruction to the world if left in the wrong hands.

Down in the lobby, the real Mr. Smyth walked in, and the head guard felt like he was experiencing déjà vu.

“Sir, when did you come back down here? I never saw you pass by,” the head guard questioned.

“What do you mean? I was late because of the rain. Traffic is a mess,” Mr. Smyth grumbled.

“But sir, I checked you in earlier,” the head guard said.

“There must be a mistake, I just got here!” the curator exclaimed.

“Stay here and we will go check,” the head guard said and sent three other guards upstairs, while Mr. Smyth made a call.

“Hello, Mr. Smyth?” Justin answered his phone. “Did you need me to come into your office?”

“Come in?” Mr. Smyth questioned. “I’m downstairs.”

“But I saw you go into your office, and I didn’t see you leave. I can still see your shadow through the frosted glass window on the door.”

“That isn’t me!” the curator was furious. “The guards are coming up – call the police!”

“Yes, sir!” Justin exclaimed and hung up. He dialed 911.

The guards made their way quickly up to the office and pounded on the door. It was locked. Binu heard them yelling for him to come out.

“We’ve been found out! Abort the mission,” Binu said to Solomon through the earpiece, and then took the USB drive in his hand. There was a large window behind him, and he opened it. He was far up but there was a ledge and Binu stepped out onto it. He was a solidier, and he could handle scaling down this building even dressed as he was. He looked down, and then he heard the police sirens. From his belt, he unclipped what looked like a small grappling hook and latched it to the windowsill. Then he jumped and swung down into the park below, just as the guards broke the door down and entered the office. Binu tore off the mask and threw off his sport coat. He ran.

Meanwhile in the catacombs of the museum, Jessie was working on the lock, but Shanson had just received the abort message from Solomon. He would not leave without the prize. The leader of the ISOD team closed his eyes and said a prayer. This man was granted superhuman strength throughout his life from the Lord, just as God had given to Samson. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the fearless leader shoved Jessie to the side and grabbed the handles of the lock in front of him. With unbridled strength, Shanson

seized the lock and began to twist it in his hands. The muscles and sinews in Shanson's arms flowed with great strength. With a burst of power, he ripped the lock from the vault door, and the door opened with ease. But to their surprise the vault was empty.

"Abort!" Shanson cried, and the team rushed out of the catacombs as quickly as they could.

They had to escape before the police found them. A detachment of police rushed downstairs, while some of their fellow officers were in the lobby speaking with Mr. Smyth about the incident. When the police made it to the vault, the ISOD team had vanished. The officers were amazed to see the broken lock on the ground and wondered what the burglars had used to tear it off of the large metal door. It was incredible indeed. Upstairs, the curator kept his cool throughout the questioning and then excused himself when he received a call. He went into the guard room down the hall and answered.

"No, they didn't get the book, I was smart enough to move it to a much more secure location. I'll bring it tonight, don't worry," he said.

"We are not the ones who need to worry, Mr. Smyth," the seductive voice of a woman replied over the phone. "But your patronage is appreciated, and you will be rewarded for your deeds. Bring the book tonight. We will meet you at the Trinity Church Cemetery. Come alone."

"Of course," he answered.

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The rain still poured down as Sergeant Matthews and his team made their way back to FDSR headquarters in Upper Westchester County. They rode silently at first, all sitting inside the black van, like they had escaped a heist. In many ways, that is exactly what had happened. These men and women were not criminals; they worked for the US government. But for missions such as this, they needed to act covertly and try to take what was not theirs. It was the whole lesser-of-two evils situation, which did not feel right to the core members of this group. They had strong faith and values. A wrong could never make a right. But the book they were trying to take was evil. It would cause great destruction and the death of many. They had

to protect the people of this world. It was their duty.

Just yesterday, while training, Lieutenant Dan Marshall had called Shanson into his office.

“Sergeant Matthews, please shut the door behind you,” the Lieutenant said.

“Yes, sir,” Shanson replied and closed the door.

He stood before his superior, not knowing what would come next. Dan motioned for the sergeant to take a seat, and he did. While he waited, Shanson looked at all the books behind the Lieutenant on built-in shelves that decorated the room. There were also assorted action figures in front of the books, and a baseball signed by Daryl Strawberry. But then Shanson saw it sitting there – the Holy Bible.

And the sight of it reminded him that he had witnessed more over the last few years than he could ever imagine. From Samyaza, the Chaldean, to Satan’s own daughter, Pandora, who sent the world into Darkness for three days and called forth horrible demonic creatures from the Abyss – there was no questioning the existence of Devil. But with those great evils came miracles that all attested to the truth of a sovereign power in this vast Universe, and all of it pointed to God. This fiery military leader had finally begun reading Scripture, searching for answers, and finding Christ in it all. But it wasn’t his faith that made Dan call Shanson into his office. It was the works of the Darkness instead.

Dan turned his computer monitor around so the sergeant could see it. There was an image of a leather-bound book. Into the leather was branded a very intricate polygram consisting of a thirteen-pointed star encased inside diverging polygons that also formed thirteen points, with two interior circles and one exterior circle around it. It looked old, ancient.

“You need to retrieve this book,” Dan said. “There’s a lot of bad juju, mixed in with it. Some cult is trying to get their hands on it to raise a demon, or whatever evil beast they follow, to bring about the destruction of the world. You know, the baseline for every horror flick ever made.”

“Seems a bit regular these days,” Shanson said with smirk.

“I know, and after all we have been through, well, I’m not taking any chances,” Dan continued. “The



group is called the Progeny of Cassius, and they are believed to be in New York City. They were originally in England and then moved to the Middle East before they vanished for some time. But there are reports of people in the city talking about them and saying they are coming to liberate the world.”

“Don’t they all say that?” the sergeant stated with sarcasm. “I have to be honest, is this really something we should be looking into? Has Jay’s team investigated it, since they are there?”

“Sergeant Sil has taken a hiatus to care for his daughter. He’s been off the field for months now, and First Officer Jael Zahavi is now acting Sergeant of the FDSR New York City Headquarters. And yes, she has investigated. You know her past. She thinks it’s tied into the group that killed her soldiers. And she might be right,” Dan confirmed. “I wouldn’t take this lightly. You need to get that book and stop them before they raise another monster from Hell.”

“Yes, sir,” Shanson said. “Do we have any leads on where it is?”

“We know exactly where it is, sergeant. It’s at the Museum of Natural History.”

As the black van made an abrupt stop in traffic, Shanson’s phone rang and pulled him away from his flashback of the day before.

“Yes, sir,” Shanson answered, knowing it was Lieutenant Marshall on the other end.

“Don’t leave the city,” Dan instructed.

“Why, sir?” Shanson asked.

“The whole place is going to be locked down thanks to this virus, and I need you to stay put. Someone has the book, and that means they will try to raise that demon. This could be worse than the last fiasco we had with Atlantis and that creature down in the financial district. The whole world was in Darkness then, and if this demon gets conjured, the world may be in Darkness forever,” Dan stated. “Go to the city branch. I will let Jael know you are coming.”

“Roger that, sir,” Shanson said and hung up. “That was the lieutenant. Solomon, turn this rig around. We are going to the city branch.”

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“This is Judy Ramirez, reporting live,” the newswoman stated over the airways, interrupting the regularly scheduled programming.

She normally hosted the morning show, but for news as big as this station management had asked her to broadcast this nighttime announcement.

“The Corona Virus known as COVID-19 is spreading fast. We are in the early stages of a pandemic, as more and more cases are arising in the United States. Due to the severity of this outbreak, New York City is being locked down. No one can enter or exit the city, and it is being requested that you remain in your homes. All schools and offices will be closed indefinitely until we have more information.”

She continued her broadcast, while memories crept up inside of her head and the heads of all who were listening – memories of the Three Days of Darkness that had plagued the Earth not that long ago. She had barely made it out alive, along with her unborn daughter. Alejandra Ramirez-Sil, Ally for short, was one year old this month. Judy remembered being so grateful that God preserved her and her daughter during those evil days. It was just a little over a year and now terror had taken over the world again. But Judy was not scared. She knew God was in control.

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The news was broadcast all over the city and, in a bar near Gramercy Park, someone changed the channel. Sergeant Jael Zahavi was sitting at the bar, drinking the same beer she started an hour before, thinking about what this lock down would mean. The pandemic caught everyone by surprise. At first, they all assumed the virus would be contained and then destroyed, but it spread. People were now all wearing masks and slowly but surely everything was closed indefinitely. This bar, the Slaughterhouse, used to be a hive for the lowest scum in the city. Police would go there to get intel or to get payoffs. Scott Pershing bought the place a couple years back and cleaned it up, so to speak, but the scum still found their way there from time to time. He had a good relationship with the local authorities. He was an expat from Britain, a large man at six feet

five inches tall, his arms strong and sturdy, but a bit of fat on his belly. He was given special permission to stay open through the lock down, giving some a place to go and get a break from it all.

Jael took another sip of her beer and then gave a startled look at the door as it flew open. Three men walked inside dressed in black leather from head to toe, literally. They all wore full black leather masks and long black trench coats. There were chrome buttons down the front of the coats and on their gloves.

The sergeant could not move – she was petrified. Memories of her unit in Israel being slaughtered by the Unseen flooded her mind. Years before, when she served on the Mossad, a band of monsters, called the Unseen, brutally murdered all the troops in her unit, except for her. She was buried under their bodies and thought to be dead until someone found her. Jael remembered the smell of death. Those evil terrorists had worn all black from head to toe with leather masks that covered their faces. When they unmasked themselves, and showed their true faces, they looked like demons with green scaly skin and large snakelike fangs. Bat-like wings grew out of their backs, from the shoulder blades. The nails on their hands and feet grew also, turning into long sharp claws, like those of an iguana. They ripped her unit to shreds with their claws and teeth. Blood was everywhere.

One of the three men placed a stack of flyers on the bar, and they walked out, slamming the door behind them. Jael woke from her trance.

“You, okay, J love?” Scott asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she muttered. “Just a little tired, that’s all.”

“I can see from the way you are nursing that beer,” Scott paused. “Why don’t you head on home then and get some rest. Consider that one on the house.”

“Thanks, yeah, I probably should get home.”

Jael got up, grabbed one of the flyers, folded it, and shoved it in her back pocket. She walked outside. The rain had stopped, and the March night air had a bit of a chill to it. She looked around but the three men were gone. Then she jumped as her phone rang.

It was Lieutenant Dan Marshall. He told her about the failed mission to secure the book and he informed her that the ISOD team would meet her at the FDSR New York City Headquarters. She was close by and headed there right away.

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That night, outside Trinity Church in the cemetery, Mr. Smyth stood next to Alexander Hamilton's famous grave. The stone monument was as cold and lifeless as all the corpses buried there. He waited patiently with a tinge of fear, because the ones who would meet him soon were filled with dark power. From the depths of the shadows of the graves, five figures crawled out. They stood tall and thin, dressed in black leather. The masks they wore covered their entire heads, and had no openings at all, not even for the eyes. With them was a woman, she was breathtakingly beautiful, her dark curly hair fell past her shoulders. A skimpy red dress clung to her smooth bronze skin. A pair of strappy high-heeled sandals held her delicate feet. She floated over to the curator and held out her hand. Mr. Smyth gently placed the book into her palm. She grabbed it forcefully and brought it close to her voluptuous bosom.

"Thank you for your patronage, Mr. Smyth," she said in a sultry tone. "Like I said before, you will be handsomely rewarded. Trust me, I have seen it for myself. Don't forget to come to the party tomorrow night. We will be waiting. And you will collect your reward. But first you must have a drink in honor of Lord Cassius."

One of the five figures handed the woman a fluted crystal glass filled, it seemed, with red wine. She smelled it and smiled. Then she handed it to Mr. Smyth.

"Drink it," she commanded.

The reluctant curator put the glass to his lips. It smelled like blood. But he was compelled to drink it all, as if he had no will of his own. Suddenly, the woman and the five figures vanished into the shadows, as if they were never there. In fear, Mr. Smyth dropped the glass, shattering it on the ground. He did not know what he had gotten himself into, but it was too late to reverse his course. He knew he needed to return for his

reward. Scared, he ran to find comfort in his home.

**END OF EPISODE 1**

## EPISODE 2: UNHEARD

The black, unmarked van pulled up to the FDSR New York City Headquarters on the East River near 23<sup>th</sup> Street, about twenty blocks south of UN Headquarters. Then the van turned into the underground garage and parked. Sergeant Zahavi was there waiting with her arms folded and her head cocked to the side. She had a half sarcastic smirk on her face as the ISOD team started to disembark from the van. Solomon stepped out of the driver side, and Jessie from shotgun. Shanson, Jenny, Cynthia, Binu, and six other highly trained men and women exited from the back. This was an elite combat command considered the best of the breed in the FDSR, but to Jael they were just bodies to add to the pile in the war they were waging. She had been part of the Mossad, a member of the Kidon – “the tip of the spear.” This woman was trained from a young age to kill with her bare hands, as were all the men and women who died that day in Israel at the hands of the Unseen. That pack of beasts ripped them all to shreds and the only reason she was alive was because her troops were piled on top of her.

“Welcome to my humble abode,” Jael said. “How long do you plan to stay?”

“Until we’ve stopped whoever is trying to raise that demon,” Shanson replied.

“Well, not sure it will be that easy,” she responded.

“Never said it was easy,” Sergeant Matthews stated as he stood over Sergeant Zahavi, who was not the least bit intimidated.

“We have spare rooms upstairs,” Jael said and gestured for them to follow her.

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Downtown, at an old hotel that had been converted to a homeless shelter, Captain Rogers walked in. The portly captain, whose red hair was turning more and more gray by the day, put on a second medical mask over the one he was already wearing. The smell of the place was worse than usual because everyone there was now dead. The director of the shelter did not want this information to get out to the public and neither did the police. But there was no way to hide it forever. Sandra Bane was the director of this shelter, and she

was an old friend of the captain.

