

# The Monster Man King of Fools

By Chad R. Hunter

The Monster Man- King of Fools  
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# FOREWORD

My name having been synonymous with monster movies now for over 35 years, I can admit that my programs have been an influence on countless impressionable viewers (“The jails are full of them!”- sorry, I had to use that quote from a *Honeymooners* episode). That has been the case with the author of this very book you now gaze upon!

You are about to go on a journey that holds many familiar faces and places for fans of the classic *Creature Features*- Mr. Hunter obviously paid close attention to those Universal film gems, and the various protagonists who lurked through them. Some will be exactly what you expect them to be- but some will have facets that you may never have dreamed of! Most importantly, you will be meeting a new hero- a man (actually, much more than just a man), who, like all of us horror fans, grew up with these creatures of the night as his entertainment and playthings- only to discover that, seriously- they are NOT playing around!

I’ve been labeled with all sorts of descriptive names- from “that coffin guy” to “the scary clown” (a co-worker’s child came up with that) to- yes- “the Monster Man”- but Mr. Hunter has created a true “Monster Man” whose monster side may be the only key to protecting our world – and maybe

others- from evils that, previously, were only contained in books and movies.

Enjoy the story- oh, and...maybe you'd best not look in your closet.

Rich Koz

Svengoolie

# Of Classic Monsters and Ancient Men –

## Beowulf & the Monster Man:

### King of Fools

#### A literary analysis and comparison

Monsters are to American culture what *Beowulf* is to England, what Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are to ancient Greece. They represent the mythical literary and movie records of stages in American culture. As such, they resonate with heroic literature all over the world. While *Beowulf* is an oral art, handed down through harpist-bards in the communal halls at night, America's modern rendition of monsters is handed down not only through British and American literature, but also through famous movies from the 1920's to today. They, too, are stories of dreams and legend, superstition and fear, told about the supernatural and a hero's conquest over a community's threat of evil. These heroes, whatever the age, are the "dragon-slayers," who fight against the powers of darkness that threaten us all.

While *Beowulf* represents an ancient civilization of Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians, *The Monster Man*

represents ancient cultures from England, Romania, and Egypt, to name a few. From its familiar monsters comes *The Mummy* based on a fear and superstition developed in the 1920's after archeologists unearthed an ancient mummified pharaoh, from which evolved a series of curses. Romanian Vlad Tepes, the original Drachole or Dracula in the Middle Ages, impaled his Turkish enemies on sticks and lined them up the route to his castle, meanwhile, supposedly drinking their blood. And, of course, there is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, from the early nineteenth century, that reflected a scientist's desire to develop life, but who released too much undirected power upon the world in his vanity to become a creator.

The hero, Damian, is not a hero in the beginning, but evolves into one. He is not pursuing fame and glory, but he believes in friendship, bravery, and loyalty. Just as *Beowulf* enters the "underworld" to conquer the "the spawn of Cain," so Damian enters Sanctuary, which houses a clan of familiar monsters. The change for Damian is more of a metaphysical one than it is for *Beowulf*.

Mainly what is similar in the modern monster tale to the ancient *Beowulf* is the language of poetry throughout. While *Beowulf* is an epic poem, *The Monster Man* is a novella filled with the musical strings of words and sentence structures. It is a tapestry woven with the finest of lyrical sounds to the ear and images of the most beautiful, albeit horrifying, to the eye of the mind. It encases all elements of

poetic elements similar to *Beowulf*, and spins a tale almost of equal sonorous language.

Images of light and dark abound in both adventures. Light represents safety and camaraderie. It is a haven in the ancient mead-hall, where warriors feast as they listen to old stories of other heroes and ring-givers – those generous kings who rewarded their warriors - and then sleep. Gold shines in the hall as they rest with dreams of glory.

For Damian, home is the haven of light. It is love of family, a wife and son, and of loyalty. In this frame story, he returns home intermittently, and structurally each return distinguishes his own digressive tale - that which befell him as a child - from his mature battles. He seeks solace in the warmth of his own mead-hall, a place where a wife caresses him and a child cries out for his father.

Shades of dark images represent the supernatural, the evil of monsters and their habitats, and contrast with the joy among warriors and among family. In *Beowulf*, Grendel rises: *a powerful monster living In the darkness growled in pain, impatient as day after day, the music rang Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing Call and the poet's clear songs, sung of the ancient beginnings of us all....*

In words to his followers, the old king describes where Grendel and his mother are said to live: *“They live in secret places, windy Cliffs, wolf-dens, where water pours from the rocks, then runs underground, where mist Steams like black clouds, and the grove of trees Growing out over*

*their lake are all covered With frozen spray, and wind down snake-like Roots that reach as far as the water and help keep it dark.”*

Just as Grendel and Grendel’s mother invade the festive mead-hall, so a monster invades Damien’s haven: “*A Sub-Terrorean to my house? To my family?*” Sanctuary itself is the dreamscape of desolation and desiccation from a past civilization. A desert of stark white, not to be confused with light, stretches across the “colorless wasteland.” Demolished remnants left over stand in hues of gray. Black images cover the ground at night. Bats, werewolves, monsters in black suits, and Dracula’s cloak sweep across its fearful scope. Like the lair of Grendel’s mother, in Sanctuary, *The Drip of unseen water echoed in competition with the howl of a small wind* corresponds with Beowulf’s monsters.

Other symbols preside in both epic poem and novella. A supernatural element gives power to each hero. For Beowulf, it is his arms, for he has the strength of thirty men in them. He is able to tear off Grendel’s shoulder, claw and all, and hang it in the rafters of Herot. When his arms fail him in the fight with Grendel’s mother, he is able to lift a sword made by giants and kill this spawn of hell. Afterwards, he uses the sword to cut off Grendel’s head and bring it home as a trophy.

For Damian, it is his ability to become a shape-shifter. Guided by righteous rage and gifted with a green

pendant that wields power, he changes into a bestial creature himself whenever he needs the strength to defeat monsters. In battle scene after battle scene, Damian the Monster Man springs into action to stave off his enemies. The emerald jeweled necklace glows as his shape-shifting takes place.

One character in each tale serves as the instrument for storytelling. They reveal the past, as well as prophecies. They give structure to poem and novella. In *Beowulf*, it is the bard who relays digressive tales of past victories with other kings. These tales unite King Hothgar's warriors in their common heritage, encourage loyalty and bravery, and promise dreams of future victories. Thus, the culture passes down from one generation to the next in order to insure survival of the tribe.

In *The Monster Man*, it is the Gypsy who develops the structure of Sanctuary. Through her, Damian learns of past battles that ended in defeat. He hears the story of an older civilization in Sanctuary that once was vibrant and thriving – until the carnage of monsters tore it apart. She reveals that a savior is needed in order to destroy the powers of darkness against them so that they can survive once more.

