The Hangman

By Marcos Escobar

“Warning to the wicked of the west

Be careful with your steps and your tongues

A noose waits for your neck to rest

You hear his horse, ravens, and guns

There will be no forgiveness or protest

For now, the Hangman comes”

Deep in the south in the vast swamplands, sat a wood cabin atop a large hill surrounded by wildflowers. A beacon within the dark murky swamp. The cabin was simple, with a long fence circling around it. A patch in front of the house was turned into a small garden, with various vegetables and an apple tree off to the side. The walls of the cabin were high and sturdy, neither wind nor rain stood a chance against it.

Inside the cabin was as simple as it was outside, a large center room, with a stone fireplace, and the workings of a small kitchen, with pots, pans, and a large basin sat atop a cabinet against the wall. There were four chairs centered around the fireplace and a large hide rug, from some beast long since dead in the middle of them. On the right-hand side were two small rooms, one for two little girls and the other for a loving husband and wife.

The room was pitch black, with the gentle murmurs and rustling of people sleeping within the comforting shadows. But as the sun rose outside light began to crawl its ways in through a window that was being blocked by a large sheet. But through the small crevices that the sheet could not cover, the light found its ways inside and lit the room barely enough to see inside. The was a large bed in the center of the room, a cabinet at its foot. As the light began to make its way through the room, it woke one of the bed's occupants. At first, the interruption was met with resistance, in the form of a few short grunts and moans. But he quickly admitted defeat and rose from the bed, taking a moment, before rising and stretching out his arms as a large yawn escaped his mouth.

He walked over to the window and moved the sheet out of the way allowing for the full glory of the sun to enter the room freely. The day was bright with barely a cloud in the sky to stop its warm glow from washing over the land. A gentle breeze flowed into the room, carrying the scent of the wildflowers that covered the hill. He took in a deep breath embracing the smell as the second occupant of the bed began to stir. The woman sat up in the bed her long curly hair covering her face for a moment before she pushed out of the way and look over at the man standing at the window.

“Good morning Samuel. Guess you couldn’t wait to get up,” she said as she began to yawn.

He turned around to her, as he took one last deep breath. His features now fully visible in the sunlight. His skin was dark brown. He was tall, standing above six feet. His eyes were brown and carried a gentle feeling to them. He had a strong jaw with clean shaven face and a permanent grin. His hair was cut short and orderly. He had a well-built body, which was ever clearer since he was simply wearing pants now. He arms were like tree trunks and his torso was well toned.

Samuel knelt onto the bed and gave her quick kiss on the lips, caressing her head with his hand. The kiss filled the two with a warm glow that couldn't be described in words.

“Good morning to you to Marry Anne.” Samuel sat back onto the bed as he grabbed his boots that sat beside the bed and began to ready himself for the long day ahead. “I wanted to rest a little longer, but you know how long it can take out there. Rather not come home in the middle of the night again if I can help it.”

Marry Anne moved over and wrapped her arms around his neck. Her shorter more slender frame was almost dwarfed next to Samuels.

"Well I rather you not go at all, but I know you too well, I think you'd stopped altogether if you couldn't work. Wish we could just sit here, lay down and watch as time simply passed by.”

“But where would the fun in that be if we couldn’t enjoy each other’s company?”

She chuckled and gently slapped him on his back.

"Well, we don't have to be completely still."

The both laughed in almost perfect harmony.

“Well that would be more entertaining than chasing after gators all day, but for now that’s going to have to wait. It’s not just us anymore.” Samuel looked over to the side, hanging on the wall was a small picture of four people, two were taller than the others. They stood in front of a small brown hut and were surrounded by flowers. The words Papa, Mama and us, written just beneath. “But someday when we can finally leave this place, then things will get better.” He said as he turned a head and looked over to a stack of crates in the corner of the room.

“I wished this could all move along just a bit faster. You do so much for so little”

"Well, so long as we get something I'm happy. So long as I have you and the girls, I'm happy."

Mary Anne gave him a grin and followed with a kiss on a cheek. “And we’ll be happy, as long as you're here for us.”

He looked back at her and gave a wide smile. But then the two of them were hit by a strong aroma. A familiar and pleasant smell. After a second, the smell was followed by a loud growl from the bottom of Samuel’s gut.

“Sounds like someone is ready to eat. Must be the girls, couldn’t stop those two from cooking if you left them with nothing but a flame and kernel.” Marry Anne said.

"Well, I think we should go and give them a hand," Samuel replied.

