

Halloween Jack

By C.E. Giugno

I am the freak who welcomed the end of the world.

Jack of all trades, master of none.

Jack the Giant Killer.

Halloween Jack.

I will not beg for mercy. Keep your dagger to my throat and your eyes locked into mine.

Consider yourself a lucky dog, to hear the swan song of a god--

For I will tell you my tale:

The apocalypse began subtly-- probably the only way it could have. You've heard the story of the frog in the pot, yes? Or perhaps no? It *is* old. They say that back in the days when sustenance could be bought in paper not blood, that the French used to boil the little creatures slowly, raising the temperature degree by painstaking degree so that by the time the frog noticed it was getting *killed*, it was already too late.

We made lovely frogs, us humans.

There was disaster upon disaster but we didn't notice. We were shocked, yes, but shock had become a way of life. ...You don't understand? Hmm. Perhaps, you're too young. Don't worry though--you will. Someday. Apathy takes us all eventually.

At the time I believe I was working as a barista somewhere in one of the big cities. Surprisingly good training for the apocalypse if you'd believe it. And you wouldn't believe how many people will still show up for their daily cup of joe even when the heating's out and the streets are

starting to smell like frozen corpse. Though, to be fair, a lot of us stayed on too. Management said if we left the job, called in sick or anything, we would be fired. Our apartments would evict us and we'd have nothing, *be* nothing. A lot of people believed them; I didn't.

Maybe one day, I'll go back and bury their bodies.

I packed up everything I owned and left my flat before they could kick me out. You see-- it was a game of survival now. A equation, I realized, with only one solution. Either I refuse my landlord power over me or I would not live to tell the tale.

As you can see, I'm still here. Survival depends on control, sweet pup-- remember that.

By the time I took to the blaze-burnt blacktop, there were several of us, swarming the streets like half-starved dogs looking for a bite of anything. *Anything*. We stared at each other out of the corners of our eyes, wondering who would be the first to break, to nibble on another's fingers or toes. We could put them down then. It would be morally acceptable-- excusable anyway-- and then we'd have our feast, a pound of flesh for each.

I know it must shock you.

But back then, there were more of us, flesh not nearly as precious a commodity.

And morality was still within its death throes.

So we watched and waited. But even rabid animals could be strong, and our wills held out, though every moment broke us with hunger. A city has, what, millions of people in it? And each person needs approximately 2000 calories a day. Children need more. Old people need less. But few enough of each party remained that I'll count both out. If my sense of mathematics is still intact, these figures suggest a city must supply over a billion calories a day for its inhabitants.

We had much less--

Any remaining sustenance was distributed in unevenly throughout, organized into little hoards, squirrel-nut caches of the dying. If you owned a grocery store *before*, you were a king. Myself, I traded stolen coffee beans for potato chips and peanut butter. A team of Uber drivers even tried to catch fish from the river, but they never had much success. And it was soon clear that whoever ate of their meager earnings would die much more quickly than they would by starvation anyway.

We were a diseased lot. Barely human-things that howled in the night for death to scavenge us from the Earth. Someone had to do something-- correct?

So I did.

(Perhaps you saw this coming.)

I told them stories, tamed the wild beast lurking within each human heart.

I sung to them, riding raw and roughshod over human souls.

I would not begrudge them for their hate or impatience or fear because the same demons lived within me too. They were the only companions we had left, in a way. Our gods had abandoned us-- the rulers and rhetoricians killed in the first panic, the tech giants escaped to the realm of the heavens-- and the animals withdrew from us, seeming to realize that we were no longer the masters of the earth.

But then what were we?

Perhaps civilization's leftovers, rotting away. Perhaps a new humanity set to rebuild the glory we once were.

I did not tell them to rebuild however. Not even when I took upon myself the burden of divinity.

Oh-- do not look at me so. A person needs to believe in something besides themselves. There is too much depression in that. Too much fear. If I was their god, one need not worry about their own imperfection; I'd take the responsibility.

...Needless to say, I was a lonely god.

But I played my role well. There was a building in the middle of an island. *Olympus*, we called it, though it had no name beforehand. I lived upon the top floor, just inches away from the sky. The idea, I suppose, was so that I could better look down upon my people-- but the city smog obscured any semblance of omniscience I might have gained...Some days I wondered whether I was the only being left, whether the others had devoured each other in my name or the name of some other hapless creature. Other days I feared you would forget about me, the idol enshrined in a high rise tomb.

So, in a way, I'm thankful you came. Though you may slice and gore me for the sake of whatever devilry goes on below--whatever they say warrants me the fate to be hunted down like a dog-- you ensure I survive. Immortality's a tricky thing, especially...now. But my death ensures that the name of Jack will live on forever.

So go ahead. Do it. A god isn't a god until they've died.

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Hmm. Foolish little thing.