Religious images, through words spoken and written, develop the underlying theme throughout the plots. The pagan *Wyrd*, or fate, in *Beowulf*, is replaced by hope for a new civilization in *The Monster Man*. The images represent the need for faith and the promise of Heaven. In *Beowulf*, the bard recalls the following in the beginning of the poem: *The*

*Almighty making the earth, shaping These beautiful plains  
marked off by oceans, Then proudly setting the sun and moon  
To glow across the land light it... And then As now warriors  
sang of their pleasure....* Even King Hrothgar's throne is  
protected by God, and Grendel cannot touch it.

The bard also recalls how the monsters represent  
demons: ... *conceived by a pair of those monsters born Of  
Cain, murderous creatures banished By God, punished  
forever for the crime of Abel's death... The Almighty drove  
Those demons out, and their exile was bitter, Shut away from  
men; they split Into a thousand forms of evil – spirits And  
fiends, goblins, monsters, giants, A brood forever opposing  
the Lord's Will, and again and again defeated.* When  
Grendel comes to the mead-hall, his arrival is told in this  
fashion: *Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty hills and  
bogs, bearing God's hatred, Grendel came, hoping to kill....*

As Damien slowly evolves into a champion, he is  
forced to run the gauntlet. Tests, trials, and disillusionment  
confront him at every turn. As a child, his tired body often  
endures the rigors of training. As an adult, he is relentlessly  
pursued by monsters and forced to defend or attack, which  
often climaxes in a rebuff for him. Only at the end does  
Damian truly perceive his destiny with pure clarity. And only  
then does he become the classic, true hero.

All of these similarities between *Beowulf* and *The  
Monster Man* may be called sketchy or formulaic, were it not  
for one main feature: The Language. Poetic language forms

the main bond between the two tales. *Beowulf* is known for its use of ancient kennings, alliteration, caesuras, lyrical sentences, and a final elegiac note.

Kennings – those compound nouns used to describe an object or person – abound in *Beowulf*. King Hrothgar is known as a “ring-giver” because he hands out gold rings as tokens of faith and loyalty after a battle. Grendel’s mother becomes “the water witch “and the “she-wolf,” and Beowulf becomes the “Shepherd of Evil.”

In *The Monster Man*, kennings appear at random. Dracula is also known as the “blood-drinker,” vampires are referred to as “night-children,” and Damian is called the “Chosen- One” or “Savior of Sanctuary.” The great Walestone is described with “vines of power.” For the contemporary writer, it is an art rarely used because it has been forgotten, but this novella brings it alive once again with all its poetic charm.

Alliteration -those words beginning with the same sound - and lyrical lines are widespread in both poem and novella. For the ancient poem, bards had to memorize stories, and valued ready-made phrases. Thus, “*he found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting Nothing, their dreams undisturbed,*” is typical of the epic poem. Another example is the following: ...”*the benches stained red, floors all wet from that fiend’s Savage assault – and my soldiers would be fewer. Still ...*”

In *The Monster Man*, sentences contain alliteration and lyrical rhythm intermittently. “*Growing and growling,*” presents the alliteration, and later the music of “*In a far off pyramid, a sarcophagus slid open. A king was waking...*” displays both alliteration and lyrical lines at play. In one descriptive line comes the following,” *In an exotic swamp, water bubbled and erupted in a geyser. An ancient beast returned from fossilized dreams.*” In describing the night, *The Monster Man* sings, “*It pulled itself inward, swelled up with a held breath....*” In referencing Frankenstein’s monster, a line includes, “*corpse began to crackle.*” The Mummy is described as “*desiccate and dry.*” In referencing Damian as the Monster Man, his shape-shifting is described as, “*supposed Savior of Sanctuary’s slit mouth bared all fangs.*”

Caesuras were a common poetic form in ancient British poetry. They occurred in *Beowulf*, as well as in “The Wanderer” and “The Seafarer.” In order to create suspense, the bard would pause before he continued his tale. In writing, the pauses were marked by gaps in the lines. *The Monster Man* creates a modern form of caesuras: the fragmented sentence. At critical times, it is used to increase tension, accelerate action, and focus on memorable events.

Poetic elements, as well as religious symbols, dark and light imagery, prophecies, and the supernatural, come together to form the destinies of the heroes in *The Monster Man* and *Beowulf*. Each man is subject to a final combat,

and each man is confronted by his mortality in the face of death and eternity.

Ultimately, each hero must face his arch nemesis. He must prove himself or die. He fights for the survival and salvation of his community. As an old man, Beowulf faces a dragon guarding a hoard of gold treasure, which represents continued fame and glory for the tribe. The dragon strikes him a mortal blow, and it is only with his friend's help that he is able to defeat the dragon before he dies.

As a young man, Damian faces the quintessential monster of evil and must defeat him in order to bring salvation to Sanctuary. There is no fame or glory in Damian's mind, only righteous power. He has matured for this final moment. He must decide if he has the faith and physical strength to fight the power of darkness

In an elegiac ending, Beowulf's community returns to their belief in *wyrd*, or fate, and accepts their loss. They return his body to the sea in a boat, a pagan ritual to honor the hero. Their mood is somber because they not only mourn Beowulf's death, but also mourn the knowledge that their tribe will be vanquished. And, indeed, the Geats are easily defeated in future years.

In the Epilogue of *The Monster Man: King of Fools*, Damian will be confronted by the metaphysical question of whether he will stand to fight evil in all its forms, as Beowulf did. If he chooses to do so, he will battle tragedy, or fate, for the entirety of his life. Therein rests the elegiac note.

*The Monster Man: King of Fools* may be enjoyed at two levels. At one hand, it is an action adventure. On the other, in the serious, metaphysical, and lyrical perspective, it rises to eloquence.

Enjoy.

Sharon Ginensky,  
English Chairperson  
Thornwood High School (Retired)

# Introduction

My first love, my first relationship was not a cute girl in my class or some puberty-escalating teacher. No, my first love, and one of my greatest loves to this day has been “monsters.”

Every Saturday, I would be terrified by local actor and personality Rich Koz as he donned the makeup for Son of Svengoolie. I would ask (sometimes plead) for one of my siblings or mother to make some popcorn and park my behind on the floor. Svengoolie would show Dracula, Frankenstein and the Wolf Man. There were others creatures he featured but these, the Universal Studio giants that rose from graves and howled at the moon were the ones that stayed with me all week. Truth be told, they have stayed with me all my life.

Even as I ran from the movies to the side of my mom’s massive Zenith television, I still listened and watched when I could stand the fear. I loved the monsters that called to me. In as much as I hid from them, I ran after them

*The Monster Man* is the epitome of my love affair, my wild courtship, my reckless abandon and my undying affection with the cinematic horrors of my childhood. Damian Malachi is my childhood grown up, married and raising a child all while it contends with the darkest loves I’ve ever had.

So don your black cape. Rise up amongst the high priests and cast lightning into stitched flesh. And then when it is all said and done, howl at the fullest of moons in the blackest of lagoons. And then, pop some popcorn and save me a spot on the side of my mom's TV.