It was hard to believe Rogers had any friends at all. He and Bane had attended school together from kindergarten through the end of high school in Queens and they'd managed to stay in touch in the long years that followed. She called Rogers directly as soon as she saw the calamity before her. The attendants and nursing staff were all still there. No one had left. And Ms. Bane – she had never married – asked them all to stay and not to speak a word. Not until after the police report was made public.

“Hey, Sandy,” you look great,” Rogers said as he looked into her blue eyes, her red hair also turning gray.

“And you look, well, the same, Finn,” she replied as honest as she could.

“So, what happened here? Was it the virus?” he asked.

“That’s what we thought at first,” Sandy answered. “Figured it was a super spreader with them all cooped up in here. But what could we do. The only other option was to put them back on the streets.”

“Hey, it’s not your fault, you gave them a place to stay. No one knew this pandemic would happen. How could we have?”

“But that’s it, Finn. It wasn’t the pandemic. That’s not what killed them.”

“Then what did?” the captain wondered.

“You’re gonna think I’m crazy, but I think it was a vampire,” she stated, not believing her own words.

“A what? That *is* crazy, but I half believe it. Shoot, after everything I’ve seen over the years, I was almost waiting for a vampire or a werewolf to show up. I always was a sucker for those horror comics when we were kids.”

“Yes, you were. I remember your favorite one, Wolfman Priest. Now that was a stretch,” she said with a laugh. “But this is too real. All of their blood has been drained from their bodies, and all of them have the same two fang-like marks on their necks.”

“Any signs of a break in?” Rogers asked.

“No. It’s almost as if they just materialized here.”

“Doesn’t someone have to give them permission to enter,” the captain said with more than a hint of sarcasm.

“Not funny, Finn. I knew each and every one of them. They were good people, who all just wanted a new start. But now they are gone,” Sandra lamented, then she began to cry.

Captain Rogers held her tight until she regained her composure. They would have to remove the bodies, clean the place, and make a report. To the public, it would be another case of deaths caused by this pandemic, but a few would know that something darker happened here. There was one more person Rogers had to tell. The only man he trusted, and the only one who had the connections to stop whatever evil was about to plague this city once again.

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Just about everyone at the FDSR New York City Headquarters was resting in their rooms, including the members of ISOD staying there for the meantime. The only ones that were not at rest were the guards on duty, for there always had to be guards on duty, as is the case for all military facilities.

Jael lay in her bed. Her studio apartment, like the rest in facility, was simple with a bedroom, a full bathroom, and small kitchenette. There was a larger apartment on the top floor that Jay Sil and his wife had formerly lived in. Jael was offered to take it when Jay took his leave of absence and the Sil family moved out. Right now, they were living in an apartment on the Upper West Side. But, instead, she kept her old room and left Sil’s apartment vacant in case he came back. She missed her commanding officer. The newly ranked sergeant lay back in her bed, wearing an old T-shirt and a pair of shorts. She was watching a video on her phone from the Messianic church that her parents still attended in Jerusalem.

She remembered growing up there and feeling strange because she was a Jew, yet she believed that Yeshua was the Messiah. She never went to college but straight to the military where she had served her whole life. Her commanding officers saw something special in her and suggested her for a position in the



Mossad, where she was trained as a killing machine. This always was difficult for her. As a follower of Yeshua, she did not like taking the lives of mortal men and women. But she also knew that Darkness was in the world and if she did not stop them then many innocent people would die. That is what kept her sane. She prayed to her Lord every day. – Adonai Elohim, El Shaddai – YHWH. She loved Yeshua with all her heart, and she asked that the Holy Spirit guide her hand to serve out the justice of God and not of man each and every day. Since she joined the FDSR, she no longer killed mortal men and women, but rather demonic creatures of the Darkness. This felt more like the justice of God to her.

Still watching the video, while she lay back, her phone rang.

“Well, your ears must have been ringing, sir,” she answered.

“Were you thinking of little ol’ me?” Jay Sil responded.

“Just remembering the good times – we all miss you here. How’s the fam?”

“Everyone is good and staying as safe as we can with the virus and all. Ally just turned one the other day.”

“Wow, time flies so fast. Give her a kiss and a hug from Auntie J.” The sergeant allowed herself this rare, soft moment, because she truly felt like family to Jay and Judy.

“Unfortunately, I am not calling you just to catch up,” Jay’s voice became stern. “Something bad is happening again.”

“Yeah, I know. The ISOD team is here, they are investigation a cult – the Progeny of Cassius. It’s not easy for me to say this, but I think it’s the Unseen. Shanson said that they were looking for a book that would conjure back a demon of some sort, the one who founded their order.”

“Hmm,” Jay said. “Maybe it’s related. You see all of the residents in one of the homeless shelters downtown were killed. Drained of their blood. There were two fang marks on each of their necks. Sound familiar.”

Jael dropped her phone to the floor. She remembered the three men in the bar. Flashbacks of the Unseen

killing her comrades flashed through her mind. The sergeant grabbed her head to collect her thoughts. The flyer she'd grabbed at the bar was still in the pocket of her jeans. She ran to her desk chair, where her jeans were draped, and retrieved the pamphlet. Then she picked up the phone and put it to her ear.

“Sorry about that, sir.”

“Don't apologize,” he replied. “I can only imagine the memories this is bringing up.”

“I just remembered that there was a flyer from the bar tonight,” Jael spoke. “Three men dressed like the Unseen walked in and left a stack at the bar. I took one. It says that there is a Liberation Party tomorrow night in the financial district at an abandoned brewery. I'm sending you a photo.”

“I would pass this along to Rogers but not sure how much help the NYPD will be. They might just get in the way. That is if they haven't already been paid off to turn a blind eye as usual. Rogers is a good man, and I'm glad he's captain, but even he can't stop the corruption in this city.”

“Don't worry, sir, we will check this out, and like I said, we have Sergeant Matthews and his team here. I can't lie, the memories of my team being torn apart before my eyes make this hard for me. But it also is making me want to crush these monsters all the more. I know we can do this. We can stop them.”

“I have full faith that you can and will. Especially because I know God is with you,” Jay confirmed.

“Yes, He is,” Jael professed. “He is always with me.”

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The next morning, Solomon made a video call to Dr. Ian Rich to discuss some projects they were working on together. The genius member of the ISOD team and the equally genius doctor were always trying to come up with new technologies to help them in their battle against the creatures of Darkness. Recently, they had developed a way to produce artificial sunlight that was able to emit the full magnitude of the Sun's rays. Many demonic creatures feared the light of day and might even be hurt or destroyed by it. The FDSR had not encountered any such creatures yet, but they had seen several flee before dawn, making them look into this useful technology.

While Solomon and Ian spoke on their video call, the rest of the ISOD members were down in the training room. Cynthia was hitting the heavy bag, her hands and feet taped up. She hit the bag hard with punches and kicks, rocking it violently back and forth, only to hit it again and again. Chase Smith walked over to her. He had been transferred to the FDSR New York City Headquarters a couple of months before.

Chase had been raised in the Bronx and felt more at home here. His mother was from Haiti and his father was a military man, a Marine. They raised him in a strict Catholic upbringing, even sent him to Catholic school straight through high school. Like his father, Chase chose to join the Marines after high school, and served proudly for many years – he left to become a member of the FDSR. He always believed in God and therefore also believed in the Devil. Some members of his mother’s family practiced Haitian voodoo and he saw some things growing up that could only be explained as demonic. One time, he saw a young girl that his Auntie was trying to heal with magic. The girl looked into a mirror and her reflection had red eyes and bloody, fanged teeth. He saw shadows with claws cast on the walls in her apartment at night. The reality of the supernatural was certain to him. Though it always seemed bizarre to him that his family believed in God yet clung to magical arts that were contradictive to their faith.

Cynthia threw a hard side kick at the bag, almost knocking it off the chain. Chase caught it and gave her a look. She smirked and kicked it again, knocking him back.

“That was dirty,” Chase laughed.

“Well, you shouldn’t have caught it,” Cynthia smiled back.

Chase was a very attractive man. First Officer Carlson glanced over at his lean ripped frame, and his smooth caramel-colored skin. His shoulders were pronounced, and every muscle on his body popped as if he were always flexing. He looked her up and down as well. Her figure was athletic with the curves in the right places. Her face was majestic with sharp feminine features. Chase let go of the bag and drew closer to her, looking down into her eyes. She looked up to him, locked in each other’s gaze.

“Eh-hmm,” Binu said, and he walked up to them. “This is a training room, not the no-tell motel.”

“What does that mean?” Cynthia said with a sharp look.

Chase laughed, “What’s up, Bi? Heard you really rocked your get-up yesterday. Spot on I heard. Not even his mother could tell.”

“Well, you know, I’m the best at what I do,” Binu replied with a smile.

“Ego much?” Cynthia asked with a snarl, and then laughed.

Jael walked in, dressed in full gear and called everyone to a meeting in the conference room adjacent to the training area. The members of ISOD piled in. Shanson texted Solomon to join them. Not everyone in the facility was invited to this meeting, only the core members of ISOD and Chase Smith. They needed to plan for tonight, based on intel that something sinister was going to happen downtown in the financial district. Solomon opened the door and quietly took a seat. They were all there, ready to see what the sergeant wanted.

The conference room had a large touchscreen at the head, where some notes popped up for the meeting. Jael had her tablet linked through Wi-Fi. There were three rows of white tables with white chairs in the center of the room. The ISOD team and Chase Smith sat at the front most table. Jael stood up holding a stylus and walked over to the screen.

“It feels like we just stopped that giant monster yesterday,” Sergeant Zahavi began. “And now something else is happening down in the financial district. That portal that was opened, the one that we closed last year, there must be a connection. Some kind of dark power down there. Pure evil.”

An image of the flyer from the Gramercy Park bar came up on the screen. Jael held the actual flyer in her hand.

“Three men left this at the Slaughterhouse bar last night, while I was there. They were dressed all in black leather, with black leather masks. Just like the Unseen,” she stated and cast her eyes downward.

She changed the screen to an image of the homeless shelter that Jay had just told her about.

“And at this homeless shelter, all the residents were drained of their blood. Their bodies shriveled up

and two puncture marks were on each of their necks.”

“So, we’re dealing with Dracula?” Jenny asked.

“No, like I said, the Unseen. That is exactly what they did in Israel, and then they butchered my troop. And it seems it all has to do with this,” Jael said and pulled up an image of the book that was missing from the museum, the same image that Dan Marshall had showed to Shanson.

“The Progeny of Cassius,” Shanson said. “So, is that the real name for the Unseen?”

“I think so,” Jael said. “We never knew what they were called so we called them the Unseen. But yes, the Progeny of Cassius, it seems, moved from the UK to the Middle East, into Israel, and now they are here in the United States, in New York City. They are trying to release some demon, a fallen angel that they worship named Cassius. From what I’ve read, he may have been one of the Watcher angels but it’s difficult to tell.”

“Kinda like the Chaldean,” Shanson said. “Samyaza was one of the Watchers, too. They played gods on Earth.”

“Yes, exactly,” Jael confirmed and then brought up the flyer on the screen again. “We have to go here tonight and stop them. I don’t know what they’re up to, but I’m sure they plan to kill everyone who shows up and perhaps use them as sacrifices to raise this Cassius. We can’t let that happen!”

“So, what are we waiting for?” Jenny asked.

“Yeah,” Cynthia chimed in. “Let’s gear up and move out!”

“Let’s develop a plan first,” Jael took the lead. “They will be expecting opposition, I’m sure of it. We need stealth on our side. We need the element of surprise.”

“Okay,” Shanson said. “Let’s make a plan.”

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The night had a chill in the air just as last night. The sky was clear, and the moon was almost full. The few stars that you could see in the New York City sky sparkled. Midtown was filled with bright lights, but

downtown in the financial district only the World Trade Center Memorial and the Freedom Tower were lit. The beams of light where the twin towers once stood shot up to the sky, but the further down the street that Mr. Smyth walked the darker it became. The curator was dressed in a black tuxedo. He wore a crisp white shirt and ruby cufflinks. In the breast pocket of the jacket was a red handkerchief. The street he entered was particularly quiet. No traffic at all. The sound of the wind whistled in his ears. An old streetlamp flickered just in front of the entrance to the brewery, which had been abandoned for years.

Mr. Smyth knocked on the old iron door, bolted shut from the inside. The façade of the old brewery was all brick, and the massive wrought iron door had intricate patterns crafted into it. The door opened but no one was there. The dim light of candles that hung from the walls gave him some sight to the hallway before him. The floor was all cobblestone and the walls inside all brick. He entered reluctantly and then the door slammed shut behind him. A figure holding a candle in the distance came toward him. The curator was too frightened to move, and then as she approached closer, he realized it was the woman that he met at Trinity Church. That was his first time seeing her before today. But they had spoken over the phone many times. She was beautiful, and still wore that same red dress and strappy sandals. She moved like an angel and slithered like a snake, all at once.

“Welcome, Mr. Smyth,” she said, as they came face to face, then she pinned a red rose to his lapel. “Please follow me.”

She led him down a winding set of cobblestone steps to the cellar, which was where the liberation party would take place. Everything was ready, but they still had a couple more hours until it began. The cellar room was very large and completely made of brick just as the rest of the building, with cobblestone floor throughout. It was where the beer had been brewed in the early nineteen hundreds until the brewery was closed during the prohibition. The place was still used secretly during that time to continue on in the business. In nineteen-forty it was bought by Samuel Prince. The brewing operation shut down that day, and no one knew what transpired behind the brewery’s doors. The place went up for auction the year before, as

part of the Prince estate after Samuel Prince VII's untimely death in 2016. But of course, there were some who knew the truth about Prince, that he was in fact a fallen angel named Samyaza, who was finally stopped thanks to a band of heroes that put their faith in the true God and fought to end the reign of Darkness on Earth.

In the back of the cellar was another wrought iron door, smaller but just as ornate as the entrance outside. The woman opened it and led Mr. Smyth in. Her candle lit the way, and she closed the door behind them.

"Why are there no lights in here?" the curator asked and cleared his throat.