After a few moments, the two had dressed and were ready for the day. Walking into the main room of the cabin, they looked over and saw the two girls sitting in front of the fire place. A Low fire heating up a pan floating above it, the heat frying up a heap of eggs sitting in it. Off to the side, was a plate of perfectly cooked fish. The two girls had shorter curly hair, nearly mirror images of their mother.

“Morning girls!” Samuel said with a cheerful tone.

“Papa, momma. We almost have breakfast ready.” One of the girls said.

The girl sat beside the fish got up and raised the plate offering it to the two parents.

“Here try it.”

Samuel broke off a piece of the fish, it flaked as he pulled up to his mouth. The taste was pleasant as the meat almost melted in his mouth. A pleased mmm escaped his mouth. Samuel bent down a bit and ruffled the two-girl’s hair.

“That’s some good fish, as usual.” The two kids giggled as the family sat down to eat.

After a while it was time for Samuel to leave, he needed to hurry if he wanted to be home in time for dinner or anything for that matter. He walked down the hill their cabin sat one and walked onto a small docked that had a rowboat tied down to it. He carried a small bag of jerky he had made as well as a jug of water. The boat had a couple of nets, a chest to store fish, some knives and a large spear he used to kill the gators from a safe distance. He got on board and began making his way down into the swamp. Marry Anne and the girls were standing a little farther up the hill waving him goodbye.

"Bye Papa, bring back lots of fish." One of the girls called out.

"Keep your mom safe while I'm gone."

“We will.”

“Don’t go and get yourself eaten ye gators now.” Marry Anne called out.

"I won't," Samuel shouted as he gave one last wave goodbye before making his way deeper into the swamp.

The work was long and hard, but Samuel was the best man for the work. No gator was safe if he was on the water. With a quick and precise stab of his spear, a gator was gone within a second. After he got all he could carry with alligators, he began fishing. He would wait for unsuspecting fish to swim over his net before pulling them up with incredible speed. But even with his skills it still took a bit of time to do. By the time, he was finished the sun had begun to make its descent over the horizon.

With his bounty and a lantern as his guide, he made his way through the maze-like swamp. As he began to reach the end of his journey, it was completely dark out. He didn't fear the dark, anything that was alive near their home was now dead, hunted to the last fish. As Samuel began his final approach his heart was filled with dread and fear. A bright orange glow shattered the darkness that had filled the world. Samuel began to row as fast as he could, as he saw his home engulfed in a raging inferno.

Samuel leaped into the water, making his way to shore, running with all his might up the hill, which now resembled the raging sun. The wildflowers were being devoured by fire as the flames began to spread. Samuel saw a clear path and darted for the cabin. The entire building was engulfed in flames, the cracking of wood like roaring thunder.

“Girls, Marry Anne!” Samuel called out to them, but there was no response.

Samuel rushed the door smashing it down. As the door opened the smoke that had begun to build up inside flood out. Samuel tried to gain his bearings as the smoke clouded his vision, but the flames offer enough light for him to barely see the clouds. Samuel was quick in his search, searching in each of the rooms. Though it was hard to see, it was clear the inside of the cabin had been trashed, their possessions scattered or broken against the ground. However, Mary Anne and the girls weren’t there. He ran back out as the roof began to cave in. He made his way back down the hill as the fire consumed everything. Samuel now panicked looked all around for any signs of his family. When suddenly he felt, a wet drop hit his face.

Above him, in the thick brush of the trees, where Mary Anne and the girls. Samuels' heart fell silent. His eyes filled with horror, as they hanged from the trees, lifeless.

“No!” His voice echoed across the land.

Samuel moved as fast as he could be climbing the tree and letting them down as gently as he could. Their bodies were beaten and bruised, clothes were torn, deep cuts all very and chunks of flesh torn from their bodies. The dark rings around their necks like nightmares made flesh.

"Marry Ann, girls, no please let this be a dream, God why them why them? No, no, no, no, not them, no, no, no" Samuel held their lifeless bodies in his arms, weeping for what seemed like hours. An all consuming sorrow flooding over him. But as the moon rose high into the night sky, his sorrow, became an all consuming rage.

Samuel sat still holding the lifeless bodies of his family as the flames that had destroyed his home now devoured everything else that remained. As the sun began to rise over the horizon, the last feeble embers died out. His face was wet with the seemingly endless tears that poured out throughout the night, which had left white streaks down his face. His anger had boiled inside him throughout the night, now it had become a raging inferno taking the place of the fired that destroyed everything. He would become the fire that would destroy those responsible. No matter who they were and no matter how far they would run he would find them and kill every last one of them.