Chad R. Hunter

# Dedication

God - for so much that an ant like me cannot begin to list.

My family - simply put: my life, my teachers, my heroes - five of the greatest people I'll ever know, especially Jaime – who never tired of a little tag-along boy following him into the night and Mom, who put God in my life and let me find space for a monster or two.

My friends – for so many crazy adventures and moments that taught me about everything.

Rick and Michelle - for leading me to Garrard.

HWG - for building a better writer, especially the gifted Sharon Ginensky.

Garrard - for seeing the writer so close to the surface.

Orlando – for teaching me more than I've taught him.

Lizeth, mi Corazon.

A special thank you to the men and women of the movies that kept a little boy in East Chicago, Indiana up at night - From Lugosi, Karloff and Chaney to Pierce and Laemmle himself, none of these geniuses knew they were helping to shape millions and especially not me.

A special thank you to Universal Studios – while this work is not a Universal Studios product or associated with the company, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge their amazing work and their personal impact with the finest of storytelling.

Special thank you to the horror hosts who catered to those of us who denied sleep to run the night and watch their monster - Especially the lovely Elvira, alluringly portrayed by Cassandra Peterson and our local and dearest Svengoolie, played forever by the legendary Rich Koz (who is still scaring new generations on Me TV!) – thank you from the bottom of every castle dungeon and vampire’s crypt.

Chad R. Hunter

*There was breathing.*

*The night breathed back.*

*Leaves and grass bit back as massive feet, no, paws slammed down and rose from the forest, no, the lawn.*

*The houses just ahead painted back in black and red shapes.*

*The distance from the growth was nothing.*

*The dogs in their fences whimpered and the sound was loud enough in unnatural ears.*

*There was breathing and the night breathed back.*

*A bound, a leap and the brick face side of a home was covered.*

*The glass window showed something small – a child sleeping.*

*Little eyes opened. A mouth screamed.*

*There was breath.*

*The glass broke.*

## 2

Damian Malachi lifted from his bed. His breathing – heavy. His skin – cold, his body slicked with sweat.

He looked over at the woman lying next to him. Elsa was beautiful enough when she was awake but, asleep, Malachi's wife was even more attractive. Her almond eyes closed with long lashes that interspersed. Damian smiled, as he caught his breath and brushed Elsa's cheek. She breathed gently. She could sleep through anything except for the baby's cry for his "momma."

Now at the window, Damian looked out. His shirtless torso danced over with the bright blue-white of the moon. It showcased his muscular physique. It also brought depth to a large jagged scar across his chest.

Just beyond the end of home's backyard was a collection of trees that suddenly felt familiar.

The night breathed.

Chicago was a city for big politics, bigger buildings with even more massive businesses. If it wasn't housing a conglomeration, any high-rise was full of tenants paying overpriced rent. And yet loving it.

In the Windy City's embrace was an infant skyscraper, not quite the height of its breather. It held the office of literary agency tycoon Miguel Gonsalves. Even if the tycoon title was self-granted and even further self-promoted.

"Damn it, D, you've done it again!" Gonsalves plopped down in the chair across from Malachi. Gonsalves was short in stature but carried himself like a man twenty feet tall. His tan skin and short dark hair had only added to his charm and bravado both in the world of literary business and in multiple conversations with women.

Damian smiled with a raised brow. Behind the writer and his agent, a massive multi-inch LCD television was jabbering with a news broadcast. Gonsalves spared little expense in his office and its décor.

"Done what?" he asked. The sun was setting in downtown Chicago. The fleeting light of day gave one last long shine across the glass giants touching the sky. Damian always found this view captivating. But he found Miguel's excitement even more so.

“Written another best seller! I thought you’d peeked with the Mummy Mysteries but now? Your draft for the Vampire Killer just left two publishing houses in a bidding war! How do you do it?” Gonsalves had been Damian’s agent, sometime editor, and always friend for almost ten years. He spoke at Damian and Elsa’s wedding and was godfather to Bradbury. But Damian could always surprise him.

“Miguel, that’s cool, man. Thanks!” Malachi’s dark brown eyes shot to the clock behind his friend. “Damn-it! I’m going to be late! Elsa’s folks are coming by and I promised I’d be there for dinner!” He snapped up, grabbing his stuff.

“Talk tomorrow, bro?” Malachi zipped up his jacket.

Miguel stood up as well, shaking his friend’s hand and hugging him simultaneously. “Yeah, for sure, for sure.” Gonsalves’ gaze stayed on the manuscript before him. He was holding another multi-million dollar project in his hands. “Just don’t know how you get these mummies, vampires and crazies down the way you do!”

Damian headed towards the office door. He smiled. “Guess I know monsters.”

*“...authorities have no leads on the disappearance...”*

Malachi turned towards the television. A rather attractive anchorwoman was finishing a story and turning the show over to a round weatherman. Miguel saw his friend’s attention shift.

“Sorry, bro,” Gonsalves said, “It’s about another kid disappearing. I think it’s like the second one. Another little boy. Sorry, D, must bring up some bad memories.”

Damian nodded. “Yeah, yeah...any more details?”

His agent shook his head. “No. Everyone’s just hoping and praying the kids are found safe. You write about monsters but there really are some horrible things out there.”

Malachi nodded once again. He looked at the large screen LCD. “Yeah, there are.”

###

Elsa Lanchaster Martinez-Malachi said goodbye to her parents. They left the door and, in their typical fashion, exchanged long farewells with details about some upcoming birthday party or baptismal event. As they said their (maybe) final portion of good night, Damian fell back onto the ground, launching a baby boy into the air.

Bradbury Claude Malachi, known as BC to his family, was all of three years old going on twenty-five. He had short dark hair with mom-gobbling curls. His parents had cut his hair infrequently and every time the boy was sheared, Elsa nearly lost consciousness. Now he was being tossed up with great shriek and joy, fresh from dinner and a bath.

Elsa smiled at the sight of her husband and son. “You know he just ate, babe!”

Damian grimaced. “Crap!” He caught the boy who begged for more aerobatics. “Dayee!!! Dayee!!! More, more!!!!”

Malachi smiled wide at his son. “Oh no, boy. No pukey tonight! We just gave you a bath! C’mon, to bed witcha!”

“DAYEE! Daddy!” Damian smiled. “Hah, the boy’s almost got it!”

Elsa grinned and narrowed her slightly almond eyes. “He says mommy perfectly!” The Malachi’s stuck their tongues out at each other.

“I’ll deal with you when I get him to bed!” Damian retorted. His wife made a sensual pouted face.

“Ooh, you promise?” At Elsa’s innuendo, Damian smiled and winked.

With that, Bradbury said goodnight to his mother and was hoisted away by his father.

Thirty long minutes later.

