

# “Chernobog Takes Roanoke”

## A Short Story

by

T.D. Smith

### 1.

They had photographed him, and that had been it. There were no more vampires, no more ghouls, no more ghosts. There were no goblins, banshees, zombies, or any other various creatures of the like around anywhere anymore.

For fear was not the *only* driving force these creepy beings derived from humans that maintained their existence. Uncertainty that caused a particular variety of anxiety in human beings, the very ambiguity of whether such creatures existed was an adequate supplement to fear. An eerie feeling one is being watched, or about to be sprung upon at any moment, or seeing a fluttering of something moving in one's peripheral vision that harkened the mind back to some long forgotten, repressed scary moment, movie, or tale of fright was often enough to keep the creatures of the night alive. Every once in a while, however, they still needed a scare. A sudden, quick, healthy burst of contact that bewildered and terrorized the humans who beheld them, even partially, in a chilling, passing moment.

But now Chernobog, the great and mighty, had been photographed, and in that split second the uncertainty vanished, and everything had ended. All his subjects had either immediately vanished, or severely diminished, reverting to normal looking, if ugly humans. He bemoaned this privately in his dark castle. He had to do something, he thought, as he gulped down his glass of clear, cold vodka. He needed to restore them, to save them, bringing back their powers, before his suffering subjects succumbed to starvation and faced permanent extinction.

What could he do, though? He could not fight them without his claws, horns, teeth, and wide-spanning, bat-like wings. He had never used them to do any harm to humans before, only to frighten them, but now that he no longer had them, he could do neither. Oh, the grotesque, grim irony, and *agony*.

The world now believed in him, knew he was real.

Yet now he was impotent, his very existence ethereal, hardly there.

How could he, who was now merely a tall, thin skeleton of a man, who looked to be balding and middle-aged, with dark circles under his eyes, take on the entire human race, scaring the daylights out of them? For only such could bring back his power and majesty, but was implausible, unrealistic, so out of reach!

He gazed out the window at his kingdom of night and dark from the last, crumbling tower on the fast fading bald mountain in the middle of Siberia and lamented. His people were dying, disappearing. Not even the stories, all that remained of them, were frightful enough to sustain them.

An idea flickered in Chernobog's head as he thought this, the light of the full moon glinting off his balding head and its ever reversing of his formerly pasty complexion. The stories! Of course. Grabbing what few of his belongings he could throw into the black briefcase himself (for the ranks of his minions had dwindled to where he was the only one in the dank, dark, lonely tower) he departed, making his way across the tundra in big, brown snow boots, a thick brown fur coat, and winter hat whose flaps hung down covering his ears. He would make his way first to Moscow, where he would enact phase one of his newly formed plan, travel across Europe on his spook-quest, into the West, and eventually wind up in America.

## 2.

All manner of creatures of the night—ghosts, goblins, vampires and the like—had returned. Even elves, pixies, fairies, and mermaids, yes *mermaids*. Or so Lincoln insisted to his long, lost friend Alex, shaking and waving his long, flowing brown hair all about as he passionately argued his point. There were reports of them in the paper, and all over the internet. Dark tales of hauntings and demons, as well as encouraging stories of enlightening encounters with angels. Of course, Alex was having none of it.

"I swear, off the coast of Cali I saw a mermaid, clear as day. *Swear* it!" Lincoln said, his brow raised and lips tight over his brown, bushy chin beard that protruded outward in every direction. He placed a hand over his heart and wore a look of conviction on his face.

"Uh-huh." Alex said, placidly, "And what else had you partaken of that day?"

"What? Nothing!" Lincoln snapped back. "Okay, so *something*. But that doesn't matter. I saw the mermaid. It was really a mermaid. I saw her plain as day and she spoke to me."

Alex reared his buzz cut head back and clean shaven, somewhat olive yet freckled face and laughed heartily.

"Oh, so now she *talked* to you, did she?" Alex said, joshing his friend.

"Yeah. She sure did." Lincoln said, folding his arms and frowning. "She sure did."

