

**1885**

His black robe billowed out around him showing traces of red satin lining. In one hand, he held a wand made from hazel wood, polished and consecrated in blood, in the other hand, a ceremonial knife. Both were engraved with the symbols of his faith.

He started making a ceremonial circle on the dirt floor around him to contain the demon he was about to summon, "I invoke and conjure Thee..." While speaking the incantation he carved the large outer circle and then an inner circle filling the space between the two with ceremonial writing. He continued his incantation, "Sadai, do thou forthwith appear and shew thyself unto me..." he drew three obtuse triangles and continued the writing at the corners and insides of the triangles. He finished his incantation, "...do thou come without tarrying; come, fulfill my desires; persist unto the end, according to mine intentions."

He stood in the center and waited.

### **Present**

"Let's go on a Ghost Tour."

"A what tour?" her husband asked.

"It's called a Ghost Tour. They're having one in downtown El Paso on Friday night. We'll make it a date night."

"A date night? Just you, me and Casper?"

She slapped his arm, "No, silly. I mean they call themselves ghost hunters and have all the weird equipment with blinking lights and stuff, but they also tell you the history around the area and about the famous buildings. I went to one in Charleston, South Carolina and it was a lot of fun. We toured the downtown area and graveyard; it was really interesting."

"Great, you, me and a history lesson." She gave him the 'look.' "No, no it's fine. Sure. Sounds like fun."

The sun shot its last red, orange and yellow rays across Cleveland Square in front of the El Paso Downtown Library. Lynn and Lee Hoyt parked their car two blocks away and took a brisk walk to a covered area with benches. A handful of people gathered around waiting, mostly couples of all different ages and persuasions. Hector walked up, assured them they weren't late, introduced himself as the tour guide, along with Marcos. Lynn paid for the tickets online so they only needed their ID bracelets to be ready to go.

First stop was the Library itself which opened in 1904 built on top of an old military cemetery. Hector told numerous ghost stories of Civil War soldiers, a nurse with a cap and cape and even

a dog padding up and down the halls. Hector and his investigators experienced a book falling off the shelf for no apparent reason while trying to do an EVP session during an investigation. Lee looked at Lynn skeptically as she wrapped her arm around his waist.

The rest of the stops turned out to be buildings designed and built by Trost & Trost. Henry C. Trost and his twin brother Gustavus built over 200 buildings in the El Paso area. Lynn loved old architecture and often took downtown tours of any city she happened to be in when she traveled. Lee avoided these activities like the plague. "You so owe me for this," he whispered in her ear as he wrapped his arm around her shoulder and kissed her softly on top of her head.

She smiled and whispered back, "I know, I know."

They passed by the Plaza Hotel that towered over downtown El Paso like a dark, silent sentinel. Lynn and Lee learned the new owner promised to restore the building, but was currently behind bars for tax evasion. The newly restored Plaza Theater, a bright spot downtown, hosted the world's largest Classic Film Festival and also claims of long since deceased patrons still wandering the aisles.

Hector stopped the small group in front of the Caples building where Pancho Villa plotted against the U.S. Lynn felt Lee move slightly away from her and when she turned to look for him, her jaw dropped in disbelief to find him snapping pictures of the defunct building. There were no windows in the seven story building and she could clearly see the frames resting at the end of the hallways inside. The building was dark like the inside of a cave. She looked at Lee again, "Why are you taking pictures of a dark, empty building, honey?"

Lee shrugged, "I got a feeling." She chuckled as they walked on holding hands.

"See, this stuff is interesting."

"Now I wouldn't go that far."

Lynn thought O.T. Bassett Towers the most interesting building on the tour. It featured the art deco style of architecture on all four sides, quite rare for its time. Small terra cotta plaques decorated the outside along with blocks covered in swirls and flower like designs that jutted out from various areas of the building. The center piece above the front door resembled Trost himself. It was also depressingly vacant. Lynn turned to Lee, "It's so gorgeous! I would rent an apartment here in a heartbeat."

"Oh, no, we wouldn't." Lee squeezed her lightly.

"It shouldn't be vacant. None of these buildings downtown should be vacant."

Hector overheard her and agreed, "We're trying to bring awareness to the downtown area through these tours and get people interested in preserving the rich history and of course, hunt

ghosts. We've tried to organize some ghost tours but some of the owners want to charge us \$5000 just to go in." The group laughed in sympathy as he added, "Ghosts don't pay that well." He went on to talk about the gunfights, prostitutes, gamblers, and violence of Old El Paso, the original Sin City.

"And here we end our tour at the Franciscan Hotel, one of the most haunted places that we've investigated downtown. We're going to go down into the basement and do a full out investigation. There is a very evil spirit or entity that lives here so I want to warn you now, it could get scary down there," he nodded at a husky fellow, "It's usually the big, tough-lookin' guys I have to escort out." Everyone turned to look at the 'big guy' in the group with nervous laughter. "Ok, let's head in."

## **1885**

Alfred Crouse waited and felt the stirrings of energy around him. Crouse chose to summon the most powerful demon from the abyss, Choronzon. If he pulled this off, he could claim one of the highest ranks in Thelema. He lived in the perfect place to draw this malevolent power, a city of vice for a price, El Paso. It was a sinners paradise with more gamblers, whores, thieves, and outlaws than everyday citizens. He needed one good game at the poker tables to set himself up for life, devoting it to the study of the dark arts.

A small, dust devil swirl of energy started between his feet. The energy was so subtle Crouse didn't realize it at first and continued with a second incantation, "...I conjure and constrain thee...do thou manifest before this circle, fulfill my will in all things that may seem good to me, be disobedient and refuse to come and behold I will curse and deceive thee of thine office, thy joy and thy place. I will bind thee in the depths of the bottomless pit..."

The energy whooshed up between his legs as a full fledged dust devil that knocked Crouse off balance for a split second. It was enough for the heel of his shoe to smudge one line of one of the inner triangles. A tiny, offshoot of the swirling mass towering above him, found the opening and shot out of the circle to hide in a far corner.