"The Progeny needs no light to see. They are one with the Darkness, just as you soon will be."

Mr. Smyth gulped and continued to follow her, not knowing if he was being led to his liberation or to his death. They were inside a corridor that led to a rusted iron, spiral stairway. The steps creaked as the woman led the curator further and further down. At the bottom was another ornate wrought iron door. She opened it. The room that they entered was almost as large as the cellar above, but the ceiling was much higher, and had arches built in like a church. Actually the room was once used as a chapel where runaway slaves held services secretly on Sundays. The Unseen had turned it into a place of worship to their false god and father, Cassius, and would use it as a place to sire their new converts for now. There were candles on the walls all around. Mr. Smyth also noticed that they were not alone. In the dim light, he could see a group of thirty other men and women standing in the center. All wearing black leather masks that covered their entire faces, and formal clothing, much like Mr. Smyth, himself. The woman handed him a black leather mask, and he put it on, afraid to say no. She led him to the group of people who were all silent. Mr. Smyth could not see a thing through his mask. Everyone in this group had drunk the same blood as Mr. Smyth, the night before in the cemetery. The very woman who gave the cup to the curator was the first to drink and then she took the tainted cocktail to all those present, one by one, preparing them for tonight.

A chill entered the room. Its sound was like wind chimes quietly echoing in the chamber. Mr. Smyth

was not sure how, but he knew others had entered the room with the chill. Their presence weighed heavily on him. Yes, he was correct. For encircling the group of thirty was a group greater in number, all wearing the same black masks, with long, black, silk robes. One other appeared from the back of the room. He was tall and slender. He wore a more elegant black silk robe, with a hood that covered his head, and golden embroidery along its edges. Over his face was a black silk veil and around his head he wore a golden crown with two great antlers protruding from it, like a buck. Each antler had six points and in the center of the crown grew one smaller point, to make the total number thirteen. This was the high priest. In his left hand, he held the book that Mr. Smyth had delivered to them and he walked to the front of the group of men and women. The high priest did not speak, but in their minds the people could hear a powerful hypnotic voice.

“Spread out and form a circle among yourselves,” the voice said.

The people obeyed as if they had no choice and formed a perfect circle. The woman who had led Mr. Smyth to the room walked to the center of the circle and placed her candle on the floor. The light seemed to glow a bit brighter and radiated all around. She joined the circle of people. On the floor was a stone mosaic that formed the same polygram marking as the book. The woman could hear that same voice in her head. Tonight, would be the night that they would deliver their promise to her, and to all those present. They would be liberated.

The high priest opened the book, and because he could not see with his eyes, he used strong telepathic powers to read with his mind all that was on the page he had turned to. Soon they would resurrect Cassius. But first, they needed to grow in number, and then they needed a couple more items to perform the ritual that would release Cassius from his prison. As the high priest read the ancient Sanskrit on the page, his mind projected those words into the heads of all those men and women in the circle. They did not understand the words yet, somehow, they began to.

From behind each person in the circle walked up a member of the Progeny of Cassius. These creatures had been mortal men and women at one time, but were transformed into these demonic beings, much like



the lore of vampires. The creatures removed their masks to reveal their hideous faces. The people who were in the circle remained still. They were in a deep trance because of the spell being cast by the high priest. The demonic fangs of the Progeny oozed with venom, and they sunk their teeth into the right carotid artery in the neck of each person in front of them. The crowd remained still. The hypnotic trance they were in gave them no choice but to let the creatures feast on their blood.

While each creature drank, it also secreted large amounts of venom into each person, which started a transformation. This was how they sired people, transforming them into demonic beings just like themselves. The members of the Progeny stepped back, and each person fell to the ground. They convulsed and shook about. Their skin turned into dark green scales. All the hair on their bodies fell off. The nails of their fingers and toes became as claws, and large bat-like wings sprang from their backs. The people were transforming into demons and tore off their masks. The teeth in their mouths fell out and two large fangs grew from their upper gums and from the bottom grew a fresh set of small sharp teeth. They had sold their souls and joined this pack of demons. The men and women slowly stood up.

“Be still all of you, and behold,” the high priest spoke in their heads. “You are now part of our family. The first in a long time. For we needed this book to add to our numbers and to release our father, Cassius, from his prison of darkness.”

The Progeny did not know everything about their father, Cassius. He was a fallen angel, one of the Watchers who fell on Earth just before the great flood. God had sent some of these Watchers to Hell, but many were imprisoned on the Earth in prisons of darkness waiting for the final judgment. Magda Magus, Simon Magus’s descendant, had freed Cassius along with five other Watcher angels. These six were known as the Scarred Heart, and they terrorized the Earth for over three hundred years. But a group of Magi from China known as the Keepers of the Light battled against them and trapped these fallen angels, sending them back into their prisons of darkness on the Earth.

The high priest spoke again with his mind to the new members of the Progeny of Cassius, “Come with

us and let us prepare for the feasting tonight. For as you were liberated, we will liberate more. We still need to eat, and blood is our food. The blood of those coming will be sweet and succulent. But before we devour our meals, we will select a few more to join us and add to the Progeny. Then, when Cassius returns, we will devour all mortal life, and the only life that will remain on this Earth will be ours!”

**END OF EPISODE 2**

### EPISODE 3: UNTOUCHED

The night was calm and clear. The almost full moon shone overhead. It was two hours after Mr. Smyth had walked down these same streets, and now a crowd of people filtered into the old, abandoned brewery. They all wore face masks due to the pandemic mandates issued by the CDC – though they were clearly violating the policy that restricted the number of persons allowed to attend an indoor event. But none of these people cared. They were here to be liberated – liberated from these policies, liberated from the confines of all government and authority, liberated from the oppression of living life. Like cattle they filtered in. The music boomed from the cellar like a rave party going on beneath the city streets. Lights strobed around the large room that had been empty hours ago and was now overcrowded with men and women who were looking to escape reality. Everything in their lives had changed overnight, because of the virus, and they wanted things to get back to normal. But all they heard, over and over, was that they had to accommodate a new normal. When they came inside the brewery, they were told to remove their masks. Some were hesitant at first, but it felt good. They had missed this feeling of freedom, and it felt liberating.

The ceiling of the cellar was about ten feet high. And on the back wall was a circular window above the wrought iron door. The DJ booth was to the right, and the young naïve woman who blasted the music and cued the strobing lights was unaware of the Darkness that truly was housed there. She always was into witchcraft and the dark arts, seeking the meaning of life from nature and powers from beyond. The Unseen knew this when they chose her. They could read every thought in her mind, and they saw her hunger for what they alone could satisfy.

But the DJ was merely a prop for the night. Other than the lights and music, she offered nothing of real value to them. Nothing, that is, except for nourishment. Other guests, however, were of great value to the Progeny of Cassius. They needed to increase their numbers. Government officials, judges, high rolling CEOs, that was the stock they desired. People with power. Power that they would take and use to push their order across the globe. Once Cassius was released, then they would have the world.

The music stopped. The lights took on a red hue and stayed at an even, dim radiance. The DJ did not know why but she just knew that she had to do this. A veiled face appeared in the circular window above the door. A red light shined on it. The people did not hear his voice, but they could feel him speaking in their minds. It was the high priest of the Progeny of Cassius.

“Welcome, all of you,” the high priest said telepathically to all around. “Thank you for coming, and we are so excited to have you all here. This world is so confining. Its laws, its rules. Look at what it has spawned – persecution, murder, hate. This virus is just the offspring of the society you live in. And now you are all trapped indoors, unable to go anywhere, unable meet with anyone. You even have to wear a mask. Well, not here! You all removed your masks when you came inside. None of you have gotten sick. None of you are dying. You are all healthy and well. It’s a lie. Everything designed to control you. Well, we don’t want to control you – we want to liberate you! But before we do, there are some of you here who have been granted VIP access to our private party in the back. Those of you who received the red rose when you came in, you have been chosen. Please proceed to the back as our very special guests.”

The crowd grew quiet and stood still. The wrought iron door at the back of the cellar opened. Those holding the red roses looked proud and arrogant. They strutted to the door, men and women of power. The rest of the crowd looked jealous as they missed the chance at the VIP party. But soon they would all know the truth.

“Don’t be upset,” the high priest continued. “For you all are just as important, and we have something grand for you as well. We all want the same thing, an end to the tyranny and a new order. An order built on truth. And for that to happen we need all of you. Enjoy the party, and your gift will be coming very soon.”

The high priest ended his speech and stepped away from the window. He had a new herd to usher in. Tonight, would be their first step to eternity in the kingdom of Cassius. As he turned away, the priest could sense some people outside the doors of the brewery. They were uninvited guests, and he gave a command to those guarding the front doors to keep them out. But then one of those uninvited guests outside caught his

attention. There was something interesting about her, something he found alluring, and something oddly familiar. *Send the rest away, but her, lead her straight to me*, he instructed the guards at the front door telepathically.

Further down below the city streets, where the woman in red had led Mr. Smyth earlier, the high Priest waited, and the new VIP members of the party walked in, escorted by two Unseen guards. The guards were tall and strong, wearing black leather from head to foot. They had flowing black leather capes over their backs and held long black metal spears. The head of each spear was large and sharp, curving from the side and coming to a point on top. Behind the high priest stood more members of the Progeny, some of whom had just been turned that night. All of them wore their black masks and black silk robes. The guests that had just entered were a little afraid and curious at the same time. They did not know what to make of this cult that stood before them yet, somehow, they knew they were meant to be there.

“So, let us cut to the chase, as you say,” the high priest spoke again in their minds. “All of you are wondering why you are here. I sense some fear, and reluctance, but mostly I sense hope. All of you have a position of power, and all of you want more from this world. I am here to make that happen. But before we do, you must first swear your allegiance to Cassius. For when he arrives, then we all will truly be free. For Cassius alone is truth. He is the way, the truth, and the new life. The only way to liberation is through him.”

Some members of the Progeny walked out with small, fluted crystal wine glasses. Each filled with what seemed to be red wine. They walked over to the guests and handed them out.

“Now, raise your glasses to Cassius,” the high priest said, and each guest followed his command. “To new life! To liberation!”

“To new life! To liberation!” they all repeated, like sheep following a shepherd.

The group of men and women drank the crimson liquid, knowing from its smell and taste that it was not wine, but rather blood. Yet they still drank until each glass was empty. The high priest read an incantation from the very book that Mr. Smyth had given to him. The men and women who drank the blood, their eyes

were opened as were their minds. They all had worldly power before, but now they were tapped into a truly dark power. Their hearts were swayed to the shepherd before them. They knew what they must do and, in a few nights time, they too would join the ranks of the Progeny of Cassius.

The process of transformation was not like those in vampire folklore – a bite on the neck and you were transformed. The Progeny’s process required two steps. The first step was to drink the blood of transformation, which was the blood of a goat mixed with a drop of the high priest’s blood, for his blood was the purest of all the Progeny. The dark spell that was cast on him – to give him his authority as leader of the cult – made his blood rich in evil and sin from the Darkness itself. Then, once the cup was drunk and the blood worked itself through the body, another step needed to be taken. The amount of time between steps was not important, just the order of them. The second step, as we witnessed by Mr. Smyth himself earlier that night, involved a member of the Progeny of Cassius biting the blood-drinker on the nape of the neck, piercing their carotid artery. The demon would then drink the victim’s blood, but not drain them dry as they would when feasting. While they drank, their fangs secreted venom into the bloodstream of the person. This venom would mix with the victim’s blood and recreate their physiology so that they would die, their soul leaving the body, and a new demonic soul would take its place, transforming that person from a human being into a demon.

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Outside the brewery, Shanson and Jael stood in front of the ornate iron door. They were geared up and ready to crash this party. Dressed in full battle attire, they were not there for a friendly visit, nor did they even care to pretend to be. On the left and right side of the building stood the rest of the ISOD team, plus Chase Smith and a few of Jael’s soldiers. All the soldiers were equipped with the standard FDSR automatic rifles which could utilize many types of ammunition. Right now, they were carrying silver-tipped rounds. The rifles also had a flamethrower function that could fire out a blast of high-heat flame that could reach up to fifteen feet in front of them. Jael carried her sword, which was laced with silver, and the ISOD soldiers all carried the

Hell-metal spears that they acquired from Samyaza's army three years before.

Shanson knocked on the wrought iron door. But there was no answer. He gave it a hearty pound. The door opened. The corridor was dimly lit by candles, and two large guards stood inside with massive, black metal spears. These spears were indeed Hell metal and had been used by the Progeny since their inception, given to them as a gift from Lucifer himself. Shanson and the rest of the team felt a cold chill run down their spines. Somehow, they could not move. It was as if something was giving them a hypnotic suggestion. Then Jael heard a voice in her head. It told her to move forward, only her. She began to walk inside. Once she was inside, the door slammed shut behind her. The trance ended, and Shanson and the team grew irate. They had to get inside. Something was happening. Shanson pounded on the door, over and over again. He pushed with all his might. The rest of the team went at it as well. Jessie walked over to look at the lock. It was simple, from the early nineteen hundreds. He could crack this in seconds. He asked everyone to back off and took out his kit.

Inside, Jael was being led down the hall. But instead of going to the cellar, they took a right turn and went to one of the brewery's back rooms. Down in the cellar, the party continued. The people were drinking, taking all forms of illegal narcotics, and acting foolish as the party went on. They all felt free, but soon they would see that they were far from it. The strobing lights stopped again and so did the music. The high priest appeared again in the window above the door.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began. "It is now time. As I've said before, we are all here for a purpose – to be liberated."

The dim red lights gave just enough visibility for the revelers to see the shadowy figures appearing around them. Members of the Progeny in black masks and black robes stood along the walls of the room, looming over all those present.

"I hope you all are ready. You took off your masks when you came in, and now it is time for us to take off ours." The high priest spoke as if to each and every one of them individually, in their minds. Making a

connection with them.

