

Lost Gods: Halloween Special

by Drew Beatty



The shrill ringing of the telephone broke me out of my extended reverie. I shook my head to clear the cobwebs and manoeuvred myself around the boxes that were turning the living room into an obstacle course, looking for the portable phone. I retrieved it from under the piles of miscellaneous detritus that I still needed to pack. Tomorrow was November 1st, moving day for Kanene and I.

“Hello,” I said into the receiver.

“Hello yourself,” replied Kanene. “Do you want the bad news or the good news first?”

“Bad news,” I replied. “Let me guess, Sheila is sick again, so you have to stay to cover her shift.”

“You got it. But the good news is I will get paid.”

“Well, that’s not really good news, more of a standard expectation. When will I see you?”

“Around ten. Are you all right? How is the packing going?”

I looked at the state of the apartment. I had not done too much, but it was a small place, we didn’t have too much stuff to pack, really. Except my books which were already in the back of the truck.

“I’ll be fine, honey. Coyote said he would come over and help. Besides, I think I like it better that you are at work on Halloween, with lots of people around.”

“Afraid for my safety? I thought most of the spooks and goblins actually liked to take Halloween off.”

“No, you just saw that on an episode of Buffy. Halloween can bring out the worst in everyone, Gods, ghosts and people alike. Give me a call when you are done, I’ll come pick you up.”

“Take care hon,” she said as she clicked off.

I looked around the living room once again. I didn’t know why I felt so melancholy packing it up. We finally had a decent home to move to, not a mansion or anything, but enough space to relax. Maybe raise a family. But this had been our home for many years, and I would miss it, in some ways.

I walked to the bathroom to splash some water on my face, hoping it would be enough to perk me up, get me focused again. I looked at my reflection in the mirror, smiled at myself, trying to get into the right frame of mind. For one horrible second I saw the toothy grin of Baron Samedi smiling back at me. I gasped, but he was gone. I thought of all the times I had used his powers, depleted his ill gotten bones, and remembered the warning of the Artist, that I might take on aspects of his personality. I hope it was just my imagination, and not a harbinger of something to come.

I needed to get out, get some fresh air. The packing was making me crazy. I grabbed a couple more boxes and went to go down the back stairs to the truck. We had stripped it of the security logs, and Coyote had let me keep it. He was saving up to buy a Porsche, a couple more months of our little swindle and he should have enough cash.

“Hey Kweku,” came a voice from behind me. My neighbour, Frank, stood in the hall. “Can I give you a hand with those?” he said, pointing at my boxes.

“Hey Frank, I’m fine, really. They are not too heavy.”

“Well, if I don’t see you again, I just want to say goodbye, you were a very good neighbour.”

“Thanks Frank, you too. Take care.”

He smiled and gave me a small salute as he shut the door. Frank had gone a little over the top with the Halloween decorations, covering his doorway and part of the hall with skeletons, gravestones, witches and spider webs. The man loved his holidays, and did something big for every season. I paused to admire his decorative flair when something caught my eye.

I stepped closer to look at the inscription on one of the rubber gravestones. Most of them were lame puns, like “Here lays A. Corpse,” but one of them had a complex, swirling pattern, many layered, with a complicated recursive design. It looked familiar somehow and unlike anything else on the decorations.

I pulled my cell phone out and dialled Coyote.

“I’m on my way, I’m coming, I promise,” he said as he picked up.

“No, it’s not that, I want you to check something out for me on your super computer. I gather you are still at home?”

“I was just at the door, I swear. I mean, what can be better on Halloween night than helping a friend move? Am I right?”

“I know, I know. Stay put, I’ll email a picture from my phone.”

“Well, aren’t we Mr. Technology these days?”

“Shut up and check your email,” I hung up on him and fumbled with the buttons on the phone, finding the camera. Hanging out with Coyote had helped me remember the importance of technology, and slowly I was learning how to do more and more. I sent him the photo I took and called him back.

“Get it?”

“Got it. What is it?”

“It’s on my neighbours Halloween decorations, it looked familiar, and out of place. Probably nothing, but I just wanted a second opinion.”

“I’ll call you back when I know something,” he said.

“Thanks.”

I drove through the streets, watching all of the children walking home from school, dressed as vampires, ghosts and princesses. Some things never changed.

I had just finished unpacking the boxes when Coyote called back.

“Are you sitting down?” he asked.