As each moment passed his thoughts raced with ideas of who could be responsible or where they could have gone. A nearby town that Samuel sold his goods to, was the only sign of civilization for hundreds of miles, and was the best place to begin his search.

He knew what needed to be done. His family needed justice and it would be carried out by his hand. Gently he placed his family's bodies down onto the ground, as he made his way back up the hill, to the ash and soot that remained of his home. The flowers that had surrounded the home, had become charred black and twisted the forms twirling around into themselves like a sickly creature. The wooden fence a ring of smoldering rubble sounding the piles of charred wood and dying embers. The vegetables were like hot coals, nothing like the colorful and bright food his family had worked so hard to grow. The apple tree that stood tall over their home, now a dark tower looming over the land.

Samuel took a moment to look over the rubble that was once his home, then Samuel began to search through it, looking for anything clue he could find from the ruins. After few minutes looking in the area where his bedroom would have been in, Samuel found the cabinet that had stood at the foot of their bed had fallen over onto the ground. Light char on the back, but mostly intact. After flipping it over he discovered out of what had been kept inside was taken. A couple of boxes of what little valuables they had, some of their clothes, as well as the money they had been saving. However, his father’s brown long duster jacket that dragged on the ground when he would walk around, his sturdy boots that never seemed to strain break and his old hat remained, artifacts passed down to him.

As Samuel continued his searched he realized something the crates were gone, the crates that held more than three months’ worth of gator hides and bone were gone. Though the crates would not have had survived the fire themselves, the hide and bones would still be resent if a bit charred. There was none, not a single piece left. It must have been stolen when his family was attacked. Carrying all those goods we be no easy task for roving bandits. This couple with the lack of bandit sighting in the area for the last few months fueled his suspicions that someone in town was responsible. No, this was planned by someone close, with the ability to sell off the wares easily. There was only one place nearby that could do that. If he wanted to find his family’s killers he needed to go, there.

With nothing left for him, Samuel got to work. Samuel had an ax in his boat, he used it to carve the remains of the apple tree, after a few hours he had managed to transform the tree into a large cross. Then he began to dig up the earth, creating three separate graves. After he finished he placed his family into their graves. He buried them, said his goodbyes, doing his best not to break down. Though their deaths had already taken their toll upon his heart and if he were to allow himself to dwell upon their deaths any longer, then he might very be lost and try to follow. But he was too strong, too determined, they needed to die at his feet, before he could allow himself peace before they could truly be at peace.

Samuel dug up the garden, searching for another artifact of his father, that he had hoped he had never needed to use. Samuel had always considered himself a passive person, he could never imagine taking the life of another, but he could only take so much and he finally reached his breaking point. After a few moments, he met the hard top of a trunk buried in the dirt. He dragged it out, inside was an old union uniform, from when his grandfather fought for the freedom of his family, as well as an old flag. At the bottom was an ornate box, on the cover the picture of a skull with crossed pistols. Samuel opened the box revealing an old service revolver., as well as twenty pieces of ammo, not including the rounds that were already inside its cylinder.

Samuel held it in his hands a mixture of fear and awe filling his chest. He could hear voices whisper at the back of his head, the promises he made, coming back to haunt him. But there was no turning back now, his mind was set on this and his destiny would soon unfold.

“Just this once.” He whispered to himself.

He changed his clothes putting on his father old duster, as well the boots. Before he put on the hat to complete his outfit, he didn't want to be recognized to quickly, less his families' killer would try to gun him down the second they spot him. He tore a piece from the old flag and wrapped it around his mouth and nose like a bandanna. Then put the hat on trying to obscure his face the best he could.

With his final preparations made, Samuel set out to find them. As he set foot on the dock, he turned back towards the hill. Gazing upon the ruin, one final tear in goodbye. Samuel got into his boat and began his journey down the swamp, ready for whatever the future held for him.

By the time, he reached the shore of the small town, the moon had already risen into the sky, the familiar darkness engulfing the world around him. This town was called “Blood fields”. It had been a hotspot for confederate troops looking to relax during the civil war. But it was discovered by the Union who performed a surprise attack. Its soil had been soaked in blood and gore by the war’s end. It’s people once proud nobles were left with barely a coin to their names after losing their slaves. Most left for better fortune else were. But those who stayed simmered in their hatred for those who had beaten them. Most didn’t know how to properly hunt, fish or farm, so the town became nothing more than a sorry trading post making what little money they could off purchasing and selling goods at a higher price to wary travelers.

