

# Survivor

## CHAPTER ONE

My name is Tavish Danger Dixon and this is where I should say something to let you readers know how impressive I am or to put fear in the hearts of my enemies. The problem is, I'm just not that guy. Never was. So, I'll just go with the Dragnet opening: My name is Dixon. I carry a badge. My beat is the supernatural.

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I was standing in the captain's office at the CIS. I hadn't asked for this job. *I didn't want this job.* The Cold Investigations Squad was the place where all the oddballs and misfits in the Lexington Police Department ended up. Or at least it was until a year back when eight of its thirteen investigators died in the line of duty during some sort of terrorist attack on police headquarters. The CIS officers were trapped in their basement offices and had to fight their way out. A bunch of awards were given - most of them posthumously. However, the actual facts of the event were kept under wraps, "for reasons of national security." I was visiting his brother in Versailles on the day of the attack and all I knew was a bunch of second hand stories, all of which seemed to agree that a group of sovereign citizen types tried to plant bombs in basement and tripped over the CIS offices.

After the attack, Lieutenant Martin "retired." The new head of the squad, Captain Arnold Long, was hand picked by the Chief. Word was that he only took the job after the Chief promised that he would be allowed to pick his replacements from anyone in street patrol ranked sergeant or below. For the last year, CIS had been trying to poach any officer who showed promise and there was a fairly large amount of internecine fighting as officers tried to avoid a career destroying transfer and the captain in charge of Patrol Division did everything he could to keep his best young officers.

Of course, none of that bothered me much; I was the short, round guy who sat at the front desk. I didn't have to worry about anyone trying to poach me. Then I made the mistake of tripping over and single-handedly stopping a bank robbery. It wasn't like I went in all Call of Duty. I'd walked in to beg for a loan and three men opened fire on me; I just dove for the floor and shot at their feet. Nevertheless, there were headlines, medals, and a promotion to corporal. Then came the transfer orders.

Captain Long extended his hand to shake. "I know you're not happy about the transfer Corporal, but your handling of the robbery was too impressive for us to pass you up. Three robbers downed in less than thirty seconds. We need survivors like that."

I shook his hand, but didn't say anything, so he started talking again.

"Corporal Dixon, Do you know what this squad does?"

"Sir, it investigates cases after the Violent Crimes or Theft Squads give up on them."

"I know that's what we do on the books Dixon. Did you know this squad has the highest mortality rate in the department – and I mean even before the terrorist attack?"

"Um, no sir."

"Good. It's a fact that the department works very hard not to publicize. Anyway, you're right, we handle the things that the other squads give up on. However, they give up on a lot of them much sooner than you'd expect. We handle the weird things which don't exist. And after we're done with them, they still don't exist."

"Here are the basic rules Dixon. One: Invite no one into your home. Not even if you know them. They can walk through the open door themselves. Two: No one gets your blood or hair. Three: Always carry silver, wood, and iron."

With that, the Captain ended the strangest interview I had ever been through and walked me out to my desk. The squad room had six pairs of desks facing each other and my name was written on a small whiteboard hanging on the wall next to one: Corporal Tavish D. Dixon. The whiteboard above the desk paired to it had the name Sergeant Maria Sanchez on it.

That desk was covered with religious icons and on the wall above the whiteboard there was a three foot tall crucifix. The woman sitting behind the desk was in her mid-fifties with graying hair tied in a bun on her head. The dark green dress she was wearing had white frills around its collar and cuffs. She looked like the matriarch from a Telemundo soap opera.

"Sergeant Sanchez, we got you a new partner."

She gave me a once over. "No way, Arnie. There's no way this kid can handle it."

"You don't think anyone can deal with reality Sergeant, but this kid ran down a cephalopod on foot. That's got to be tough enough."

Sanchez gave the captain a strange look. "A cephalopod? Some sort of demon?"

Captain Long just stood there. After a second, he shrugged and turned to walk away. "It's a joke. Sometimes I forget you don't have a television . . . or sense of humor. Take care of the rookie. He's a survivor."

As soon as the Captain's door closed Sergeant Sanchez was on her feet. She put on a matronly sweater from the back of her chair and motioned for me to follow her.

“Where we going, Sergeant?”