Alex didn't believe in this sort of thing at all. He was the strong rational type. He had missed his friend Lincoln, a close high school companion, while he had served his four years in the U.S. Air Force. He was out now on honorable discharge and had returned to his childhood home in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains looking for work, while volunteering at the local Fire Station at night. Lincoln, too, was in this predicament, but had not served in the military like his friend. The two of them had recently reconnected through social media and had met up at this fairly new local watering hole for a night of drinks and catching up.

There had indeed been an influx lately of reports of paranormal creatures and strange encounters in the news. Stories of this nature were usually confined to tabloids that were less than reliable regarding the accuracy of their facts and questionable methods of obtaining them. Consequently, such tales were normally relegated to the realm of nonsense and unreliability, falsehoods. But lately, the stories had been pouring in much more frequently and in large quantities to the mainstream media people generally trusted, even to the local news stations and papers.

Alex thought nothing of any of this. It was just a fad, like fidget spinners or duck face photos. Everyone felt like they needed to join the bandwagon and make up a story about a fantastic encounter with an enchanted being to fit in and be a part of the craze. Still, enough of these stories existed that even a rational guy like Alex thought that by the law of averages a few of them might have more credibility, be more grounded in real goings on than others, if in the periphery of his mind.

Regardless of how or why these stories came to be, they were there in multitude. Alex had to acknowledge that fact. They had infiltrated the internet, and the subconscious of the people, who were beginning to be scared again. A pervasive uneasiness reminiscent of ancient times had returned. Surrounded and buffeted by these tales all day, people would think, if unconsciously at night, about them and wonder if they were true. Some even saw movements and flashes in corners of their peripheral vision. What if, then, the very fear and bombardment on the human psyche with all these stories and information therein was causing a subconscious belief based in fear in the people, which was in turn giving these creatures substance, existence?

“Nah!” couldn’t be!” Alex assured himself in his mind.

\*\*\*

Several more friends met up with him and Lincoln a little later and they all ordered pints and kicked them back and carried on. They caught up and reminisced with each other, until they were done with that place. Deciding to hop to the next bar, and finally all agreeing upon their old hangout, a bar and grill up the hill from their town’s mall, the group departed.

The friends entered the place and got a booth with a big table that could accommodate all of them in the far corner of the restaurant’s main floor, situated between the building’s two wings, each of which was equipped with a fully stocked and staffed bar. The hostess sat them, then a few minutes later their waitress came and took their order of various wings and pints of beer. Alex glanced about between conversations here and there, and noticed a peculiar looking pale, bald man with rather narrow, pointed ears. He was wearing darkly colored jeans and a blank, black t-shirt.

The odd man sat in the corner on the opposite side of the floor on a stool next to a high table. He stared out at the young men as he knocked back shot after shot of vodka, which he ordered repeatedly. He ordered no food or water. Alex watched him as the man watched them. He had been trained to see unusual things like this in the Air Force, and he found this man staring at him and his friends oddly perplexing. The man sat with his unsettlingly white arms folded on the table in front of him.

Finally, Alex allowed himself to ignore the staring stranger and relaxed, enjoying himself and sipping down several pints of a blonde ale. The evening came, and the sun set outside the window. A pale full moon began to rise over the horizon. The night began to get fuzzy for some, and downright hazy for others of the young friends with each pint they drained.

They moved outside to the outdoor patio later, by request of the owner, who was glad they were there and spending money, but asked if they were primarily going to drink if they minded terribly moving their party outdoors to make room for people who wanted to eat inside, as they were desperately in need of table space for such people indoors. The friends graciously retreated outside.