“Okay, son, time to go to sleep, okay?” A book had been read. Prayers had been prayed and the nightly rituals were complete. Bradbury was a perfect mix of his parents. He had his mother’s eyes and cheeks. He had a tint of his father’s color and, as Elsa often pointed out, the size of his father’s head. He was stubborn, even for a three year old, and willful. But his heart was big and Bradbury was the most sought after child between the two families.

“Okay, Dayee...” The little boy pulled his blankets up to his neck. Damian smiled and walked away, leaving the boy’s door nearly closed.

The child settled in and yawned. His eyes flickered until they finally shut.

Just beyond his toddler bed and the mounds of stuffed toys was his closet. It was normally full of clothing Elsa could not bear yet to part with and everything he could wear now. But at this moment, with the lights off, the closet was full of blackness. A pitch of darkness that seemed like a pool of ink sitting in the room.

The door to the walk-in aperture moved a bit then stopped. Moved a bit more then stopped once again. Finally, the door pulled itself closed and clicked shut. The closet was now just a white rectangle.

Until a greenish glow grew around it. Pulsated. And the closet began to hum.

As BC slept, the door opened. It creaked. It whined and a sickeningly green light fell over the slumbering child.

And the shadow of something reached out for him.

In the kitchen, the Malachi’s were washing and drying dishes. The couple played and flirted until a scream broke the air.

Damian burst into his son’s room. Elsa caught up. She was breathing heavy while her husband barely looked like he had covered the house in the few steps he had taken.

“MOMMY! DAYEE!!! SCARY FACE! SCARY MONSTER!”

“BC, “Damian said, “Where?”

Elsa was consoling her son. The boy pointed to the closet.

Malachi stood and looked into the open and dark closet. He paused and then looked back at his wife, shaking his head after finding nothing.

Elsa smiled and her eyes were filled with teary love. Her cheeks swelled as she smiled. “Baby,” she said softly, “It was just a bad dream. Go back to sleep. Mommy and daddy will be right here.”

Surprisingly, Bradbury accepted the offer and, as his mother held him, fluttered back to sleep. She put him down and the couple left the room.

The child’s room was quiet. It was dark.

Until it simmered to life in sick green coming from the closet.

The door whined open and a shadow reached for young Malachi again.

Another scream sent Elsa and Damian bursting into the room. Bradbury was sitting up screaming.

“MOMMY! DAYEE!!! SCARY FACE! SCARY MONSTER!”

“BC!!! “Damian said, “Where?”

Elsa was consoling her son. The boy pointed to the closet.

Once again, Malachi stood and looked into the open and dark closet. Once again, he saw nothing in the shadows.

“Okay, son, we’ll take care of it.” Damian stood at the edge of the walk-in and cleared his throat. “THIS IS THE LAST TIME WE’LL HAVE YOU BOTHERING US! YOU HEAR?”

Another conversation of consolation from mother to son. Another successful return to slumber. Elsa kissed Bradbury and he returned under his blankets.

Another dark room.

Another green glow.

Another shadow reached.

Bradbury cried out.

Damian came in, this time, by himself. Elsa was in the shower.

The father was visibly angry now.

“You need to know that this is the last time I’m going to put up with this...” he began.

BC looked up at his father with big watery eyes. “But Dayee...why you yelling at me?”

Damian inhaled deeply. Suddenly, he changed. He was moderate height with an athletic build but now he stretched and widened – skin pulling and bones popping. A green flicker ran over his body like a crackling tide washing over with the same tint as that color from the closet.

Suddenly, Damian Malachi was nearly seven feet tall, football wide shoulders with furred skin. His defined face was gone and something lupine with a skeletal nose had taken its place. A massive dark collar adorned the skin-tight black one-piece suit that clung to his rippling muscular body.

“I wasn’t talking to you, son...” The voice was not Damian’s anymore. At least not only his voice. There was something else. Something that howled and growled underneath his words.

What-was-Malachi thrust a muscular clawed arm into the closet’s shadows. He pulled something out of the darkness. He retrieved Bradbury’s monster – by the throat.

“...I was talking to him.”

Damian-not-Damian held the beast up. It was a short stocky creature with large eyes and a mouth of short nail-like teeth. Its hands ended in stubby claws. It sniffled and snarled while the lycanthropic-vampiric creature held it off the ground.

“A Sub-Terrorean? They sent a Sub-Terrorean to MY HOUSE? TO MY FAMILY?”

Malachi pulled the creature close. His mouth bared a row of wolf fangs. “You tell them – I’m-coming-back!” With that, he hurled the below ground dweller back into the closet. Rather than slamming into children’s clothing, hangers and drywall, the bestial hunchback disappeared into a flash of green and then the dark.

The remaining monster turned and looked at his child.

“Bradbury, don’t be scared, son, it’s me, Da---“

Bradbury exploded in a scream. Damian-not-Damian jumped back. His son’s shriek brought in Elsa.

“WHAT’S GOING ON?!?!?!”

Bradbury pointed to the beast that stood in his father’s place. “COOLEST. THING. EVER!!!!!!!!!! DADDY!!!!!! MONSTER DADDY!!!!!!”

Elsa shook her head. She looked at Damian-not-Damian. Almond dark eyes to his glowing penlight lupine gaze.

“Well honey,” Mrs. Malachi began, “You said you would tell him one day.”

The wolf-like creature raised an eyebrow.

###

*“Authorities continue to search for the missing boy. So far, the investigation has yielded no evidence as to whether or not this is foul play or a child who has wandered off. The FBI will be involved as they look to see if there are other disappearances nationwide similar to this one. More news after the break.”*

The clock on the microwave said “3:15 AM.” The Malachi family sat around the kitchen table.

Elsa had an oversized hooded sweatshirt robe pulled to.

Bradbury sat in a booster seat.

A large fanged wolf creature sat looking at them both.

“You know, you could just change back,” began Elsa.

“NOOOO! MONSTER DADDY!!!!

AWESOME!!!!!” Bradbury bounced in his chair, pounding his hands on the table. He growled with a smile on his face and would’ve woken anyone in the house sleeping if they were not all already awake.

“He won’t let me,” Damian answered back.

“He’s a little boy!”

“Monster daddy!!!!”

“Okay, son, okay...shhhh...calm down....”

Elsa sighed or yawned or did both. She wiped her face. Exotic and beautiful, even at the crack of the crack of dawn and with the hint of puffy eyes.

“And why am I so calm? Why am I not hysterical?”

Damian’s fanged slit of a mouth twisted into the closest smile he could mimic.

“Sorry, honey, it’s because you’ve seen this side of me before.”

“WHAT?” Elsa exclaimed. The boy was still clapping his hands. “WHEN? WHERE? I don’t---FINE. We’ll talk about that later! Right now, that little boy is not going to calm down, honey. He just found out his father is a werewolf---“

“Baby,” Damian-thing interrupted, “I am not a werewolf---“

Bradbury howled from his booster seat. “DADDY’S A WEREWOLF!”