“We, Ducky, are going somewhere that I can throw you into the middle of a bunch of gators. You won't believe anything I say until we get this over with.”

## CHAPTER TWO

Fifteen minutes later we were in the Chevy Chase neighborhood and had just passed Christ the King Cathedral. Sanchez pulled into the parking lot of the Kroger and drove past it to a building at the back of the parking lot. The sign on the door said “Miss Tre's Botique.”

“Sergeant, why are we going into a beauty salon?”

“Oh, please. Tell me that you aren't so green that you don't know what this place is.”

“Sarge, I worked the Northside. You ask me about Winburn, or North Limestone, or Castlewood and I can tell you anything you need to know. You ask me about the ritzy areas of town and I don't know squat.”

“Fair enough. What was the most profitable whorehouse on the Northside?”

“That's easy. It was the oriental massage parlor on New Circle.”

“Well, this place makes more money in a week than that place does in a year. If it gets busy, they can do it in one day.”

I hesitated for a second. “Sergeant Sanchez, unless we are going in there to arrest someone, I have no interest in going in that building.”

Sanchez looked at me. “Which is it, married or gay?”

I froze. I wasn't either, but if I answered I would probably run afoul of the Department's diversity and sensitivity regulations. Saying you weren't gay could be construed as saying there was something wrong with being gay. It wasn't usually a problem back in the locker room with the guys in your squad, but I didn't know Sergeant Sanchez well enough to take the chance.

She watched me and her face broke into a giant grin. “Get over yourself, Ducky. The women in here cost more than you make in a year – maybe two. And we aren't arresting anybody either. The lady who runs this place has contacts at the highest levels both in Lexington and in Frankfort. Hell, if she really pushed she could probably bring federal heat down on us too.”

With that, Sanchez turned and pushed the glass door open. Inside, there was a small room with four chairs. Two of them had men reclining in them as their hair was being shampooed by young women wearing nothing but tube tops and micro-minis. Sanchez walked right past them and knocked on a door at the back of the room. A slit in the door opened and a lilting, Southern voice came through. “May I ask who is calling?”

“Knock it off Clara. You know damn well who it is. You've been watching us on video

since we pulled up.”

The door clicked and opened to reveal a petite woman with bleached blond hair and not a stitch of clothing. Behind her was a room filled with pillows and young, naked women. Whichever one I looked at was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen – until another woman caught my attention and became the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. The woman at the door spoke. “Why Sergeant Sanchez, what a pleasant surprise. And who is this uniformed fellow you've brought with you? Who are you boy?”

As soon as she spoke, the entirety of my attention snapped into focus on the woman in the doorway. She continued to speak and I felt myself centering on her with a single minded attention I had never had for any woman, or anything else for that matter. Strangely, I couldn't understand her words, but I could still hear Sanchez's.

“Clara, turn that crap off. He's brand new and he's not used to this sort of thing yet.” When the woman continued to speak to me, Sanchez changed tactics. “Okay. You and your girls have your fun with him. Just turn him back over to me in the morning.” She turned to walk away, then stopped and turned back casually. “Oh, and you should probably know he's a survivor.”

The woman stopped talking and took a step back. I found myself two feet from her. I'd been closer before she stepped away and wasn't exactly sure how I'd gotten across the ten feet of floor from where I'd been standing. I retreated in confusion to my original spot.

“That's better.” Sanchez said. “Ducky, I want you to meet Clara. She's our local siren and all these others,” she pointed to the other women in the room, “are her spawn. None of them live longer than ten days, but best I can tell Clara is immortal.”

Sanchez turned to Clara. “I need you to show him.” When Clara shook her head, Sanchez leaned into her. “Clara, we don't enforce against you *ever*. In exchange, we expect a certain level of cooperation. Now show the boy so that he can't go back and rationalize your singing away as some sort of male hormone thing.”

Suddenly, the woman in the doorway was gone and a giant fish with scale covered breasts and a head with yellow eyes and green hair stood there. It spat out “Satisfied, Maria?” and a scaly arm reached forward and slammed the door. Sanchez grabbed my arm, spun me around, and led me out of the beauty salon.

In a few seconds we were back in the car. As we drove away I sat stunned, trying to process whatever that was I had just seen. A cheerful voice interrupted my thoughts. “Welcome to the wonderful world of the supernatural, Ducky.”