Choronzon materialized out of the middle of the dust devil. A full skeletal figure riding a skeleton horse appeared before him. Patches of a skeletal face could be seen through an iron helmet with two large horns sticking out of it. A human skin cape billowed around it with horns sticking up at the shoulders and neck of the cape. A human skin cape covered the skeleton horse as well and swept the ground.

Crouse felt, rather than heard, Choronzon speaking to him. It was soft and comforting one moment, then a thunderous scream the next. Crouse swayed unsteady on his feet with the disorientating motion and noise fighting not to be sick. He redoubled his efforts to understand what the demon was saying, but he couldn't make out the words coming from the lipless mouth. He decided to go on with the incantation, "Welcome, demon, welcome art thou unto me; I have called thee and thou hast obeyed. I bind thee to remain affably and visibly before this circle,

within this triangle, so long as I need thee, to depart not without my license, till thou hast truly and faithfully fulfilled all that I shall require.”

The soft whispering and shrill screams continued as Crouse detailed his plan to the demon. He felt more than heard confirmation from the demon. He finished the ceremony by closing the circle, “O Choronzon, because thou hast diligently answered my demands, I do hereby license thee to depart. Depart, I say, and be thou willing and ready to come, whensoever duly exorcised by the sacred rites of magick.” A popping in his ears and change in pressure staggered him again as the dust devil sucked back into itself suddenly and without warning. The basement returned to normal as he kicked at the dirt floor until the circle disappeared.

He tore off his robe and wrapped his wand and knife in it before stowing it away. Underneath, he wore the typical outfit of dark pants, jacket, and top hat so that he blended in with the crowd milling the streets above. He never noticed the filmy, smoky air hovering in the corner of the basement.

## **Present**

The interior of the Franciscan Hotel looked bright and cheery. The walls painted a fresh white and the floor covered with light colored tile. Only after looking closely could Lynn tell objects were covered in a thick layer of undisturbed dust. The building was quiet. It must be vacant too, thought Lynn. The group trooped through single file as they made their way down the hall and into a small room. Marcos pulled open a large trap door set in the floor along the far wall.

“Ok, people. Watch your step here. Don’t touch the door. I’ve had it fall on me and it hurts, a lot, and there’s nails sticking out of it,” said Marcos.

“You’d think they would make this a little safer,” said Lee.

“Must add to the experience,” said Lynn. Lee helped her down the stairs following closely behind. He’d always been a little overprotective, but ever since her surgery he’d gone out of his way to make sure she didn’t trip or lose her balance. Hector led the group into a small room to the right and Marcos brought up the rear. Basements were usually cooler, especially ones with walls of stone, but this basement was musty and humid. It smelled moldy and old. Lynn wrinkled her nose in disgust. The only light in the room came from other people’s devices - cell phones, cameras, iPhones with the Ghost Radar App, and K2 Meters.

Marcos started the session by calling on the ghost of a little girl reported to be trapped in the basement. The session dragged on with minimal blips on the K2 meter and members of the group turning toward perceived noises and shadows. One corner received some particular attention after the K2 meter jumped into the red for a little while.

“Is the ghost of the little girl here? We’re not here to hurt you, sweetie. Is that other spirit here holding you back? Is he not letting you come out?” Marcos said.

By this time Lynn was standing behind Lee with her arms wrapped around his waist. She went on tiptoe and kissed the lobe of his ear. He squeezed her forearms. She wanted to say something, but the investigators warned them that whispering would interfere with the EVP session.

“Hey that other spirit who thinks he’s such a bad ass, get out of here. We’ll be seeing you in the next room soon enough,” said Marcos.

Lynn rested her forehead on Lee’s back. She just felt sleepy and after the hour and a half walk around downtown her lower back and feet were starting to hurt. She enjoyed the history part of the tour, but felt nothing spooky in the room and since it was getting close to eleven o’clock, she was ready for it to be done and go home. A couple of people shuffled on the opposite side and Hector commented softly, “These guys aren’t feeling so good, so I’m going to take them topside.” A sliver of light appeared as they opened the door and sure enough, a woman and the ‘tough-looking’ guy headed out and up the stairs. Faint footsteps could be heard down the length of the hall.

Marcos and another investigator continued for about five more minutes, but by this time even the K2 meters stopped lighting up. “Folks, let’s head to the other room where we have encountered an evil spirit. I think he’s interfering with the spirit of the little girl we’ve experienced in this room. It’s scratched people and people have felt really sick staying in that room. I will be provoking this spirit. I’m not trying to offend anyone, but I’ll be using some coarse language,” Marcos started leading the group to the next room, “A lot of stuff is piled in there because they used it for storage, so please, watch your step.”

Lee kept a firm hold on Lynn as they made their way through a dimly lit room and a door into yet another room. It was much smaller, but thankfully smelled better. A red EXIT sign glowed on the other side of the room with what looked like stairs leading up. “That way is completely blocked off,” Marcus said as everyone settled into position. “You’re a coward. You can’t do anything other than keep a little girl trapped in here. Go ahead, scratch me, push me, scare me if you can,” Marcos said. Everyone was quiet, intently watching the K2 meters flicker. When footsteps started overhead everyone looked up at once. “Must be Hector coming back,” said Marcos. The whole group followed the footsteps with their eyes but it was walking away from the trap door and headed for the completely blocked off EXIT. The footsteps stopped with everyone staring in the direction of the EXIT, expecting someone to come down. Then the footsteps started again from the trap door, but this time in a jog across the floor and in the direction of the blocked off EXIT. “It can’t be Hector, he never jogs,” said Marcos. Everyone laughed nervously.

“Can you call him and see where he is?” Lee said.

“Good idea,” said Marcus as he dug into his backpack for a walkie talkie. “Hector, where are you?”

“Hey, Marcos. Everything OK?” Hector’s voice crackled over the walkie talkie.

“Yea, are you in the building?” said Marcos.

“No, I’m outside sitting with the two who had to leave the basement. Why? What’s up?” said Hector.

“Someone is walking down the hall headed out of the building. Oh, now they’re jogging,” Marcos said. “We said it couldn’t be you because you never jog, ever.”

“No, man, it’s not me. No one is in the building. I locked the door behind me.” Over the walkie talkie the sounds of someone pulling on a locked door could be heard. “It’s still locked,” said Hector.

