

## **A Hero Rises**

Thunder cracks as lightning dances across the nighttime sky. No rain, just lightning was ever a good start to the night? Bandages are itching, but this is my hood. The people here know I am here to help. It seems like a lifetime ago that I was actually Reverend John, man I hate my glitchy memory, what was my last name? Mustafa. Tug my Kevlar gloves over my bandaged hands, almost a year since that bad Sunday morning at Agnes MacPhail Unity Church (it was a shared ministry of Anglican-United Church-Presbyterian and Evangelical Lutheran).

Flip my hood up to hide the bandages that act as my shield against the world. That morning still crystal clear, events since then just blurriness. But that morning, such a beautiful time in our 110-year-old church building on the prairie. Sue had brought her "adopted" baby girl, Meena to me for baptism. Such a beautiful little girl, a baby that another working girl had left in the crack house, Sue rescued her. The life recovery service I held every Sunday morning at 11:30 a.m. was packed out to the rafters for that old church it meant 85 were in attendance. All those struggling with demons, working girls, guys and transsexuals (which technically Sue was, but she had chosen to live as Sue not Stephen and I had chosen to honour her God calling) not to

mention addicts of all stripes, the young and old, and those that just struggled to make ends meet.

They had all come when they heard Sue's daughter was to be baptized into our Faith Family. It had been a hard autumn, especially with using our sanctuary as a safe injection site, and me being visible in the area handing out lube and condoms, with clean needles and food hampers. Just trying to stem the tide of death, helping the coroner identify those who had returned to the loving embrace of God far too early. We as a community had begun to be targeted by the Neo-Nazi element of the city. They threatened all our lives; at the Pride Parade we had a confrontation, and I had the bruises to prove it. Never thought they would do what they said they would.

The rumbling drowned out the liturgy (I had mixed Lutheran and United Church baptismal services). Then the explosion from behind the altar I cried for calm and to make their way through to the exit...that was locked. Another explosion this time from underneath the pews, the cries of my community dying around me as the flames enraptured my body.

They tried to run me out of the community. My church is a burned out husk. The denominations that originally sponsored it, walked away leaving the husk as a testament to the absence of God to

those in the deepest need. I was in a coma, and then the burn unit, never felt such pain in my life.

Didn't leave hospital for three months, returned home still requiring bandages over 60% of my body. My answering machine was full, people crying out for help. I lost it and threw the blasted box against the wall breaking it. The church was gone, I was feeling dead, and 84 souls had gone to be with God in heaven all because of hatred, yet the need continued to stream in.

Checking my mail I found the postcard. It was one of the Pride Week postcards my church had mailed out to the community with a swastika drawn over the rainbow image. On the back in bold type was a simple message: **Today you die.** Postmarked the day of the bombing.

I just crumpled to my kitchen floor and the tears flowed. Memories. Flashes. Doctors figure it's that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, I say watch as 84 of your closest friends burn to death and then tell me how to feel. I feel empty, unless I am helping. Reverend John Mustafa is dead. The people call me Street Priest; I am their Batman if you will, their avenging angel.

I try to keep the streets safe for those societies would rather forget. Those that society would rather die than had to deal with. My brown eyes lock on the images swarming the young girl.

13 years old and already selling herself, knowing this community it is probably to feed her parents crack habit. But the four men swarming her are wrong, in my past life I had taken a vow of non-violence, unfortunately the only thing these monsters understand is power.

“Leave her alone.” My leather jacket creaks as I move toward the four slowly. My armour toe boots crunch the broken glass underfoot, I hope the puddle I step in is rainwater but know better.

The largest idiot turns to face me, he’s got at least two heads on my 5’9” and he’s twice as broad (which is impressive because I tip in around 200+lbs, and no I do not want to know how much the + is).

“What did you say puny?”

“I said leave the young lady alone.”

“She’s our property, and we’ll do what the fuck we want with her.”

“See there you went and did it, now my virgin ears are burning.”

I let my hood fall back, and the gasp is audible. The penny dropped, guerrillas’ three friends start booking it, but he refuses to lose face. The girl is cowering, trying to melt into the building wall. I was hoping not to have to fight, usually the sight of the bandages and my rep is enough to scare them off, Batman was right criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot.

He swings at me, but telegraphs, in a past life I swear I must have been a boxing coach cause I roll back on the balls of my feet, duck under the flying fist and let my gloves land solid hits into his kidneys. He tries to swing down and I dive roll out of the way, back up onto my feet and a roundhouse kick (where did that come from?) makes the loaded toe of my boot connect with his ribs I feel and hear the pop. Two ribs out, he's having hard time breathing. Can tell from the look on his face he is rethinking standing his ground, that's good.

A sweep kick and take out his right kneecap, he stumbles, can tell through the baggy jeans that the knee is popped out funny. He's down on the ground. Fighting to get up and the right hook connects with his jaw, he spits teeth and blood across the street and goes down for the count.

Check the wallet, Royce White, excellent he's on the most wanted list, flips open a cell phone I picked up that's untraceable. "Hi, Police? You can find Royce White on the Corner of Vine Crescent and 12 Street." Flip the phone closed. The girl looks confused.

"Whh-wwhh—at do you want? Head? Hand? Anal?"  
I shake my head, such a sad state our world is in. "And Jesus looked to the woman as the crowd left, and who brings charges against you? Neither do I."