There they talked about everything and everyone, old friends, teachers, school days, stores in their town that had opened, closed, local politics, etc. Eventually, it being a cool October night with a gentle breeze blowing outside, they began telling ghost stories. Such was the trend, with all the alleged paranormal activity in the news, but the weather matched the mood, making ghoulish tales even more appropriate. For that autumn wind blew through the already tumbling leaves of the great and tall trees on the mountains that were growing steadily more orange with each passing day and carried with it a crisp, oaky fragrance, distinctly indicative of fall in the Virginia mountains. That specific scent swirled around them and filled them as they each went around a circle trying to spook the other as best they could. Some of the stories were awful and so un-scary that everyone laughed. Others were illogical and unbelievable, if a little spooky.

At length, Lincoln piped in with his own tale. He told his story that he swore was true about how one dark night, when he had first moved back into town, he was walking his dog late when he noticed something stirring under a streetlamp. Approaching it, to his horror he realized it was a woman, or at least a torso and face and one arm of a woman. She was covered in blood and looked not exactly mutilated, but as if the rest of her missing parts had never even been there, never *existed*, in the first place. She called out to him, but he did not remember what she had said, for he was too frightened. She propped herself up on her one elbow and pulled herself close to him. Blood gushed from her mouth as she struggled forward, squirming and letting out a shrill shriek that pierced both his ears and his soul.

Lincoln's dog's hair had stood on end, and it turned on its heels and ran, tugging the leash in his hand. Lincoln followed the wise beagle, turning and fleeing. He glanced back once again, and she was, surprisingly and frighteningly, hot on his trail. He ran like hell, faster than he ever had before, of that he was sure, down a hill, across a creek, and throwing his dog over first, hopped over a neighbor's fence and joined his dog on another side of his mom's neighborhood. They kept running and did not stop or look back again, entering their home, slamming and bolting the door, then turning on every single light in the house and shaking on the couch watching television until his mother returned from the store later.

Having finished his story, most of the young men were laughing, but some were silent, secretly spooked by his urban legend and its enthusiastic delivery. Alex just rolled his eyes.

"Yeah right," Alex scoffed, "You saw the infamous Bleeding Lady that night, like an alleged hundred other folks around here, just like you saw that mermaid!"

"I swear to God it's true! Creepiest shit I've ever experienced."

"Oh, come on! You ripped that off from Kanye West's string of tweets last year!" Alex added, and the whole lot of them erupted in laughter. "It's exactly the same story *he* posted one time!"

"I remember seeing that tweet now!" someone gasped between laughs.

"Oh, yeah!" declared another.

Indeed, the great and talented entertainer himself, having purchased some artwork, and more recently, property, in the Roanoke area, had posted a story in a stream of rapidly flung

together tweets on the morning after Halloween a year ago, the plot of which was suspiciously similar to Lincoln's story.

"Oh, as if you can do better, Alex!" Lincoln challenged, a bit steamed now.

"Sure," Alex said, shrugging, then, "So it was late one night at the Fire Station, and we got this call to an old mansion in South West that's abandoned, and supposedly haunted..."

"Oh *God*, not *this* story again!" Lincoln interjected, "Is this the ghost fire story?"

"Um...maybe." Alex said.

"That is the *stupidest* shit I've ever heard!"

"It's *real*. It *really* happened!" Alex said, in a tone purposefully mimicking Lincoln's when he said his stories were true.

"No, it fucking isn't!" Lincoln said, amused underneath and half smiling, but attempting to remain looking cool in front of the group, and then, "It's dumb as shit. You go to put out a fire at this old creepy mansion and the fire hoses' streams don't put it out and it spreads and you fear it's gonna consume and kill all of you when it suddenly disappears along with the whole house and suddenly you and the other firemen are just standing spraying an empty lot, and then on your way back to the station your whole fire truck disappears and it turns out it was a ghost fire truck the whole time."

Everyone laughed, including Alex, whose big, goofy, sprawling grin stretched out over his face, the one Lincoln knew well and missed, the one from their days of debauchery and shenanigans in high school. Lincoln glanced around, seeing that he now had his audience reeling, and kept going.

"It's worse than the one where you tell about a creature you saw once, and describe it as scarily and gruesomely as possible, and in the end everyone realizes it's a stick man you're describing!"