We made four other stops that morning and I was introduced to a group of dwarves who ran a diamond shop, an elf who was head grounds keeper at the Lexington Country Club, a werecat who ran a pest extermination business, and a sorcerer who was a professor of physics at the University of Kentucky. The next stop was Wheeler Pharmacy. We walked

back to the soda fountain and sat at the end of the counter away from the other customers. A young woman served us up a couple burgers and heaping stacks of fries.

“So, why are we here, Sarge? You gonna show me that the pharmacist is a vampire?”

“Heh. Not likely. I'm not sure there are any vampires left. Word is, some guy out of Chicago capped 'em all. Can't decide if he's a genius or a friggin' idiot. Hard to believe one guy can cause so much chaos. Anyway, we're here because I like the food and I trust Maggie and Beatrice not to spit in it because I'm a cop.”

“So no one in here's something other than they appear to be?”

Sanchez mumbled around her mouthful of burger. “Didn't say that. Beatrice is a fate. Don't ever let her tell you something about yourself. Once she says something will happen, it will.”

The second woman working behind the counter, a thin lady in her sixties, walked over in front of the officers. “I also have extremely good hearing. Don't let Sanchez fool you, young man. Free will reigns supreme. I can't make you do anything.”

“No she can't.” Sanchez agreed. “However, once she makes a prediction the circumstances around you become such that you do what she predicted or your life becomes a living Hell.”

“That's closer to the truth. Once I predict something the universe conforms to the prediction as though it has already happened. When it doesn't there's an awful mess. I've spent twenty years trying to fix a free will problem caused by Sergeant Sanchez here saving my bacon. I predicted she would kill a young man who jilted me. It was petty and stupid and I regretted it almost instantly. The only thing that saved me from myself was her free will. She didn't shoot, even after he trolled out on her. Although,” Beatrice smiled, “She did use about a gallon of pepper spray on him.”

“And for my exercise of free will, I got exiled to the CIS. Been in the squad for twenty years now and, despite Beatrice's guilt, I wouldn't trade the last twenty years for nothing.”

“Careful dear, you sound like you're just about to say 'And next week I retire and move to Florida.' We all know what happens after that.”

Sanchez laughed. “Hell Bea, you know better than anyone else that I ain't leaving the job until I go out feet first.”

“Yes, I know. I also know that we've wandered too far into the maudlin. So, let's change the subject. Are you ever going to introduce me to your young man, Maria?”

“He ain't 'my young man.' Ducky here's the newest meat in the squad. I got the joyous duty of babysitting him. Introduce yourself to the lady, Ducky.”

I stood and extended my hand. "Corporal Tavish Dixon, ma'am."

Beatrice took my hand. "Well, at least she hasn't beaten the politeness out of you yet." Then her grip tightened and a shocked look hit her face. "You're Tavish Danger Dixon? You're the Survivor! But, it's too early. The probabilities haven't gelled yet. *You can't be here yet!* It can't be now!"

"Oh, crap!" Sanchez jumped up and chopped our hands apart. "C'mon boy, we need to get you out of here now!" She threw some money on the counter and started to pull me away. Before they could get five feet, Beatrice shook herself and looked around.

Sanchez practically screamed at me. "Move! We've gotta get out of earshot *right fucking now!*"

The fate turned to the young girl working at the other end of the counter and started speaking in a loud voice. "Margaret Emerald Terrel, I predict that you and Tavish Danger Dixon, the Survivor, shall fall in love, marry, and live long lives together of mutual protection and loving companionship."

Sanchez stopped pulling me. When I looked at her, she had her face down, covered with her left hand. Then she looked up. "What the Hell are you doing, Bea? You're on probation. You know I have to take you in."

"It doesn't matter. He's Danger Dixon, the Survivor. I had to make sure Maggie was taken care of and I don't have a bit of desire to be out in the world while all this gets sorted. He's at least five years ahead of schedule and that can't be good."

As she spoke, Beatrice took off her apron and walked out from behind the counter. She held out her hands for cuffs, but Sanchez waved her off. We walked her out of the pharmacy and put her in the back seat of the car. Sanchez pushed a button and the plastic separator behind the front seats began to hum. She looked over at me. "Sound suppressor. From now until we hand her over, we won't hear a word she says. Predictions don't work unless the person involved hears them live."