All the slaves had left, it was by pure coincidence that Samuel had decided to build his temporary home so close by. If it wasn’t for Samuels work, which brought the town decent money, he would have been forced out. Most people of color were nearly chased out of town. Barely allowed to get the supplies they needed before being told to leave.

This was the town where Samuel had sold all his goods, for what meager coin they were willing to give, thought they were basically stealing from each time he sold his wares. But at the time, it was better than nothing. They had no love for Samuel or his family, foul words always loomed behind him every time he would show up with his weeks catch. Incidentally, they were the only people around that really knew about them and the only place where the stolen goods were worth anything. He held no doubts about it, his family's killer was here.

He sneaked about the best he could, the darkness, a true friend in this direst moment. There were few buildings that still glowed in the darkness, Samuel peered into them the best he could without getting caught, searching for any sign of the crates or at the very least catch a damning conversation. Most of the buildings, held no trace of goods and most of their inhabitants were sleeping or absent. Until he reached one of the towns few shops, specifically the trader he brought his goods to. Peering inside Samuel saw the shop keep alone at the shop counter, flipping through some papers.

He was an older white man, wearing a white apron marked with grease stains, a red stripped shirt and his hair white slowing fading to the back of his head. He a busted nose and his glasses looked too big for his head. Initially, he thought that it was clear of the goods that were stolen. However, after a moment he watched as the man opened a door into a back, in single moment Samuel caught a glimpse of crates as he vanished into the next room.

Samuel made a quick look around, making sure no one was around. Then went inside, the door bell ringing as it opened.

“One minute please.” A voice called from the back.

Samuel was quick on his feet, doing his best not to make any noise as he rushed behind the counter and beside the door. Out of the immediate view of the back room.

“You going to need to be quick I’m about to close for the night.” The man said as he walked out of the back room. When he was clear in view Samuel took out his revolver and placed against the man’s head.

"Quiet, I won't hesitate," Samuel said with a hushed town, trying his best to mask his voice by deepening it.

The man raised his hands, nodding his head.

“To the back now.”

Th two made their way into the back, Samuel keeping the gun aimed as they moved. For the moment, h didn’t realize it was Samuel. When they made it into the back Samuel could see one of the crates had already been open, and sure enough, it was exactly what he was looking for.

“Who brought the crates?!”

“W-why do you care?”

Samuel pulled back on the hammer of the revolver, readying it fire. “Answer my question before I paint these walls red.”

“We got them from a cabin deeper in the swamp.”

“Who’s we?” Samuel quickly rebutted.

“T-the whole town.”

Samuel's entire heart sank, this entire situation just became a bit more complicated. He had an entire town to contend with now and had no clue of how he was going to deal with it.

“You were responsible for the slaughter in the swamp.”

He gave Samuel a confused look.

“Y-yes, please mister if you let me go, I won’t tell a soul you were even here. Why do you even care about a few niggers?”

A fire started in Samuel's eyes, his face becomes contorted as the rage he had calmed down re-emerged and began to engulf him once more. Samuel pulled down the flag that covered his face.

"Because you didn't kill all of them."

The man's eyes widen with fear as the realization hit him. He turned away from Samuel and screamed from the top of his lungs as if he was faced to face the devil himself.

“Samuel is here!”

And with a single pull of the trigger, a shot rang out as the man's head smacked against the wall, a trail of smoke exiting from the open wound in the side of his head. He slid down as a trail of blood and gray matter was left behind, perfectly coating the wall.

“Dammit.”

Samuel was in trouble now, that shot would have woken the entire town up. There was no escaping now. It either ended here or their crimes would go unpunished. This would be his last stand, this was his sentence. He could hear men crying out, alerting everyone else in town. He needed a plan and quick. The shop's second floor, higher ground, that would give an upper hand if only just an inch.

He rushed back to the front, where the stairs to the second floor were. He immediately saw men start to approach the front of the store, almost immediately spotting as he emerged from the back.

“There he is!” Someone cried out.

Samuel wasted no time as started firing at the figures as he rushed to the stairs. The first two shots were fired wildly. But the third hit true taking down one of the figures as the others began to open fire. He barely managed to slip past as the shots almost danced around him.

The second floor was a small bedroom, beside the door was a small cabinet. Samuel was quick as he shoved it through the door, blocking anyone from coming up the stairs. He walked over to the window and broke the window, look down he could see a group starting to form. He reloaded his revolver and started to fire at the group, only to have even more shots fired back at him.