Elsa tilted her head slightly. Her bob cut hair waved slightly. “A vampire?”

Damian-thing smacked his forehead with a massive bandaged clawed hand. “What??? No, not a vampire either!”

“DADDY’S A DRACULA!”

“Damian, he’s not going to go to bed until you explain it to him. Tell your son a story.”

The bestial creature paused. “Not exactly a kid’s book story, Elsa...”

“Tone it down then, Sweets. You’re the writer.”

Damian-thing sighed and a growl rumbled out as well.

“Fine. You’re right.” It turned lupine eyes towards the little boy. The irises were pin-light white dots set in darkness.

““One quick story, son. And then it’s straight to bed.” Damian Malachi, all wolf-like and undead, drew in a large breath and let it slip out. “Bradbury Claude Malachi. You’re about to learn how your father became...the Monster Man.”

Time had passed and Damian's story had ended. Despite his excitement, despite the new exposure of his father as a creature, sleep had overtaken Bradbury C. Malachi. The child slumped over in his booster seat. He inflated and deflated with every slight snore. Elsa moved to him, lifted him up gingerly and put him to bed.

She now stood in the kitchen with her husband, still more monster than man. He had spent some time looking through the house. He said he was looking for something. Something else trying to enter the home.

"Well now that we've permanently scarred him..." Damian, now mortal again in appearance, looked at his wife. She was watching the coffee maker hiss to life. Dawn was approaching in less time than it was an hour ago.

"Tell me the full story, not the kid version," Elsa continued, "I should know this. This part of my husband."

Damian stroked his wife's bare shoulders. "You may wish you didn't."

Her almond eyes looked into the dark brown of his. She thought, for a moment, that they never had looked so deep. Or so unknown.

The writer exhaled. "Like I told the baby, it happened twenty years ago. When I was just a kid asleep in his room full of werewolf curtains and Frankenstein piggy banks."

###

*The young boy soared through the air. Screaming.*

*He saw the darkness hurtling up towards him, the night air whipping past his face. Wind removing the ability of his breath.*

*Something green flashed in front of him. It was like glass. Damian screamed and threw his arms up in front of him. He crashed through it and was surrounded by spinning glass, almost stained like church windows. Suddenly he fell and crashed.*

*The ground beneath his hands and knees was gray. A dark gray dust that wasn't just dirt but lifelessness. The soil was more like soot from when he saw his dad clean the chimney.*

*He lifted up and saw the world before him. It wasn't just nighttime, it was a blackness that covered everything.*

*Malachi looked down. Something was burning on his young chest. He looked down and saw a golden pendant on his chest. It glowed a sick green.*

*The boy turned and saw a massive wall behind him. As far as he could see, it never ended.*

*"MOM!!!! DAD!!!!" His voice echoed.*

*There was nothing around him but what he had seen in books described as a desert. A wasteland of cracked and dried earth stretched out before the young boy from all around him until the end of the horizon. He looked at his hands and then up at the sky.*

*The world was black and white.*

*“What? I’m dreaming? MOM!!!! DAD!!!!”*

*Damian walked, calling out at the top of his voice for his parents. Tears began to run down his cheeks. His body was cold and getting colder. His t-shirt and pajama bottoms did not keep him warm. The boy stumbled through the colorless wasteland. As he called out, cried out for his parents, for anyone, Malachi walked across a jut of land. As he called out, cried out, the blackness on both sides of the outcropping moved. It came alive and something large and with wriggling appendages moved from the darkness.*

*Malachi continued until he tripped and fell.*

*A large mass moved quietly behind him.*

*A child’s tears ran from his face. He sobbed a bit and sat on his knees.*

*The thing reached spindly limbs out towards him.*

*Wiping his face, Damian stopped when he heard something softly crunch behind him.*

*The boy turned and saw it – a giant shadow – it seemed to be literally blackness moving towards him. For its size, it moved with a remarkable silence. But as he recognized the shape, the eerie quiet of the thing made sense. It was a giant tarantula.*

*Malachi tried to scream but nothing came out.*

*He could not move. Fear gripped him and bound his feet to the ground. Malachi found some shock to his system and scrambled to his feet. He ran. Now the colossal beast*

*made sounds. It was some horrid and ear-screeching hiss coupled with the sounds of cracking timber and falling trees as its massive limbs fell with its approach. Damian ran.*

*The air was stale, windless, lifeless. There was no smell except from some acidic aroma from the arachnid behind him. There was no sound of traffic or people anywhere. No planes over heard. This world was dead and the young boy was being chased by possibly one of its killers.*

*A sweep of a mighty clawed limb sent the boy hurtling through the air. He crashed down into a pile of dust and dead soil. The grass was browned and felt more like hay than it did greenery. Damian held his head and his vision cleared with the descending form of the giant, moist mandible maw as the hellish spider came down for its meal.*

*A figure was suddenly in front of Malachi – standing between the eight-legged hunter and him. Dark cloth billowed around the person before him. Odd how the air and its accompanying wind whisked suddenly to life.*

*The cloaked figure held up something – at first, it was just a darkened object but it quickly pulsated and snapped out a light that stopped the goliath arachnid in its tracks.*

*Damian still was unable to scream. Although the spider's feast was halted, with the light that appeared to stop it, the true appearance – from dripping mandibles to glistening eight-eyes – was fully recognizable. It was like looking into some alien god – large and beyond comprehension.*

*“BACK, BEAST! BACK!” The figure screamed and the object held aloft pulsed more and the green energy bellowed out, sending the tarantula away. It cried out with some horrible sound like a thousand shrieks. Damian fell to his knees, his hands slammed onto his ears.*

*Another darkened person appeared suddenly and held Malachi’s shoulders. A large fork like object crackled with electricity in the figure’s hands.*

*“Shhhh, young master, it will be gone soon!”*

*With that, the 100-foot arachnid stormed off and down the side of the cavern crossed by the bridge.*

*“Is he alright?” The voice came from the taller man. It had an accent and was very formal, very educated. He had a long walking stick that he held as a cane. More so for look or class than necessity.*

*“I believe so, doctor.” The shorter man’s voice had a grunting breath to it.*

*“We will need to get him into hiding. It is a miracle one of the Five have not been here yet.”*

*“Maybe they do not sense him,” said the short man.*

*“No, my friend, they sense everything – especially a living mortal.”*

*Damian looked up at the two men talking about him.*

*One was tall, thin – the other short and hunched over. They removed their hooded faces.*

*“Luckily neither of us have been alive for some time.” The taller man was chalk white with penlight eyes and fangs.*

*The shorter figure was a deeper color and one eye was far larger than the other. His back massively deformed.*

*Malachi found no scream once again. But he did find he could pass out.*

###

*“No! No! No!!!!”*

*“Again? Five nights in a row...”*

*The little Malachi boy was running, screaming and arms waving, through the night. Scratching branches and dead leaves raked his face. Blood streaked with tears as he cried beyond composure. The metal pendant on his chest glowed green in the jewel set within it. The necklace bounced as the boy ran wild.*

