



Monster Town

A Novel

by

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writing as**

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PROLOGUE

The monster struck him again. Harder this time. A single claw raking flesh on the follow-through. JD felt something in the back of his mouth splinter like nine-pins. Not the most encouraging of signs, all things being equal. He grinned anyway. It was a bad habit of his. He always grinned when he was in trouble. The more the trouble, the fiercer the grin. And right about now he was grinning like the Cheshire Cat cornholing Felix in a pot full of tuna casserole.

Oo-fuckin'-RA!

A voice fought its way toward him through the fog in his head. The words in English, the accent French. JD spat out the remnants of a tooth and blinked the blood from his eyes to try and focus on what was being said, and who was saying it.

He got as far as, "...the girl in the photograph..." before another blow cannoned into his skull.

There would be more to come. That much he knew. More words. More bravado. More pain. But the darkness would have none of it, and quietly wooed JD back to that childhood place where things cannot be unremembered. And some things shouldn't be...

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The car was parked at the far end of a deserted gas station just south of Irwin Prairie, Ohio. It was a late model Chevy Explorer and by anyone's reckoning should've been put out of its misery at least twenty years before. Jerome David Enron sat hunched in the backseat, his sweat gluing his school uniform to the fake leather upholstery like a bunion to the back of a band-aid. The air outside the car was unnaturally humid, the night thick with errant Gypsy Moths and Seepage Dancers, temporarily absconding their wetlands home. And - not that he was counting - but it was now four hours, three minutes and ten seconds until his thirteen birthday. And time was dragging.

Thirteen was unlucky for some, but not for Jerome. For him it was a rite of passage. Twelve was a child. Thirteen was a man. And there would be no place in a man's world for *Tommy*.

Tommy David Enron had just turned seven, and was the sort of freckle faced kid-brother you told your friends was *adopted*, for fear word would get out that you shared the same DNA. And tonight, as per usual, Tommy was to blame for everything. Including - but not limited to - the time Jerome was currently serving in the back of the Chevy Explorer while his parents, Bessany and David, took Tommy into the gas station to pee.

Again.

Not wanting to be part of a world where time stood still and birthdays refused to arrive no matter how much you thought about them, Jerome slumped low in the back seat of the Explorer and ported his consciousness into the XTC holographic game console that lay beside him. His mind effortlessly interfacing with the all too real landscape of holospace.

Because of that, he didn't see the rusting RV pull up on the far side of the gas station. Didn't see the black faced wyvern, the one-eyed troll and the blonde vampire twins clamber out, their monstrous faces all twisted and malign. Oh the grown up JD saw them now all right. He always saw them in the dream. It was part of his torment. To be able to see everything, but change nothing. The darkness was good like that. Regurgitating long forgotten happenings and guilt in equal measure.

Suddenly time skipped forward, as time is want to do in the place where it holds no power, and JD's perspective changed from watching himself as child, to watching the robbery go down inside the gas station. His point of view both omniscient and impotent.

The monsters had already behaved monstrously. David Enron lay slumped against the hotdog machine, his head propped up by the yellow sign offering French Mustard (made in Iowa). Bessany lay beside him, tears staining

her porcelain cheeks. She too was battered and bloody where they had slapped her around. Nearby, the young Muslim gas station attendant cowered in the corner, sobbing and biting on his bottom lip as if he was trying to chew his way toward Mecca one mouthful at a time.

The twin vampires ignored the pitiful whines of the norms. The living were of little consequence when they weren't hungry. They were nothing more than larvae bloating inside a corpse. Part of death. And death was nothing more than another bill to be paid for the high cost of living. Instead, the vampires busied themselves emptying the till, while the troll and wyvern worked with grim determination stuffing cigarettes and cans of beer into black garbage bags. They didn't whistle while they worked. Far from it. They swore. A litany of whispered obscenities streamed from their mouths, getting louder and louder as their bags filled. The invectives had one purpose: to terrify. And they did just that. If the norms were lucky enough to survive the robbery, they would be haunted by the monsters' bestial vulgarities for the rest of their natural lives. The words burned into the very fabric of their souls. And, if life was short, well that didn't matter, because they'd still hear the words while they rotted six feet under. It was a gift, this language of the damned. And not all gifts were

meant to be unwrapped. Some were better off buried in the bedrock of hell.

The toilet in the rest room flushed.

Tommy walked out, wiping his wet hands into the seat of his brown corduroy pants. He looked up at the rows of dusty shelves that towered before him. Well-thumbed magazines displayed big butts and saggy breasts. 40+, 50+, 60+ skin mags offering treats of a wrinkled variety. Magazines with women who knew what they were doing, and for a price you got the distinct impression they'd do it for you. Other magazines catered for those with more monstrous tastes, Vampire Seduction promising dead sexiness, Zombie Whore promising sexiness with the dead, and Tooth and Claw offered non-stop were-loving, and tips on how to get the fur out from between your teeth when you were done.

And like that everything changed.

"*Half-meat!*" cried the wyvern singling out the boy's scent from between the buttered popcorn and day old donuts. Instantly her gigantic reptilian wings unfurled and beat the air, lifting her toward the ceiling, and then again and again, battering everyone in the gas station with the force of their thrashing.

"*Crackow, no!*" the younger of the vampire twins roared. But, even as the words had left his bloodless lips, the wyvern was already soaring across the gas

station and swooping down on the helpless boy, her talons ripping into his stomach in one carnal motion, her jagged incisors feasting on the glistening wet coils of his intestines as they unravelled. Small boys offering much red meat if you knew where to cut.

The older vampire twin - they must have been born into the undead decades apart, making this one seem so much older despite immortality - scratched the scar over his right eye. The smell of death permeated the room.

"Sorry about this folks," he said to the norms, and meant it, "it really wasn't supposed to go down like this, you know? But, life's a bitch and then you die. *Horribly.*"

The twin vampires swept forward as one, the air around them rippling and blurring as they threw their heads back and released the beast within. Jaws distended, teeth bared, elongating into wicked fangs, turning the last lingering edge of humanity they possessed into something altogether monstrous. And, because witnesses were the last thing they needed now norm blood had been spilt upon the earth, they did not stop feeding until the three remaining norms were desiccated husks beneath their feet. Then they threw the lifeless meat to the troll so he could finish what they had started. Troll pallets being far less discerning than most.

As the troll's teeth crunched into the skulls of David and Bessany Enron, the darkness abruptly lifted, catapulting JD once more into the here of light and the now of pain.

Somewhere close a werewolf howled.