

Monster Town – a novella by Steven Savile & Brian M Logan



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by

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writing as:

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When the leggy blonde with breasts you could ski down entered the run down New York office of JD Enron, monster wrangler, she did so without making a sound. Winifred Winifred, JD's seventy-something secretary, practically had a coronary when she looked up from her knitting to see the stranger standing no more than two feet away.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, dropping her knit one, purl two. "I didn't see you there!"

"I'm here to see Mr. Enron," said the woman, her expression devoid of anything remotely resembling emotion.

Winifred Winifred peered suspiciously over the metal rim of her bifocals. "I see. Do you have an appointment?"

The woman slowly looked around the empty waiting room. "No."

"Well, best you take a seat then and I'll enquire if Mr Enron is available."

The woman glanced down at the 'Month Ahead' planner that sat open on the counter between them. With the exception of 'Yankees Demonstration Game' listed on the 13th, the entire month of December, 2055 was blank.

"Oh I'm sure he can fit me in somehow."

Winifred Winifred picked up the retro 20th century handset and dialed an internal line. "Mr. Enron, sorry to

disturb you, but there's a woman out here wishing to see you...I don't know sir, she didn't say...no she doesn't...very well, of course. I'll send her right in."

By the time Winifred Winifred had placed the receiver back in its cradle, the woman was already halfway toward the door of JD's inner sanctum, and all the way toward changing his life forever.



JD lounged in his torn leather-backed chair with his feet on the corner of a weathered, mahogany desk. A striking, if somewhat haggard ne'er-do-well in his mid-forties, JD had black thinning hair buzzed to a number one marine cut, dark piercing eyes, and might on another day have been thought of as handsome. A day which started with a shower and a shave, perhaps.

When the door to his office opened and the mysterious woman entered, JD promptly forgot to breathe. Backlit, her legs going on forever, her ethereal beauty seeming to make her whole body momentarily translucent, the woman was a vision in white satin and long dead mink.

"Please, ah...come in," JD stammered, when his lock-jaw finally disengaged. He pointed to the chair opposite his desk. "Have a seat."

The woman sashayed toward him and poured herself onto the chair, crossing her legs just slowly enough to hint that maybe – just maybe – the promised land might offer a day pass if JD could only play his cards right.

“That’s a nice dress you’re almost wearing,” JD said by way of introduction. “I’m JD Enron.”

JD rose from his seat and offered his outstretched hand across the desk. The woman didn’t take it.

“I know who you are. You come highly recommended.” Her voice was like a frosted daiquiri. Nectareous and chilling.

JD retracted his hand and considered himself told. “And you would be…”

“A paying client.”

Dispensing with the usual client/wrangler verbal foreplay – which JD happened to enjoy – the woman promptly took out a thick wad of hundreds from her bag and placed it on the desk between them.

“*Holy shit!*”

“Indeed. Now if we can dispense with the pleasantries, I need you to start straight away.”

JD sat back down, instantly lowering his poker face.

“Whoa, back up a ways lady. I make it a policy of not signing onto a job without knowing what’s on the table.”

“Approximately fifty thousand dollars is on the table, if you must know. In unmarked, non-sequential bills. With as much again on completion of the job.”

JD wiped a bead of sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his sweat-stained shirt. An old fan clunked and whirled in the background.

“So, who do you want me to kill?”

It was a joke designed to break the ice. But if this woman had a sense of humor she sure as hell wasn't going to give it up without a fight.

“You'd kill somebody for a hundred thousand dollars?”

“Lady, depending on whether I like 'em or not, I'd probably kill 'em for free.”

The women contemplated this for a little longer than JD thought was healthy. “I'll keep that in mind. But no, I don't think any killing will be necessary. Though the assignment does not come without risks.”

“Keep talking.”

“I need you to find a missing person. Someone very dear to me.” She reached into her Prada Vuitton handbag and pulled out a happy snap of a cute fifteen year old girl on a pure white Andalusian stallion, and slid it across the desk. JD picked it up.