"You're him?" A closer look she was covered in goose bumps and purple bruises around her legs, her skirt was short enough to show what she wasn't wearing, and her hair was a bad dye job to purple. Her lip was bleeding from where it looked like a piercing had been ripped out. I simply nod at her question. "Come with me, I know a safe place." She takes my hand, still shivering, I schluff off my leather jacket and wrap it around her, it will at least provide some warmth for the four block walk to Sanctuary House.

Sanctuary is an old four story brick building, a youth drop in, it replaced the Roman Catholic Church in the community, there was a deeper need for a rescue house for children involved in the sex trade than a dying parish. Father Bryan and Sister Joan run it. I ring the doorbell.

"What's your name?" Her lip has started to scab; it's quivering and tears run down her face. I pull my leather jacket back on. "I am simply a friend." I fade back into the shadows as Sister Joan answers the door and brings the girl inside.

I barely catch what she says as she walks inside, "I'm your friend too." Funny, she's the first one to ever say anything like that to me, most are too afraid after the rescue that their pimp will find them and kill them.

I have a weird feeling in my chest at her comments, a friend,  
what does a dark avenger need with a friend?

**To be Continued...**

## **PERCHANCE TO DREAM**

The building is a burnt out husk, the weather comes in regardless of dampness, heat or cold. Yet this was my birthplace, just like Easter Sunday Morning when Jesus came alive inside the tomb, this was my resurrection experience. No longer living the confines placed on me by the denominations that built the church, but getting back to the true call to live the Gospel of Christ. That is to spread hope throughout those that society has chosen to disenfranchise that is this community.

The baptismal fount, the rubble more appropriate, running my bandaged fingers over the scorched stone walk through the burnt remnants of the pews as I move towards the crater that was once the altar. The source of the first explosion and still no word on who did it, who killed so many of God's children?

The police do not seem to care, for what was lost, those who were viewed as lesser than by society. Bodies collected, remains bagged and identified through dental records or DNA. Burials in the pauper field as I lay in a burn ward.

"Damn it." My eyes move upwards to the crucifix, or rather the left hand of my Lord and Saviour dangling from the ceiling, the blast tore apart the crucifix and it impaled the Acolyte. "Why God?" I crumple into the rubble ash and dust. The tears soak into my



bandages, causing minor pain on my face. “Why the fuck did you let this happen?”

I keep asking the questions, but no one has an answer. My boss is silent, the churches that I served here at the nexus of darkness in the city and after the explosion I petitioned for funds to rebuild. They were skittish saying that the parish no longer fit their plans for the future.

The future plans involved the suburbs and rich middle to upper classes, yet not those that Jesus actually spent time with. I argued, and was defrocked.

My vocation taken away by those that discerned the call.

My church destroyed by fire.

My congregation literally dead—

Now what?

“Where the hell are you God?” My tears have stopped streaming as I struggle up to my feet staring at the dangling wooden arm. The toe of my boot hits the cover of a book; I look down, *Holy Bible*.

“What the fuck do your promises mean Lord?”

Filled with self-righteous anger and false bravado, I know. But who holds God accountable when horrors happen on this earthly plane. Where do I find myself? Staring up at a burnt up crucifix screaming at a God I can no longer feel near to me. The church has abandoned me,

but my calling continues to serve this community. But I have never felt so alone as I do right now.

But why God have you left me?

"Father John?"

The voice is low and gravelly like James Earl Jones playing Darth Vader. My peripheral sees the wispy shadowy form trying to play at being human. An old foe and much familiar to the exorcist, "Bob fuck off."

"Father John, I am here to offer respite and you talk to me that way."

"Sorry, In the name of Jesus, Beezlebaub fuck off."

"That's better, but I am not here as the Lord of Darkness' bootlick, I am here on behalf of the higher power."

My head is beginning to hurt again this is so not cool. I had spent years exorcising this yahoo from one poor sap to another, and now that I am yelling at God he appears to offer me help. So not needed right now.

"Father John." A new voice, more like Toby Maguire playing Spider-Man. A blonde haired and bronzed Adonis in shimmering white suit that makes him look like a bloody televangelist awaiting the next scandal to end his ministry.

"Who ever you are fuck off."

"I am Gabriel." Shit. Shit. Shit. Gabriel a guy who's practically glowing.

"Gabe really, you lost the card cut, he's mine its Job time." Now Bob is talking, what the hell?

"Bob, change of plans, the Boss wants a personal investment in Father John."

"Both of you shut the fuck up!!!" It's bad enough I have lost so much, but now I got a supposed angel and a known undesirable demon type bickering over me. I point a bandaged finger at blondie, just realized that I am stuck in the middle of what was the isle between these two yahoos. "What is going on here? I ain't no fucking minister anymore."

"Well not with a mouth like that, but seriously, John God has called you and no institute of man can strip that away. She has a deeper calling for you now and that is to continue your work here."

"Uh tut tut Gabe remember the card cut, his soul is mine."

"Oh really Bob grow up." Gabriel snaps his finger and the floor opens beneath Bob and I hear a scream then the floor reforms. I think Gabriel senses my hesitation. "Do not worry Father John, Bob has simply gone home."

I get a good look at the bronze Adonis, he is literally floating about five inches off the ground, maybe I haven't been around people enough lately. "So what are you going to do to me?"

"I am here to simply say you are blessed and that God weeps over the carnage that was wreaked over this church and congregation. Please now there is nothing that is predestined, as part of free will both good and evil are laid before you and this individual chose evil."