Instead of driving to the station, we went a block over to Christ the King Cathedral. The car stopped in the middle of the parking lot and Sanchez switched the dial on her radio to the off position and then spoke into the handset. "Got a pickup at the Cathedral. Probation violation."

Before Sanchez put the receiver down there was a knock on the window on my side of the car. A man who had not been there a second earlier motioned for Sanchez to release the lock on the back door. As soon as she did, he opened the door and Beatrice stepped out. She walked ahead of him as he escorted her through a door in the side of the church. Then a knock came on the driver's side and another man who hadn't been there a second earlier motioned for Sanchez to roll her window down. She complied.

“Sergeant Maria Katia Sanchez, we have Beatrice in custody and she has been judged guilty. Do you wish to say anything on her behalf?”

“Yes.” Sanchez said. “I believe she acted in a manner which she thought best for her friend and ward Maggie. I do not believe she meant evil by her action.”

“Your statement has been noted and weighed. Beatrice has predicted an outcome which has narrowed reality and threatened free will. This is balanced against her shock of a reality changed improperly around her and her desire to protect Maggie Emerald Terrel and possibly Corporal Tavish Danger Dixon. Her sentence is two years. She will return to this reality after that time. She asked that you know her sentence.”

Sanchez thanked him and started to close the window, but the man stuck his hand in the window and it stopped.

“Sergeant Maria Katia Sanchez, have you reconsidered your decision?”

“No. I am quite happy working for the Lexington Police Department. You can take another crack at recruiting me when I die.”

“We will Sergeant Maria Katia Sanchez. Rest assured.”

With that the man moved his hand and the window closed. I could sense a vague feeling of disappointment in the air and then the man was gone. I spun my head around, but he just wasn't there.

“Where'd he go? Who are these guys? Are they feds? Homeland Security?”

“They're Michaels. Not sure who they are exactly. Think they're probably angels. All I know is that they guard the unguardable. Think maybe they judge them too, but not sure. Hold on a sec.” She pulled her phone out and started tapping on it. “I have to make sure I calendar Bea's release so I can pick her up.”

“Wait, are you telling me that the Cathedral is a prison?”

“Nope. You and I go through that door and we end up in the church hall. Churches are just the easiest place to contact them. They hold the condemned somewhere else. The supernaturals say it's purgatory, but I've got my doubts.”

“And before you ask, yes, they offered me a position. Ten years ago, I almost died. Wasn't even a supernatural who got me. Was some kid who was drunk and hit my car. Anyway a guy showed up at the hospital and offered me a position. I declined.”

With that Sanchez started the car and drove back to the station. I tried to ask her more questions, but her mood had soured and all I got were a few uninformative grunts.

## CHAPTER THREE

When we got back to the station, Sanchez walked me straight into the Captain's office. Captain Long was sitting at his table working through a pile of papers when she shoved open the door.

“We got problems, Arnie. Beatrice predicted this kid to be 'the Survivor.'”

The Captain stood and his face started to cloud with anger. “You took Corporal Dixon to Beatrice for a prediction?”

“No. *Hell no.* I took the kid to Wheeler's Pharmacy for lunch. You know I eat there. I'd already shown him the siren, dwarves, elves, and that goofy sorcerer at U.K. Figured I'd kill two birds with one stone and get lunch while showing him a fate and ogre. When Beatrice met him she just went nuts and predicted him to be the Survivor. Woulda never let him within ten miles of her if I thought something like that might happen. Had to turn her over to the Michaels. Probation violation.”

“I couldn't care less about your friend getting locked back up, Sergeant. Does anyone know she's predicted him?”

“Pretty sure it's out, Captain.” Sanchez pointed and they all looked through the glass window in the Captain's door. Someone had drawn a Superman “S” over top of my name on the whiteboard. Someone else had written in “Danger Will Robinson! Danger!”

“Great, Just great.” The Captain sat back down. “That looks like Meiers' handwriting and if that idiot has already found out then every troll, demon, and minor league sorcerer in Lexington knows. It'll be all over Kentucky in a week. God help us when the news gets to Louisville. We've managed to keep that group of miscreants bottled up there for decades, but there'll be all sorts of supernaturals who will feel the need to come down and take their shot.”