The high priest could feel their thoughts, their desires, their fears. The members of the Progeny of Cassius took off their masks to reveal their demonic faces. They appeared like snakes with green, scaly skin; bulbous red eyes; fangs like vipers, oozing venom; and from their shoulder blades sprung great bat-like wings, ripping right out of their flesh. Large claws grew from each of the creatures' hands and feet. The Progeny of Cassius were cunning, demonic creatures. They could almost make themselves appear to be human, except their faces, which had to be hidden under their masks. But once they were ready to feast, they would transform into their true demonic form. The wings and claws would grow out, and their muscles would ripple and strengthen, like beasts ready to devour their prey.

“Yes, the time of liberation is upon us. We will be liberated from this oppressive world, and you will be liberated from your lives!” His voice echoed in their heads.

At once, all of the Progeny grabbed men and women from the crowd and began to feast on their flesh. They tore their limbs and slashed their throats. They drank the sweet nectar from each of these mortals who came to escape reality and be free for a night. Now, they would escape the world permanently and for all time. The high priest lifted his veil to reveal his hideous face, and he joined the rest of the Progeny in the feast. They all drank up until there was not a drop of blood left.

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Back outside, Jessie unlocked the door with ease, just as he said he could, but the door still did not open. Something wasn't right. Some kind of dark magic was keeping this door closed. Shanson charged at the door, but it would not budge. They had to get Jael out of there before she was killed. They needed to blast a way in. Jessie readied some equipment and he and Solomon began to construct an explosive that would focus the blast on the door hinges and lock. Even though the door was unlocked, they hoped that by blasting it from the frame they could somehow pry it away even with the dark magic being used to hold it shut.

“What are we doing?” Cynthia asked.



“Trying to get in,” Jessie replied.

“If we think there is dark magic involved in holding this door shut, what do you think an explosive will do? I mean, with everything we’ve been through, why don’t we just turn to God. He has delivered us before and He will again,” Cynthia preached. “Shanson, don’t just charge at the door. Call on that strength that the Lord gave to you. Believe in Him and I know the door will open.”

Shanson shook his head. How could he have been so doubtful? Why was he not giving it his all? It was as if his spirit was waning. At that moment, he felt a peace come over his body. The Holy Spirit filled him, and strength welled up in all of his limbs. Sergeant Matthews, as many times in the past, called on the Lord, and he became as strong as an army of men. He grabbed the ornate designs on the door with his hands, bending the iron in his grip. Shanson planted his feet and then with one great shove he ripped the door from its hinges and threw it into the street. The guards inside charged at the sergeant. He lowered his head and charged back. Like a linebacker, he plowed his way through the guards. He grabbed one of their spears and swung it at his attackers. The rest of the team joined in, and they began to fight their way through the horde of soldiers before them. More and more guards came, and then they heard the screams. The sound of flesh being torn. People were being massacred – all those who had come to be liberated that night. The guards removed their masks to show their hideous faces and great bat-like wings grew from their backs. The members of ISOD pulled out their guns, special automatic rifles. Today, they were loaded with silver-tipped shells. It was known that silver somehow had an effect on supernatural creatures, much like it did on bacteria. It did not outrightly kill these creatures of Darkness, but it would slow them down, make them vulnerable, and cause them great pain.

These creatures were like vampires in so many ways and, in actuality, they were the inspiration to those myths. Cassius created these creatures many years ago while he was a member of the Scarred Heart. He used men and women whom he corrupted with dark magic, and turned them into these monstrosities, deploying them as soldiers and pawns to do his bidding. When he was sentenced to his prison of darkness,

these creatures had no master to follow but sought his return. They called upon the Prince of Darkness, Lucifer, to help them. He gave them the book that they now held. The book that had a spell that would release Cassius from his prison. It also would allow them to add to their numbers. They did this for many years as they sought all the items needed to cast the spell that would break Cassius free. But then the book was lost. Taken from them by a group of monks in China, the very monks who also trapped their master back into his dark prison.

The order of Magi known as the Keepers of the Light had the book stolen from their temple after it collapsed, when the villain Legion tore it down. A man was traveling through that province and found the book sticking out of the ground, as if by chance. But nothing ever happens by chance. It is either the hand of God or the Devil that guides these events. This event was surely guided by the Devil's hand. The traveler could not read the words inside, but he knew it looked ancient, so he sold it to a museum in Beijing for a very high price tag. The book found its way from buyer to buyer, until Mr. Smyth saw it at an auction and curated it for the Museum of Natural History, or that was what he said.

He knew well of this book. He had studied the Progeny of Cassius for many years and desired to join them in their pursuits for power and world domination. He was searching for this book. That is how the book ended up where it was today. Everything full circle, and the time was drawing near. But the Progeny still had more items to collect before they could restore Cassius to power. One was a pendant that held great dark power – it was the pendant that Cassius himself had worn and that he'd used to create these vile creatures from the bodies of dead men and women. The other was thirteen virgins that would need to be slaughtered to perform the ritual. The pendant had been lost since Cassius was first defeated and trapped by the Magi. No one knew who took the pendant after his demise. Some believed it was Magda – the descendant of Simon Magus who had originally released Cassius. Others say the Magi kept it, while yet others thought that it was swallowed up by the Darkness itself.

The fight continued inside the brewery halls. The ISOD members fired at their opponents. Shanson

continued to fight with his mighty, bare hands, dodging the opponents' blows, and connecting with a few of his own. He grabbed one of the soldiers and threw him into another.

“We need to get downstairs and save those people, before they are all dead!” Shanson shouted.

The team pushed forward. Jennie connected with a few rounds of ammunition and knocked down her attackers. But they got back up. The bullets were slowing down the Unseen, but not killing them. Cynthia put her gun over her back and pulled out her Hell-metal spear. She thrust it at one of the creatures as it dove for her head. The spear went right through the creature's skull, and then she pulled it up, splattering brains and blood everywhere. The blood was like acid and sizzled on the ground. A couple of drops landed on Cynthia's forearm, and it ate through her forearm guard and almost reached her skin. She swung the spear around and cut off the creature's head. Just like in the movies, the vampire-like demon turned to ashes, and its demonic soul was sent to the Second Death.

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Not too far away, Jael was being led by the guards into a dimly lit room. It was the old office of the brewery owner, but all the furniture had been removed and the room was empty. There was a large plate-glass window opposite her, and the moonlight poured in, allowing her to see the empty room. Her mind was still foggy, and the control of the Unseen was still upon her. They had strong telepathic powers that they were using to keep her compliant. The high priest had just finished drinking his supper with the rest of his children and now he was making his way to the room. At that moment, Jael felt his dark power approaching and there was another feeling inside of her. It was a nudge in the back of her head, a reminder of who this unholy group was, what they did to her troops, and what they intended to do to her.

God was with Jael as she had told Jay earlier. He was always with her. He was waking her up from her trance. She looked carefully at the guards and then at the window. She knew she had to escape right now because she had no way to stop them all, especially the high priest. As he approached the room, she felt his dark presence and his voice weighed heavily in her head. He had been there that day when her troops were

slaughtered. He remembered her. He had felt her energy before. How did she get away? By God's grace, she had been buried deep underneath the bodies of her fellow soldiers, and below all those corpses she was lost to the Unseen. But the high priest would have her now.

Before the high priest could get to the office door, Jael woke from her trance. God released her from the telepathic hold of these demons. She pulled out her sword and attacked the guards in the room. They struck back with their spears. Her blade was strong and laced with silver, but their spears were Hell metal. With a powerful strike from one of the guards, Jael's sword was shattered at the center of the blade. She took out a handgun and shot a few silver rounds into the throats of both guards. Then she shot the window, shattering it. With faith in the God who was with her, Jael jumped out of the window. God was indeed with her, and she was still on the first floor. Jael rolled as she hit the sidewalk. She was at the back of the building and had to make her way to the front.

"Shanson, come in," Jael radioed the sergeant with her earpiece.

"Where are you?" Shanson shouted, as he continued to fight the guards inside.

"I'm outside, at the back of the building," Jael responded. "We have to go. You have to get out of there now!"

"But what about all the people downstairs," Shanson asked.

"They're dead. They're all dead," Jael stated.

"How do you know?" the sergeant wondered.

"I just do. Now get out of there!"

Sergeant Matthews alerted the rest of the team and they fought with their backs against the walls as they retreated to the front entrance and returned outside. The Unseen did not follow. It was still dark outside, but it was the early hours of morning. The sun would be up soon. The team of heroes needed to get back and regroup. Jael came from around the back and rejoined them. The team left alive but, somehow, they did not feel victorious.

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“I was wondering when you were gonna call me back,” Captain Rogers said over his cellphone.

“Yeah, well, trying not to get too involved these days, you know,” Jay Sil said from the other end.

“So, what’s new?” Rogers inquired, not wanting to really know the answer.

“This is bigger than we thought. Listen, Rogers, I know I’m not a cop anymore and we had our differences before, but I’m telling you this is evil, pure evil.”

“Hey, punk,” Rogers snarled in jest. “We are over that stuff. It’s all water under the bridge. I know there’s some mumbo jumbo stuff going on. Shoot, I even started going back to church. I ask the priest to bless me every Sunday. After all the crap we’ve seen these past years, I know there is definitely more to this world. God, the Devil, they have to exist. I mean look at all those folks at the shelter that were drained. It’s like something out of a Bela Lugosi movie. Like Count Dracula’s come to New York.”

“Something happened last night, at an old brewery in the financial district downtown. It was a complete bloodbath. A group called the Unseen was responsible – at least that’s what people were calling them. But it seems they are actually called the Progeny of Cassius, an old demonic cult. They are trying to raise a fallen angel named Cassius. You know, the usual end-of-the-world kind of stuff.”

“I’d expect nothing less coming from you. I’ll go check it out. But I have a feeling the boys have been paid off as usual, so not sure I’ll get any help.”

“You said you were going to church, right Rogers?” Jay asked. “Why don’t you say a prayer? I’m sure God will get you the help you need. Not everyone there is on the take. There are some good cops. Ones just like you.”

“Aw, you’re making me blush, you ol’ softy,” Rogers laughed.

Jay gave the captain the address of the brewery, and the two unlikely friends hung up without saying goodbye. They knew they would speak again, or at least they hoped they would. Rogers gathered his things and walked out. He had a brewery to investigate.

**END OF EPISODE 3**

## EPISODE 4: UNTOLD

Captain Rogers' car pulled up at the old brewery Jay Sil had told him about. He walked up to the door, which was on the ground, the hinges and lock broken. The police captain walked inside and used a small flashlight to see – there were no functioning lights in the place. Candles were along the walls and even though it was early afternoon, Rogers felt a chill going down his spine as he continued forward. Then his ears picked up a clapping sound on the cobblestones. He was not alone. The captain took out his handgun and looked around.

“NYPD, come out with your hands up!” Rogers shouted.

“Relax,” the voice of a woman came from behind.

The captain turned with his gun still drawn. He recognized the woman in front of him, who stood there with her hands held high into the air, and a smirk on her lips.

“Detective DellaCruz, what are you doing here?” the captain inquired.

“My job,” she replied with the subtlest hint of sarcasm.

“Well, don't you know better than to sneak up on an officer of the law? I could have shot you.”

“Well, you didn't, and I didn't mean to sneak up on you. I didn't know anyone was here.”

Detective Ana DellaCruz was a recent transplant from Chicago PD and was known for her unorthodox approaches to investigations. In basic terms, she never followed the rules. Without consent or a warrant, she was standing inside a crime scene, one that most of the NYPD glossed over thanks to some green incentive that came their way. The Unseen were rising in the ranks, and with their new members being men and women of wealth and power, they were soon buying the government piece by piece, starting with the law. Captain Rogers was not much different – he too had no warrant, but he also wanted to keep this quiet, given the supernatural circumstances involved.

DellaCruz was dressed in a gray pants suit, with black chunky-heeled ankle-high boots. Her black hair was thick, straight, and shoulder length. Her skin was nicely tanned. The detective's parents were

immigrants from the Philippines, and she was raised in the suburbs of Chicago. She had wanted to be an officer of the law since she was a kid and pursued this goal right after getting her college degree in criminal justice. DellaCruz was short but in great physical shape; kick boxing was her workout of choice. Her features were soft and beautiful, with brown, almond shaped eyes, which were almost as dark as her hair.

The captain wore his usual khaki trench coat and khaki pants to match. His white shirt had some jelly stains on it from his breakfast doughnut. Rogers would need some help with this case, and maybe he could trust the new detective, but it was difficult to trust anyone. At this point, he needed to at least learn what she knew.

“The place is empty,” Ana broke the silence. “I swept the whole place. Something definitely happened here. The door outside shows a break in, and in the cellar the stone walls and floor had some strange scratch marks. Still can’t figure out what they were from. There was another door down there, but I couldn’t get it to open. It was locked.”

“Let’s go check it out, maybe I can jimmy it,” Rogers said. “I grew up in Queens and one of the first things you learn as a kid in Queens is how to jimmy a lock.”

They went down to the cellar. The room was large, and both the captain and detective shined their flashlights all around to help them see. Rogers saw the scratch marks she spoke of. Something demonic must have caused these. There was no other explanation. Those creatures Jay had told him about, the Unseen, they were no joke, and Rogers did not want to catch any of them down there. He took out a couple of small tools from his coat pocket and began to prod inside the door lock. In a few moments, the lock was released and the door opened.

“I still got it,” the captain said. “Let’s see what’s inside.”

They shined their flashlights into the doorway. There was a long corridor. They went in and followed the corridor to an old, rusted iron, spiral stairway. They went down the creaking steps. Ana’s chunky heels thudded along the way. When they got to the bottom, they came to another iron door. The captain didn’t



have to unlock this one; it was already open, and they went inside. The room was large and the ceilings very high for the subbasement of a downtown building. In the center of the room, they saw the large mosaic of the thirteen-pointed polygram that seemed to be the mark of the Progeny of Cassius. Ana took out her cell phone and took some photos. Rogers did the same. Whatever happened here last night was a ritual of some sort. But there was no evidence at all, and they had no one to prosecute.

“So, what do you think happened here?” Detective DellaCruz asked.