"But I swear the ghost fire one is true!" Alex insisted, in an ironic tone and trying not to laugh out loud. "I swear!" then he did finally laugh and break the character of an honest defender once again.

"It doesn't make sense, for one!" another friend observed, "So you get a call, to a specific address everyone's familiar with, but ends up poofing out of existence and apparently wasn't real?"

"Yeah," said another friend, "then how does everyone know about the old mansion?"

"Everyone just assumes it burned down," explained Alex, "and the firemen don't tell many people, duh! What's so hard for you guys to understand?"

"The ghost fire truck is the best part, and I think the most realistic detail." Lincoln said, sarcastically.

Everyone laughed again. Alex nodded, grinning. "Yes."

The friends bickered for a bit longer about the credible and incredible plot points of Alex's story, its merits, and lack thereof. Finally, they heard an unfamiliar, vaguely Eastern European accent call out over their various voices that were engaged in chatter.

Their discussions stopped immediately.

Turning and looking, they saw that the pale stranger from the corner inside who had been spying on them had risen and come out to their tables in the outdoor patio. He stood by them now, tall, pale, and with dark, wrinkled bags under his eyes. The moonlight glinted off his bald head as it poured downward, cascading over all of them.

"If you please," the odd man said, "I could not help but overhear you as I left this place, and the subject matter piqued my interest. If, how you say, 'ghost stories' is the game, I have one I would like to contribute if you will allow it."

The group of friends looked at one another. Some were grinning, others looked worried, vaguely bothered by some ineffable quality of the man. Others still had little expression whatsoever other than a distant, glazed, blank drunk stare. Lincoln looked spooked but intrigued. Alex frowned, suspicious of the man and his intentions, but curious.

"Alright, old man, we'll allow it." said Alex. "Go ahead and entertain us. Have your go."

The bald man bowed to the group.

"Thank you kind sirs. Here I go."

Then he cleared his throat, downed a tall glass of straight vodka in three big gulps, wiped his mouth on one of the cuffs of his black t-shirt, then opened it and began telling his story.

### 3.

*Danny had not seen Jake in quite some time, five years or so had passed since their last meeting. They had grown up together and been close friends throughout elementary and high school. After college, eventually Jake moved to China, traveling and teaching English and making music with a band he was in. Danny became software developer and lived in Texas with wife.*

*After a time, Danny missed his old friend from his old life, so he contacted Jake, and made arrangements to visit Jake in China. On his vacation, Danny met up with his old buddy and they had the greatest time catching up. They walked Great Wall together, they go on boat ride and hike, and celebrate Chinese New Year and see big dragon festival, yes? They enjoyed many exotic and different things there. Each of them held the special trip in a cherished part of their hearts. Thereafter, however, their lives got very busy and they did not see each other for five years.*

*When five years had passed, they both found themselves and their families living back here in this town, how you say, Roanoke, their hometown, again. Jake felt the pain of missing his good friend again, and he reached out to Danny this time. They met up here, in this very bar, for it had been a high school hang out spot of theirs when they were younger, where they would eat wings and burgers and make merry times with friends.*



*They drank pints. Jake liked thick, dark, creamy ales. Danny drank cider, for it was his favorite. They talked, joked, and reminisced, catching up on old times. They laughed, drank, and showed each other photos of their lives over the last five years. It was very good time.*

*Then they left and went their separate ways, working and living on opposite sides of this town from each other. They would meet up and their children would play with each other occasionally, and occasionally but far less frequently, when they got a free moment away from the kids and wives, they would meet up here for a pint or two.*

*On one such occasion Jake and Danny they are talking about their old friends and the tom foolery they used to get up to. Jake speaks to Danny.*

*“Hey, Danny, do you remember that Tim guy who you used to hang around with?”*

*“Who?” asks Danny, not immediately remembering such a friend as named Tim.*

*“Tim. You know, Tim. You were pen pals with him or something, then he moved here. I never met him, but sometimes you would hang out with him. A couple times here and there I’d call you throughout middle school and high school and ask if you could hang out and you would say you already had plans with Tim.”*