*Van Helsing and Igor watched from not-too-far away.*

*“Shall I get him again, doctor?” the hunchback asked, bouncing and somersaulting in place.*

*Van Helsing shook his head. “No, I will get him this time.” And with his last word still in the air, the doctor twisted and shape-shifted into a dark, winged shape. With a mighty gust of leathern membrane, the bat took to the air.*

*Damian huffed and puffed as he ran until suddenly he crashed into something. Wiping his face, the little boy looked up into a dark form turning into a pillar of mist and then into a man – the lean man with the burning eyes.*

*“Young man,” he whispered, leaning in, his fangs glinted in the moonlight, “We have things to discuss.”*

*Damian's face twisted as tears flowed again and he held his face sobbing. The necklace below his face throbbed and simmered. Its emerald coloring the only illumination in this world of black and white.*

*“Where am I? I want to go home!”*

*Damian huddled around a fire. It crackled in what seemed like an endless night. The orange embers died as they reached up into swallowing darkness. A blanket shrouded the boy’s shoulders. It was gray. Or possibly bright red if there was any color in this wasteland.*

*Standing next to the flames was the tall, chalk white man. Crouched by the fire pit was the hunchback. He bobbed as the kindling crackled in the light.*

*“At least you have stopped screaming,” began the tall man. “This world is called Sanctuary. We once called it Earth. Our Earth, not that different from yours, Damian Malachi. Except your world is thriving, alive. Ours ---” The immortal man waved his arm back and the boy looked – everything was seemingly gray, some areas only showing vitality with black and white. The ground was like sift less sand more so than dirt – nearly ash and soot. Buildings seemed to lean rather than stand straight and trees were leafless and twisted.*

*The sky was dark and where there should have been a sun there was only a moon – large and looming. It knew this world while Damian Malachi did not.*

*“Who --- who are you?”*

*The taller man sighed. He shook his head and the glasses on his nose reflected softly the bright penlights he had*

for eyes. *“We have been over this before but we will do so again. My name was...is Abraham. Abraham Van Helsing.”*

*“He is the Doctor...” hissed/growled the shorter, hunched man.*

*Abraham sighed. “I once was a doctor. This is Igor, my assistant”*

*The hunchback bowed as gracefully as he could. A large bible was held close in an arm that was smaller and more twisted than the other. As the shorter man stood as well as he could, there was a third figure.*

*A giant in size, some nine feet tall; it lumbered from the night just beyond the fire’s light. It never moved from beyond the cloak that covered it.*

*“That is Carradine.”*

*“Carradine,” it said. There was something childlike, obedient in the voice-servile.*

*The doctor continued his explanation to the Malachi boy.*

*“Sometime during the 1920s and thru the 1950s, the monsters rose and waged personal war on mankind. The human world doubted the very existence of monsters. Yet, beliefs changed when the war began. Some of mankind fled and some stayed to fight. But in the end, the things from myths and horror won. Our world paid the price – the very life of the places and people tainted by the undead and the accursed became victims to their presence. Whole continents*

*lost their vitality. Eventually everything fell and only we, the creatures of nightmares remained.”*

*Malachi frowned up slightly. “Are you people crazy?”*

*Van Helsing nodded grimly and his mouth parted. His sharpened teeth glinted in the moonlight and the fire’s flicker. “We have been for quite some time. Our whole world has lost its mind.”*

*“I want to go! This is a bad dream!” The pendant on the boy’s necklace danced with his sudden irritation. It flickered and pulsated. At closer inspection, it was almost a perfect oval shape of metal. It had ridges in it that were partially hidden, the metal folded in around itself. In the middle of the oval, was a green crystal. And Damian had looked at it every night before he faded of to sleep. And moments like this, when he sobbed aloud.*

*Igor moved in towards the weeping child, Damian almost pulled back. The hunchback put his hands up in reassurance and he resettled the blanket on the boy’s shoulders. Igor patted Damian on the shoulders softly.*

*“This is a nightmare, Mr. Malachi,” Van Helsing stated, “The world is split into several types of creatures – The Lupos, shape-shifters cursed by the werewolf’s bite; the Ichthys, thought long-extinct amphibious dwellers of the waters; the Bolted, patch worked from cadavers and reawakened by lightning; the Dusted, mummified followers of*

*the awakened Egyptian king and lastly, the Nosferatu, bitten and dead but still walking and thirsting for blood.”*

*“What about the others, Doctor?”*

*“Yes, yes, you are correct Igor. After this realm became accursed, many foul and vile presences came to roost. There are the giant ants that plague desert regions. You have met the gargantuan spider that hunts near the Lugosian Gate. There are also the underground Sub-Terroreans, the murderous Space Men who orbit the skies and the Phantom, but no one has seen him in some time.”*

*Carradine stood like a giant. Hooded. Hidden.*

*“Avoid the waters,” the doctor additionally instructed, “Some of them are deceiving and will dissolve you before you know you’re being eaten.”*

*Tears welled up in Malachi’s eyes. He buried his face in his folded arms. He fondled the newfound necklace that had joined him as he flew through the air and green glass to arrive in this land. “Why am I here?”*

*The vampire looked up at the large moon. “There is a woman you must meet. She believes that you will save our world...and yours.”*

*Damian frowned, his sorrow now turned to anger, to rage. “What??? I’m a nine year old boy!”*

*Van Helsing spoke. He tried not to show the elongated canines in his mouth. “Not for long.”*

*###*

*Time had passed since the human boy's arrival. He had done what no adult could have - accepted and adapted to a world of monsters. The doctor and the hunchback would train him. Van Helsing's walking stick would tap and Malachi would do pull-ups or somersaults. The cane would strike the ground and Malachi would run sprints over and over or lift rocks from pile to pile.*

*Day in and day out. There was the double-tap of Van Helsing's cane and Damian would run. The cane would tap twice, Damian would jump. He would learn to move, live and push his body in ways no child of a civilized world ever would need to.*

*But Sanctuary was a world where civilization fell long ago.*

*When Malachi wasn't learning physical lessons, he was taught those of the mind and the soul. He read massive books and learned lessons as if still in school, as if still at home. Igor, despite the appearance of a diminished mind, was quite brilliant. He taught lessons of mathematics and science, literature and writing.*

*While other children were in schools and on playgrounds, Damian Malachi wrote with chalk on cave walls or on paper in burned out houses. He ran and jumped over ravines and spiked traps.*

*Damian accepted, adapted and adjusted. But, far too many nights, just before drifting off to sleep, the*

*Malachi boy would find his tears for his parents, his home and his world.*

*Unbeknownst to him, the Doctor, with his hearing acute from Dracula's bite, would listen to his young charge weep.*