“Let’s cut to the chase, detective,” Rogers stated. “Why are you here? Did you get a tip? I mean why come to this brewery – that is obviously completely empty – to look for a crime?”

“Why are you here, captain?” she flipped the question. “I mean, we both know something happened. I spoke to Ms. Bane at the homeless shelter. She didn’t tell me much but I’m sure she told you more. She seemed to know you pretty well.”

“Hey, I’m your captain! Don’t go getting too big for your britches. Stay in line!” Rogers scolded her.

“I didn’t mean any disrespect, sir,” Ana replied. “Let’s be honest, something is happening in this city. This isn’t the first time. Trust me, I’ve done my research, and it’s why I asked to be transferred here. I wanted a real case for once. Something juicy. And no, I’m not on the take. I’m a good cop, like you.”

“Hmm, well, we will see about that. But yeah, people were killed at that shelter, and I got word that something went down here last night. But seems like we got here too late. They cleaned this place good. We got nothin’.”

“Well, not nothing,” she said. “The scratches and the polygram tell us something. I would like to have this case, sir. Please. I promise to only report what I find to you. I have to solve it before more people die.”

“Okay, the case is yours. Let’s review the clues tomorrow morning. I got some work to do down at the precinct. If you hear anything else, let me know, and yes, I’ll do the same,” the captain said.

The captain and the detective gave each other a look as if they both were aligned on the mission. Then they turned and began to walk out.

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“Finn, back so soon,” Sandra Bane said as the police captain walked up the stoop of the shelter.

“Guess seeing you again made me realize I shouldn’t be such a stranger,” Rogers said.

“Always the charmer,” Sandra remarked, Her red hair was tied back, in a bun, and she wore a crocheted sweater, a dark red skirt, and black tights to keep her legs warm.

Rogers was still in his khaki pants and khaki trench coat. The only thing he had changed was the color of his shirt, and right now his shirt was a surprising salmon pink. He followed Sandra inside to get out of the chilly March air.

“So really, Finn, why are you here?” Ms. Bane asked.

“I do miss you, Sandra, but yeah that’s not the only reason I came here today. Something bad is going down and I don’t want to see any more people get hurt. The same monsters that killed the people here and drained them of their blood? I think they did the same thing last night, and they will go on doing it until they’ve drained the whole city. Did they leave any other clues here at the shelter? Anything?”

“You’re free to check, Finn, *mi casa es su casa*,” she said. “The place is still empty. Haven’t reopened the doors yet. I’m too afraid it will happen again. But, at the same time, my heart goes out to all those who need a place to stay. We were doing a good work here. Making a difference.”

“You were and you will again. I know it,” Rogers stated and placed his hand on her shoulder. He looked into her eyes.

“One of your officers was here and looked around as well, asked a lot of questions, but I had no answers for her.”

“Detective DellaCruz,” Rogers spoke.

“Yes, that was her name. Nice girl, good cop. In this city, there aren’t too many. But you’ve always been the best of them. A little rough around the edges, but you have a good heart. I saw it when we were kids.”

“Not sure I agree, but for sure I know you have a heart of gold, Sandy,” he looked deeper into her eyes. “I’ll take a sweep around the place and be on my way.”

He took his hand off her and walked up the stairs. Sandra watched him from the first floor as he ascended. She was wondering what could have been if she just told him that she had deep feelings for him since they were young. Sandra Bane loved Finnegan Rogers, and a part of her hoped he loved her back.

Captain Rogers walked from room to room. The police had swept this place and found nothing. So did Detective DellaCruz. What did he expect to find now? He walked through the whole building and an hour later came back downstairs.

“Nothing,” he said as Sandra walked over to him. “Is there anywhere else I can check?”

“I mean, you can look in the basement. The others checked there too and didn’t find anything, but go ahead,” she said.

Rogers followed her to the basement door and down the old concrete steps. The basement was unfinished and held a boiler and laundry machines. The light down there was dim, so he took out his flashlight and turned it on. In the back corner, by the washing machines, he noticed a medium-sized metal trap door in the floor. It went to the sewer line. Typical in old basements. Rogers bent down and opened it. He looked down inside and couldn’t see much. But then next to the door, in the concrete floor, he noticed claw marks. Just like the ones at the brewery. This is how they entered the building. He didn’t say anything to Sandra. He didn’t want to scare her. Something told the captain that these monsters had moved on. He also had a good idea where they were hiding. The only problem was that the underground of the city was a maze and they could be hidden anywhere within the sewer or subway system. But they were indeed under the streets. A community of killers waiting and lurking to strike their next victims.

“Thanks, Sandy,” Rogers said.

“Any time, Finn,” she replied, looking into his eyes, hoping for a sign.

“I’m gonna get going now,” he said and turned toward the stairs.

Rogers began to walk up the steps and Sandra followed behind. Once they exited the basement and he walked toward the front door, Rogers turned.

He said, “If you’re free tomorrow afternoon, let’s grab some coffee and talk about something other than monsters plaguing this city.”

“Yes,” she quickly replied. “I’d like that.”

“Then it’s a date,” he said.

Captain Rogers turned and walked out. Sandra watched him as he left with hope in her heart. A date, now that sounded amazing.

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Jael and the ISOD team decided to unwind at the Slaughterhouse that night. The bar had a few of its usuals hanging around. It was the only place allowed to stay open at the time of the pandemic thanks to the owner Scott’s connections with the NYPD. But there was a limit on capacity so at this point the doors were closed. Jael and all the elite members of the FDSR that were with her were dressed in street clothes – jeans, T-shirts, casual boots or sneakers. But they did each make sure to conceal some weapons, in case something went down. Solomon and Jessie were playing a friendly game of pool, sharing their scientific theories, and talking about all the cool new toys that Ian was working on back at headquarters. Chase had come also. He was not part of the ISOD team but was Jael’s first officer and one of the FDSR’s best soldiers. He and Cynthia were getting cozy in one of the booths, acting like two high school kids on their first date. They flirted with their words, but the only contact they made was with their eyes. Each of them too nervous to make the first move. The conversation began to get a little racy as they talked about their training and various submission holds that they would implement if they had a fight. Binu and Jenny were next to the bar chatting about the Unseen and making countless vampire references, including Binu doing his best Dracula impression. Shanson and Jael sat at the bar discussing strategy. These two took their work very seriously, both born leaders.

“So, Shan,” Jael said and took a sip of her beer. “You really never had a drink before?”

“I am drinking,” Shanson replied. “Ginger ale.”

“Ha – you know what I mean,” Jael replied with a half smirk. “I know we shouldn’t get drunk, but one beer never hurt anyone. I mean even Jesus drank wine. He talked about how the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and also don’t forget the wedding feast at Cana. He made the best wine, they said,” she laughed.

Shanson smiled at her. *Her laugh was cute*, he thought.

“Yes, I know that all too well, but I’m more of the John the Baptist type. A Nazarite like my namesake, Samson. Though he’s a bad example because he drank a lot,” Shanson said with a hearty chuckle. “My parents never drank and so I never really got the desire for it. I like having a clear head always and even one beer can fog it up.”

“Well, my head is clear enough,” Jael stated.

Shanson went back to talking about the case at hand and their strategy. Jael zoned out and missed everything that Shanson was saying because she was lost in his eyes. She realized that they were a striking green. He was very handsome. But her trance was broken when the Slaughterhouse door flew open.

“Sorry, but the sign says that we are at full capacity. You can’t come in,” Scott shouted from behind the bar.

A group of twelve men and women walked in wearing black leather from head to foot. The gang of miscreants was very diverse and one of them even looked like a kid. They all wore biker boots, and had studs and spikes on their leather jackets, pants, and gloves. One of the men was of medium brown complexion with his hair tightly braided into corn rows and standing at about six and half feet tall. He was well built and had a large chain slung over the back of his neck. Each of them wore black eyeliner and had various facial piercings. The tall man looked over at Scott and then turned to trade glances with Shanson. One of the women, a tall blond, pushed past the large man and walked over to Shanson. She gently caressed

his right bicep.

“So, what brings you here, mister tall, dark, and handsome?” she said with a soft British accent.

Jael gave the blond a mean stare. These individuals all seemed suspicious. They were not part of the Unseen, they were human, but somehow, she felt they were tied into that group of demons.

Scott slammed the bar and yelled, “I said the place is full!”

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch, gov’nor,” the blond said in an exaggerated tone. “We won’t hurt nobody. We just want a drink and to make some new friends.”

“Well, you’ll have to come back tomorrow,” Scott said. “City rules. We are at capacity. You know there’s a pandemic going on and we need to be safe.”

“I don’t see anyone here wearing a mask,” the blond said. “Doesn’t seem too safe to me.”

The large man with the chain on his neck walked over to Scott and grunted at him. Scott didn’t budge – he just stared right back.

“If you don’t leave, I’ll have to call the police and trust me, they take my calls very seriously. They’ll be here right quick,” Scott said.

“Geez,” the blond replied. “What a party pooper. Hmm, well I guess we’ll have to go. But if any of you want to join us, there’s a party going on tomorrow night downtown. The location is a secret, but you’ll all get told exactly where to go. Just click the link on your phone.”

Everyone jumped as each of their phones dinged with a text message. Jael looked at her phone and clicked the link. Instantly, a thirteen-pointed polygram, the one that the Progeny of Cassius used, appeared on her screen. Before she could click the image, the large man took off his chain and swung it at the bar, breaking the mirror behind Scott and several of the alcohol bottles. One of the other men opened the front door and they all started to leave.

Shanson quickly got up and lunged at the large man. He dodged Shanson’s advance and whipped his chain straight into Shanson’s gut. The sergeant of the ISOD division of the FDSR fell to one knee. Jael put

away her phone and dropped to the floor. She rolled and swept the large man's leg with no effect. He kicked her swiftly in the gut, grabbed her by the throat, and lifted her into the air. Shanson got back on his feet and charged the large man. He plowed him through the barroom door to the outside. They both rolled on the concrete sidewalk. The large man got up first and struck the ground with his chain. Shanson stood up also. But he was surrounded by all twelve members of the gang. Jael and the rest of the ISOD team came outside. Scott called the police for back up and then swore to himself as he looked at the damage done to his bar, including the broken front door.

“Who are you?” Jael yelled.

“Who, us?” the blond said. “No one special. But soon we will be. We've been given a taste of what is to come, and it's only left us hungry for more.”

After she spoke, the blond woman's eyes became blood red and then changed and began to glow a dark sapphire blue. It was as if her whole body were consumed in a flame of blue fire. The rest of the gang began to do the same. The blue ominous glow that bathed them all grew more and more intense. The group of specially trained FDSR soldiers knew these men and women were drawing evil power from the Darkness. They had seen this before. No wonder they were so strong. The heroic soldiers readied for a fight and pulled out their semi-automatic pistols. But the sinister gang did not flinch. The large man with the chain cracked his neck and wrapped the chain around his right fist – about two feet of chain still dangled from his wrist. The blond woman cracked her knuckles and sounded the attack. The heroic soldiers opened fire. The bullets entered their targets but the wounds sizzled and sealed up instantly.

“What are these people?” Jael said to Shanson.

“I have no idea – all I know is we have to stop them,” Shanson replied.

He fired his gun at the large man with the chain but the monster laughed off each hit and landed a crushing blow to Shanson's jaw, sending him into the building behind him. The sergeant got up. The mountain of a man threw another punch, but Shanson dodged it, and the monster's fist went right through

the brick as if it were peanut brittle. Shanson maneuvered behind him and wrapped his arms around the large man's waist. In a feat of superhuman strength, Shanson suplexed the large man into the sidewalk, and then rolled to the side and stood up. The monstrous man got right up, the ground was cracked where he had hit. He just dusted himself off and charged back at the sergeant.

Jael fired a few rounds at the blond woman but she moved fast and dodged the bullets. Jael lost sight of her and then she was struck in the side by a knee that sent her to the ground. The blond woman stomped on her hand as Jael tried to get back up. She caught the woman's boot and twisted her leg, taking her to the ground. The two women wrestled on the ground trying to gain the upper hand.

Meanwhile, the rest of the FDSR soldiers were in action. Chase Smith and Cynthia fought back-to-back as three goons surrounded them. They fired their pistols but to no avail. The bullets seemed to evaporate inside of these creatures and the wounds always healed in an instant. Were these a new type of Unseen? Solomon, Jessie, and Jenny fought back the rest of the gang. Jenny pulled out a long knife and thrust it into the chest of one of the evil women. The woman spat up blood and kicked Jenny in the chest, knocking her back. She pulled the knife from her chest and the wound healed. She went to stab Jenny but Jessie came from behind with a garbage can from the street and hit the woman over the head. Two more goons attacked Jessie from behind and knocked him down. Solomon shot at them both but with no success. Two more women came after him and the whole team of heroes was on the ropes. These men and women were truly demonic in so many ways, and the blue glow from their bodies increased in intensity.

Sirens could be heard in the distance and the flashing lights of police cars drew closer. The voice of the high priest rang into the heads of the sinister gang, telling them to leave. They stopped fighting and a mist came over the whole street, making it difficult to see. When the mist cleared, the gang of superpowered men and women had vanished. The police rolled up to the bar, answering Scott's call. But by the time they got there, Jael and the rest of the heroic team had all gone as well.

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Downtown, at a warehouse in the meatpacking district, Detective DellaCruz responded to a call. All the workers were dead. Each of them drained of their blood, exactly like the people at the homeless shelter. She checked the bodies as she waited for forensics to arrive. She took out her phone and called Captain Rogers.

“Captain, you might want to have a look at this,” she said. “Yes, just like the others, completely drained. I’ll wait for you here.”

Right after she hung up, the detective received a text message. She thought it could be spam and went to delete it, but instead a red, thirteen-pointed polygram appeared on her phone screen. It was the same one from the mosaic at the brewery. Then a message appeared. *Join us tomorrow night and be liberated. Location to follow shortly*, it read. She took a screen shot, not knowing what else to do.