“OK, well someone is only walking out of the building. We don’t hear any footsteps coming into the building,” said Marcos.

“You want me to come back in?”

“No, we’re fine. We’ll finish up here pretty soon.” Marcos went back to provoking the spirit. “Is that you walking above us? Come on, you can do better than that. You’re supposed to be this big, bad, powerful spirit. Show us what you got.”

Lee shifted and bumped into a stack of boards on the floor. Everyone swiveled to look at him, “Sorry, that was just me.”

Lynn saw the K2 meter flare red in the man’s hand right next to her, then the overpowering smell of sulfur, as if a match just struck, filled the air. The air seemed to thicken around her with the sulfur odor becoming stronger. She turned to the man holding the K2, “Do you smoke?”

“No, ma’m, I don’t,” he whispered back.

Lee drew close, “Are you all right?”

Lynn nodded before she realised he probably couldn’t see her, “I’m fine. I just smell something.” She turned her head and looked around trying to find the source of the smell. It became like a blanket wrapping itself around her. Lee took both her hands and drew her close. She suddenly started to feel nauseous and buried her nose in the nape of his neck and breathed in his familiar scent to try and ease the queasy feeling. The air kept pressing down around her becoming thicker and heavy with the smell of sulfur.

She was about to ‘cry Uncle’ and ask Lee to take her upstairs when Marcos told the group, “All right guys and gals, lets head back up.” Slowly they made their way down the short hallway

to the steep stairs leading up. Marcos was the last one to make his way up the stairs. As he exited the room, the trap door slammed shut on it's own with a thunderous crack!

## 1885

Crouse slipped into the flow of pedestrians headed down Mills Avenue. He stopped short with the realization, "I did it. I really did it." People flowed around him as if he were a rock in the middle of a stream. He moved out of the stream of the sidewalk to lean against a building. "I did it." He didn't know what to feel. Slowly a purpose filled his eyes and he checked his money purse. He needed to test his new found powers.

It didn't take long for the new gambler making the rounds at all the popular saloons, theaters and brothels on Utah street to become one of the top five Faro players in El Paso. Crouse no longer blended in with the crowd. A dandy now, he wore expensive, black suits with starched white shirts and brocaded vests. Large gold rings decorated his fingers and a jewel encrusted stick pin adorned his jacket. Even his pocket watch was made of gold with a thick, heavy, gold chain that ran across his chest. Like any gambler worth his salt he also knew how to shoot the pistols slung across his hips.

Crouse pushed himself back onto the two back legs of his chair as he looked over the cards spread out between the dealer and himself. He'd alternately placed bets on his card being the winner, loser, odd, even, and any combination stringed together in a 'square.' He loved this gambling game the most because of it's fast pace, easy odds, and the ability to stake it all on a single turn of a card. Faro was a game of chance and tended to favor the player. Saloons made up for this by using crooked dealers, dealing boxes and cards. None of it fazed Crouse who kept winning his way closer to the number one Faro player in El Paso.

His chair hit the floor with a thud as a petite, fiery, red-head plopped herself down in his lap. "Mary Ann," he gestured toward the table, "I'm working here."

"I know. I love a man who works at whiskey drinking, wagering, and whoring as hard as you do," Mary Ann grinned. He forgave her when she slid a shot glass full of whiskey into his hand and squirmed her bottom suggestively in his lap.

Mary Ann owned one of the most luxurious brothels in town and shared the top room of the establishment with Crouse. She was ruthless when it came to business and ruled her girls with an iron fist, making them virtual slaves by letting them run up charges for basic necessities and then deducting it from their wages. Crouse fingered her side as he laid down his chip, betting everything on the last turn of the card. Mary Ann let out an excited yelp as he won. He downed his whiskey, dropped her off his lap and gathered up his winnings.

Mary Ann was in the best mood he'd seen in several weeks since a six foot tall blond, blue-eyed gal by the name of Alice Huxter had set up a whore house almost right across the street from Mary Ann's establishment. The two not only didn't see eye to eye, but after Lucy, a girl Mary

Ann owned lock, stock, and barrel, up and moved over to Alice's place, the two became bitter enemies barely able to pass each other on the street.

"So what has put you in a fine mood today - my whiskey drinking, winning, or whoring?" he said as he hugged Mary Ann tightly.

"You're not the one who has put me in a fine mood. I did it all by myself!" she laughed heartily. "I spread a rumor all up and down Utah street that Alice's whores are infected with the 'clap' and unless they want to see their dicks swell up and fall off, they'd better stay away."

Crouse joined in her laughter as they made their way back to her whore house to wile away the rest of the afternoon in her bedroom. He couldn't have picked a better partner in crime than Mary Ann. He could only assume she was yet another gift from his weekly sojourns to the basement of the Franciscan Hotel to commune with Choronzon. She knew nothing of his dark practices, but only seemed to love the fact that he was a winner.

They were awoken by a thunderous pounding on the door. Shouts and a commotion could be heard in between the fierce pounding. "Mary Ann! Open this door and face me, you bitch!" Mary Ann recognized Alice's voice. Mary Ann threw on a night gown, marched over and flung it open. Crouse propped himself up on the pillows to watch.

"Take it back!" yelled Alice, her face purple with rage.

"Take what back?" asked Mary Ann giving Alice an innocent face.

"Take back what you said about my girls!"

"But your whores are diseased. That's why I threw Lucy out."

"Lucy left because you were stealing her money just like you do with all the girls here."

"Now look who's telling lies."

Alice reached back and cold cocked Mary Ann in the face. Mary Ann crumpled backwards then sat up screaming, "I will kill you, you fat, ugly whore!" Alice grinned at Mary Ann, turned on her heel and marched down the stairs and out of the brothel.

Crouse sat too stunned to move as Mary Ann scrambled to her feet, pulled his pistol from his holster and made her way outside after Alice. Crouse jumped up and dressed as he heard the front door slam shut. He made it outside in time to see Mary Ann kicking at Alice's front door. When Alice appeared, her tall frame filling the doorway, Mary Ann raised the pistol and fired.