*“Oh yeah,” Danny said, giggling, “Tim. Nice guy.”*

*“I wish I could have met him.” Jake said. “You talk to him anymore?”*

*Danny is smiling.*

*“No. Not for a really long time, Jake.”*

*They change subject now and talk of many other things. Work, family, TV shows, whatnot. They pay for drinks and stand to leave. As they are going to their cars, Jake shakes hands with his best friend.*

*“Hey, maybe next time we invite Tim to hang out, too?” Jake suggests.*

*“Ha-ha, sure, Jake.” chuckles Danny.*

*Time passes, and Danny is at work making new program. He takes break and pulls up Facebook. Jake messages him.*

*“Hey so I wanted to see if you could grab a drink Friday.” types Jake.*

*“Sorry bro, can’t. Delilah’s out of town and I have to watch kids.” Danny replies. “But I can do Saturday night.”*

*“Great! Saturday night works for me,” Jake types back, “and I will see if Tim can come.”*

*“What do you mean?” asks Danny.*

*“I found him and connected with Tim on Facebook. I’ll ask if he’s free and see if he can come, too.” Jake told Danny.*

*"Haha, okay, sounds good." Danny said, thinking Jake surely was joking. Sometimes Jake would mess with Danny, you see.*

*So, Jake and Danny meet up Saturday night and it is just them.*

*"Where's Tim?" Danny asks sarcastically.*

*"He was busy tonight. Said he had prior commitments." Jake explained, quite sincerely.*

*"Uh-huh." says Danny, unconvinced.*

*Some more time passes, and it is Danny's birthday. Jake and his family meet up with Danny and his and have a party right here, in this very restaurant. They have fun time at party. Kids give Danny cards and he tears up. Jake gives Danny a pocketknife whose handle he carved himself whittling.*

*After dinner, their wives take kids home. Jake says he wants to have pint with Danny and has another birthday surprise for him.*

*"It's okay," Jake tells Danny's wife, "I will get him home safe and sound later."*

*Jake and Danny finish their pints and Jake bids his friend to follow him. They rise and stagger out of bar at about 11:45 PM, walk out of bar across the parking lot, cross street, walk down main road to a park and ride, and onto a riverside trail.*

*"So, I finally did it!" Jake says.*

*"Did what?" asks Danny.*

*"Got Tim to agree to show up. And for your birthday!" Jake exclaims.*

*Danny laughs. "Sure, you did, Jake. What's the real surprise?"*

*"That's it. I really got in touch with Tim, your old friend, and he's really going to meet up with us. Wants to meet us by the old rope swing by the river." Jake says.*

*Danny rolls eyes.*

*"Why couldn't 'Tim' meet us for dinner?"*

*"I don't know. Said he was busy until midnight but would meet you by the old rope swing by the river where you two used to play."*

*Danny knew the rope swing well. He had frequented it as a child and teenager. But he had never gone there with any Tim.*

*"Okay, Jake, time to cut the crap. What's really going on?" demands Danny.*

*"What do you mean?" asks Jake. They are very near the rope swing, which is across river from them. They have but to round two more trees and they are there.*

*"Jake, Tim was my imaginary friend. I made him up to use to get out of things when we were younger."*

*Jake laughs.*



*"Good one, Danny, old friend. Good one."*

*Danny looks at Jake sternly.*

*"Jake. I'm serious. Tim isn't real. Never was."*

*Jake is confused.*

*"No, he's real. I searched and searched for him online and finally found him and have been talking to him on Facebook for weeks!" Jake insists.*

*"There's no way Jake. He's made up!"*

*Jake feels sick to his stomach now and is overtaken by an ominous feeling. He becomes a bit pale.*

*"Then who the fuck was I talking to on Facebook?"*

*The two friends round the bend now and pass by the last two trees, just as a clock on the bell tower of a nearby church tolls midnight. They look across the water at the rope swing, from where now an eerie, pale grayish white light now emanates. Sitting on swing, looking across the water at them is a tall, thin man in a black cloak, with skin pale and white as the full moon. He has bright, red, shining eyes that cut out across at them, peering at them, long claws, big, black, bat wings, and long fangs jutting from his mouth.*