“I’m at the new house, we don’t have chairs anymore.”

“Well, crouch at least, because I have bad news.”

“That’s all it has been today, so just hit me with it.”

“Okay, here is the deal. The text is ancient Babylonian.”

“Isn’t it always?”

“What?”

“Never mind, go on.”

“All right, so the text is an invitation, basically. It’s an open invitation for Babylonian Kalpeth demons to come right on in and kill everyone.”

“They don’t have to knock?”

“No, you don’t get it. They usually can’t even get to this dimension, or plane, or whatever you want to call it. It’s like a gateway, giving them an opening to crash any party that has that decoration up. What are the odds it was handmade by your neighbour?”

“Zero, it was store bought plastic for sure. We could be dealing with thousands of these things.”

“That would not be good.”

I sat down on the hard linoleum floor of my new kitchen. “What do we do now?”

“I’ll see what I can find out about Kalpeth demons, how they can be defeated, you find out where your neighbour got that decoration and see what you can find out about it. I’ll come by the apartment.”

“Be safe,”

“You too.”

I don’t remember the drive back to the apartment, but I didn’t kill anyone, and I didn’t get pulled over for speeding, so I assumed something was on my side.

“Frank, Frank, you still in there?” I asked, banging as politely as I could on his door. He opened it with a smile.

“Kweku, what’s up man, you need my help after all?”

“No, no. It’s about this decoration of yours here,” I said, pointing to the offending tombstone.

“Oh yeah, it’s pretty neat, eh? I mean, it doesn’t flash or scream or anything, but it looks pretty cool. The pattern is wild.”

“It’s about that pattern, Frank,” I said. I had to think fast, I couldn’t actually say that it would open up a demon portal and his family would be eaten like so much Halloween candy by an ancient evil. Good thing

I'm a con man. "That pattern is actually a language, Shona, an African dialect. I think someone is playing a kind of a joke, because it's an insult. A very vile insult. It says the person in this home, well, he does unfortunate things with both his mother and his dog."

"Jesus, really?"

"I studied Shona when I was younger, so the translation might not be perfect, but that is basically what it says. You might want to take it down."

He started pulling it from the doorframe before I finished the sentence. "I can take it down to the trash if you like, I'm running more boxes down."

"Thanks, Kweku, thanks a lot."

"Can I ask where you got it?"

"Yeah, yeah, it was at the little dollar store on St. Clair, just around the corner. "

"Thanks Frank."

"Jesus, thank you for telling me! That could have been embarrassing. "

I took the decoration back to my apartment and examined it for any clues. There were few markings on it, but it did have a ten-digit number. I typed the digits into Google, and was rewarded with a series of images identical to the decoration I was holding, but without the symbol. All of the pictures were of blank headstones. Weird. Time to find the source.

I walked over to the dollar store, watching the sun kiss the horizon, filling the streets with a golden glow. Night was coming. Shit. I phoned Coyote again.

"What's our deadline?" I asked. "When do these portals open?"

"Guess."

"Midnight?"

"Bingo. I'm on my way."

"Good."

I entered the store, clutching the decoration under my arm. The lady behind the counter smiled at me. I wasn't a regular, but I had been in a few times, so perhaps she recognized me.

"Can I ask you a question about this?" I said, putting the decoration down on the counter between us. She looked at it casually.

"Sure, we had a few of those, but they sold out. Not much Halloween stuff left tonight."

"How many did you have?"

“Ten.”

“Your sure it was ten, not twelve, or eight?”

“We order ten of every decoration, ten is the magic number for us. Why all the questions?”

“This symbol, was it on all of them? On the Internet they were blank.”

“No, they all had that symbol. Why?”

“It’s complicated to explain. Do you know where else I could get this decoration?”

“Any dollar store in the city would have them.”

“Thanks.”

One more call to Coyote.

“You on your way over?”

“Yeah, just walking to the subway, what’s up?”

“Can you check to see if the dollar stores in your neighbourhood have the decoration?”

“Yeah, there are two I’ll pass.”

“Okay, check them out, and grab a cab.”

“Done.”

Back to the apartment, after ripping the gravestone to shreds and dropping of bits of it in multiple dumpsters. I threw a frozen pizza in the oven and waited for Coyote. Packing no longer held any appeal.

Finally he buzzed.

“So, I have some good, possibly strange news.”

“What’s that?”

“The stores I went to had a couple of the same tombstones left, but none of them had the design.”