As Crouse made his way down the stairs to the basement, he began to understand the price for his fame at the Faro table. Mary Ann's shooting of Alice was ruled self defense and



miraculously, Alice survived. Mary Ann on the other hand became increasingly more violent with her girls and customers until almost all were gone. She was depending more and more on Crouse's support. Violence also started to dog Crouse. Lately the gambler's around him were challenging him at gun point. He narrowly avoided a shoot out just this afternoon with a wild, drunken gambler. The other night, on his way back to the brothel, a man ran at him with a knife. Crouse thought the man attacked him to steal his winnings, but he couldn't tell by the man's incoherent rantings.

What was the use of winning all this money, if he didn't live long enough to spend it? As he draped the cloak around him, took his ceremonial knife and wand and began making the familiar circles and triangles, he made up his mind to break the pact with Choronzon and take his winnings and move to Sunset Heights further north of downtown El Paso, far away from Utah street. From there he would decide what to do next.

Everything began as usual and the skin draped demon and horse appeared. Crouse never could make out words from the demon but felt his power and influence. He started reciting the release of the spirit verse and was more than half way through when he felt the air become very still and silent. He finished the verse and looked up to see the towering figure of Choronzon on horseback. There was a moment of complete silence and then the skin capes of the demon and his horse billowed wide. Choronzon skeletal jaw filled with sharp teeth stretched wide and an inhuman screech echoed and rolled through the basement. Through the middle of of Choronzon rolled a black mass that exploded and passed through Crouse. The mass had substance and knocked Crouse flat on his back as it rushed through him and swirled around. Crouse nearly screamed in terror as he saw the carefully made circle smeared under his body. He looked up to see the skeletal horse take a tentative step out of the middle of the intersecting triangles. He scrambled for his ceremonial knife and wand and leaped up as high as he could as the skeletal horse set it's haunches and sprang forward. They met in mid air with the horse and Choronzon materializing as they passed out of the edge of the circle. Crouse clubbed the side of the horse's head with his wand, shattering it and swept his knife up and into the skeletal chest of Choronzon. The whole apparition vanished in a smoky cloud and Crouse plunged to the floor, knocking the breath out of him.

The black mass that attacked him earlier did not disappear but instead plowed through him again. It kept up the attack as he tried to regain his feet. He tried slashing with his knife but it only passed through the apparition. He had no idea what it was. He tossed his robe and ran for the exit of the basement. He raced up the stairs. When he flung himself through the front door his ears popped so hard he cried out as he landed on the dirt road. Sweat ran through his hair and beads of it dripped from his face as he knelt, trying to breathe again. People passing by gave him a wide berth and some snickered at the drunk lying in the street.

Crouse dragged himself to his feet and started making his way back to Mary Ann's whore house. He would collect his money and leave tonight for higher ground. The air shimmered before him as he passed through and brought a cold so deep it chilled him to the bone. He stumbled and whirled around. The air turned to waves of clear, clean water in front of him

again and he heard an audible hiss, "Did you think it would be that easy?" He whirled back around and started trotting to Utah street. The air enveloped him for a third time and the hiss said, "Fool!"

Crouse crashed through the front doors of Mary Ann's house and ran up the stairs. He grabbed a large black satchel and started collecting his money from its various hiding places. When he reached the top floor he saw Mary Ann passed out on the bed. 'Good,' he thought, 'I can make a clean get away.' He quieted down and moved slowly around the room collecting what few belongings he wanted to take with him. The satchel was already bulging with money as he knelt before the mirrored dresser to finish collecting Mary Ann's jewelry.

He felt the room go icy cold. He jerked his head up to look in the mirror and see the air vibrate in front of Mary Ann's body. She sat straight up in bed. She turned her head slowly until her once green eyes met his through the mirror. Her eyes were now completely and utterly black so even the whites of her eyes were swallowed in darkness. She flew from the bed and clear across the room to smash into his back. His head smacked into the glass of the mirror, shattering it. She started an unearthly howling and screaming as she tore at his face and arms with her nails.

Footsteps pounded up the stairs, but it was just the few of her whores who had no where else to go and as soon as they caught a glimpse of the chaos in the room, they turned and ran screaming from the house. Crouse struggled with her, at first trying to push her away. When she tried sinking her teeth into his arm he choked her with one hand and landed a solid punch to the side of her face. The huge rings on his fingers leaving bloody gouges on her cheek. He tossed his satchel toward the door and scrambled backwards trying to gain his feet when she rushed him again. He placed a kick to her abdomen that sent her flying backward. He remembered his pistols as she charged, red hair flying, black eyes wide, mouth screaming, and face contorted in uncontrollable rage. He pulled the trigger and fired point blank into her face. She dropped like a stone to the floor.

Crouse ripped his holster and clothes off, sticky with blood and other bits of Mary Ann and threw on a shirt and pants. He slammed a hat on his head and made his way out the back window as he heard a commotion start up in the front of the house. He tossed his satchel to the ground and hung off the porch for several seconds before landing beside it. He cleared the small back fence and cut down several side streets, scrubbing his face clean, before heading toward the center of town and San Jacinto Plaza.

J. Fisher Satterthwaite was commissioned by the El Paso Parks and Streets Commissioner to make something beautiful out of the dry, sand and mesquite filled property. Before the city of El Paso bought it, Army soldiers drilled in the first Post north of Juarez and horse corrals dotted the area.

Satterthwaite fenced off the park, created a walled pond, installed a gazebo, and planted seventy-five Chinese elm trees in the park. Then he brought alligators. By the time he was

done the pond held at least seven alligators of various sizes. No one knew the reason behind his choice, but the unique reptile attraction drew shoppers and on-lookers to the downtown area.

Crouse entered the crowded area expecting to hide himself among the crowd as he made his way to the train depot. He surveyed the people going about their day and started making his way to the southern part of the plaza. As couples, families, and lone men made their way past him without giving him a second glance, he loosened the vice like grip on his satchel and shrugged his shoulders to ease the tension in them. He paused to watch the alligators one last time. He admired their cunning, strength and skill at taking apart their prey. He felt a chill and started to tighten his jacket around him. Then he froze, remembering what the chill meant. He looked around him cautiously and could see other people pulling at their clothes or hugging their chests as if, they too, felt suddenly cold. He saw the shimmer start at his right and to his horror saw completely black eyes turn in his direction. He reached for his holster. Dread overcame him as he realized he'd left it at the whorehouse. He panicked and hopped over the low concrete wall into the alligator pit. He landed in the soft grass that lead to a moat. Beyond that was another grassy area and a man made rock grotto meant to provide shade for the alligators. He could feel people moving on either side of him so he quickly moved into the grassy area and began to circle south. His plan was to clear the other side of the alligator pit and make a dash for the train depot. At once, all the alligators plunged into the moat.