#### **END OF EPISODE 4**

## EPISODE 5: UNKNOWN

The 5:00 a.m. alarm went off and Detective Ana DellaCruz pushed down her quilt and slid out of bed. She wore a cozy pink pajama set and slipped on her matching, furry pink slippers. Time to brush teeth. Brush, rinse, spit – she went back to her small bedroom and made her bed. “An unmade bed led to an unmade day,” her mother always told her. She looked up at the Crucifix over her bed and then walked into her kitchen-living room combo. Her one-bedroom apartment was small. On a cop’s salary it was good enough – she lived in Manhattan, just south of Canal Street, where rents were through the roof.

DellaCruz brewed a small pot of coffee and then threw a pre-sliced bagel into the toaster. All the while, she looked at news on her phone and various social media updates from people she knew. The toaster popped. Ana grabbed the hot bagel and put it on a plate. She proceeded to slather it with butter and then grape jelly. This was how her mother always served her, growing up. Her coffee was ready too and now it was breakfast time.

While Ana crunched her bagel, some of the jelly stuck to the side of her mouth. She picked it up with her finger and licked it. The detective turned on her TV to channel 5 news, and then opened her laptop. One of her fellow officers had sent her a video and she clicked Play. It was footage from the warehouse security cameras last night. It showed the employees working hard, packing up various goods into parcels along an assembly line. Then suddenly, a mist appeared, and a group of dark figures materialized, standing all around. They were blurry and dressed in all black from head to toe, including black masks that covered their faces completely. Then the video fizzled out. Someone had knocked out the cameras. She had to go see the captain about this. But before she could get up, her cell phone rang.

“Hey, Mom,” Ana answered.

“Just hoping you are safe. I saw so many murders in that city, why did you move there? And now we have this pandemic. Your father and I are very worried about you,” her mother complained over the phone.

“Mom, Chicago isn’t any safer. It’s New York – I’ll be fine.”

At that moment, the TV news showed the meatpacking warehouse, and the reporter mentioned the massacre from last night, saying the victims were drained of their blood. *How did something like that leak out to the press before they investigated it?* Ana wondered.

“Mom, I have to go,” Detective DellaCruz said to her mother. “Yes, I love you and Dad, too. But I really have to get to the precinct. Love you, bye.”

She hung up, got dressed, and ran out of her apartment.

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“Geez, Jay, how did it leak out – you sure you didn’t say anything to the Mrs.?” Captain Rogers questioned Jay Sil over the phone.

“Seriously, Rogers?” Jay replied, his daughter could be heard crying in the background, while Judy yelled something inaudible in Spanish. “It wasn’t even her station. And now she’s upset because she didn’t get the lead. To be honest, I didn’t even know about the warehouse until I saw it on the news.”

“Thought your people had eyes everywhere,” Rogers said.

“Well, they’d like to think that, but even some things get past the FDSR. I’m praying you can get to the bottom of this, before more people get killed.”

“There’s going to be another bloodbath tonight. But we don’t have the location yet. The messages that went out said to wait.”

“Yeah, I got it too,” Jay said. “Think everyone in the city got the text. But how many people will really show up?”

“Well, to be honest, I’d tell your wife to make a special announcement so that no one goes to that party. But I didn’t tell you that. I’m not supposed to cause a panic, but in this case, it might just save lives.”

“Yeah, well, don’t worry, she already had that idea and I think she’s heading down to the station now to make the broadcast.”

“Well, let’s hope people listen,” Rogers said and hung up his cell.

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Detective DellaCruz opened the captain's office door and walked in. She was dressed in black slacks and black leather ballet flats. Her fuchsia blouse added a spark of color against her black peacoat.

"Good morning, sir," she greeted her captain.

"Good morning, detective," he answered. "Channel 4 news is going to give a warning about tonight, so expect some panic in the streets. Or maybe everyone will just stay home because of this stupid virus."

"Yes, the streets are dead, it doesn't even feel like the city anymore."

"You're telling me? You just moved here. I've been here my whole life," Rogers answered.

"Did you see the footage that Diaz sent to me? I don't know who these people are or if they *are* people. I swear, we are dealing with some serious vampires or something. Here, check it out yourself," DellaCruz stated.

On her phone, she pulled up the video that she had watched earlier on her laptop. The captain watched with horror. Something wicked was once again loose on the streets of Manhattan, and it needed to be stopped.

"Where did Diaz get this? Why did he send it to you and not me?" the captain inquired.

"He didn't know who to trust, so he sent it to me," Ana responded. "No one knows who to trust these days. I did not tell him anything about the case we were working – but he knew he had to show somebody the footage. He got it from a cousin who's a security guard at the warehouse."

"Well, thank you for showing me. Can you send me that video?" the captain requested.

"Yes, of course. I'll send it to you right now."

"Did you get the same text we all got last night?" Rogers asked.

"Yes, I took a screen shot. It had that same symbol we saw on the floor of that underground chapel under the brewery," Ana replied. "There will only be more deaths if we don't stop these monsters. With your permission, I want to gather a SWAT team for the liberation event tonight. We need to hit this place

hard. We can't let any more innocents die," the detective professed.

"I know, you're right. I'm just not sure the SWAT team will do any good. They might just end up part of the pile of corpses. I've seen it before. Something evil is going down, and I can't hide it from you, detective. It's supernatural. This city has seen a lot over the years and so have I. These aren't people, they are demons, monsters, something out of this world," the captain explained.

"I know. There is nothing human about this. I grew up Catholic but I never really believed in that demonology stuff. But there is something seriously demonic about this. These vampires, or whatever they are, we have to at least try and take them down."

"Then, go for it – gather a SWAT team. We can't turn a blind eye."

"Thank you, captain."

"But before you go, I need you to check something," Captain Rogers said and showed her an image on his computer screen. "This is the doctor from the morgue, Dr. Gunther Klein. He is doing the autopsy of the victims from last night. I want to know his thoughts about all of this. I've heard he's a real quack, though, so be careful."

"No problem, sir, I'm on it," the detective said and she left.

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Shanson walked into the conference room at the FDSR New York City Headquarters, eating a yogurt. The rest of the team was already seated, along with Chase Smith, and Jael was standing at the head of the room talking.

"Glad you finally decided to join us, Sergeant Matthews," Jael said in a stern tone. "Now, as I was saying, there was another attack last night at a warehouse in the meatpacking district. Everyone was killed and police found this footage," Jael paused and played a video on the large screen next to her. "Channel 5 news got a hold of the story somehow. And there was a message transmitted over the air about tonight's liberation event, thanks to former Sergeant Jay Sil's wife. But something tells me people won't listen."

“My question is, who were those freaks at the bar?” Shanson asked and then took another spoonful of yogurt.

“I think the Unseen are taking people from the events and transforming them,” Solomon said. “We know the Unseen were quiet for a while, probably because they were low in numbers. But now they are adding to their ranks.”

“But they looked like regular people, not reptilian vampires like the others,” Shanson responded.

“Maybe it’s a transitional stage,” Chase said. “My abuela always talked about were-creatures of different kinds and that they are sired and transformed over time. The ritual isn’t instantaneous.”

“Don’t these people know they are making a pact with the Devil?” Jenny asked.

“They don’t care,” Cynthia jumped in. “They want power.”

“But soon they will be monsters,” Jael said. “Ruthless, killing monsters. We can’t let them take any more lives. We have to stop this tonight – at the event.”

“So, you’re getting all this police stuff from Sergeant Sil right?” Shanson asked.

“Former sergeant,” Jael said. “Yes. He still has connections at the NYPD. He actually told me about this woman,” Jael clicked the remote in her hand and a file appeared on the large screen with Detective Ana DellaCruz’s picture and background. “Detective Ana DellaCruz is assigned to this case. She’s putting together a SWAT team for tonight’s gathering. I think it’s a bad idea to get the police involved. They will just get killed. But there is nothing we can do to stop them. All we can do is help end this. In the meantime, let’s track DellaCruz and see if she has any leads that could help. Sergeant Matthews and First Officer Carlson, come with me. Agent Alexander, I could use you, too. The rest of you prepare for tonight’s mission. We will all be going, along with twenty more armed soldiers. I have a plan. Let’s regroup at fifteen hundred hours. Let’s go!”

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Ana showed up at the New York City mortuary and went in to see Dr. Gunther Klein. He was short,

overweight, and had short white hair that encircled his bald spot at the back. The doctor wore a white lab coat that had a few blood stains on it, and he spoke with a nasally voice, his breathing heavy and winded.

“Detective, nice to meet you,” he said and put out his hand.

Ana reluctantly shook it, not knowing if he had worn gloves or washed his hands while fiddling with the corpses.

“So, what do you make of all this?” she asked.

“Well, to be honest, I really don’t know. These people were drained of all their blood, each of them with two puncture marks in their jugular. I assume it was some device the killers used, but they looked more like snake bites to me – albeit a very large snake. Also, there was some kind of strange DNA on the bodies that I could not determine. Almost animal but somehow almost human. Placed in the arteries where the blood was drained were traces of a very acidic venom. Nothing we could identify and highly lethal. I wouldn’t believe it if I didn’t see it. But I also did the autopsy for the victims at the homeless shelter and found the same DNA and venom.”

“Yes, I know, the captain told me. Was there anything else?” DellaCruz asked.

“Yes, there was one thing,” he said and pulled out a gold pendant, on a thin gold chain.

The pendant had the same thirteen-pointed polygram that was on the book that the Progeny of Cassius had.

The doctor continued, “This was inside one victim’s stomach. It looks like he swallowed it just before he was killed. Almost like he was hiding it from whoever killed him. Guess the killer never found it. But I did.”

“I’ll need to take that from you, Dr. Klein. It’s evidence in this case,” the detective said.

“Certainly, please take it,” he said.

Detective DellaCruz took out a Ziploc bag from the inside pocket of her coat and put the pendant into the bag. Then she put the bag back into her pocket.

“Thank you, doctor,” she said, reluctantly shook his hand again, and left.

Shortly after she was gone, another man walked into the morgue wearing a pair of aviator sunglasses.

He was dressed in a black suit with a black overcoat. It was agent Binu Alexander.

“Can I help you, sir?” Dr. Klein asked.

“Yes, FBI, special agent BA,” Binu said and flashed a phony FBI badge. “We need to talk about what happened last night in the meatpacking district.”

“I just told the detective everything I know,” the doctor said.

“Well, you didn’t tell me, and I outrank her, so spill it all, doc!” Binu shouted.

The doctor recounted everything that he told the detective. He even mentioned that he gave her a pendant. Binu excused himself and left in a hurry. Jael heard everything over the earpiece that she was wearing.

“Tracking her now,” she said, talking about Detective DellaCruz. “Let’s follow her and see what this pendant is.”

“I have eyes on her,” First Officer Carlson said. “She’s heading to the 6 Train.”

“I got her,” Shanson said.

He was also dressed in a black suit, like Binu, with a black overcoat. Shanson walked up to Detective DellaCruz before she went down the stairs to catch the subway.

“Detective Ana DellaCruz,” Shanson said.

“Who’s asking?” she questioned, in both a bothered and curious tone.

“Special agent Matthews of the FBI,” Shanson said and showed her his phony FBI badge.

All of the agents in FDSR carried these badges, since they could not reveal their true organization. She looked at the badge and it looked legitimate to her, so she stopped.

“So, what can I do for you?” she asked.

“I need that pendant that Dr. Klein gave to you,” Shanson said.



“No,” she stated. “This case is under the jurisdiction of the NYPD and that is evidence in the case. I don’t have to give you anything. I know my rights.”

“This is a matter of national security,” he said with a sharp tone.

“Well, tell that to my captain,” she said, turned, and ran down the subway steps.

Shanson did not anticipate that move and he quickly lost her in the crowd.

“Don’t worry,” Cynthia said. “I was able to use your phone to tap into hers. I have her GPS and we can follow her wherever she goes.

“Glad one of us knows what they are doing,” Shanson said.

“Well, I had Solomon teach me that one,” Cynthia said.

“Okay, let’s go then. We have to get ready for the mission. We can keep her on watch and we know she will be there tonight with the SWAT team,” he said and left to meet with the rest of the group at the city headquarters.

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Somewhere below the streets of the financial district, the Unseen prepared for that evening. They had abandoned the previous location they had used, a place that had been rich in demonic and occult history. But where they met now was a darker and more sinister place. The catacombs spread out, connected to the subway and sewer systems, with access throughout the entire downtown area of New York City, from the Village all the way to Battery Park. The center of catacombs was directly under the place where the World Trade Center once sat. This was the same location where that Abyssite had been released during the Three Days of Darkness on the Earth, just over a year before. Satan had a temple built to him in that very place. Constructed by demons when the city was still young. Many cults of dark origin used this location to perform sacrifices and rituals to the Devil, worshiping him as a deity of Darkness. Now, it would be used by the Unseen to bring back Cassius, a fallen angel.

The place where they stood was vast, with a high, domed ceiling, supported by pillars and arches. In the

center was a platform and on it was recently carved one-inch-deep channels in the shape of a thirteen-pointed star encased inside diverging polygons that also formed thirteen points, with two interior circles and one exterior circle around it, the seal of Cassius. The channels of the polygram image were meant to collect the blood of sacrifices, thirteen virgins to be specific. Yes, they needed to collect these young girls, and they had a plan on where to get them, to ensure they were indeed virgins.

From that domed temple sprang tunnels that led to other chambers. In those chambers slept the growing tribe known as the Progeny of Cassius. They numbered more than eight hundred now, and tonight they would add two hundred more to their ranks. In addition to those were twelve highly ranking generals in the Progeny's army, who also waited to be fully transformed.