“Dixon, has Sergeant Sanchez told you what's going on yet?”

“No, sir. We spent the morning doing so many things and I haven't been able to compute it all. She didn't need to pile more on me.”

“Good instincts Corporal. It's good to see someone covering his partner's back,” the Captain gave Sanchez a withering look, “even when she's screwed up royally.”

“Corporal, there are certain people who come through supernatural encounters better than others. We don't know if they are magical or blessed or just a joke of fate. We do know they've been around forever. After you got the drop on and killed three ghouls, without even knowing what you were facing, we were pretty sure that you were a survivor. Now, we know.”

“Supernaturals tend to at least be wary of survivors. Survivors are the evil characters in the fairy tales they tell their young. Of course, in their version the survivor always gets it in the end.” The Captain smiled. “My research tells a different story. Every survivor I've been able to identify has given the supernaturals fits and dies of old age or natural causes. We think there are three in Lexington PD; you were the only one I was able to get transferred to CIS. Nobody fights too hard for an out of shape officer who sits at a desk - even after he's just done something accidentally heroic.”

“Anyway, there's a myth they all know about 'The Survivor.' Supposedly, once every generation or so, just before a major supernatural catastrophe, The Survivor appears. Sometimes he stops the catastrophe; sometimes he mitigates it; in any event, he kills a bunch of supernaturals. They don't like that. Beatrice made you public enemy number one for every supernatural this side of that walking disaster zone in Chicago. Every supernatural thug who wants to make a name for himself will take a run at you.”

“Captain, are you saying I'm Buffy?”

“*You wish.* You don't get any special abilities. You won't be any faster, stronger, or instantly have a black belt. You're just you and everything they try to do to hurt you will fail or backfire. Picture yourself more as the Roadrunner and all the supernaturals as a whole bunch of Wile E. Coyoties.”

The Captain cocked his head in thought. “Aaand, I can't let anything like that kind of mayhem and destruction happen on the Southside. Looks like you're getting our Northside patrol Corporal Dixon.”

I was a little surprised at how blatant that was. “Okay, Captain. I grew up in Rookwood and that's where I was stationed before. I know the area pretty good. Am I still partnered with Sergeant Sanchez?”

“No. The Northside patrol is a solo. You'll replace Lieutenant Meiers and he'll brief you on any activity he's been keeping an eye on. He should have a list of the names and numbers of local supernatural community leaders. You'll start tomorrow.”

With that, the Captain dismissed us from his office. As we walked out, my head was spinning. Fairy tale monsters were real and they were my beat. I sat at my desk and stared off into space until I noticed Sanchez sitting across from me with a huge grin on her face. I looked a confused question at her.

“Ducky, wouldn't you like to know who the ogre was?”

## CHAPTER FOUR

It was well past midnight and I was sitting in the dugout of a baseball field in the middle of Castlewood Park. This was my first attempt to sort which supernaturals were where in the Northside. Lieutenant Meiers turned out to be less than useful in that regard. He was old school CIS, which meant he'd been assigned to the squad because someone thought he was useless. After speaking to him, I was inclined to agree. His main pieces of advice were that the Burger & Shake gave a fifty percent discount if you showed your badge and an officer could get a free room at the Bryan Station Inn, should he need someplace to go during his shift. When I asked for his list of supernatural community leaders Meiers dug into his desk and came up with a sheet of paper with some phone numbers and notes like "cats-Castlewood", "dogs-Winburn" scribbled on it. I asked what they meant, but he just shrugged. "Hell if know kid. I got that list from Anderson when I got stuck on the Northside. I ain't never been stupid enough to call any of them." Of course, Anderson was one of the officers who died in the attack on the station twelve months prior.