*Jake and Danny stand there, transfixed, petrified. No sooner has the bell finished tolling midnight, then the impish man pulls back his head and lets out a high-pitched shriek that makes shivers shoot down their spines. He leaps up, flaps his bat wings, and flies directly at the two of them, who scream bloody murder.*

*They go missing after that. There is no trace of them anywhere. The only thing police recover and take back to the men's wives is pocket knife Jake gave Danny for birthday. They find sitting on rope swing next to river next morning.*

#### 4.

The bald man finished his story and stood there in total, complete silence. The young men looked at him, stunned and thoroughly creeped out. After a few long moments he bowed to them.

"Thank you very much. Now, I go." he turned to walk away, then whirled back. Lincoln had two uneaten chicken wings left on his plate. "Ah, are you finished with that?" the stranger asked. Lincoln nodded. "I'll take it, if you do not mind." We reached into his pocket and produced a pocket knife with a wooden handle, which he opened and jabbed through one of the wings. He picked up the chicken with the blade and took a large bite out of it. Then, he picked up the other wing with the blade, both pieces of chicken now kebabled onto the tiny blade. Etched into the wood of the knife handle, Lincoln could have sworn he saw the letter "D" but the stranger's hands were at an awkward angle and he moved them quickly to eat the chicken, occluding any other symbols or letters from him.

"You have been too kind. Farewell friends." and the pale storyteller slunk off into the cold October night.

Alex was thoroughly freaked out, but he dared not tell anyone why. With his trained, keen Air Force vision, he had made out the words “to Danny from Jake: Happy Birthday!” carved into the knife handle. He glanced downwards in deep, if drunken, thought. When he looked up and back at the parking lot, there was no trace of the pale, impish man.

\*\*\*

Lincoln and Alex were the last ones to leave the bar that night, shortly before midnight. The rest of their friends gradually trickled out one by one or in twos or threes here and there. They needed to get home safely and were both far too intoxicated to drive. Alex did not like Uber or cabs, so they resolved to walk. It was only a couple of miles to their respective homes, and the moon was bright and full and lit their way. The two of them slunk out of the bar, into the moonlight, and down the road together.

They walked on the path by the river together. The moonlight reflected off the rippling water, making it even brighter around them.

“That was some spooky story.” Lincoln said.

“Yeah,” Alex admitted, “It was spooky. I’ll give him that!”

“Think it’s true?”

“I hope not.” Alex said. “I don’t believe in stuff like this, but after what I saw, and with all the strange stories in the news...it’s got me wondering.”

“What do you mean, after what you saw?” Lincoln asked, and then Alex told him about the carving in the knife handle. Lincoln shuddered. “now *that’s* creepy.”

“Well, it certainly shows the guy knows how to tell a story.” Alex said, nodding with his eyebrows raised. “He could have carved that stuff into the knife handle himself, though.”

“Yeah, which was a nice touch, because those names were from the news. Kept it current. That’s what made it even spookier.”

“What?”

“There was a story like that in the news, just today.” said Lincoln. “Heard it on the radio as I was headed to the bar. I’m pretty sure. But maybe the guy’s name was Davey, not Danny.”

“Uh-huh.” said Alex, the suspicion in his voice evident.

“You don’t believe me.” Lincoln said, sounding offended.

“Nope. You’re definitely fucking with me.”

The quarrel that ensued, that which can only be held between the closest and oldest of friends that late at night when they are that level and brand of intoxicated together, was what led them up the bank, across the street, away from their homes and into town to find a newspaper stand.

“I didn’t get to read the paper today.” Alex lamented, as he put coins into the machine, turned the dial, and opened the plastic case. He flipped open the paper and Lincoln pointed.

“There. Flip to page seven.” Lincoln said.