They were the gang that faced off against Jael and the members of ISOD at the Slaughterhouse just the day before. These men and women would finally be turned into full-blooded members of the demonic cult after Cassius was raised and established his rule over the world. Then their powers would be increased tenfold. They had waited over two hundred years for this. This band of twelve men and women were pirates, a gang of thieves and vagabonds looking to escape the reality of death. They had heard of the Progeny in Eastern Europe, and they had heard that the Progeny were immortal. The twelve craved this same immortality and searched far and wide for the demonic cult. Once they found the Progeny, they cunningly made a deal with them, to help them grow their numbers and release their master from his prison, in exchange for eternal life. Right away they went on a quest to find the book and the pendant that were needed to raise Cassius. These generals were granted great power, but had not been fully transformed, so they could move about in the daylight. For sunlight was fatal to, these vampiric creatures once fully transformed, turning them to ash. This was where the lore of the sun being deadly to vampires came from. All creatures created by dark magic had weaknesses, for the power of Satan was not absolute.

The twelve walked into the temple of Satan and presented themselves before the high priest of the Progeny of Cassius. He could not see them with his eyes, but he could sense them with his mind. His veiled

face was hidden from them as they bowed at his feet.

“Tonight, we will feast again,” he spoke in their minds. “More will join our ranks as well. Then tomorrow, we will gather the thirteen virgins and, once we have the pendant, we will perform the ritual to bring back our master Cassius. He will be released, and all humanity will bow before him. We will increase our ranks by the thousands and the rest of the world will be our nourishment.”

“Yes, lord,” the tall blond said with her head cast down at the floor. “The will of Cassius be done.”

## **END OF EPISODE 5**

## EPISODE 6: UNDONE

Before heading home, Ana DellaCruz stopped by a small antique shop on Canal Street. She had visited this shop before, when she first moved into the neighborhood. Ana loved looking at the beautiful pieces that were in the shop. Much of it was from China, relics from every age in that culture's rich history. The owners were a brother and sister, the children of the original owner. They took over the shop when they were in their late twenties, after their father suddenly passed away. Recently, their mother had gone home with the Lord as well. Yes, they were Chinese and they were Christian. Wang Sheng, their father, converted to Christianity after he left the secret order of the Keepers of the Light and moved to America. His children did not know the true story of their father's past. He had fought Radix back in China, years before, using the Ring of Solomon to battle the beast. He even followed that villain to the United States once and fought him in this very city. That was their last battle, and Wang Sheng barely survived. Only the power of the ring had kept him alive. But while in America, he met a woman and fell in love. She showed him the truth of the Gospel and he was baptized. When he returned to China, Sheng told his great teacher that he had a new calling. With his teacher's blessing, he left the order of Magi and returned to America to marry the woman he loved.

Ana was looking at a hand-carved jade statue depicting fully laden grapevines. It was exquisite. The son of Wang Sheng, Mark Wang, approached her. He was in his late forties, average height and build with a head full of thick black hair.

"Hey, Ana right?" Mark asked. "Nice to see you again."

"Hey, Mark," she answered. "Nice to see you, too. This piece is so beautiful."

"Yes, it just came in yesterday. Early 1900s. So, what brings you in today? I've been watching the news and saw the killings down in the meatpacking district. Glad you are safe. I'm sure it gets scary out there on the beat. They still say that right?"

Ana giggled, "I've never used that phrase but some of the older cops do. I'm doing good, still getting

used to the city, but I know how to take care of myself. It's definitely a tough time to be a cop. We aren't so popular these days."

"Yeah, well, we support the police here," Mark smiled at her.

"I actually did have something that I wanted to show you," Ana said and took out the pendant.

Mark looked at it with awe. The shop was empty, and Mark went immediately and locked the front door, turning the OPEN sign to read CLOSED from the outside.

"Sharon!" he shouted. "Sharon, come here!"

His sister walked out from the backroom. Sharon was two years older than her brother. She was short and petite, her hair also jet black and tied into a bun. She wore thick-framed tortoise shell glasses, with a gold chain that connected the temples.

"Yes, Mark, what's all the commotion," she said as she walked over. "Oh, the cop," she said. "Ana, right?"

"Yes," the detective answered. "How's everything?"

"You know, same as always – nothing around here changes," Sharon replied.

"Do you know what this is?" Ana asked them.

"You came to the right place," Mark responded. "I do know what this is. But let me warn you, if anyone knows you have this, your life is in danger. Come into the back."

Mark ushered Ana into the back room with Sharon following. There was a small kitchenette with a table and a couple of chairs. Against the back wall was a small sofa and past that was a half bath. Next to the bathroom door was a staircase that led up to an apartment. The brother and sister both lived in the apartment, which was the same place they grew up. Sharon had never married but Mark was divorced. His ex-wife ran out on him with one of her coworkers and left Mark a single father of their daughter, June, who had recently turned sixteen.

He asked Ana to have a seat on the couch and he and his sister took the chairs from the table and

brought them over. Mark held the pendant and studied it.

“Do you see how it still sparkles in the light,” Mark said. “This is a very old pendant, ancient Egyptian in origin, and the chain is original to the piece. The symbol on the pendant has roots in the darkest of black magic. But this pendant is best known as the Heart of Cassius. It was worn by Cassius, the reincarnation of the ancient Egyptian god Ra, it was believed, although some legends say Cassius was a fallen angel and a demon. This pendant was said to have been used to bring forth Cassius from his prison of darkness a few centuries ago. When he was awakened, it was given to him to wear as a sign of his power. He used it to create demons that he called the Progeny of Cassius. They were much like what we refer to as vampires. They drain their victims of their blood, their life force, leaving them shriveled up corpses.”

“So dramatic,” Sharon said and rolled her eyes. “These are all fairytales. Come on, Mark.”

“I don’t know, I think they are real. Or, at least, there is some truth in the stories,” Mark said. “With what happened at the warehouse and now this showing up, it seems even truer than we could ever have imagined. Where did you get this, Ana? It’s been lost for centuries. Cassius was defeated by a group of Chinese monks, who resealed him in his prison of darkness, along with five other beings. They were called the Scarred Heart, and they were led by a witch named Magda. The pendant was lost that day and his demons, the Progeny of Cassius, fled. There have been stories of them across Europe and in the Middle East ever since, but no hard evidence of their existence. Now, with all of this happening, this could be them.”

“It was inside the stomach of one of the warehouse workers. But I don’t know much about him or how he got this. Obviously, he was hiding it from his attackers and luckily, they didn’t find it,” Ana said.

“He must have had a strong will, for them not to read it from his mind. It’s said that the Progeny are clairvoyant and can read the minds of their victims,” Mark said. “I wonder who he was and why he was hiding the pendant. He must have known about the Progeny, and the evil they plan to conjure with the return of their master, and the dark magic he would wield.”

“What should I do?” she asked.

“All I know is that it cannot end up in the hands of the Progeny. They will use it to release Cassius. If he is released, we are all doomed, for sure. I mean real life, supervillain style doomed.”

“Sounds like a lot of mumbo jumbo but it does look valuable,” Sharon spoke up. “I’ll buy it from you. Could make a good piece for the shop.”

“No!” Mark commanded. “We can’t have that here. It’s too dangerous. Ana, if I were you, I would find a place to get rid of it. A place where they can’t find it and where you are as far from it as possible. They will come for you and, if they find you, they will kill you and take it.”

Ana didn’t know what to do. She put the pendant back into her pocket, thanked Mark and Sharon, and went home. The siblings reopened the shop, but Mark could not stop thinking about the pendant and what fate the city was in if the Progeny of Cassius was truly out there looking for it.

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A blond woman dressed in a leather jacket, thick rimmed shades, and tight leather pants with biker boots walked into Dr. Klein’s office. He was seated at his desk, doing paperwork. It was the woman from the Slaughterhouse, one of the twelve elite generals that served the Progeny of Cassius. She shut and locked the door behind her.

“Can I help you miss?” the doctor asked. He looked nervous.

“Yes, doc, you can help me,” the blond said. “I need that pendant you found.”

“Oh, umm, pendant?” the doctor gulped. “What pendant?”

The blond woman laughed. “Oh, you know what I mean, and you will give it to me.”

The Progeny of Cassius had tracked the pendant to that warehouse. A group known as the Eternal Seekers had acquired the pendant many years ago and hid it well, fearing the release of Cassius into the world. This underground order did not stay hidden from the sight of the demons that lurked in the shadows of the city streets. The demons heard whisperings of the pendant, and by order of Satan, quickly brought word to the high priest of the Progeny of Cassius. Now the Progeny had traced the pendant to this very

place, hidden in the belly of one of the corpses from the night before.

The blond woman walked over, lifted the doctor by his throat, and pinned him against the wall.

“If you scream, I will kill you,” the woman said. “Now where is it?”

“I gave it to a cop,” he said, terrified. “Detective Ana DellaCruz. She has it, I swear.”

“Good boy,” she said. “I love a canary that sings so easily. But I also like to eat the canary when I’m done playing with it.”

The woman opened her mouth and exposed two vampire-like fangs. She slammed the doctor onto his desk and covered his mouth so he could not scream. Then she sunk her teeth deep into the nape of the doctor’s neck, and proceeded to drink his blood, until there was none left. His body lay on the floor now, shriveled up. As quickly as the woman came, she left. The staff did not realize that the doctor was lying dead in his office until she was far gone.

Now, the Progeny of Cassius knew where the pendant was. She would tell the high priest later. But first, she and the rest of the twelve generals in the Progeny’s army had another appointment to keep.

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Back at FDSR headquarters, the team was getting ready for that evening’s events. They did not have the location yet, but they had a plan. Shanson, Jael, Cynthia, and Chase would enter the event dressed for the occasion, while the rest of the team, including Jael’s elite soldiers, were ready to storm the event once they had a lock on the situation and the targets were in sight. The plan was laid out, vehicles were prepped, weapons were ready, and the entire team was prepared to suit up and head out. Chase and Cynthia locked eyes as they passed each other.

“Hey,” was all Chase could muster up.

“Hey, yourself,” Cynthia replied. “How about after we’re done killing some vamps, you take me out and show me your moves on the dance floor?”

“I was about to ask you the same thing,” Chase replied with a smile. “Not sure there are any clubs open



with the pandemic and all, but we can always just have our own dance party here. And I hear the cafeteria makes a mean prime rib.”

Cynthia laughed. “Yeah, I forgot about that. Everything is closed except for the Slaughterhouse. But honestly, I don’t mind going there, at least we can get some one-on-one time.”

“Save the one-on-one time for training,” Jael said. “We have a mission and lives are at stake.”

“Don’t be so uptight,” Shanson said from behind.

Cynthia and Chase walked away, and Jael turned to Shanson.

“Well, maybe you need to focus, too,” Jael said to Shanson. “You were more worried about that blond’s body the other night, than the fact that she tried to kill us.”

“Hey, in my defense,” Shanson said. “I didn’t know she was part of the Unseen when I first saw her. I mean, all I noticed was how good she looked and, anyway, *she* approached me. Jealous much?”

“In your dreams, Conan,” Jael snarked and stormed off.

Shanson turned and left to get ready, confused by Jael’s comments.

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It was a bit chilly, but the small coffee shop had patio heaters outside for their patrons. Finnegan Rogers sat across from Sandra Bane – two old friends finally catching up after all these years. They had been talking about when they were kids and all the trouble they used to get into. Times seemed much simpler back then. Now they were dealing with murders and a pandemic sweeping over the whole planet. The world had seemed like it was so vast back then and now was so small. The city was locked up. Most people could not go to work. They could barely grab a cup of coffee. But it was good to have human contact. The world was so virtual these days and soon it would only get more so. Remote working would rise, and the city would see a huge exodus over the next few months. But for that moment, they just sat and laughed and looked into each other’s eyes. For that moment they were happy.

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On Trinity Place, near Trinity Church, was an old brownstone that was used as an orphanage for young girls. The caretaker was a stern woman named Ms. Nancy Henchwood. The children called her Nasty Nan because of how she treated them. She knew about her nickname, but she never let on. The girls had just been put to bed after supper. They had all brushed their teeth and drank their glass of water before bedtime. Unknown to the girls in her care, there was more than water in their glasses. Nasty Nan mixed in a special something that would ensure the girls would not wake up until the morning. The clear and tasteless drug had worked, and the girls were all knocked out in their beds.

“They are ready for you,” Nancy said to the woman standing beside her.

It was the blond woman from the Slaughterhouse. She and the eleven other super-powered generals were all at the orphanage.

“You will be rewarded tonight at the event, Ms. Henchwood,” the blond said.

The twelve generals walked into the girls’ dormitory and each general grabbed one child to carry away. The large man, with the chain slung over the back of his neck, grabbed two girls and threw one over each shoulder. Then they all moved down to the orphanage basement. It was unfinished and the light was dim. Hidden in the back was an old metal door that led to a tunnel under the streets. This passageway eventually connected to other tunnels, the sewer, and the subway system at different stations. It was used many years ago as part of the Underground Railroad, offering refuge and passage to escaped slaves. The twelve elite generals of the Progeny of Cassius used the passageway now to take the young girls to their high priest. They had the thirteen virgins they needed for the sacrifice.

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An hour later, in the catacombs underneath the New York City streets, the evil brood known as the Progeny of Cassius were preparing for that night’s event. The thirteen young girls that they had kidnapped were still unconscious. They were bound with rope and each one laid atop a stone bed. The high priest looked at the girls and fantasized about the sweet and savory blood running through their veins – the taste of it like

ambrosia on his tongue. But that delicacy was not for him to partake in. No, it was meant for only one – Cassius, their lord and master. These girls would be drained of their blood and, together with the spell, Cassius would be released from his prison. The first meal for him would be the blood poured out as a sacrifice to the Prince of Darkness, who made this all possible. Satan was at the center of every evil scheme, for the Devil was the originator of all Darkness, a murderer, and a liar from the beginning, as it is said. He had given them the book. He gave the Egyptians the pendant that was used in this ritual. Mere devices crafted in the Darkness to defy the God that created him.

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Throughout the city, phones buzzed with notifications, giving the location for tonight’s liberation event. It would start in an hour. Many ignored it, thanks to the news reports, but some took their chances. They never trusted the media or the government. This was their chance to truly be free, they thought. Others were coming with a purpose. They were promised grand things by the Progeny, life everlasting and power to rule the world.