“That is weird.”

“Another thing, perhaps pertinent. The tombstones were made in Mexico.”

“As in, the last known location of Judy and Iktomi?”

“As in. I don’t know for sure, this is some pretty serious speculation, but they might have something to do with it. Perhaps they found out that a shipment would be coming to your neighbourhood, decided to have a little fun.”

“It’s a stretch.”

“Yeah, but it’s the only thing I’ve got. So the good news is we are not dealing with thousands of portals opening.”

“Ten, well, nine now. Nine probably in this neighbourhood, nearby. What’s our next step?”

Coyote blew on a steaming slice of pizza and took a large bite. “Find the other nine. Destroy them.”

“And if we don’t find them all?”

“Fight some demons. I have a bit of good news there.”

“Please tell me they are allergic to spider bites.”

“No such luck, but they are not too strong, actually. I mean, a human would be fucked, but either of us, using our smarts and powers should be able to take one of them.”

“What about two, or three?”

“Well, let’s not let that happen. I’m going to walk, go up the street, get into all the apartment buildings, see what I can find. You take the wheels, drive around, cover the houses. We are probably only looking at a four city block radius, out from the store. I’m sure most people bought those decorations locally. Stay in touch.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

I drove the streets slowly, trying to balance watching the children who were coming out to Trick or Treat and looking for the damn decoration. I checked in with Coyote every fifteen minutes. By ten o’clock he had found and destroyed three of them, I had found five, not counting the first one.

The streets grew quiet around ten, people turning off their lights and bringing in their pumpkins. I had to creep along, scanning slowly in an attempt to make out the dull grey decoration in the darkness. My phone began ringing as I was turning around to go home.

“So, are you coming to get me?”

“Shit, Kanene, I’m sorry. It’s been a hectic night.”

“Did you and Coyote get the packing finished?”

“Well, not as such, no.”

She blew out an exasperated puff of air. “So what have you been doing, exactly?”

I slowed the truck, thinking I had seen another one of the cursed decorations. Just a regular tombstone, no pattern. Crud.

“Well, we have been going around the neighbourhood saving people from a possible demon attack.”

“Are you trying to con me?”

“I don’t do that, not to you. Seriously, we came across some cursed Halloween decorations, we have found and destroyed nine out of ten. Do you want to grab a cab home?”

“Will do.”

“Lock yourself in, I’ll be home after midnight. Love you.”

“Love you too, spider boy.”

I found Coyote walking down Bathurst, heading back to my apartment. “Any luck?”

“Nine out of ten. One is still out there.”

“That sucks. Hop in.”

“I’m going to change, use my coyote eyes.”

“Good plan.” Suddenly I found myself sitting next to a coyote, instead of Coyote. Same thing, really. He gave me a little yelp and a smile, and stuck his head out the window, scanning the streets with his preternaturally sharp coyote vision. He sniffed the air, using all of his senses to hone in on that one last damned decoration. 10:15. Time was ticking.

I drove in an ever expanding circle, trying to drive up and down each block before moving on. It was slow, frustrating work. The night only got darker as clouds rolled in. 11:00. 11:15. 11:30.

We were virtually downtown when Coyote gave another yelp, and started pawing at me.

“What is it, boy, did Timmy fall down the well again?”

Coyote snapped back to his human form. “Very funny, spider. Down there, I could smell something.” He pointed down a back alleyway, not the most inviting of places. A large Hummer blocked the entrance to the alley, so we got out of the truck and started walking after Coyote got his cloths back on.

“Less than two minutes left,” I said, checking my watch.

“It’s close, I can still smell it now. Fuck, I should have thought of this before, we could have saved so much time if I just used my nose in the first place.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll find it.”

That was when the world went dark. I mean, yes, it was already a cloudy night, and we were prowling around a back alley in downtown Toronto, but that was merely dim. We were now in utter, utter blackness. I couldn’t see my hand in front of my face, let alone Coyote beside me.

“You still there, spider?”

“I’m here. Think we are too late?”

“Probably.”

A bright light flared up ahead of us, in the shape of the design. It grew brighter and brighter, colours pulsing and throbbing, reds, greens, blues assaulting our eyes. I could see nothing but the design. A crash split the silence, and I fell on my ass as a burst of energy exploded from the gravestone. I pulled myself to my feet, dazed, and found myself face to face with a Kalpeth demon. Although he was much taller than me, I was able to look into his eyes due to the fact that he had grabbed me by the neck and picked me up.