Alex read it aloud. Two men in their thirties, Danny and Jake, had gone mysteriously missing the night of Danny’s birthday two nights ago.

“Okay,” he told Lincoln. “So maybe the man got a copy of the paper earlier today and read that story, then incorporated it into the one he told us. Doesn’t mean anything. Wait. Holy shit!” Alex had just read on and fell silent after that final exclamation. Lincoln read over the now trembling man’s shoulder. The only evidence found by the police in the case was the pocket knife they found on the rope swing by the river, the description of which fit the one Alex had seen in the mysterious man’s hands tonight, perfectly. It had mysteriously vanished from the crime scene after several police officers, finished with a brief discussion, had turned back to where it had been sitting on the rope swing, only to find it gone.

“H-he read the paper and then carved that into his own knife just to scare us, right Alex?” Lincoln asked.

“I really hope so. Don’t know, don’t want to!” Alex sputtered. He didn’t believe it. Such things were not real. Yet, the fear was already in his mind, spreading through it like drops of black dye dripped and splashed into a plate of milk. The seeds of creepy thoughts were planted, and already, his head darted this way and that, thinking he saw something move in the bushes in his peripheral vision. “Let’s just get the hell home!”

Just then, something pale and eerily bright swooped down and flew between the two men, brushing them with something icy cold as it blew by, before darting up into the air again. It turned midair and looked down at them. Both the men dropped to the ground and covered their faces in fear. Flying high above them, basking in the pale moonlight, was the man from the bar, looking down on them ominously. Only now he was bigger, taller, burly, and had burning red, shining eyes, fangs, claws, and expansive bony wings that were covered with thin, stretched out brown skin, one of which had a large bite taken out of it. The wings did not look unlike the chicken wings he had taken from Lincoln. The pale imp reared back his head and let out an ear-piercing, blood curdling shriek such as the men had never heard before, and no earthly analogy can be drawn. Shivers dominated the men’s spines, and they ran, screaming. The pale, winged man rose high into the night sky and flew onward and upward toward the moon.

## 5.

Chernobog laughed as he flew onward over the city as it rested under the moonlight. He had done it! The past few months he had traveled far and wide, working tiny deeds of fright and telling many unsettling scary stories. It had been rough going for much of it. He had started small and worked up to enormous amounts of storytelling in every corner of the globe, until enough fear and discomfort existed in the world again to spawn monsters here and there, which in turn led to more stories created and told to people by people who were not himself. Those embellished the tales, and the fright grew and spread like a wildfire, regenerating old monsters and birthing new ones. Just then, when Alex had read the details in the paper and his mind connected the terrifying dots, the fear Chernobog had spread across the entire world, both subliminally and directly, had reached critical mass.

It was at that moment that he and the rest of the creatures of the night and fabled beings of legend had come roaring back to life in their fullness across the entirety of worldly existence.

Chernobog's hard work of planting fear all over and subverting the status quo had finally payed off. The tide had shifted and with it so did the paradigm: everyone was scared, and the monsters existed anew, even with a presence and knowledge of them on the internet and in media. Lack of uncertainty had not killed them off, after all.

The king plunged down towards the bright, electronic, man-made star above that looked down protecting the town. He landed atop it and stood perched there. Even now he could hear screeches, hoots, howls, and roars of his subjects in the night, mingled with terrified human cries as they awoke below from night terrors. He witnessed light after new light popping on down the mountain below in the distance. A wide grin broke out across his face. His sharp front teeth protruded over his curled, smiling lips. Below several ghouls, ghosts, and gargoyles gathered in the pavilion and looking up at him, bowed. He raised his head and gave one more spine-tingling bellow, a victory screech, before spreading his wings and launching into the air once more. He flapped and flapped and rose high into the night, glinting and glimmering in the light of the moon, fully restored, muscular, and pale. He flew on, making his way toward the East, heading to the castle in the tall spires of that dark, bald mountain he called home across the Siberian plain, to home, reconstituted servantry, and hearth.

The End