So, I started calling the numbers. Half of them were disconnected. When they weren't I identified myself as part of the CIS and tried to find out if the person on the other end of the line was a supernatural. It was tricky because I couldn't come right out with a straight forward question like "Hey, you wouldn't happen to be Frankenstein's monster or a werewolf, would you?" Most people were unaware of the supernatural aspects of the world and both the Captain and Sergeant Sanchez had made it clear to me that part of his job was to make sure they remained ignorant. In the end only two people admitted they were supernaturals and they insisted on meeting at Castlewood Park because it was considered neutral territory. I arrived an hour earlier, at two in the morning, and turned the lights of the baseball field on. From my spot in the dugout I had a brick wall behind me, a roof over my head, and a clear view of anyone walking toward me. I hoped the meeting would be polite, but I wanted some protection if the meeting went the other way.

The first to arrive was a pack of coyotes. They walked up cautiously, sniffing the air and looking in every direction before they loped through the open gate onto the infield. Then a single, huge black panther jumped over the outfield fence and all the coyotes save the biggest turned and yipped nervously. The big one kept his eyes trained on me.

The panther walked toward the infield and as it did, it somehow transformed into a pudgy white guy of about sixty, with an old Hawaiian shirt on over honest-to-goodness corduroy pants. After the panther transformed, the big coyote changed into a skinny black man who looked to be about the same age. He said something to the other coyotes and they all ran back out the gate, returning to the darkness. He was dressed from head to toe in a bright blue nehru jacket and bell-bottomed pants, both covered with white paisley swirls. The men walked together to about ten feet in front of the dugout.

The black man spoke first. "We apologize for the terrible clothes. This was the height of fashion back when I agreed to get bit and join the pack and Harry over there got bit while he was mowing his lawn somewhere in deepest, darkest Appalachia."

“Yeah,” Harry chipped in, grinning “being a bitten changer gives you a long life and great health, but every time you change back you have the same stupid clothes on that you did when you were first bit. At least I've got an excuse.” He hooked a thumb at thumb at the other man. “Marcus chose that.”

The two men grinned, obviously friends, and I stepped forward to shake their hands.

“I want to thank you gentlemen for coming to speak to me. I was given fifteen numbers to contact supernatural community leaders and your numbers were the only ones that were actually right. You're the only members of your community who I could get to meet with me.”

“Oh, I wouldn't say that.” Marcus smiled amiably. “My pack spotted at least twenty other people out there in the dark.” He leaned over to Harry. “By the way, we spotted Anna. You might want to talk to her. I had to snap pretty hard at a couple of the younger members of the pack to keep them from chasing.”

“Yeah, the young ones are always stupid. Like as not she was baiting them; she still feels invincible. Of all people, you'd think she would already understand the concept of a 'pack.' I'll have a word with her, but we both know mine aren't as easy to keep in line as yours.” Both men nodded and their semi-private conversation ended.

“Anyway, Marcus and I,” Harry waved his hand at the darkness, “and all those good people out there, wanted to see Danger Dixon, *the Survivor* for ourselves.”

“I don't know who this Survivor guy is. I'm Corporal Dixon, assigned to patrol the Northside for the CIS. I just want to do my job and as far as I can tell I don't have any magical abilities outside of the things CIS has given me.”

Harry and Marcus exchanged a look and then Marcus spoke. “Corporal Dixon, we've all been watching you for the entire time you've been in the Park. From the moment you got here you've had a mazikeen trying to prank you. He's tried to trip you several times and he even tried to make the switch shock you when you turned on the lights. Every time, he's failed. He's tripped over his wings a couple times, flat out missed a couple more, and you saw the sparks on the line when you turned on the lights?” I nodded. “Well, that was him shocking himself silly.”

Harry spoke up. “Marcus, he can't see the little booger.”

“Yeah, well, I can fix that. *Demon, Spirit, whatever ye be, I call on ye to let us see. Three times I say it. Three times you hear. Appear. Appear. Appear.*”

“Alright. Alright. He can see me now.” A four foot tall man with wings on his back and wearing a toga appeared. He spoke with one of those weird New York accents. “You two are spoilsports. All I wanted to do was one little thing. Something I could brag about back

in Queens.”

“Wow.” Marcus said. “You came a long way to get yourself in serious trouble.”

“Trouble? For a little prank? I didn't do anything which would hurt him permanent.”

“This,” both men intoned at the same time, “is neutral territory.”