Tears well up in my eyes again. I must be losing it, having a vision like this. Talking to this vision. Taking it all seriously. Such a low point in my life yet there seems to be some reality here.

"Why does He give a damn?"

"Father John, look around you. The church is in ruins..." Gabriel vanishes and behind him is a restored crucifix, but one of the ascension of Christ, not his death.

"Rebuild my church." A different voice, kind of echoes yet resounds deep within me.

"Rebuild my church."

Then it all goes black.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**

## **A PHOENIX RISING**

The taste of ash in my mouth is worse than waking up to cottonmouth from my drinking days. Head is swimming, like living through the explosion all over again. Eyes aren't focusing properly. Struggling to quit seeing multiples of things that should not be multiples of.

My hand attempts to grip something, I feel a crunch charred white bits in my hand. Look at where they came from the scrap of beautiful red satin cloth. Shit, that's what Sue was wearing on the day—

The day it all went south.  
There's a creak and the floor gives way. Voices. Sirens. What the hell is going on here?

Where am I?  
Holding a baby aloft then flames...screams...a floor collapses...The Bishops had warned me they wanted to close the church, I flipped them the bird and found a new funding stream, the people here needed this parish.

What love built hate has destroyed?  
Struggle to my feet.

Body is screaming in pain.  
Fresh burns, the smell of charred flesh in my nostrils.

Moving through ash and debris. Gaining a footing. Sirens are still echoing like they have a ways to go, probably trying to figure out if they really want to come down here or not. I feel the heat from the upper floor. The fire is gaining a foothold, but I'm in the basement, crawling to the emergency exit, up the backstairs with the peeling pepto pink lead paint and the yellowed cracking linoleum to the original entrance, bolted shut to old ply wood doors.

Body is screaming, I should just lie down and die, smoke is thick. Head is spinning what wonky dreams explosions give you?

Bracing against the wall push myself up as a clump of skin falls off. One...two...three and lunge, I think I feel my shoulder dislocate as the doors burst open and I roll down the hard concrete steps, there's only four of them but the wet snap I feel tells me at least one rib is gone.

Hard to breathe, the blackness is creeping over my mind again, but I start to crawl up the road. The rattle of a shopping cart filled with cans. The shrieks of a child I think my peripheral catches the local pimp smirking.

I think I raise my hand, but the body is screaming in pain, the sunlight hurts. "Father John that you?" the voice, I know that voice, I feel a gentle touch on my cheek and fight not to, but I scream at the pain invoked.

Head is swimming, but I think I am moving on satin sheets when my eyes open again. A stuffed Eeyore is resting by my left eye.

“Thank you Jesus. Father John you’re alive.” The piercings around her mouth and eyes make her unmistakable, Joan. A former sister, but after a local church elder raped her when she was a postulant in the order she left the church and was turned out of the street by a local pimp. Her life fell apart when the church turned their back on her and sided with the elder.

“Joan, how?”

“You forget I got some nursing skills, I bandaged you, but I wouldn’t suggest moving to fast you burned up good.”

Burned. The explosion. The dream. The thoughts of the rescue of the child from the Nazis, the angel/demon dialogue all that was a dream? Here I am in Joan’s bed, I feel the bandages all over me and...shit...I can only see out of one eye.

So many churches were counting on me, and now this—check that, so many church members were counting on me, the denominations were counting the money the plot of land was worth and now the explosion, almost a full house for Sue’s little one’s baptism.

“Any survivors?”

Joan turns her head slightly to where my bad eye can't see her facial expression, but her voice gives away the tears she's fighting. "I gotta go to work Father John." I shift and fight the hurt so my good eye can look at her, not her ho wear a grocery store uniform? "Sobey's hired me, thank you for the reference. Rest here."

Rest? "How long?"

"You been in and out of sleep for about five days now, news keeps saying everyone died in the fire, but I been too scared to call and tell them otherwise."

"Thank you, don't just yet."

"Surely you need a hospital?"

"I'll go when I'm ready, just let's keep it on the down low until some things come back together." Joan is a tough lady, she's struggling to stay clean the honest work is another step in that to make her feel human again. Her pimp Brian is a challenge, he tries to keep her in line through fear, and she has a lot of fear of the man that has put her in intensive care six times in three years.

Yet she's been nothing but compassionate with me, nothing but honest and wanting to get out. The church, that is the institution that is Christianity failed her, but followers of Christ did not.

"They'll rebuild Unity right?"



That was the billion-dollar question. Would they rebuild or just look at it as an experiment that was before its time? One that had/has no chance of success so why bother, I do the most pastoral thing I can think of, a non-committal grunt then let my aching body fall back into the queen sized satin sheeted multi-pillowed bed.

I attempt to fight to keep my eye open, but it's closing as I hear the door click shut.

The creak of old floorboards is what I wake up to; the eerie blinking of red LED lights of the alarm clock says its dark out. Another creak, voice is raspy makes me sound like Kermit the Frog as I rasp out my query, "Joan?"

No response but more creaking, then the crash okay I know Joan can be a bit of a klutz but she doesn't break things. Roll out of bed, the pain is searing I busted some ribs (or one rib?) good cause it hurts to move, looking at the bandages there is some blood soaking through too.

Roll to the edge of the bed and use that to balance myself to a standing position. The doorknob is shaking, maybe it is Joan but the cursing is definitely male, a shift in the creaks and the door bursts open.

Try not to laugh, face burnt laughter not good. The guy looks like an accountant, bow tie and all. "Where's Joan?"