“Die, you son of a bitch!” Someone shouted from the crowd.

For a few moments, they traded shots, ten more for each one Samuel made. Samuel tried to make each shot count, taking one down for every two he fired, but he soon realized he was running low.

Then he heard a crash of glass, someone threw a lantern into the room with him, it shattered on the growing, sending flames everywhere. Samuel was running out of options, there was a lamp in the room as well sitting on a night stand, Samuel picked it up and tossed it out the window. An eye for an eye. He needed a distraction, hopefully, that would be enough. He could hear people crying out down below, one person clearly screaming in agony.

He moved quickly climbing out the window and running along the roof and leaping over to the next roof, then the next, before turning around and beginning to open fire on the crowd as they started firing at him again. Three rounds were shot before suddenly pain surged through his left leg he had been shot. He felt his leg buckle under him as he fell from the roof. He landed hard, the wind nearly being knocked out of him. Quickly rolling onto his back, he knew they would soon be on him. He could see the crowd approaching. With three rounds left he fired them off. Only to be hit once again. The pain was searing hot as the heated led sat in his shoulder. Grabbing a knife from his side, he was ready to die with his teeth bared.

Within a second they were all over him. Punching, kicking, met with Samuel swinging his sword cutting at whatever he could. Before he saw a boot come down, then darkness. A cold soothing darkness, it's presence almost comforting amidst the pain suffering. Then with a flash of hot white light, Samuel awoke.

Now back in the swamp, the moon still high in the sky. His body ached and raged with a pain he never experienced before he could feel cuts and bruises all over his body, blood slowly pouring down his form. He tried to gain his bearings. His arms were restrained and above his head, he could feel his weight tightening the ropes around them. He had been hanged from a tree, left to die from the exposure.

He looked down and saw one lonely guard watching over him.

“Ya fuckin, bastard, you should a died with ya damn family in that shit hole of yours. Now we got people to mourn and bury. I hope ya rot in hell.”

The man turned around and headed off into the distance.

Samuel could feel wet drops fall onto him as it began to rain. He took a deep breath before giving out a cry of pure agony, so loud and with such force, it shook the very core of his being and something else. He began to weep as he thought about his family, the pain they had endured and the terrible deaths they suffered.

“Marry Anne… girls… I’m so sorry. God forgive me I wish I had been there. I wish I could have saved you. Now I can’t give you the justice you deserve.”

After a moment of silence, he heard a voice.

“Not necessarily.”

The wind began to pick up leaves and dirt began to pick up as a powerful gale blew through the area. He could hear whispers trickle down the back of his skull, speaking dark things, in a language he did not understand. The voices and words sent a chill up his spine and filled him with a sense of terror. Suddenly a purple flame before him on the ground, it began to grow before bursting into a raging inferno. The bright light from the flames blinded Samuel for a minute. As he felt the flames die down with his eyes shut he opened them up and saw a figure standing before him.

With a ring of purple flames standing tall, was an avian like creature. It had a bird like a face, big black eyes, dark purple feathers that became light the farther out they went, as well as a big black beak. Its form was humanoid, standing on to legs, at least that was what it seemed like as it's lower body was covered by a long robe. Its arms were long, adorned with feathers and had talon like hands. On its back was a pair of wings that kept tightly to itself. Around its neck were various necklaces bearing various trinkets runes and bones from untold horrors. Along it's was a sash carrying a large sack as well as various vials and pouches.

It approached Samuel, slowly with keen interest on his features. However, Samuel snapped as he realized it was coming close.

“Back you demon, you won’t have my soul.”

The being merely raised a hand to silence him.

“I’m no more demon then you are a god. Though that might not remain the case.”

"What are you talking about." The began to walk around Samuel, scratching the feathers against his lower beak, as if in deep thought.

“First, I think introductions are in order.” The being stopped in front of Samuel spreading its large wings that nearly blocked out the light of the moon. Purple energy beginning to dance a swirl around it’s being.

"I am Necronox, Lord of the Necromancers." His voice roared like thunder and carried the weight of worlds. "I heard your cry for help and I'm here to offer my services to you."

“I have never heard of you.” Samuel explained.

“I’m not surprised, I have little history world, I prefer to watch from a distance, I’ve watch many worlds, see many great things. The people and stories your kind speak of, you call legends and fables, but I assure you they are very much real. I’ve had my hand in a few. There are even more like me, but they rather watch seeing these worlds below them, unworthy of their time and grace. For a time I sought to aid this world, but after my own failings ages ago I grew silent and knowledge of my existence disappeared.”