“Crap!” The little man was in the air in an instant and halfway through the outfield before a huge half-woman, half-vulture swooped down at him. He avoided her, but crashed into the ground doing it. Then a panther jumped over the back fence and coyotes started flooding through the gate. The little winged man jumped up and sprinted back toward me.

“I surrender! I surrender! Take me to Purgatory.”

The Panther stopped at the edge of the infield and the bird-lady landed beside it. The coyotes pursued the man right up to pitcher's mound, when Marcus turned around and yelled at them to stop. They yipped a lot and one of the smaller ones started to come forward until a larger one nipped its tail. The winged man stood there and held his hands out in a way that indicated he wanted to be cuffed.

They all stared at me for a minute and then the bird-lady cackled – actually cackled – and spoke in a screechy voice. “Unbelievable. Marcus, you were right. They assigned the Northside another incompetent. He doesn't even know the rules yet.”

Marcus kept facing his pack and motioned to Harry.

“Right, introductions all around then. The harpy is Sherry. The young panther is Anna. I can't really keep track of everybody in the pack, but I know the lady who snapped the young one back in line is Marcus' wife Eva.”

“The particular rule Sherry is talking about is that violation of neutral territory ends one of two ways. Either the transgressor goes to the Michaels or gets hunted until he is killed. You are the only one here who can take him to the Michaels. It's your choice.”

“Um, I'm pretty sure my boss wouldn't be happy if I let somebody get killed on my first week on the job. Murder is kind of considered a bad thing.” I motioned the man over and cuffed him. “Where's the nearest Catholic Church?”

Marcus waved at his pack and they trotted back out the gate into the dark. The panther took a couple quick steps and made a long jump back over the fence. The harpy transformed into a lady in her mid-forties in a gray power suit, who looked like she spent a lot of time keeping herself fit. She walked over to the others.

“I particularly liked the point where you two yahoos spoke in a menacing chorus telling this twit what he'd done.”

She turned to me. “Is your name actually 'Danger' or is that something the fate stuck you with?”

“It's something my parents stuck me with. I'm Tavish Danger Dixon, but I go by Tavish, not Danger.”

“Okay, Danger it is then. You were stuck with it from the moment that prig Beatrice hung it on you. I just wanted to know if it was really your name or not. I'm Sherry Selliers and I guess you could say I run the Northside for our people – as much as anybody can.”

“Our people?”

“Our people are all those who are not mundanes between Winchester Road, I-75, Old Franklin Pike, and into downtown to about 4th Street – just short of Transylvania College. We're the most ignored part of the city and your predecessor never made a single arrest. You planning to be much different?”

I pointed to the man in handcuffs.

“Yeah. Well, we'll see, You didn't have much choice today. And I know the reason you were sent here. They don't want the Southside being mused up when people start taking potshots at you. Who cares if the North gets blown to bits as long as the Southside stays pristine?”

“And what's all this about taking this idiot off to a Catholic church. You a Jesuit, or something? Most everybody you arrest around here's a Protestant. Why should they be handed over at a Catholic church? It's discrimination and I'll have none of it.” She pointed at Marcus. “Take him for example. Marcus, where does your family go to church?”

“Four members of my pack go to Saint Peter Claver, and I resent your assumption that because we're Black, we couldn't possibly be Catholics. Furthermore, young lady . . .”

Harry rolled his eyes and motioned me off to the side. “Marcus is about the only one who'll argue with Sherry anymore. They can go on for hours. If you want to get out of here any time soon you'd best break in.”

By this time, Sherry was loudly talking about community synergy and Marcus was just as loudly telling her his people could get along without her limousine liberal meddling. They were standing face to face and neither showed the slightest inclination of backing away.

I put on my best concerned cop face and walked over. “Maybe you two should separate a little and cool off.” The two looked at me and embarrassment crossed Marcus' face as he stepped back. Sherry's face started with a look of disdain and slowly composed itself into

a blank expression. “That's better. I'm going to run this guy in and I guess I'll take him to North View Baptist, since it's a sensitive issue.” I took hold of the little man's arm and started to lead him away.

Sherry looked in my direction and leapt into the air, transforming mid-leap into her harpy form. “Next time, Danger, don't waste our time like this. Some of us have to be at work in a few hours.” Then she was gone.

Behind my back, I heard Marcus utter, “Bitch” and Harry agreeing with him.