Okay mental note, smiling doesn't help the burn scabbing either.

"Out. Who are you?"

"Brian her boyfriend."

My good eye catches a glimpse of the jailhouse style bracelet tattoo; this is her pimp, added former to that.

"Your not her boyfriend, and she no longer works for you."

The little white guy is really starting to piss me off. But he is looking like he has rumbling anger inside him. Okay that's because the flush is creeping up his neck.

"Who the fuck are you bandage boy?"

He lunges at me.

A quick uppercut and I scream, some would be stoked and say the scream was tough sounding, it's cause the uppercut hurt like a bitch through the burn tissue. A few of the chump's teeth fly free and he starts to cry before slumping down. "I'm her priest."

**To be Continued**

## **Priest**

### **Six months later.**

The asphalt of the roof crunches under the composite toed work boot. My eyes struggle to focus, okay technically its an eye but why split hairs. Flip the hood down. Kevlar gloves grip the edge as I look down. Neighbourhood is quiet for a change.

Six months since my fist connected with Brian's jaw, six months since an explosion tore through my church killing my flock. Six months since all the churches, the so-called bearer's of hope, fled the slum. Six months since my funeral.

The gangs now control most. Joan thinks I am perfectly nuts to hang out here still. But the basement is semi structurally sounds at the church, and it has a shower from when it was used as a shelter for families experiencing homelessness. Not like any of the denoms care about what happens to the tract of land. Not even the cops will come down here anymore.

Swing over the side of the roof and land on the fire escape. Wipe the dust off my leather coat's left sleeve. Bandages are wrapped tight around my face and upper body, learned that was the key about three months back, a bit of glue to hold them in place otherwise they'd trip me up.

Scale down the ladder to the urine soaked alleyway. Dry out, have had zero moisture this year. Cries of children, moving into the dusky street lit street. Pushers and pimps circling like vultures, gang bangers flaunting their pistols in front of buildings. Joan and her sisters/brothers shaking it up and down as the millionaires roll looking for tail.

The scary part is that at 23 years young, Joan has aged out to the seniors track for the sex trade, they want them young, almost pre-puberty in some instances. But when the law checks out.

Tug a little on the backwards collar underneath the hoody, Sherwood Foresters that is, our junior hockey team, they may deem me dead, but I still have an office to uphold that comes with the parish.

Priest.

Move across the road, keep the head down, and listen, the sounds of the scavengers, those that prey on the dying. Walk up behind Joan look like I am negotiating a price; slip some money into her skirt to hopefully keep her out of a John's car.

"Brian's jaw is still wired."

I smile beneath the bandages, the bastard deserves it but unfortunately that pain is passed on to his stable of workers. "Any word?"

"The skins are rumbling, want the FOBS out."

The quiet was like the old cliché, the calm before the storm. "Thought about what I said?"

Four months back I had offered her a way out through a dying convent in the area, there was only three sisters left and they were trying to decide what to do with the land, before my "death" I had put forward the motion for a safe haven for children in the area. Joan was considering it, it would get her off this life, but she was afraid Brian would do something.

"I want to, but..."

I make eye contact with her, "go there tonight, and ask for Sister Mary Margaret." She nods, I say a silent prayer that she will follow through and continue my pastoral rounds.

A priest, a simple call really to word and sacrament. Work in the parish includes pastoral care for all of God's children that on the sixth day of creation God looked upon humanity and called us blessed and very good. Includes the offering of sacraments: healing, marriage, holy orders, confirmation, baptism, communion and reconciliation (what used to be confession).

The workers, panhandlers, bottle collectors, transients and people in this area have taken to simply calling me Padre. They don't know how, but I manage to get them extra food, money, condoms,

clean needles. Without a police presence in the neighbourhood many of the non-profits have stopped coming around, but the public library still runs so through the internet I get materials dropped off that I can distribute. For the little children who may or may not make it into school I get some candy.

I need to visit police though, if a gang war is brewing over this, one of the most lucrative drug trade areas in North America, it will not just say to the area, but the question is how do I do that?

Fifty cents into the corner's TELUS pay phone and dial the Sherwood Herald's office switchboard. The police won't give a damn, but I know a reporter that will. He brought the city through a hellacious time of corruption and terror.

"I am trying to reach Alan A. Dale."  
The receptionist exhales slowly, "please hold." He or she, hard to tell which, says in a nasally drone.

There's a dead time, then a click, several rings, he's not answering, what day of the week is it? Look to the daily newspaper box, Friday, right, Alan's an Imam he's in the midst of holy day. Voicemail clicks on. "Alan, Padre hear, meet you at the cross tomorrow, day break." I hang up and scan the street with my good eye, too damn quiet.

Move towards a collection of gangbangers that are hassling a young one either walking home from school or skipping. Joining was like military service in Switzerland in this area, it was mandatory.

One of the bangers catches sight of me and hollers. "Move on pops nothing to see here." I let my hood fall back to reveal the bandages; two of the three bangers vamoose. I look at the kids.

"Go now."

The remaining banger, a true knuckle dragger grabs him. "Na, he needs to be initiated or he's dead."

"Let the child go, or you will find out why we pray for the dead." He starts to turn a bit pale; his eyes fall to my neck where the collar is. "Fuck you him."

A dive role and my Kevlar glove punches upward hitting just under his armpit. The kid bolts as gorilla boy yelps in pain. A sweep kick and I watch his left knee pop inwards and bone tear through his jeans.