He made it half way, keeping one eye on the calm alligators floating so close he could make out each scale and the other eye on the increasing number of people staring at him with black filled eyes. When he tried to make his way back up, hands shoved him back down. Crying out in frustration, he ran to another point in the wall and was again pushed back. On his third attempt a huge man with dirty overalls and the same black filled eyes, punched him in the face and he tumbled down to the edge of the moat. He shook his head, trying to clear it, then started back up the grassy slope. He never saw the alligator, whose skills he admired, charge out of the water and clamp down on his leg. He screamed and twisted around using his heavy satchel to beat on the reptile's nose. He smacked once, twice, and on the third smack the satchel popped open and money flew into the air. Another alligator clamped onto his arm. Crouse tilted his head back to scream and saw his money floating lazily down from the sky.

## **Present**

"Let's go get that drink you wanted earlier," said Lynn as she hugged Lee around the waist.

"Are you sure? It's kind of late," said Lee hugging her back.

"Sure I'm sure. I haven't been there in a long time. The Dome Bar is beautiful. It'll be like drinking under the stars."

Lee laughed, "Just like drinking under the stars with a six dollar bottle of beer."

"I want a rum and coke."

"That'll be seven dollars. You're expensive."

"But worth it!" Lynn grinned up at him and they started off arm in arm to stroll across the San Jacinto Plaza to the Paso del Norte hotel and bar. They stopped to admire the alligator sculpture in the middle of the plaza. "Ok, I'll bite, why alligators?"

"You don't know, Ms.-I-Google-everything?"

"No and obviously I don't google everything."

"There used to be live alligators as part of a downtown attraction. The alligators, I think one's name was Oscar, were here for like fifty years."

"You're kidding! You'd think that would be a little dangerous."

"Not dangerous for people, but for the alligators. Some college kids started pulling the alligators out of the pond at night. They put one in a professor's office and another one in someone's swimming pool as a prank."

"You're kidding!"

"Nope and after twelve, blissful years of marriage, you think you'd realize I don't kid... much."

"Right!" Lynn playfully squeezed him as he opened the big, wooden door that lead inside the bar. The Dome bar was a large square room two stories high in the Paso del Norte Hotel. The bar was located in the middle of the room with a Tiffany, stained glassed, dome ceiling directly above the bar. The brown speckled walls of the room and gold plated moldings glowed with the light from the hanging chandeliers.

"I think this is the most beautiful place to relax and have a drink. There are a lot of fleur de lis decorations too. What did Hector say about them?"

"I thought they used them to brand prisoners who were marked for death." They ordered their drinks and settled down in the comfortable, cushioned chairs. Lee took out his iPhone and started fiddling with it.

"Don't play games on that thing now."

"What? No, I'm just looking at the pictures I took."

"Of the empty building?"

“Yea... wait, whoa!” he looked up at Lynn grinning, “Check this out. There were no windows in that building right?”

“Yea, let me see.” Lee handed the iPhone to Lynn. “Ok, first one - big empty building. Second one - big, empty building. Third one - big, empty building. I’m beginning to see a pattern here. Fourth one - big... Holy shrimp!” She looked up at Lee. “There’s a light in one of the windows!”

“Look at the next one.”

“There’s a light. Sixth one, there’s a light. Last one, no light.”

“I took those pictures one right after the other.”

“So it’s like someone turned a light on and then off.”

“Yea,” they both grinned at each other.

“This is awesome, honey, we’ve got to show these to Hector and Marcos.”

“Sure. Here, let’s check the audio.”

“Were you recording the session?”

“Some of it. Mostly the one down in the basement.” Lee took out his ear buds as the waiter brought their drinks and set them down. They both put an ear bud in and started listening and drinking. Their eyes met. “I heard something there.”

“So did I. Play it again.” They listened to it several times. Finally, Lynn pulled the ear bud out shaking her head. “I don’t know what it’s saying. It’s a garbled sentence and then a word. Let’s send all this to Hector and Marcos and maybe they can clean it up.”

“Good idea. A toast,” Lee said as they clinked their glasses together, “to a devil of a ghost hunting team.”

Several days later, Lynn was finally able to get the pictures and the EVP over to Hector. He sounded intrigued by what they’d captured and told her to give him a couple of days to work with it. Meanwhile, things went on as normal. At first.

Lynn went on a girl’s night out and Lee stayed home. For some reason, his plans with the “guys” fell through. She felt guilty about leaving him, but he told her to go on and she would have to make it up to him some other time.

She returned early around ten that night to find Lee drunk and playing on-line poker. On the two or three occasions he’d gotten tipsy since they’d been married he’d been a very affectionate

drunk. He never drank that much, so at first it didn't bother her, but when she went to kiss him 'hello' he'd flinched and looked at her angrily. "What?"

"Nothing, just giving you a 'Hi, I'm home kiss.'"

"Humph."

"You winning?" she said looking over his shoulder.

"Not really. I win some, then I lose it all."

"Why don't we call it a night?"

"Nah, you go on, don't wait up for me."

"But Lee, how long have you been sitting here?"

"What the hell?" he said shrugging her off, "You go out and have a good time. I stay here and have a good time and now you're jumping my ass."

"Lee, I'm not jumping you," she held up her hands backing away, "What's wrong?"

"I'm staying up!" he shouted.

She left him and closed the door firmly behind her. 'What the hell indeed?' she thought.

She didn't know when he'd finally come to bed, but it was Sunday morning and they usually slept in before going to the corner bakery to pick up some menudo with pan bolillo and pan dulce. He groaned when she'd tickled him under his nose, hoping he'd wake up in a better mood. "Come on, menudo is good for a hangover."

"I don't have a hangover," he groaned. "Go without me, you know which kind of sweet bread I like."