*And the necklace would simmer with the boy's sorrow.*

###

*Time had passed. With the moon always being present, it was easy to forget how many days had slipped behind. Nearest he could recall, Damian had been trapped in the black and white world of monsters for over a year at least.*

*"Where are we?" Damian, Van Helsing, Igor and Carradine stood at the outskirts of a small settlement. There were tents and places where fires looked like they once burned high. There were wagons and mounds of hay. But there were no people. No sounds of adults talking or children laughing. No whinny of horses or music from the instruments laying on the grass. There was one lone wagon where light, small and flickering, showed through the glass windows.*

*"We are here for you to meet the woman who sent for you."*

*Before long, Damian found himself shuttled off into the wagon. He looked around and the training he learned in tracking kicked in. There were no clear footprints in the*

*door, only signs of an old battle. Sporadically, however, there were markings he recognized from the doctor's lessons – paw prints. Big ones.*

*Before long, Damian was now inside the wagon. The door closed behind him and he was sitting on a little wooden stool. A short table was in front of him and an old, very old woman was perched on the other side. She looked wooden. She looked dead. Still as if ready for the grave.*

*“Hi?” squeaked out Damian.*

*The gypsy sat quietly. Malachi looked her and the woman appeared to possibly be dead. The boy sat in the small shop with the old woman. Her home was like a shop. Made of wood and aged scents unmistakable but indescribable, the little hovel was barely lit by the candles around the woman's chair. Tokens of odd creation hung from the walls. Feathered dream-catchers. Talismans with claws. Glass eyes staring at their forever death. These things and more kept Damian Malachi company.*

*The little wagon that hitched itself to the gypsy's home sat in a small village. It was more so a collection of other wagons and make-shift homes, tents and gatherings of kindling. However, all of these objects were just that – objects. There were no people in the tents. There were no horses tied to the wagons and the fires had long since gone cold. For all he knew, Damian, save for the Doctor, the giant and the Hunchback, was the only person here. Besides the old woman with closed eyes.*

*Malachi sat a little longer. The old gypsy did not move.*

*He narrowed one eye, squinting his look at her. Nothing.*

*Damian pulled back, squatting on the little stool where he sat. He got bored, tired and his nine-year-oldness reared its little head. He stuck his fingers in his ears and waved at the still woman. He stuck his tongue out and rolled back his eyes.*

*When he looked at the old gypsy, with his tongue out and foolish face, she was now looking back at him.*

*He slowly slid his hands back down to his side. If his mother or father were there, they would have had his hide.*

*The gypsy might beat them to it.*

*“This is him.” Her voice was aged. Cracked. Like something from centuries ago and forgotten twice as long. Damian jumped off his seat from the scary voice of the collection of wrinkles, bandana and bangle jewelry.*

*“It is,” said Van Helsing who was now behind the boy.*

*“Doctor?” Damian whispered. “Who is she?”*

*The undead man smiled. His fangs showed slightly. “Damian Malachi, this is the Gypsy. She is the elder of this village.” The boy turned and the old woman nodded slightly and slowly in either greeting or acknowledgement.*

*“Sit, boy,” she said, commanded, croaked like an old frog. She reached out to him and there was a chocolate bar*

*in her hand. Malachi dove for it, finding it as delicious as anything he had eaten back home. Home – he thought – wherever that was.*

*“It began with the nosferatu,” and with that, The Gypsy began a tale. “The English could not stop him. He rose and took his revenge. Those who tried to stop him felt his wrath.”*

*Van Helsing’s head lowered. A dark tear fell from his eye.*

*“Then as the Count’s evil spread, the scientist’s revived creation rampaged once again. Soon, the werewolf ran through my land. He spread slaughter and his woe throughout the gypsies and others who once called this place home.”*

*“The fish man survived the fire and steel used to kill him. It plunged into its murky depths and returned with all of its peoples. The land lost its modern life and descended back into times long lost.”*

*The young boy unconsciously held himself and trembled slightly. It was part the chill in these abandoned woods and the small wagon. Pots and pans hung around Damian, each covered in a layer of dust. As the Gypsy told the tale of the world’s demise, these abandoned cooking tools were like objects of the old ways and life lost long ago.*

*“Finally, the long dead Egyptian returned from beyond the grasp of his gods. He defied those who rose to*

*stop him; he stole a vessel for his resurrected queen and spread his biblical plagues throughout the lands.”*

*Van Helsing reflexively tapped his cane. Damian snapped his attention towards his mentor. Also another reflex from untold nights of training under the rhythm of the doctor’s walking stick. “After the Five connected and began to wield the power of the Walestone, it was not long after that they built armies. Victims of their curses fell in line and attacked. Towns fell and soon after, cities. By the time the civilized world and its leaders caught wind, it was too late. Ignorance and doubt had to be beaten before oak stakes and silver bullets would be passed out to soldiers on the field. Soon, the world fell.”*

*“Did everyone...die?” Damian’s voice broke and he cleared his voice mid-sentence.*

*“We saved who we could,” Van Helsing continued, “With the stone, the portals came alive. With the mind of a great scientist, we manipulated the portals to other places, other worlds. Some stayed to fight the evil, to buy time while the surviving populations ran.”*

*Malachi wiped his eyes. The Gypsy woman gave him a wrinkled look.*

*“Yes, boy, these are the monsters that you played with in your world, in your room at night. These are toys and books to you. Here - these are horrors, these are murderers to us.”*

*Damian was on the verge of full tears. “I don’t want monsters anymore!” And he hopped off the stool and ran outside.*

###

*Damian had tired from his outburst. He now walked to the edge of the abandoned camp. Igor led him towards some of the toys that resided in the dirt. Their owners were long gone and the lifeless soot of Sanctuary had settled on them decades over. Van Helsing watched the boy and the deformed lab assistant. The flickering light of the cursed gypsy woman gave a veil of shadow to the undead man’s eyes.*

*“Your burdens are heavier than usual, Abraham,” the old woman began.*

*Van Helsing sighed. He often forgot he no longer breathed and needed to suck in the night’s air to make noise. His clawed hands rubbed the top of the cane – its crown was some type of black onyx. In life, it had been a nervous reflex of intense thought when he taught university or hunted the undead. In his unlife, the doctor did the same thing for the same reason. “This whole thing...this prophecy...the things we’ve had to do! The things we’ve allowed to happen! If he survives the test, the power Damian will get...he’ll be cursed ---“*

*“Gifted,” interjected The Gypsy, “He will have more abilities at his fingertips than any of THEM put together! He will return this world ---“*

*“NO!!” Van Helsing roared, his eyes burned and the night swirled in response to his anger, “Do not make this sound as if we are doing this child a favor! And this was never about revitalizing our home....this whole idea is about REVENGE.”*

*The Gypsy was silent. “You have lost your perspective, immortal,” she replied. “You have spent too much time with the boy. He is needed.”*

*“Exactly,” Abraham hissed, his fangs bared and the walking stick clutched. “He-is-a-boy.”*