My fists act like Mike Tyson in his prime on this punk's face. I stare as his bloody mass, not one of the big two, simply one of the small pecking gangs trying to act big. He's a bloody, crying, tooth everywhere probably hoping EMS will come down here to collect him, which is always a crap shoot of a phone call.

"This ain't your hood. It's mine." A swift kick to his temple that's hard enough I pop out his eye. Flipping my hood up I walk away leaving him they're as a message. A rumble across the sky and the blessed rain pours down as a baptism of God's love on the streets of the dying.

**To Be Continued**



## **The Cross @ Daybreak**

Boots crunch the charred remains of the inside of the church, hate brought down the house of love and it's going to be love that rebuilds community upon its ruins. Not an institution, but actual community of people that give a damn for one another.

Don't know why, but the old wood cross-survived the explosion, especially shocking since the altar was ground zero, but there it is. The sun is coming up and shining through the shattered remnants of the stained glass windows.

There still is remnants of the congregation around, pieces of people that they could not clean up, or didn't give a damn to clean up as the first responders jokingly referred to this as a "NHI" crime<sup>1</sup>, going back to the records and media afterwards helps to fill in the gaps.

"Padre."

The voice has a slight British lilt to it, not one would expect from a Muslim Imam, but then Alan is far from traditional. His mum is from Nottinghamshire and his Dad is from Iraq. It was his mum that converted his Dad to the Ahmaddiya sect of Islam.

"Alan, bit chilly this morning." My colleague scans around the burnt out remains, I can see it in his eyes he is remembering the joint

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<sup>1</sup> No Humans Involved

celebrations both of our communities held here to celebrate the high holy times in our faiths year.

"We are at war, this church and their members were the first casualties." Alan looks at me, he doesn't know that I am John, he just knows me as the enigma of this street.

"Friends of mine died here Padre, good men and women that knew Allah loved them, and they loved Allah. The war is on the doorstep, now what?"

What indeed? Why did I want this reporter here, what did I hope to bring forward to him that I could not have just accomplished on my own. Am I just wasting his time?

"We need the police back in this neighbourhood, ordinary civilians are at risk, dying because the city has written us off."

"What can I do?"

"Alan, tell our story, tell the story of Agnes MacPhail church. Tell the story of the girls and women being attacked by racist scum, and the gangs that peddle death on each corner. Open the world up to this community like you did during the rain of Nott here a few years back. Tell the story like you did for the rise of a new hero in the city.<sup>2</sup>"

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this aspect of Alan's past, read Sherwood E-novel.

Alan looks ponderous, or constipated can't really tell the difference with my one good eye. The challenge is did he get the message?

"How can I reach you Padre?"

I nod at him, "I will reach you daily, and as far as the city is concerned I do not exist."

The sun hits the right refraction on the shard of stained glass and it appears like I vanish before Alan's eyes. I am sure he does think of me now as a ghost, which is good I just pray that he writes the story.

I watch from the alley as Alan leaves the husk of the community's soul. He is looking around; the streets are filled with death and despair as my good eye locks on a site that breaks my heart.

Battered and bloody leaning against the porn shop window across the street holding her side as she tries to balance on platforms...Joan.

**To Be Continued**

## Seeing Angels

Joan was in rough shape, was it a rough date or worse? Brian. Walking across the road is weird that there is no traffic, especially on this track of the working girls stroll. What was it they used to say in those old detective shows, too quiet, that's the eeriness on this street now.

"Joan."

"Padre." She gasps my name out still clutching her side, being closer I note the drying blood from her nose and mouth with the rising bruise on her cheek the lack of clothing reveals other welts. Someone worked her over well.

"Brian?" She shakes her head and whines in pain. Her left index finger is crooked, broken, she points down the alleyway. Hate being out in the daylight hours, but this is something that needs to be handled.

The alley is dusk like in lighting the sounds of squirrels and mice scurrying about, I think I feel a stray cat rub up against my leg. A pile of garbage overflowing from the blue dumpster, with a bloodied hand sticking out.

Move aside some garbage bags to reveal a pulverized face, but still recognizable, Brian. Well he won't be hurting Joan anymore, but a glance around with my good eye and the alley is empty.

The first volley, someone wants the turf.

Head back to the alley opening, Joan is gone. Couldn't really expect her to wait around someone worked her over and beat Brian to death. The body may be collected with the garbage, if service ever returns to the neighbourhood.

Back to the pay phone; punch in Alan's cell number. His voicemail clicks on, "its started." Hang up, he's a smart Imam journalist, he'll figure it out.

Now on to try and figure out who whacked the kahuna of the sex trade here. Definitely someone with a brass set, and I do despise a power vacuum when I am not the one that creates it.

Sister is in the mission near the boarder, the last stop before hell for the poetic out there. A small old convent built around the 1930's, sturdy as all heck, it has become a sanctuary for those wanting to leave the game or the life.

I ring the doorbell, Sister Mary Margaret is an 89-year-old Canadian-Japanese nun, and she was born in Canada and served time in our nation's disgrace of internment camps during World War II in Lethbridge, Alberta. "Is Joan here?"

Sister shakes her head, "I am sorry Padre, she left two weeks ago, went back to Brian." She wasn't ready, I pushed her for

something she was not ready for and now she's been attacked and is missing in the jungle.

I say my good byes, Sister lets me know that they have increased in population at the convent by five, bringing the total to forty-seven that are living here, dying there if the truth was known. She slips me a wood bead Rosary and winks at me.