“Ummm, boo?” I gasped. He was unfazed. Ugly fucker, small piggy eyes set wide in his head, no nose to speak of, just a couple of moist looking slits, and a mouth filled with a hodgepodge of teeth, no semblance of order. But a lot of them were very sharp looking. And long. And pointy. He wasn’t as big as Veles had been, but he was strong. I could feel the pressure building on my neck, knew I didn’t have much time.

I swung my feet at him, trying to kick him, with no effect. Well, I hurt my feet a little bit, so I suppose I had some effect, just not what I was hoping for. I threw a few lame punches at him, but again, all I did was hurt my hand. Strong, and hard, like his skin was actually some sort of armour. Super.

I changed into a spider, just a common house spider, nothing fancy, enough to get out of his grip and regroup. I fell to the ground, spinning as I did so. I ran between his legs and popped back up to human form. I hammered my fists into his kidneys, or at least where I assumed his kidneys would be. Nothing happened.

A form bolted out of the darkness, Coyote lunging for the throat of the Kalpeth demon. His jaws closed around the neck of the beast, but he couldn’t break the skin. He started to slide off, paws frantically trying to find purchase, I could hear the skritch sound of his nails against the iron hard chest of the demon. He reached up, and with one hand flung Coyote away. I heard him shriek as he flew through the air.

Ok, no more playing around. Fang time. I jumped at him, and scrambled into his ear, for the second time in my life becoming *Phoneutria nigrivente*, a spider with venom so deadly even one small bite could kill a man. I hoped that I would have some effect on this jackass. The skin inside his ear was thinner, so I jabbed my fangs in, felt the skin pierce a little bit. I pumped my venom, pumped myself dry.

A clawed finger started to probe into the ear, jagged nail scratching and clawing for me. The venom didn’t seem to be working, not as far as I could tell. Desperation time.

Still in his ear, I became human. I had never tried anything like this, never even thought it was possible.

I exploded from his ear and fell to the pavement below. I could feel glass and rocks digging into my knees and palms, but at least I hadn’t landed on my head. I looked back, to see him still coming toward me. He was bloodied, sure, his left ear hung crookedly from a strand of skin, but still, he came at me. I had nothing left.

That’s when I noticed Coyote slinking in the background, pulling the graveyard decoration down from the garage door. I wondered what he was doing, it seemed a little late to destroy it now.

I got to my feet, trying to buy him some time, I didn't have any ideas, but maybe he did.

“So,” I said to the demon. “I don't suppose you are in the market for any running shoes? I happen to have several pair.” I looked down at his giant feet, with large twisted toenails. “They might not fit. I don't suppose you are a size 11? No?”

Finally Coyote made his move. He jumped up behind the demon with the decoration held high above his head. He swung down, hard, thrusting the demon back through the portal. It had shrunk back to almost regular size, so only the demon's head fit now. Coyote shrugged, and pulled backwards, neatly severing the head of the demon as he did so. Its body stumbled forward a few steps, before finally collapsing in the middle of the alley.

“Thanks,” I said to Coyote.

“Hey, you kept him busy, I just dropped a decoration on his head. That reminds me,” he paused to rip the tombstone several times, destroying it.

“What do we do with this guy?” I asked, pointing to the headless corpse.

“Beats me, you're the one with all the experience hiding demon corpses around Toronto.”

“Hey, last time it was a god, not just a demon. And I do have one idea. Help me grab him.”

We spent a few minutes dragging and arranging the body, trying not to cover ourselves with blood. When we were done, Coyote admired our handiwork.

“Not exactly hidden, is he?”

I smiled, looking at the remains propped up in the Hummer, the headless corpse sitting behind the wheel. “Not really.”

“You don't think this is a little mean? Even for you?”

“Hey, not only does the guy drive a Hummer, but he parks it in such a way that people can't get into their parking spaces. I was going to key it, but this is even more satisfying.”

Coyote laughed his signature laugh, with almost a touch of madness behind it. “Let's get home, partner. We still have to pack you up. You move into your new pad tomorrow. Ready for it?”

I looked from the demon, to Coyote's smiling face. “I think I am, actually. Let's roll.”

“You think we should plan a trip to Mexico?”

“Yeah, I sure do.”

“I was hoping you would say that.”

The End