“Let me guess, your daughter, right?”

“Yes. This is Cassie...I mean, Cassandra.”

“So what’d you do? Ground her once too often? Refuse to buy her a new Mercedes for her birthday?”

The woman bristled at this.

“What I did or didn’t do is none of your concern. The fact that she’s missing is all that you need to be aware of.”

JD was seriously starting to dislike this woman. Which, given his love for unmarked hundreds and a good décolletage, took some doing on her part.

“I’m sorry lady, I can’t help you. I’m a monster wrangler not a PI. I don’t work norm cases.”

“I know full well what you do. And it’s your experience dealing with monsters that brings me here. You see...” - she hesitated for a moment, as if the memory was too much for her - “...my daughter has run away to Monster Town...”

“*Jesus in a Walmart!*” The words nearly caused JD to fall over the back of his chair. “What makes you think she’s gone to Monster Town?”

“Because that’s the very place I told her she couldn’t go. But, as always, Cassie chose to defy me.” She unfolded a small handwritten note from her bag and passed it to JD.

*

I've gone to Monster Town to become a dancer. Don't try to follow me. It's your fault daddy left. I hate you! I hate you!

*

The woman's cold exterior thawed ever so slightly as JD read the note. "Tell me, Mr. Enron. Do you have any children?"

JD looked up. "Me? None that I'll admit to. Why do you ask?"

"Pardon me, I don't mean to be intrusive. It's just that once you hold a new born child in your arms for the very first time, you realize you'll never have control over anything in your life, ever again. And that's a horribly scary feeling." She paused, fighting back tears. "I'm sorry, I'm babbling."

"No, no, that's okay." JD pushed a box of 2-ply tissues across the desk. The woman took one and dabbed the side of her eyes.

"I love my little girl, Mr. Enron. You must understand that. And Monster Town is no place for a child like her."

"You got that right. Monster Town's hell on earth and make no mistake."

An awkward silence followed. The whirring fan and a subdued police siren, softened almost into melody by the distance, the only sounds. JD was aware the woman was waiting for him to say something comforting, but he also knew that to do so would weaken his hand. Because, as every freelance monster wrangler knows, in the final part of a client negotiation: 'He who speaks first after the close loses.'

"So...will you...take the job?" the woman said, when the silence had become unbearable. "Please? I...I don't know where else to turn."

And then he had her.

"Yeah, yeah, I'll take the job already, relax. But it's gonna cost ya."

The woman instantly straightened against the hard back of her chair. Her posture once more aloof and commanding. "Money is not an object."

"That's good. Because let's just say I'm public enemy number one in Monster Town. And if you want me to go back there and risk my life to rescue your kid, it'd damn well better be worth my while."

"How much are we talking?"

He reached across and picked up the fifty thousand dollars and dropped it in his desk draw.

"This'll do as a retainer. But I want another hundred thousand upon the safe return of your daughter."

"Agreed."

"And fifteen hundred a day expenses."

"That's not going to be a problem."

JD stared at her. Hard. "I could've said five thousand a day expenses and you would've agreed to that too, wouldn't you?"

She nodded.

"Man, you rich people are a riot."

The woman looked perplexed. "So...does that mean you need five thousand a day expenses?"

"Nah. Keep your money. Fifteen hundred a day should cover it. But, if I need to hire some muscle when I get to Monster Town, that'll cost you another \$500 a day per person. But, let's cross that bridge when we come to it. Because if I play my cards right I can be in and out without anyone ever knowing I was there."

He stood up and walked over to an ancient coffee pot that sat on the nearby windowsill, a gaudy red neon street sign reflecting off its discolored surface. He poured himself a cup, thick and black, but did not offer one to his guest.

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“Right now I need you to tell me everything you can about your daughter. Who she is, what makes her tick...and why the hell she’s foolish enough to risk her life by running away to a town full of monsters...”