A little step towards salvation, wish I still had sensation in my fingertips to fully feel the beads. Next stop will be Joan's old crash pad, she would retreat to what is familiar in this time of need and since the church is no more that leaves just her old apartment.

The streets feel even colder, civilians not wanting to venture out if they do not have to, even if it means imposed fasting. Gangs are running the streets, yet there is fear in their hearts, better yet in their eyes when they see me moving down the streets, the hood up over the bandages, they know I have nothing left to loose. My soul died when the church was fire bombed.

The apartment building looks a fortress in the midst of a ghetto; petty drug deal happening as I walk through the security door, well the security door that should have been there but somebody removed it by popping the hinges.

The entry door is broken so I am in without having to struggle to remember Joan's last name and buzz her apartment. The challenge

though will be in getting out of here. A man on a heroin high is crouched on the stairs with a gun in his hand; my good eye can tell it's not loaded.

The elevator doors are open, but there is no car there. The woofing of a dog from somewhere in the distance, I begin to ascend the staircase. It's a five-story building, shouldn't be too hard to get to the fourth floor by foot.

The second floor landing a lady of the night that has seen better nights offers me a free blowjob through her toothy grin if I'll pay her ten bucks for anal sex, says her vagina has warts. Way too much information for even my mind to process about why if they vagina had an STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection) I would want any part of her.

The third floor landing I step over three bodies with needles sticking out their arms, on another day I may give a damn if they were still alive, but even if they were in need of medical care an ambulance is not coming for them.

The fourth floor landing has prepubescent's that should be learning spelling lists instead they are posturing as tough guys, a growl from beneath my bandages and they run like sheep from the wolf. A nine millimetre clatters to the cracking linoleum floor, oh the horrors of gun safety not being followed.

There is an odour that is a mixture of vomit; urine and stale sex in the hallway as my boots stick to the carpet in places and in others the carpet is worn away (even the underlay) to reveal plywood.

Her apartment is the corner suite, with the lovely view of the alley crimes and dead body dumps. The window at the end of the hallway was shattered outwards long ago by a bad date escaping Brian's gunplay.

Go to knock on the door, but it's swaying in the light breeze from the broken window. Check the jam, someone has kicked it inward. Step inside with my stealthiest step. Fresh blood so not a good sign.

"Joan?" starts with a whisper, as the place looks well ransacked, though Joan was never what you would term a housekeeper at the best of times. The bedroom door was replaced with a beaded curtain, a weird shadow is cast there with the black lights, Joan had once explained the creams of her trade and black lights, why do some consider it fun to torment the confessor with sexcapades?

Step through the curtain...fuck me...two large wood beams attached to her wall in the form of an "X" (or St. Andrew's cross if you will), and Joan is nailed to it upside down.

**To be Continued...**



## Crucified

My knees hit the stained carpet (never ask what the stains are in this place). If my tear ducts were not scared I am sure I would be crying. My good eye notices a twitch. Is that just a death rattle?

Rise and check the ankles and wrists where the spikes have been pounded through? How could no one have not heard her cries of pain? Stupid question, this is definitely a see no evil, hear no evil, speak no truth location. Grip with the glove and yank, four times and catch her body over my shoulder, slowly lower her to the carpet.

Barely breathing, on her nightstand is a cell phone. Flip it open and dial 911. Begin chest compressions, will start breathing for her if I need to, but honestly I do not know if I have any communicable diseases and that would just blow to save her to give her a life sentence.

911 operator placed me on hold, phone is in the crook of my neck, why the hell would an operator put me on hold? Breathing stops, try to breath for her.

Operator comes back on. "Sorry, there are no ambulances available."

"Send a fucking fire truck!"

Silence. The operator hung up. Joan cannot breath on her own which means she is gone. No help is coming. Another life lost in the pursuit

of money on the backs of the spiritually ill, filling the void with whatever they can.

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The remains of the crucifix haunt me, why do I bother? Joan is dead. Another day that shows the people of this neighbourhood do not matter.

My thumb runs up and down the spike, pulled from an innocent in this conflict, another body to bury.

“Why God?”

Seems so simple, close one’s eyes and never awake to this reality again.

To be continued

## **Fifth Reich**

My eye opens to the sounds of gunfire on my streets, the dust falls away from my jacket as I rise. Sleeping in the former altar space of the burned out church I am going to really have to work on going to my hideout to sleep at night this type of napping gives me such a crick in the neck.

Move to a view of the street, a jeep, and some motorcycles shooting randomly. That symbol, flying from flags attached to the jeep and armbands, the swastika. "Fuck." They are just shooting at civilians, attempting to instill fear and obedience through murder and carnage.

They forgot one thing, a simple inner city pastor. I give a bit of a stretch and step out into the sunlight. An outstretched fist catches one of the riders square in the solar plexus sending him flailing from his motorbike. The bike skitters across the asphalt. The gun clatters helplessly to the ground and the guy is grasping for breath. Three more riders (the last three except for the jeep) screech to a halt in a circular formation around me.

My peripheral in my good eye notes the blood on the streets; people have been hurt or killed by these bozos. "What the hell you supposed to be, the mud peoples Mohammad?" A gap toothed stereotypical yokel.

They can't see my grin underneath the bandages, such dullards. The other two ever so brave ones are hiding behind bandannas across their faces. I crack my knuckles. They are circling trying to figure out how to beat on the bandaged guy and still maintain looking tough I gather.