Detective Ana DellaCruz readied her SWAT team and then she headed to the event, dressed for a night out, but still ready for a fight. She wore a sleeveless burgundy wide-legged jumpsuit, with just a hint of lace on the small of her back. The front had a low-cut V neckline, but not cut too low. Over her shoulders she wore a sheer burgundy shawl. She had a well-placed hidden pocket at the waist so she could access her handgun, when needed. For shoes, she decided on a pair of gold, pointy-toed dress flats. They were a little flashy and not the most practical, but a lot easier to move in than heels.

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At the FDSR New York City Headquarters, everyone was geared up and ready to shuttle down to the location. All troops would ride in one of the large tactical vehicles that Jessie would drive, with Solomon in the passenger seat. The rest of the crew would be in the back. Some of them had ridden in one of these vehicles the last time, when they had fought against the Abyssite down by the Freedom Tower. Memories of

that event flooded through each of their minds as they recalled the horror of that demonic creature and all the havoc it caused.

Downstairs in the prep room just outside the garage, the team began to meet up to leave for their mission. The soldiers and ISOD members wore their usual field gear – armored padded vests, arm guards, and shin guards, plus additional padding on the elbows and knees, combat boots, and tactical gloves. They also wore helmets, each with a built-in visor that helped protect their eyes and also served as a display screen. The helmets included receivers and transmitters that allowed them all to communicate when in the field.

Shanson, and Chase entered the prep room next, dressed for the event. Both Shanson and Chase wore black tuxedos, with black patent leather shoes equipped with high traction rubber soles. They each had a small automatic pistol hidden under their jackets. The pistols were loaded with silver-tipped bullets and they each carried four magazines. Chase also had a small silver-tipped knife strapped to his left side, just in case.

Then Cynthia walked into the prep room, and Chase was stunned by her looks. Her hair was slightly curled and flowed behind her. The outfit she wore was a modern take on the classic Indian sari. Her blouse was violet, and sequined, with a squared off neckline and ruffled sleeves. Instead of a petticoat dress under it, she had a flowing pair of violet matching pants that were pleated and flared at the bottom to give the impression that she wore a dress. The matching sequined sari was tucked into the pants, wrapped around her in traditional fashion, and was nicely draped over her left shoulder. Under her sari, she also hid one of the automatic pistols with extra magazines carrying the same bullets as the others.

Finally, Jael walked into the prep room and the team's jaws dropped. Because she was a casual type, they had never seen the sergeant dressed for a night out. But tonight, she was dressed to impress and Shanson was impressed. She wore a black, mermaid maxi dress, her left leg parting the slit, which ran up her thigh. The neckline was cut low in a V and the straps crossed in the back, which was also cut low. She wore a pair of black, strappy sandals that had a ribbon lace at the top, wrapped up her calves and tied in the

back. With no place to hide her pistol in her outfit, she instead placed it in a small cross-body clutch with a metal chain. This she wore over her right shoulder with the bag sitting on her left side.

“Shan, you can pick up your jaw off the floor, whenever you’re ready,” Jael jabbed.

Shanson looked at her with a smirk, knowing that he was caught. But he did not mind. She looked gorgeous and there was nothing he could do but stare at her.

Soon, these moments of style and personal interaction came to a close and it was time to move out – to destroy the demons that plagued the city.

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Underneath the concrete streets of the city was a whole world of its own, catacombs from a time before the city was built. It was a vast tunnel system that had been extensively expanded over the years. Some of the newer passageways were parts of the sewer and subway system, other parts were used as escape routes, especially during the days of the Underground Railroad. And some of the tunnels were simply built by men and women who had great wealth and much time on their hands, to dabble in the occult.

They held rituals down in the depths under the city, worshipping Satan and other demons to gain dark power. But the power they sought was useless, for in the Darkness was no real power, only death and destruction of the soul. The high priest of the Progeny of Cassius stood under the vast dome that Satan himself had built, a place where many sacrificed to that false god, and held dark ceremonies. It was located underneath where the World Trade Center buildings once stood – the very same place where Satan released the Abyssite onto New York City streets, a little over a year ago. This place was perfect for the spell the high priest would cast to bring back Cassius. It was the perfect throne room for his lord to rule from. But before that could take place, there was one more event that was about to transpire, and one more item they needed to obtain.

In another underground room, about a mile away from the domed temple of Satan, everyone entered for tonight’s event. They had been ushered through the cellars of four different locations in downtown

Manhattan, but they all funneled into this same underground ballroom. The music was loud with a lively beat – so much so that many were already dancing. No one at the party wore a face mask, which was in contrast to what was now the new norm for living on the streets above. With the pandemic, you could barely leave your home, and when you did, you had to mask up. People began to feel caged, and isolated. Depression was on the rise, and this event was refreshing to all who attended. There were warnings all over the news not to come here. They were told they would all be killed. But that was nothing more than propaganda, more fake news, they all thought. The drinks flowed like water, drugs passed around like candy, some of the finest food in the city, and one of the most intense laser light shows these people had ever seen. The party was epic by worldly standards, and everyone there was living it up.

The underground ballroom was built in the 1920s. It was first used as a place for the elite to gather and hold secret parties during the prohibition. It was elegant – marble floors and columns throughout, antique crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling. The molding along the walls was exquisite, and there were rare and expensive paintings hanging all around. The group of four FDSR agents walked past the two large members of the Progeny who were guarding the door. These evil guards were dressed in the usual black leather from head to toe, their faces fully masked, but their minds reading all who walked in. They knew exactly who entered and what their intentions were, and now so did the high priest.

“Let them be,” the high priest said in the minds of the two guards. “They pose no real threat. They soon will be dead along with the others. That is, except for the woman. The one who escaped us in Israel. I want her for my own. She escaped me twice already, but she will not escape again. When I drink her blood, it will be most sweet.”

The couples broke off, Shanson with Jael, and Cynthia with Chase. The latter two decided to hit the dance floor and make this show as believable as possible. Jael and Shanson, on the other hand, walked over to the bar. They stood away from the food and drinks, not knowing if they had been tampered with. Before they could get too comfortable, Shanson felt a tap on his shoulder,

“Agent Matthews,” the voice said.

“Oh hey, yes, Detective DellaCruz,” he answered when he saw who it was. “What brings you here?”

“Same as you, I presume,” she replied.

“Well, I am on duty, if that is what you mean,” Shanson said with a smile.

“Uh-hmm,” Jael jabbed Shanson in the ribs with her elbow.

“Oh, who is this?” Ana asked. “Your date?”

Shanson began to answer but was cut off by Jael.

“Yes, I’m his date, agent Zahavi. Sorry, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Sorry,” Shanson said. “This is Detective DellaCruz. Remember, I told you about her.”

“No,” Jael said with a snarl. “I don’t remember.”

Shanson tried to laugh it off, “Come on, she knows we’re FBI,” he whispered to Jael and winked.

“Not here, sweetie,” Jael said to Shanson and giggled, adding to her role-playing.

“I guess we really shouldn’t talk here,” Ana said. “But fair warning, I didn’t come alone.”

Shanson leaned over to Ana and whispered in her ear, “Neither did we.”

“Good,” she said in return.

Jael grabbed Shanson by the arm and pulled him away.

“Sorry, this is our song,” Jael said and took Shanson to the dance floor.

On the dance floor, the music changed to a modern waltz and the couple drew closer as they moved to the music.

“What do you think you are doing?” Jael said.

“Me? What am I doing? What about you?” Shanson questioned his partner.

“Do you have to flirt with every girl you see?”

“Is that what this is about?” he asked and laughed. “I can flirt with whoever I want to. I am single.”

“I am single,” Jael mocked him. “We need to focus on the mission. Why did you tell her we had people

here?”

“She thinks we are FBI, so relax, she’s a cop,” Shanson said. “We know she has a SWAT team ready to fill this place up. We just don’t know what they can do. They aren’t prepared to fight these things.”

“Well, we are,” Jael said. “So, stay focused and when the time is right, we will make our move and hopefully your girlfriend won’t get caught in the crossfire.”

“She not my girlfriend.”

“Whatever,” Jael said and kept dancing.

She turned and smiled at Ana. Then she threw her hair back and twirled.

Across the room, Chase and Cynthia danced close in each other’s arms. They talked as they moved but their conversation was not about the mission – it was more personal.

“You’re a very good dancer,” Cynthia said.

“Well, it’s in my blood,” Chase answered. “My mom was a dance instructor and taught all of us when we were young. You’re pretty good yourself.”

“Pretty good?” Cynthia asked and followed it with some fancy steps of her own.

“Well, maybe excellent,” Chase said, and then he leaned in and kissed her.

Cynthia was caught off guard at first, but then just let it happen. In their line of work, there was little time for relationships or anything that resembled a normal life. But for that single moment, they enjoyed the feeling of each other’s lips and hoped that they could have at least a small taste of normal.

The music stopped. Everyone stood still and turned toward the front of the room. It was almost as if they were following a command. The high priest came out and, just as he had at the last event, he called all those who were predestined to join their ranks to step forward and leave through the doorway behind him. These men and women all carried a red rose and were the same individuals who drank the blood in the underground chapel at the last event. As one woman with a rose passed by, Jael stealthily placed a tiny sticker on the back of her dress. The sticker contained a very small homing device, which gave out a signal



that Solomon was already beginning to track.

Solomon was outside, in the tactical vehicle, giving commands to the rest of the team as he tracked the signal under the street. The members of ISOD, along with Jael's soldiers, cautiously left the vehicle and walked around to the side of the building where they were parked. They surveyed the area and found that the street was completely empty, not a soul in sight. They walked over to the building's door and found it was locked. Jessie easily picked the lock and let them all inside. Quickly and quietly, they walked toward the stairwell. Once inside the stairwell, they headed to the basement. Jenny peered through the small glass window in the basement door.

"I see about five of them, standing there," she said. "They are all in black, faces fully covered, so I can't tell if they can see me or not."

"Didn't Jael say they were clairvoyant?" Binu asked. "They must be reading our minds as we speak."

"That's ridiculous," Jessie said.

"Wait, they are walking toward the door! Get back!" Jenny said.

All at once, they each began feeling lightheaded and dropped to one knee. The sensation of needles in their skulls struck each of them. The door opened, and the members of the Unseen walked into the stairwell. They pulled their masks off, revealing their demonic faces. Each of their hands grew razor sharp claws, and they opened their mouths ready to strike. Solomon had been monitoring the situation and sent a counterfrequency into the earpiece of each member of his team. The sound helped alleviate the feeling of pins in their skulls and Jenny was the first to move.

She grabbed her automatic rifle and fired a stream of silver-tipped bullets at the attacking monstrosities. The rest of the team took out their guns and fired as well. There were more soldiers from the FDSR than Unseen, and they soon overtook their foes, causing them to retreat back inside the basement. The team followed and kept firing at the demons. The bullets hurt the Unseen but did not kill them.

Jenny's team soon discovered that the basement was unfinished and there was an old gas furnace still

operating down there, its pipes running along the ceiling. The team had to be very cautious where they shot or else they could ignite a gas explosion with misplaced rounds.

The Unseen ran for another door in the far back of the basement and the FDSR soldiers ceased fire. They followed close behind and went through the old iron door. It led to one of the underground tunnels. It was dark and the tunnel was made of cobblestone, including the floor. The soldiers each had a light on their helmet and turned them on. They walked forward. The screens on their visors showed them where to go. They were still following the signal from the device that Jael had placed on that woman. Solomon was able to use the GPS satellites above the Earth to help build a map of the tunnels. The soldiers crept slowly through the tunnels. The Unseen were a quiet breed. They made no noise and could be anywhere, watching and waiting to attack.

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Back inside the event, the last of the rose bearers had gone, but the high priest did not leave. He stepped down from the stage and seemed to float over to Jael. Three of the Unseen walked over, fully garbed in black leather, their chrome buttons reflecting the lights from the disco ball. These tall, lanky creatures towered over the FDSR sergeant.

“I would like you to be my special guest,” the high priest spoke to Jael in her mind.

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” Jael said and spit onto the high priest’s veil.

“A feisty one,” he said telepathically. “You have no choice.”

Suddenly, she could not move, and neither could Shanson, Chase, or Cynthia. Two of the Unseen each grabbed one of Jael’s arms and began to walk her out behind the high priest. She obeyed them, unable to fight their will. Ana saw what was happening and began to walk over. Before she could take a second step, the large man with the chain slung over the back of his neck, stood in front of her. The blond woman soon followed.

“Where do you think you’re going, detective?” the blond demanded, as she walked closer to Ana. “This

party is just getting started. And, now, I think you will come with us, too.”

The large man put his hand on Ana’s shoulder and made a fist.

“You don’t want him to ruin that pretty face of yours, do you?” the blond asked. “And I do mean pretty. Did I tell you that you look absolutely fetching tonight?” She winked and blew a kiss.

The large man took his hand off Ana’s shoulder and crossed his arms. The detective stepped back, pulled out her gun, and shouted “Everyone freeze, NYPD!”

Ana pointed the gun at the blond, and with her left hand sent out an alert to the SWAT team with her cell phone.

“What a joke,” the blond said.

Before Ana could pull the trigger, the blond knocked her out with a lightning-fast right hook. The large man caught Ana before she hit the ground and threw her over his shoulder. Everyone in the place was frozen in place. Some of them wanted to run out but somehow none of them could move.

“Nothing to see here, she just had too much to drink,” the blond announced. “Carry on!”

The large man carried Ana out the same door that Jael had just been ushered through. The music came back on, and everyone was able to move again. They somehow forgot about the events that had just occurred and were all engrossed once again in dancing and revelry. Shanson, Chase, and Cynthia were finally able to move and went toward the door at the front, but it was locked. All the doors were locked. The lights flashed faster and faster and the room seemed to be spinning.

Suddenly, the walls were lined with members of the Unseen. It was time for the Progeny of Cassius to feed. They took off their masks revealing their horrid faces, like cobras ready to strike. Then their long sharp claws ripped through their gloves and boots. Large bat-like wings shot out from their backs, tearing through their leather garments. The crowd began to panic but it was no use. The massacre was about to begin.

**END OF EPISODE 6**

