

Prologue

On December 12, 2020 the world changed forever.

Two events happened simultaneously.

A stable anti-matter was developed which would fuel cities and transportation indefinitely.

The process ripped opened a portal that allowed unbelievable and terrifying creatures to enter our world.

In response . . . the Hunters came.

Chapter 1

Five women were dead and the clock ticked down for number six.

San Francisco Police Inspector Todd Rainer clenched his teeth and growled, “Stupid idiot,” as he flung the case files across his uncluttered desk.

He gripped the side of the metal desk with both hands, focused on the American flag embossed on his black t-shirt and counted in his head. Four and a half years ago, guilt, anger, and shame drove him into the bottom of a tequila bottle, and when he climbed out, he promised himself he would never go back. Even though he had been sober for two years, when anger reared its ugly head, the desire for a shot was so strong, his head swam with vivid memories – the pleasing scent of raw apple, vanilla and butter and the taste, slightly sweet but with a definite burn that ended up between his throat and upper palate. God, he missed Jose Cuervo!

“Are you slandering our leader again?” asked Inspector Carlos Ramirez, as a slow grin slid across his bronzed round face and lit up the corners of his dark eyes. He gave a small laugh, straightened the lapels of his tailored Italian suit, and tapped on his desk in time to the counting Todd was doing in his head.

As usual, the finger drumming annoyed Todd and broke his counting ritual. He pushed his anger aside and fought his way back to control. He glared at his partner of two years and said, “I told Chief Alto the task force’s evaluation of the deaths was total crap, but he’s not listening.”

“What makes you think they would value your input? Once the chief organizes one of his famous task forces and the FBI gets involved, the entire case goes to hell.”

“I found the first body. Damn it! I did the initial legwork. It’s not some stupid serial killer.” Todd felt the rage rise up his spine and stab his brain. He pushed it away; he wouldn’t start counting again!

Carlos shrugged. “The task force has three confessions already.”

Todd shook his head. “Some people will do anything for a hot meal and a safe place to lay down their heads, even admit to killing five women.”

“Times are bad out there, Todd, but I don’t think anyone would endure prison for life or death by lethal injection just to get off the streets,” Carlos observed.

“Hell yes, they would,” Todd exclaimed. “These days life out there is more dangerous than any high security penitentiary. People disappear everyday. At least in prison, they’ve got a fighting chance of survival.”

“You think one of those damn demons killed the women, don’t you?” Carlos grimaced in disgust.

“Oh, yeah.” Todd slumped his six foot, three inch frame into the metal desk chair and ran his fingers through his light brown wavy hair. Even though he was only thirty-two years old, on days like today—he felt ninety.

“Tell me again why it can’t be a human serial killer.” Carlos came around the desk and took the seat usually reserved for witnesses.

Todd dug through the five files and flipped out the initial crime scene photos. “How many people can slice through a chest and yank out the heart while it’s still beating?”

“If they had a sharp enough knife, they might?”

“No,” Todd pointed to the wounds on the women. “Unless they wield a knife with ten blades, they can’t. These wounds were made with a claw.”

“I’ve never seen a demon with a ten-fingered claw.”

“We haven’t seen half the shit that comes through the portal those moronic scientists made over forty years ago.”

“Yeah, but on the positive side, I never have to put gas in my car or pay an electric bill,” Carlos reminded Todd.

“Yep, we’ve got a limitless and cheap energy source, and a boundless number of creatures feeding on us. That’s not progress, as far as I’m concerned.”

“What are you going to do?” Carlos asked.

“I don’t know.”

“You can call in a Hunter.”

“No, only the Chief can. Besides, I’m not sure if a Hunter will help the situation or make it worse. Remember the last time?”

“God, yes.” A visible shudder ran down Carlos’ spine. “How could I forget? I still have nightmares about the ten-foot lizard that left a trail of red slime everywhere. The Hunter was such a tall skinny guy. What was he? Seven feet tall and maybe a hundred pounds?”

“I thought that reptile would snatch him up for a snack.”

“It didn’t,” Carlos said.

“No, but the Hunter leveled an entire city block in order to kill the demon.” Todd shook his head.

“Yeah, and it was a section that had survived the last earthquake, too.”

“It’s like choosing between two evils—the demons or the Hunters.”

The desk phone rang.

“Inspector Rainer.” Todd’s gut twisted as dispatch rattled off an address. He scribbled it on a piece of clean binder paper.

When he slammed the phone down, Carlos asked, “What?”

“Over on Market Street, number six!”