"You're a dead man, Jesus said death to all sinners...that means all you inferiors."

"First, I am Metis, Louis Riel believed himself to be the next coming of David, didn't end to well for him. Second, fuck nuts, Jesus was Jewish and finally..." a round house kick drops the gap tooth. The other two swing their guns up as I dive roll through them the bullets missing me but hitting each other. Idiots. Maybe Darwin's theory of natural selection is right, now after the jeep.

Or continue rolling out of the way as the jeep is flying back towards me. So far I am winning like a Golden Age DC Comics superhero, two unconscious skinheads, two bleeding from gun shot wounds. The five in the jeep do not look happy as they aim to hit me I leap—they miss—the jeep crashes through what's left of the front doors of my church.

The ripping and crunching sounds tells me its stopped. Move towards the new wreckage, the driver had gone through the windshield glass and was a bloodied heap under the cross remnants,

two from the back seat had fallen or jumped out and knocked themselves out, leaving the passenger seat that got impaled by the drive shaft.

But that's only four, where is the fifth? The fist connects with my bandaged face and I feel my skin tear open by a metal finger guard like some 1970's horror movie warlock would wear. Palms up as I land and roll away out of reach.

Metal fingers is about 6'5" I'd guess 300lbs if he's an ounce, chiselled muscle with a gleaming bald head that has the Nazi Raven tattooed on it, his arms have the Nordic symbols of Thor and Odin, and his face is hidden behind a red bandanna with the swastika on it.

"The Fifth Reich will take victory over those that have sullied this great nation. White..." a switch upward swing kick with my work boot and the inhumane tear-crunch tells me he will not be able to reproduce. As he crumples to his knees cupping his genitals with seminal fluid and blood leaking out of his pants I let my fist meet his temple and send him to dream land.

Fifth Reich, that's a new one on me. Hitler called his movement of evil the Third Reich, a Justice Society of America graphic novel I read had the Fourth Reich, so maybe they are not that stupid and don't want to be sued by Warner Brothers for copyright infringement.

But this has escalated the violence in the abandoned zone, the police need to return or I will need help of some kind. The question that comes to mind is why and how? Time to call the Imam again, brings a whole new understanding to inter-faith dialogue.

Leaving the wreckage of my church I now know that I'll need to find a new place to live. The pay phone kiddie corner from the church still works. I punch in the number, and receive his voicemail. "Alan, it's Padre. We need to meet, city hall midnight." I hang up, and dial 911, never give up hope.

"911 what is your emergency?"  
"Drive by shooting, I need SPS." She transfers me to another operator, I give my location, and the operator tells me there will be a unit responding within 24 hours. They transfer me back to EMS, and yeah the line suddenly disconnects.

In the short half block of carnage there are eight casualties, four seniors, three children and a young adult. The seniors are deceased, so are the children, I use what I can to put the young adult's guts back in.

Then vanish back into the church building; I will need to gather some things.

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<sup>1</sup> There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

<sup>2-8</sup> A right time for birth and another for death,  
A right time to plant and another to reap,  
A right time to kill and another to heal,  
A right time to destroy and another to construct,  
A right time to cry and another to laugh,  
A right time to lament and another to cheer,  
A right time to make love and another to abstain,  
A right time to embrace and another to part,  
A right time to search and another to count your losses,  
A right time to hold on and another to let go,  
A right time to rip out and another to mend,  
A right time to shut up and another to speak up,  
A right time to love and another to hate,  
A right time to wage war and another to make peace.

<sup>9-13</sup> But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does?

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-12 from the Message)

**To Be Continued...**

## **The Pigeon takes Flight**

The sunsets on the desolate street, this is bullshit. Those that were elected to protect us; those that were hired to enforce the laws have given up on us the poorest of the poor here in Sherwood. Left us to the predators.

That is not right. Fucking Nazi scum. Historically Hitler's raid on his opponents was dubbed the night of the long knives, where I should have neck hair bristles with phantom hair beneath the bandages. The air is cool as I wait. My eyes are locked on the newest spray painted sign on the gutted waste that was the people's church.

DIE GUTTER FOLK! With the ugliest symbol ever, a swastika, under that a simple message, SUNDOWN. It's sundown, where are these skanks? The street lights that haven't been shot out, spark to life. It's that eerie horror movie quiet just before the zombies swarm the cheerleader.

"Padre." I turn, my good eye locks on the source of the voice.

"Imam, how are you today?" Alan has entered the war zone, hope he brought some means of defense cause I don't think I can keep him safe and battle these punks at the same time.

"The Fifth Reich made a press release, declaring that this neighbourhood was theirs a first step in the purification of Sherwood."



I grimace under my bandages; they have drawn the line in the sand. Nott tried to take the city by force, on whole, that failed, so these idiots are taking it one neighbourhood at a time. "How many died in the last attack?"

Alan just shakes his head. "You don't want to know, but I think it's time hope came back to the neighbourhood." Interesting idea, hear a rumbling they're coming. "I want to build an ecumenical faith centre on the site of the church, for all religions to have a place here to worship and come together."

"Sanctuary?"

"Yes Padre, Sanctuary Hall."

I see the glint of a gun and knock Alan out of the way as the bullets begin flying. It's not just the Fifth Reich; there are other players on the field. A local punk gang, the death cookies (vampire wannabes); and a bunch of wannabe Mafioso types (who happen to be Russian). Four groups coming together with plans to kill each other over highly profitable territory of Sherwood, the first step for city takeover.