*A howl came out from the woods around the camp. The moon, as in all of Sanctuary, looked fuller than ever. The Gypsy’s eyes were now amber with lupine striations pulling from the pupil.*

*“Not for long,” she answered. And her head fell back and the old woman howled in response to the night’s call.*

*Van Helsing returned to watching Damian.*

## 6

*“Where are we?”*

*“Wait here. Igor and I will circle around and find out what’s following us. Stay here, Damian. You will...be fine.”*  
*With that, the Doctor and the Hunchback were gone.*

*Malachi stood in the dark clearing. Blackness was around him in thickness so great he could not see past the trees.*

*The woods moved. The shadows were alive.*

*“D-d-doctor?” There was nothing that came back.*  
*No answer back from the Dutchman.*

*“Igor?” Equal silence returned his call. But there were sounds - just not those of would-be saviors.*

*There was a growling growing to his left. Damian turned and saw two wolf-like creatures emerging from the darkness, moving with massive limbs and claws. They were taking their time approaching; moonlight set fires in their amber lupine eyes.*

*There was a hissing sound to his right. Malachi turned to see two pale, penlight-eyed things, a man and a woman. They bared clenched teeth at the boy and he saw long fangs shine with wetness. They reached out to him with sharp fingers. The two were floating towards him and his throat. Damian felt something hit him. Yet it was not the night’s denizens surrounding him. It was something else.*

*Something altogether different. This blow was not from his right or left but from inside.*

*Somewhere - In a far off pyramid, a sarcophagus slid open.*

*A king was waking.*

*Malachi fell to his knees. The blow was like a massive fist, a giant punch from within his body. Instead of one strike, it repeated. Again and again like a drum - his heart was crashing against his ribs. His lungs were swelling and pushing out all the air around him.*

*Somewhere - Under a full moon, a forest exploded. A feral force of primal power howled to life.*

*Damian's skin tingled and then burned with an unknown crawling like a thousand bites pulling on his flesh.*

*Somewhere - In an isolated castle, lightning crackled and struck a tower.*

*A scientist's nightmare was coming to life.*

*He looked down through the pain. His eyes felt as if they were pushing out from his skull and with the fading light in his vision, he saw the necklace on his chest change. The chained item he gained crashing through some jewel in the*

*sky, the small metal and green crystalline talisman he could not get rid of - opened. Light danced inside of it and exploded. Damian tried to cover his eyes but his body would not respond.*

*Somewhere - In an exotic swamp, water bubbled and erupted in a geyser.*

*An ancient beast returned from fossilized dreams.*

*Then it was over. Malachi felt no more discomfort. He rose up from the ground and saw the werewolves and the vampires do something he could not imagine - they took a step back.*

*The boy was gone. He looked down with new eyes and a vision that was layered in multiple phases of perception. His ears gave him every sound of Sanctuary's night. His hands were now large and paw-like. Fur covered his body save for where it was shrouded in the wrappings of old bandage and a tight black body-suit. The necklace was gone and a metallic batlike emblem protruded from his chest.*

*With his new clawed hands, Damian felt his face. He had a large head with pointed ears, a mane of fine fur and a snout. His nose elongated to a point and consisted of two skeletal slits. Malachi's eyes set back in his face - and they burned with green power - like that of the necklace.*

*“---what?” And the voice was not Damian’s pre-pubescent pitch. It was deeper, doubled and had an echo to it that rumbled.*

*The werewolves leapt at him and instinct kicked in. The boy-turned-monster spun out of their attack. He was a blur in movement. With massive claws, he reached and caught the creatures in mid-leap and hurled them against nearby trees. They howled out as the trees broke in their impact. The two lupine creatures did not return. One other one looked at what used to be a boy and then scampered off.*

*The vampires hissed and billowed up towards Malachi-not-Malachi in a furious row of smoke and flap of bat wings. Damian himself spun into a pillar of dark mist and hurtled into the approaching night-children. The meeting was explosive and the wolf-bat-bone creature Damian had become solidified in victory. He returned to form in spinning motion and threw both vampires into the far off distance of the woody shadows.*

*The entity that had taken the place of Damian’s body fell to its knees. It panted, it breathed and it exhaled slowly. With the last breath, the massive form returned to that of the ten year old boy.*

*“Doctor,” came a familiar voice from the side, “It is HIM!” Damian wiped sweat from his brow. His body ached as he turned to see Igor standing next to Van Helsing. The doctor’s burning eyes were wide open. His mouth slightly agape.*

*“My God...” whispered the Dutchman, “It is him.”  
Malachi looked at his mentors. He suddenly frowned.  
“You left me here!”*

*Damian leapt and he was gone again. When he  
landed, the massive beast he had become had returned. This  
time, it swatted the hunchback aside and held the doctor by  
the throat several feet off the ground.*

*“D-Damian...lis---listen to me---!” The words  
struggled out as Van Helsing’s throat was being crushed by  
the young boy in his newfound form. There was fury in his  
glowing eyes. His jaws whined with the squeezing of fangs  
and maw together.*

*Igor was doing his best to pull the doctor loose but to  
no avail. “Master Damian!” the hunchback pleaded. “No!  
No! Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord!”*

*“YOU LEFT ME,” the monster formerly known as  
Damian Malachi growled. His claws were digging into the  
doctor. Sooner than later, Van Helsing would die again.*

*“You---you---leave me---no choice----Sorry, D--D--  
Dam---” With his apology still fresh in the air, the Dutchman  
flicked a sharp nail across one of his hands and smacked the  
lupine face of Malachi’s transformed body.*

*Damian dropped Abraham Van Helsing. It was more  
from shock than from the slap. Malachi flicked Igor off to the  
side.*

*“You slapped me?” The creature rumbled, “You  
almost got me killed and now you-slap-me?” Mighty paws*

*slammed into the ground as Malachi stormed his way over to the undead doctor.*

*“There was no other way, Damian,” Van Helsing huffed, holding his throat. “For our kind and anyone with our traits, the blood is the life...it is also...the past.”*

*Abraham held up his hand and showed Damian the slit where he had cut himself. His palm oozed blood - the same dark liquid that ran down the snout of Malachi and into his mouth. The slap was a delivery. The blood - information.*

*“Learn, Damian,” Van Helsing whispered as the monster before him blinked and staggered. It fell to its knees.*

*“Ungh....” Malachi groaned, holding his head, closing his eyes. “What did---you---what did you do to me? What’s happening?”*

*Van Helsing sighed. He approached the struggling Malachi, slowly. But he still approached. He placed a hand on the massive back trembling.*

*“You are learning.”*

*Somewhere - In a castle perched high atop a mountain range, cobwebs and shadows filled a throne room.*

*In the darkness, a coffin - ornate and crested with royal seal - lay amongst three others. It slid open and a clawed hand burst forth.*

*A massive ring adorned a finger; it had the letter “D” upon it.*