"What kind of help do you offer me," Samuel said, with obvious distrust in his voice.

"I can grant you powers, powers that aid you in your quest for justice. You see I have power over the dead, I can revive those that have fallen, even construct armies of the souls I collected. Though sadly, your family is not within reach. You, however, are different.”

“And what price do I pay for this power, would you take my soul.”

"Why does everyone think I want their soul, no. I don’t deal in souls, well at least not on those I offer my services to. Besides, yours is far too bright for me to even consider using. However, the price you will have to pay may be worse than that. The price of this power is your own mortality. You see the power I offer cannot be barred by any mortal man. Only the dead or immortal can bare such power. That is the price you will need to pay. Not to me, but yourself. Now, do you accept?"

“Why do you want to help me?”

“Because my friend I am tired. I’m tired of seeing the worlds I bare witness to be consumed by evil. I’ve watched too much to be quiet any longer. For years I slept in ignorance, thinking it was not my problem to solve. Then I heard you, the first painful wails upon your family’s death and I knew I cloud no longer be idle. I may look a monster, but I have heart that beats like any other man. And I feel for the feel people of this world, where do not. You are one of those people.”

Samuel paused for a moment, thinking long and hard about the decision. He could feel his life begin to fade, it was now or never.

“I accept.”

“Good then let us begin.”

Below Samuel Necronox created a circle of various runes, bones, and artifacts. Taking various ingredients from his pouches, he started to pour them into the center chanting in a language Samuel did not understand. After taking a vial from the pouch and pouring it into the circle a pillar of black fire erupted. The wind began to roar around them as leaves and debris were kicked into the air. Necronox’s chanting grew louder as the flames continued to grow. Samuel felt the ropes unwrap around his arms and instead slither around his neck and began to choke the life out of him.

“Born from sorrow, molded by rage. Bare upon the symbol that tore away your family, claim the symbol that terrorizes your people. Now it is yours, forever its master. Gone its evil now, it is judgment. You shall hang the monsters of this world, you shall hang the evil that would devour. Gone is the mortal, now you are the Hangman!”

The purple energy returned and began to dance around the flames, Necronox raising his hands high into the air as he tore feathers from his arm and letting the wind toss them into the air and into the fire. As the feathers danced around the fire, they began to grow and changing transforming into black ravens hundreds in number. The Ravens began to circle around Samuel, as the life was forced out of him. With his final breath taken, everything went black for Samuel. The pillar of fire slammed into his body devouring him. The ravens flew around him faster as the flames grew brighter and brighter, before vanishing within a moment. Smoke poured out as Ravens dispersed, allowing Samuels form to fall onto the ground.

“Rise Hangman!”

After a moment, an audible gasp escaped the body. It began to twist and shift as Samuel rose to his feet, stretching his limbs from what felt like an eternal slumber. He wore all black, he had on a duster, that covered a vest underneath, a hat rested on his head, a bandana covered his face perfectly only revealing his two white eyes that glowed like the moon, he wore jeans with a belt that had a buckle in the shape of a skull, he had on boots and a pair of thick gloves and his body was covered by a thick darkness. He looked down at his body, examining his arms. It was obvious this new form was alien to him. He took a step forward, moving his body to see if everything still worked like it should. He tried to speak, barely able to as his throat tried to open. After a few moments, he could speak normally again, though his voice was far deeper and had unnatural air to it.

He turned to Necronox who stood to the side admiring his work.

“Just do what comes natural to you.”

Then like that he vanished in a pillar of flame. Do what comes naturally, Samuel thought. Do what comes naturally. Looking at the way the man had left earlier, Samuel thought to himself, must move. Samuel, almost through pure instinct raised a hand, as a raging black fire emerged from a ground and stepping out of it was a pale horse, with a mane of black flames. He stood beside him, allowing Samuel to climb atop of it. The Ravens that had swarmed around his body now circled overhead. Samuel let go, letting his instincts take over, now it was time for the Hangman to ride.

He raced through the night as stallion carried him with unmatched speed. The ravens following close behind, like a lingering storm above them. Samuel, thought once more about his family, his love happiness and how it was ripped away from him.

No, he wasn’t Samuel, not now. Noe the Hangman comes.

Within mere minutes, they arrived at their destination. Samuel stopping outside of the town as the Ravens began to circle overhead. The Townspeople had formed into a crowd into the center of town. They were loud shouting at a figure that stood in the center of the crowd, by his appearance he appeared to be the sheriff.