"Oh, all right," she said, "You were really grumpy last night."

"I was?"

"Yeees."

"I don't remember," he opened his eyes cautiously, "I don't remember much of anything." Lee rubbed his eyes and snuggled back down as Lynn got up, dressed and headed out to pick up the food. "Can you put some coffee on?"

“Sure.”

“And hey, I’m sorry if I said anything stupid last night.”

“It’s ok,” she said poking her head back in the doorway. “I love you.”

“I love you more.”

As they were slurping up the menudo and eating hunks of pan bolillo dipped in the broth, the phone rang.

Lynn grabbed her phone, “It’s Hector,” she said to Lee. “Hey, Hector, what’s up?”

“Morning! I checked out the stuff you sent over and those pictures are pretty cool. It almost looks like it’s a florescent light. You know the old kind that had a grill over the front of them?”

“Yea, we thought so too. And the EVP? Could you make it out?”

“The mumbling we couldn’t clean up, but that one word we could. Wanna hear it?”

“Of course.”

“Let me play it for you,” Lynn could hear sounds of Hector moving the phone closer to his computer. The volume was turned up really high but the mumbling was still too garbled to make out, then she very clearly heard one word - “Fool!”

“Fool? Gee, we can’t get a break, even the ghosts think we’re stupid.” Lee said.

“I don’t know, Hector didn’t have any idea either. It’s interesting, I guess. Anyway, I’m supposed to head over there and he’s going to make a copy of it and also print those pictures out for us. I’m going to get changed.”

“Ok, I’ll jump in the shower and maybe we’ll do something afterwards?”

“Maybe, depends what you have in mind,” she winked at him, “Race ya!” She started running out of the kitchen and up the stairs.

“No fair,” Lee yelled, “I’m still handicapped.” He jogged half-heartedly to the stairs and started up. About half-way he looked up to see Lynn giggling. When she was sure she’d caught his eye, she flashed him and ducked back into the bathroom. Lee smiled and then froze as he envisioned himself dragging her, savagely by the hair and throwing her down the stairs. He stumbled backwards as if to dodge her body and caught himself by gripping the railing so hard that his hands turned white. Lynn popped back out, smiling. When she saw Lee, her face fell, full of concern.

“My God, Lee, are you all right?”

“I, uh, yea, I’m fine. I must be hungover, still.”

“Are you sure you’re OK?”

“Yea, yea, I’m coming up. Get the water warm.” She looked unsure and moved slowly back into the bathroom.

He looked over his shoulder and saw Lynn clearly, bloody and broken, at the bottom of the stairs. He turned and raced the rest of the way and shut the door.

Lee hugged Lynn tightly before he finally kissed her and let her go.

“Are you sure you’re OK? Why don’t you come with me?”

“No, no. You go on ahead. I have some work to get ready for Monday.” She looked at him skeptically but didn’t push it further. She grabbed her purse and headed out the door. It took thirty minutes to get anywhere in El Paso. Hector was sitting at Kippy’s Cheesesteak with a bottle of his favorite beer when she found him. The prominent sign above the counter read “Beer is Good.”

Hector gave her a hug, “How you doing? You want to order something?”

“Pretty good. Yea, I love this place. I’ll probably grab something to take home to Lee.”

“How’s he doing?”

“Ok, I guess. Thanks for asking.”

“So, here’s the stuff. I also wanted to tell you a little more history, if you don’t mind.”

Lynn took a bite of her Green Chile Philly with homemade fries and listened as Hector told her about the black magick practiced in the basement of the Franciscan Hotel. When the owners first let them in to investigate, they discovered crude ceremonial circles drawn on the floor and Satanic symbols on the wall along with other paraphernalia.

“That’s creepy,” Lynn said and then she told him everything she’d felt during the investigation.

“Really? That’s a pretty strong reaction,” Hector said. He continued on about the hotel and how the owners weren’t able to make a go of it. The hotel never quite made it financially, but it also never fell into complete ruin that it might be torn down. By the time he was done, it was getting late. Lynn looked at her phone. “Sorry for boring you with all this.”



“No, no. I love this kind of stuff, but Lee usually texts or calls me and I haven’t heard from yet. We really liked the tour and hope to go to some of the others.” Lynn picked up the to-go bag of food for Lee and the folder with the pictures.

“Well, someone was even “possessed” or maybe that’s too strong of a word, more like they were followed home, but we took care of it.”

Lynn stopped, “What followed them home?”

“We’re not really sure other than it’s a sort of malevolent spirit. It just wants to cause trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“The person was just acting strange. Doing things they don’t normally do. Why? Something like that going on at your place?”

“No,” Lynn said hesitantly.

“Because we took care of it, so if anything’s going on, anything at all, just let us know.”

Lynn shook her head and smiled, “No, I’m sure it’s nothing. Hector, thanks for everything and like I said, we’re planning on going to another one of those tours soon.”

“Great! We got something going on almost every weekend.”

Lynn tried calling Lee before she started her car, no answer. She left him a message saying she was headed home with food. When she pulled up in front of their house, she could hear music blaring. The couple of times he’d blasted their stereo it was always country. The music playing wasn’t country. She entered the house. Once inside, the music was so loud she didn’t even bother calling his name to try and tell him she was home. She moved empty beer bottles to set the food down on the table. She couldn’t believe he was drinking again. She went to go look for him upstairs as the music pounded in her chest. She found him back at his computer gambling and drinking beer. “Lee,” she shouted. “Lee!”

He seemed to be forcing himself to look at her, “What?!”

She left him to go to their bedroom and turned off the music. “Hey,” she heard him scream from the study, “I was listening to that!”

‘Enough was enough,’ she thought as she marched back into the bedroom they used as a study to confront him. “Lee, I don’t know what’s gotten into you but we need to...”

Lee’s hands flew out and hit her square in the chest so that she went flying backwards and

landed hard on her butt. Lynn looked up at him in shock, not sure what to do. She'd never been hit before. Not on purpose. Not by a man, let alone Lee. He'd never raised a finger to her. She grabbed her neck. It felt jarred, but nothing hurt. Lee's mouth was opening and closing as if he was trying to say something, but no words were coming out. His eyes were wide and panic stricken. His legs jerked forward as if he were being forced to move and he clenched his hands rhythmically. Lynn started to scoot backwards, "Lee?"