An explosion, apartment building erupts in flames, screams, people leaping from windows, time to move. Damn I wish I had powers. Out of a black cube van steps a bald version of Rambo,

grunting. The others are looking to him, with a quick Heil Hitler style salute. "Will you follow Siege?!" More a statement than a question.

Alan flips open his cell phone, "we need you now!"

A chorus of shouts and outstretched arms. I am FUBARred!!! There's at least 125 folks in the streets and armed.

A swoop sound, I think I'm in love; she lands in skintight leather and a flowing cape with a cowl covering her face, forest green. The Hood<sup>3</sup>, hallelujah! "Padre, you ready?"

"I hope so." Clinched fists, time to take out the big boss here. Alan joins us in a triangle formation. The yeller, who I assume is Siege, is hiding behind the entourage of badass wannabes. I wonder if anyone has explained white supremacy to them, and the master race of Aryans being blonde haired, blue-eyed gods and goddesses. According to that logic the majority if not all of these punks are on the chopping block.

"Now what, Padre, Hood? Any ideas?"

Ah Alan, great reporter, excellent Imam, but never really thought we'd wind up in a situation like this one here right now.

"Just one, attention masses, it is my sad duty to inform you that the white supremacy movement you have aligned yourself with

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the mysterious woman called The Hood, check out Sherwood E-Novel.

stipulates that once they have achieved their aims, all of you must die for being inferior." That's right, I said it.

Hood glances at me. "That's your grand plan?" I give a non-committal shrug, what else did she expect, the death cookies look like they are processing, the Russians look pissed (although come to think of it those are gangsters that always look mad).

"Quit stalling you idiots! KILL THEM!!! Siege com—uck!" My eye tries to focus; there was a swish sound. A flash of white and gray and then Siege vanished from view. The Fifth Reich look confused, the death cookies turn on them, the Russians come at us, Hood, myself and Alan go back to back fists and legs swinging as best we can sending people to dream land.

Sirens. Glory hell, I hear sirens, there is a God! Another building explodes out from the furnace room in the basement, the rattle sends glass cascading down, thankfully I know it was a former abandoned crack den, no one is inside.

The local street toughs have dispersed, taking on whoever to try and get out, blood is flowing, God's children are dying. Some would say this is justice, the wages of sin are death. I scream poppycock or bull shit if you prefer. These were once someone's children, they were raised to hate, raised to live in fear, and raised to not love. It is humanity that bred humanity to suffer and die, nothing to do with

"sin" a metaphysical concept, rather to do with avarice. Our self-centredness, survival of the fittest mentality lived out through generations coming to a head on the streets tonight.

The Nazi in front of me crumples, the white and grey clothed individual is standing there, I admit I have to look down, he's maybe five foot if he's lucky, a wee nip pudgy.

Screeching tires, unfurling fire hoses, rubber bullets fly into the crowds, swat shields, the gangs are turning their attention back to newly arrived S.W.A.T. team.

Tear gas, and smoke bombs, time for me to fade away, the gray being vanishes in a puff of smoke, if I didn't know better I would say he flew away. Hood is already gone, I melt back into my church ruins, Alan is voraciously typing on his blackberry now that he can watch from the steps and no longer has to be involved.

The city is reclaiming it's poor from the grips of terror...Once again...

*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this **temple**, and I will raise it again in three days." (John 2:19, New International Version).*

**To Be Continued**

## **Flight of the Crime Fighters**

**By Alan A. Dale**

**Sherwood Herald**

It has been a long time since I was in a war zone, but Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans, almost Rwanda came to the streets of Sherwood today. The Fifth Reich, a local Neo-Nazi/White Supremacist organization attempted to seize control of the city through the Properties community, which the emergency responder services had forsaken. True heroes brought them low, and an announcement of rebuilding with the cornerstone being the Sherwood Wisdom Centre.

Good enough for Shakespeare right? The takeover bid commenced with the bombing of Agnes MacPhail Unity Church, killing local outreach pastor, Reverend John Mustafa. Out of the ashes of the eighty dead men and women, a hero rose up. Covered in bandages, fighting from the shadows, only a whisper on the lips of community members. Padre. He led the charge that reopened the community eventually to the Sherwood S.W.A.T. team.

Padre, The Hood, Brother Imam, and a new comer known only as, The Pigeon, took the fight directly to the Fifth Reich, their leader Siege, and a few of the local street gangs. When the smoke cleared the villains were in chains, the wounded (26) innocent civilians were taken to hospitals, clean up crews, haz-mat and fire crews rolled in to

fix the community, and finally the dead (73) were prayed over, and laid to rest in pauper graves.

Sherwood learned a lesson during the siege of the Fifth Reich, the poor are not less than human, and they are our brothers and sisters that we need to walk alongside. Welcome into community and through mutual care, we can build a society.

As for the four heroes that fought alongside one another, they have dubbed their grouping The Prophets, and these crime fighters have sworn to uphold justice and fight darkness.

The special announcement by me, and the mainline Christian churches that founded Unity Church, with the work of the Roman Catholic Diocese and the local Synagogue that had never been rebuilt in the neighbourhood after Nott's attack, and the Hindu-Sheik Temple, is the ground breaking on the ruins of Agnes MacPhail Unity Church to build the Sherwood Wisdom Centre, where the meeting hall, has been named already, the Reverend John Mustafa Sanctuary. It will be a central beacon of light and hope in a neighbourhood and city being reborn.

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