“What are we going to do.”

“Look at the damage he caused.”

“I told you we should have killed him when we had the chance.”

"Please everyone just, calm down, we have all been affected by this, I suggest we all just head to bed and we can talk about this in the morning."

Suddenly someone called out from the crowd and pointed skyward.

“Hey what with those birds, everyone looked at the sky and watched as the Ravens began to circle overhead.

“What in the hell.” The sheriff called out. Then a scream.

Looking out into the distance, they saw the Hangman make his approach. His stead slowly walking towards them. Everyone felt a surge of fear in the hearts, watching as this ghostly horse with a mane of black hellish flames approached, being ridden by a black rider. As they had approached, the Hangman had kept his head low, until they finally stopped. The towns people frozen in fear of the sight before them.

"W-what are you." An unseen soul said.

The Hangman raised his head, revealing his moonlight eyes as he gazed upon the horrified souls before him.

"Your judgment."

Suddenly the ravens swooped down and flew around them all, creating a barrier. The Hangman got down from his horse and began to walk toward them.

"You have been found guilty of murder, your crimes cannot be forgiven, and the sentence is death.” The Ravens began to close in on the group, as a ring of fire emerged in the sky above, hanging out from it nooses of countless number that began to lower themselves. A woman tried to run through the ravens. But as she reached them, raising a hand to push them out of the way, she felt herself get pulled into the group, the unkindness surrounding her. The ravens began to pick and tear at her flesh, tearing her asunder as blood and gore began to spin about them. The other screamed in horror as the woman cried out in agony with her last feeble breaths.

One man fired a gun at the Hangman, a small hole appeared on his chest followed by three more. But he remained unfazed, the wounds pouring out a black liquid unfamiliar to all. In a moment, the wounds become shrouded in darkness and the stitches with the clothes seemingly repaired themselves.

“My turn.”

Samuel pulled out of two holsters at his sides, two revolvers twice the size of his grandfathers. They had ebony handles, the frame and trim was some sort of golden metal and the barrels of the revolvers had a black coat with a golden rim.

He fires two shots, that hit the man square in the chest. Th shots spraying blood across the ground and over more of the townsfolk. From the wounds black flames appeared, the man began to scream in pain. The flames began to spread, turning his body into ash until nothing remained but a blackened skeleton.

Another charged at the Hangman with an ax, but he simply grabbed the mouth by his face and raised him into the air.

“Oh god no please.” He pleaded with the Hangman. No, you don’t get to see him. Black cracks began to form around the Hangman’s hand on the man’s face. His eyes rolled back, then he fell onto the ground cold and dead. In the hand, the Hangman held a ghostly orb like the one that had escaped the man’s mouth from before. Instinctively he placed the orb into his duster.

The rest of the town people, now cowering on the ground begging for their lives. But it did not matter.

“Please spare us, have mercy.”

“Mercy is showed upon those worthy, you have been judged and been found guilty. Your fate is sealed. Now hang!”

The nooses, like animals wrapped around the necks of the townsfolks strangling them and raising them high into the air towards the flames they came from. The people cried out and gasped for air. But one by one, they became lifeless and their flesh consumed by the flames. Justice was served. The ravens dispersed leaving behind the bloody mess, all that remained of the town, or so it seemed.

As the dust settled Samuel felt a great pain engulf his form, his body felt as if a thousand hot needles were stabbing into his flesh, the energy that he had, all but vanished. He had used his powers excessively and was now paying for it. He knew new he had limits now and he dare not break them again.

After a few minutes he had recovered, though still exhausted from his fight. Looking around the Hangman saw no other signs of life until he saw someone duck into a tavern down the road. He quickly gave chase and ran into the tavern. Kicking open the door, he looked around. Come out now, you have nowhere to run. Then he began to hear crying.

The Hangman froze in place, holstering his guns and sending his beasts away.

“Dear god what have I done.” His mind clear of the rage that had consumed him. “Please come out, I don’t mean to hurt you.”

After a moment, a girl appeared from behind a counter. She wore a brown dress her golden hair was held back with a red bow. She was no older than Samuel's girls. She was obviously terrified, streaks of tears crawling down her cheeks.

“Please, don’t kill me.” She pleaded with him timidly.

“I… I... Dear god, forgive me. Child, I dare not hurt please understand I…” Samuels thoughts raced in his head, what should he do, there was nothing left here, then a thought emerged. He knew what needed to be done. He needed to be judged. He took out a revolver and placed into the child’s hands and knelt before her.