Lynn met his now terrified eyes, his mouth working furiously until finally he howled one word, "RUN!"

Lynn stopped in horror as an inky blackness started to leak from the corner of his eyes to meet his pupils. "Lee!" she screamed.

As the blackness overtook his eyes he started to lunge forward, arms outstretched, his face contorted with rage as he screamed again, "Run!"

Now at the top of the stairs, she started to push herself up when he sprang at her. Lynn fell onto her back and pumped her legs in and up in a kick that caught Lee in the chest before he landed on her. On instinct, she rolled to her side toward the stairs which sent him crashing down to the floor below. Lynn belly flopped down several stairs before being able to stop herself. She turned over, breathing hard and looked at her husband laying face down on the floor at the bottom of the stairs. "Lee?" she whispered.

Nothing moved and the house was completely quiet. She crawled down the flight of stairs and nudged him with her toe. She took a deep breath, 'What in the hell had happened to her husband?' She stepped over him gingerly, expecting him to sit up and grab her any second. She backed into the kitchen keeping an eye on his motionless body the whole time, grabbed her purse, and raced out the side door into the garage. She was in her car and speeding away from the house, calling 911. She told the operator her address and that her husband had fallen down the stairs. Before they could ask any more questions, she hung up and immediately called Hector.

Hector answered the phone and listened intently as Lynn told him everything. "Meet us at Bassett Tower. You know where that is right?"

"Yea, I know, but why? What does another building have to do with anything?"

"Just get down there and we'll try and explain everything."

Lynn stood hugging herself and pacing in front of the impressive art deco Basset Tower. Hector and Marcos came trotting up the sidewalk to meet her. Parking in any downtown area was hard to come by and they'd both had to park blocks away from the building. Lynn was trying hard not to burst into tears and her voice sounded shaky, "What in the hell is going on? Is my husband possessed?!"

Now it was Marcos' turn to try and explain, "We think he is by a minion of one of the devil's demons that was contacted using the black magick portal in the Franciscan hotel."

"So we just burn down the hotel," said Lynn.

"It's not that easy. The portal doesn't necessarily belong to this dimension even so destroying the building won't really change much."

There's got to be something we can do!" Lynn started to panic.

"We think," Marcos looked at Hector, "and I know this may sound just as crazy, that a way to balance out the portal is in this building."

"Oh, screw this! I should have just gone to the police," Lynn said as she began to back away.

"Hear us out, Lynn," said Hector, "We think you're the one who needs to help us close it. We have everything we need here to try it." Hector held up a black backpack.

"I can't believe I even thought of doing this. Oh my God, I should be at the hospital or with the cops because I probably just killed my husband!" She was pulling out her phone when it started ringing. She jumped and almost dropped it before she was able to answer the call, "Yes, yes I called it in. Did you find him? Is he alright?" she paused listening. She grew visibly pale and then hung up the phone.

Marcos reached out to grab her arm, afraid she was going to fall, "Are you all right? What happened?"

"Nothing," she said. "He's gone." Marcos and Hector exchanged a look.

"Lynn you obviously love your husband. We don't want anything to happen to you two. If we try to close the portal, we may have a chance to not only help you two but also to stop anyone else from using the other portal ever again. We can't eliminate it, but we could balance out the powers again."

Lynn lowered her head to think it over then nodded, "We need to get going. I think he's headed here."

"What makes you think that?" they said in unison.

"His eyes. He was scared and I don't think he had a choice, but whatever's in him wants to stop me from doing what it is you all think we need to do."

Marcos and Hector looked at each other again, "OK, I'll explain on the way up," said Marcos.

“Way up where?”

“The tenth floor with all the eagles facing east. We think that’s where the portal should be built.”

Lynn, Hector and Marcos headed around to the back of the building. It was vacant, had been for years and everything was locked up tight. The owners never let the paranormal group enter to do an investigation, so there was no way they would be able to convince them to open up now.

“What’s the plan?” said Lynn.

“We’ll have to use the fire escape to get up to the tenth floor. Open a window somehow and make it to the center of that floor. Draw a ceremonial white magick circle with salt. Here, I’ve written out the prayer for you to use. After that, I really don’t know what’s going to happen.” Marcos put on the black backpack with the materials they would need and Lynn, after getting a boost up from Marcos, started up the fire escape followed by Marcos and Hector.

Hector started huffing and puffing around the fourth set of stairs. “See, I told you. You need to start working out, Hector,” Marcos called back.

“Now, now’s the time you want to bring that up?” Hector said.

“Just saying.”

“Do something useful and tell her why we’re doing this.”

“Because you’re out of breath.”

“Cabron,” Hector said, out of breath.

“Lynn, remember all the symbols on this building?” Marcos said.

“Yep.”

“Well, there are four major ones repeated throughout the building. You’ve got the fleur de lis, symbol of the Virgin Mary; an acorn and leaf, symbol of patience; a seashell, symbol of pilgrimage; faces, of different styles, depict the Green Man, a symbol of rebirth or renaissance and eagles, a symbol of strength and power. All of the eagles on the entire building, face east.”

“Why?”

“The symbols also have magick properties like air, fire, earth, and water. The eagles are air for spirituality and change, with force, if necessary.”

“So that makes you think it’s the tenth floor?”

“Yea.”

“But you don’t know for sure?”

“Well…”

“Jesus guys!” she slammed her hands down on the railing, “What if this doesn’t work?”

“Hey!” Hector yelled up from several flights below them, “Listen, I think someone else is on the fire escape.” They looked over the edge and heard someone clanging up the fire escape. A black shape rounded the edge on the second floor.

“Hector, you need to put it in high gear.” Marcos ran up the couple of steps to grab Lynn and hurry her up.

“Wait, maybe I can talk to him.” She leaned back over the fire escape railing and called down, “Lee! Lee, it’s me Lynn. Lee can you hear me?” The figure stopped and looked over and up at Lynn. It was Lee, but the change in his eyes made it seem as if she was staring down into empty eye sockets. His face screwed up in anger as he let out an inhuman scream.