“I cannot undo what I have done, all I can offer is this.” He aided her in raising the barrel and pressing it against his forehead. “I am sorry for what I have done to you. But it was something that had to be done, to ensure that justice was surely dealt. Now you must decide whether I deserve punishment for what I did.”

The little girl just stood there trembling, holding the revolver tightly in her hand. Tears still trickling down her face and chin. She gazed into his eyes and saw no evil, no injustice, and no monster. The gun shook in her hand before finally falling out of her hand. She cried into her palms and fell to her knees. The Hangman didn't know what to do, so he tried to comfort her. She embraced him hugging his waist, he tried his best to comfort her as continued to cry. As he placed a hand upon her head, a flood of memories entered his mind. The Hangman was looking through her eyes, seeing the past as she witnessed it. He could sense her emotions, her fear, and her sorrow. She was their witness the murder of Samuel's family. He could feel her inner pleas for someone to stop it and understood she has no hope of becoming their savior. She wanted to save them, but she couldn't, just like Samuel. Then he sensed something, something she could not see, something dark. But before he could see it the memory was gone.

He sat with her for a few hours, she had no family beside her parents, who he discovered had adopted her, and tried to use her as free labor. Though still frightened she had calmed down. This time had given the Hangman time to thin kind a revelation came to his mind. He could not care for this child and with no one in this world left for her she was lost. Then a familiar pillar of flames erupted in the middle of the tavern and as once again the lord of the necromancers appeared.

“I see you were victorious, but it seems, things have become complicated.” He said gesturing to the young girl. Then suddenly he realized what he needed to do.

"Necronox, I beg you take this girl into your care and watch after her. She has no one left in this world and I cannot care for her."

“Hmm, I thought you might ask that.” He said with a sigh. “Samuel, give you your power was one thing, but cannot trust myself to care for someone, especially after have been so isolated. Besides what makes you think I can care for her, I’m not exactly appealing to your kind.” He said spreading his wings.

“You are strong and you can protect her better than I ever could. And I know you, you’re a good man. You wanted to help this world, this is somewhere to start.”

“Hmm, I guess you’re right. I will care for her.”

The Hangman suddenly felt an energy against his chest, he reached into his duster and take out the sphere he had acquired earlier. In it’s center was a faint yellow glow, that was a struggle to properly see. Its form was covered with pitch black splotches and red cracks that radiated a strong glow, as black energy crackled around it.

“Will this suffice?”

“You know what this is do you not.”

“A human soul.”

“Correct. Souls when pure shine with golden light, their beauty unmatched by anything I’ve seen. But this one rotten, corrupted by evil. I told you I don’t deal with souls like yours. But these are different. A soul even one like this, can still be used for good.”

“Then take it, a gift from me. Do what you can and see that some good can come out of it.”

“Thank you and I most certainly will. I will take care of the child. I could always use an apprentice. Besides, as time goes on things begin to age and decay. Someone else should know of my skills, so they shall not be simply wasted.”

The Hangman turned to the girl and gestured her towards Necronox.

“I know he may seem frightening, but he is like me, he is a kind soul, and will care for you. “

Necronox knelt and extended a hand in peace, "I will guard you, child."

She kept by the Hangman’s side looking over Necronox intimidated by his appearance. But after a few moments, she sheepishly walked over to him and took his hand. He picked her up carrying her in his arm. She held onto his neck letting her cheek rest on the feathers. Then Necronox turned to look at the hangman.

"That's one thing settled, but one more remains, you. What do you plan to do now?"

“I… I don’t know, everything I know is gone. I am aimless, lost.”

"Hmm, you saw the injustice of this world have you not. Would you not want to do right by those who have been hurt in this world like you have."

“What are suggesting.”

Necronox raised a hand and pointed west.

“Out there I can hear the chaos and roars of evil that have been left unchecked in this world. People pleading for salvation… hope… justice. You are what they need. You can guiding through the darkness”

The Hangman paused for a moment, then his horse appeared and he climbed atop.

“Then that’s what I will do.”

“May you find purpose Hangman, and let your days bring mercy.”

“Goodbye Necronox, thank you. Until we meet again.”

The Hangman then rode off into the distance as the sun began to rise shining its warmth across the land. With new purpose found the Hangman will begin his journey into the darkness that has gripped the land, where judgment would soon fall upon the wicked. For the time for the darkness to rule has ended, now a new guardian has come and in his wake, only three words remain, “The Hangman Comes”.

The End