“Nope, that’s not gonna happen,” said Marcos, “Come on, Lynn, if you have any chance of getting him back, we gotta go. Hector it’s just a couple more flights. Better hurry your ass up!” Ten stone eagles, like American style gargoyles, sat perched, facing east as Marcos described, on the tenth floor of the building.

Hector muttered, “Chingao,” and started running up the stairs. Lee sounded as if he was taking the steps two and three at a time. Lynn and Marcos reached the tenth floor and started looking for an open way in.

“Nothing,” Marcos said, “these are all locked.”

“We’ll have to break in?”

“Looks like it, but Lee will be right behind us.”

“We’ll have to find a way to lock him out when we get in.”

“Right, back up,” Marcos said as he shrugged off the backpack and jacket. He handed the backpack to Lynn as he wrapped his arm with his jacket and busted in the glass window.

He knocked glass out to clear the sill and Hector yelled up from just below them, “Watch it!” as

glass tinkled through the mesh of the fire escape.

“Sorry,” Marcos finished clearing the window sill and helped Lynn through. Marcos leaned over the railing as Hector pounded up the last flight of stairs. “Go, go! He’s right behind us.” Hector grunted as he squeezed himself through the opening, yelping as glass scraped his back. His black, cowboy hat tumbled to the floor of the fire escape landing as Marcos climbed in after him.

“My hat!”

“Forget the hat!”

“No way,” Hector leaned out to pick it up just as Lee rounded the corner and stood on the landing. He wasn’t even breathing hard. The black holes fixed on Hector who said, “Ohhhh shit!” Lee leaped and Marcos grabbed Hector by the collar of his shirt and hauled him back through the window. They heard Lee crash to the floor outside as they hit the tiled floor inside. Hector held up his hat proudly and put it back on his head.

“Happy now?”

“Yea,” Hector gasped. Lee’s face appeared in the window. Hector and Marcos scrambled to their feet as they heard Lynn call out to them from behind and to the left.

“Guys, come on! This way!” They turned and ran as Lee cleared the window sill. Lynn was holding open a door that lead out into a hallway. “Here.” Hector slid the last couple of feet in his cowboy boots. They passed through and she slammed the door shut using a board to pin the door shut between the door knob and a door brace on the floor.

“This isn’t going to hold him for long,” said Marcos, “The door has a glass window too.”

“Well, where to now?” asked Lynn. Breathing hard, they all looked around at their options. Down a short hall stood a set of double doors.

“This way,” Marcos said. They banged through the double doors, closed them shut behind them and scrambled for another way to brace the doors shut. Marcos grabbed two shelves off an office wall and used them to jam the bars of the door handles from being released. “This isn’t going to stop him for long either.”

“We need to get started then,” Hector said as he stood, bent over, trying to catch his breath. They moved down the hall to where it opened up into a foyer that held the defunct elevators to the right and to the left large ornate windows that showcased the twinkling, cheerful lights of El Paso. Marcos took the backpack from Lynn and started pulling out boxes of salt. “Kosher salt? You going gourmet ghost hunter on me, Marcos?”

“Shut up, it was on sale,” Marcos said.

“Does it make a difference?” said Lynn.

“No, well... no, no it doesn't make a difference,” said Hector. “Look, here's what you have to do...” They all paused at the muffled sounds of glass breaking. Hector flipped open the spout on one container of salt and handed it to Lynn. He instructed her to make a large circle. She completed about a third of it when Lee slammed into the double doors down the hall. “Hurry, once you complete the first circle, nothing should be able to pass.”

Lynn paused, “What about you guys?” The doors rocked again with the force of Lee throwing his body against the doors.

“Don't worry about us,” said Marcos from the hallway, “just finish the circle. Hurry, the door's going to give.”

Lynn started pouring again then stopped short of closing the circle, “Don't hurt him.”

“I don't think you have to worry about *us* hurting *him*,” said Hector, “close the circle.”

“Promise me, you won't hurt him.”

“Lynn, he's coming, close the circle!” yelled Marcos backing up into the foyer. The doors crashed against the wall and they heard a thud as Lee hit the floor in the hall.

“Not until you promise me!”

“I promise, we will try really hard not to hurt the possessed maniac coming down the hall, NOW CLOSE THE CIRCLE!” yelled Hector. Lynn closed the circle. “Now make two squares one on top of the other and another circle inside the squares. Don't break any of the edges, stay inside the middle. Once you're done, start the prayers on the paper I gave you.”

“Then what?”

“Pray something happens.”

Lee entered the foyer. Marcos and Hector both ran up to draw his attention away from Lynn but he swatted them back like they were bugs. He stalked up to Lynn standing in the middle of the circle and howled in rage when he couldn't pass. He started pacing back and forth around the perimeter of the circle snarling at her.

Lynn watched Lee for a moment then started the prayer, “This Sacred Circle, my fortress be, in perfect love and perfect trust be thou cast, so mote it be! Watch over this Circle Of Power, touch us, change us, make us whole,” she looked up at Lee and whispered, “Lee, come back to me.” Then she continued the prayer, “Spirit and Guardian, I call you to my circle, come be with

me. Watch from the east and keep me safe, witness my workings and lend me thy aid." She clapped her hands on the ground, "As above, so below, this circle is sealed. Blessed Be!"

When Hector and Marcos came to, they saw Lynn and Lee clinging to each other in the now ruined magick circle. Lee explaining that he felt trapped inside his own body and not able to stop himself. He kept repeating over and over, "I would never, ever hurt you." and Lynn kept answering with, "I know, I know."

As dawn was breaking, they started trudging back down the fire escape. Hector looked up at them and said, "You know, there's this great, get away hotel up in Cloudcroft and there's some pretty wild activity going on there. We're doing an overnight tour at the end of the month. You two should check it out."

Lee stopped, looked at Hector, raised one eyebrow and said, "You can't be serious."

## **Epilogue**

"All right people, watch your step. There's a lot of junk down here since they used to use the basement for storage."

No one noticed the black, smoky haze that floated in the back corner of the basement of the Franciscan Hotel.

A shout out to the El Paso Ghost Tours at 877-GHOST10, Paso del Norte Paranormal Society, Paranormal Posse, and all the ghost hunters out there!