

JUNE, 2003

SIX YEARS PRIOR TO THE EVENTS OF KENNY G MUST DIE!!

Legendary force of evil (and ex-Vice President of the United States) Dick Cheney refused to touch the Seven Daggers of Megiddo.

He had them locked into a special titanium case prior to being brought into his office. Dick appreciated the profound threat the Seven Daggers of Megiddo represented, and he didn't intend to underestimate them. In the many universes, only one thing scared him more than the daggers: his master.

Like a penitent child, Cheney took the case and entered his master's chambers—a bare room containing only a desk and a single chair.

"The daggers," he said, dropping to one knee and setting the titanium case down on his master's desk.

"What happened to the nice wooden box the daggers used to be carried in?" she asked.

"It broke on extraction. The daggers were briefly set free."

"Did we lose everybody?"

"Three out of the five. A fourth will die shortly. Only the team leader survived. Regardless, the mission was a success."

"Agreed. I don't care if we lost the entire Fifth Fleet, what matters is that we have the daggers. I'm pleased, Dick. You have done well."

Cheney blushed, his master rarely gave praise. He got excited and carried away.

"So, let's do it! Let's go right now and set Hokhoku loose."

Cheney's master drew back her hand and smacked him across the face with enough force to send him cartwheeling across the room and into a wall. He slid slowly to the ground like a character in a cartoon.

"Oh Dick, why must it always be one step forward, two steps back with you?" his master asked, talking the way a mother does to a small, witless child.

"What did I do?" he whined, his voice high and petulant.

"Don't use that whiny bitch tone with me," she scolded. "The Seven Daggers of Megiddo are useless to us right now. The last time I checked, Hokhoku was the Demon of War, not the antichrist. Until we change their orientation, they're powerless against him. If we don't have the daggers, we're lunch. I've explained this to you several times. My doing it again now seems suspiciously expository."

"I remember now. I'm sorry, Master."

"It's not your fault you're a stupid dick, Dick. After all, you don't even have a heartbeat."

Cheney doubted he would get out of the room without licking the bottom of her shoe. Humiliation almost always accompanied seeing his master. In truth, the creepy old fart liked it.

His master took a folder from her desk and handed it to him. "I want you to implement the plans outlined in this folder immediately. In order to change the orientation of the Seven Daggers of Megiddo, we have to read the incantation seven times. It takes about a year to read it through once. That gives us seven years to put the necessary pieces into place. Now that the daggers are in our possession, we need to expand our efforts into several parallel projects."

"What projects?" Cheney asked.

"You focus on the ones in the folder. I'll tell you the rest when I'm good and ready," she growled. Her hand twitched and Cheney expected a second blow.

The attack didn't come.

Instead, she continued, “And as it turns out, I am ready to tell you now. I don’t know why, it just seems like a convenient time. The next phase of the plan is to create an event so monumental, it will leave the public unable to deny the existence of magick. Equally important is for this realization to come with a very healthy dose of terror.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I took a look at the media landscape and the two things the world is lousy with right now are vampires and zombies. You can’t change the channel on the TV without seeing someone shuffling and groaning, or sucking blood. We will focus on the two creatures that are already close to the minds of the sheep. The zombies or the vampires will attack and the world will finally know the truth: magick is real and it is *very* powerful.”

“But what if the zombies kill everyone? Then there won’t be anyone to boss around except for a bunch of stupid zombies. I’ve worked with zombies my whole career. Ordering them around is like herding cats.”

“There are plenty of powerful magickians who can step up and put down a threat on the level I’m thinking about. I’d bet money that whatever happens, it’ll be that goody-goody¹ Keith Richards who comes running and puts a stop to things.”

“Okay, well, you’re the boss. If you say that’s the plan, then that’s the plan, I guess. I doubt it will work though.” Dick’s head stayed down, but he raised his eyes at this last.

Cheney’s master looked at her petulant second-in-command. She found him to be so sadly predictable. His eyes practically begged her to give the order.

“Fine. Lick my boots, pigboy.”

With pathetic eagerness, Cheney rushed forward to pay his penance.

While Cheney licks away, let’s take a moment to introduce our story’s big bad: Ayn Rand.

Best known for her book *BORING*, a 645,000-word bloated nightmare of choppy, badly plotted prose that could be completely summed up in two words: be selfish.

That’s it, the other 644,998 words were unnecessary.

If you wanted to be verbose about it, here’s a paragraph: People, in Ayn Rand’s opinion, should act exclusively from a place of self-interest. What is best for you is the only thing that matters. Anyone who stands in the way of your selfishness is to be dealt with.

It is, in other words, second-rate solipsism.

Nevertheless, when she died, the purity of her selfishness brought her to great power in the afterlife. Being evil, she used her power ruthlessly to forward her own agenda, which only increased her power. She discovered the most fertile place for her ideas were in the minds of moderately intelligent fifteen-year-old boys. Her second-largest demographic turned out to be far more useful: rich, white, selfish monsters occupying some of the highest levels of power in the American and European governments.

As it turned out, there is very little philosophical distance between adolescent boys and old rich guys. Ayn Rand’s “Doctrine of Selfishness” really resonated with rich white guys who thought they were entitled to being *richer* white guys—largely due to their being rich white guys. Ayn Rand scooped them up as followers like a kid grabbing candies, growing in strength with each banker and hedge fund manager until she wielded power sufficient to bring even Darth Cheney to heel.

If her plan came to fruition, no one and nothing, alive or dead, would be able to stop her.

All she needs is just a little patience.

[Insert maniacal laughter and Guns and Roses guitar lick here.]

¹ This might be the only time in history anyone has ever called Keith Richards a goody-goody. Also, the event being described by Ayn Rand is the exact one that occurs in *Kenny G Must Die!!!*

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

AUGUST, 2010

ONE YEAR AFTER THE EVENTS OF *KENNY G MUST DIE!!*

Emma Crewley stood in the kitchen doorway, holding her hand over the phone and scowling, “Aliester?” she asked. “There’s some dude on the phone who wants our address. He says he needs to know where to send the prototypes for the new action figures.”

“Great, I’ll take the call in the other room,” Aliester replied, getting up and attempting to escape before the inevitable yelling began.

“Don’t you take one more step, oh husband of mine,” Emma warned.

Aliester froze. He had heard that tone in his wife’s voice before, and it didn’t bode well. He turned back to her.

Feigning innocence, he asked, “What?”

“Don’t you dare ask me ‘what?’ You know what. Action figures, Aliester? Really?”

“There’s an action figure of you too.”

“I’m guessing that’s supposed to make me feel better?”

“Well yeah, you come with a goat as a sidekick.”

Emma softened at this. He knew she would.

“My action figure comes with a goat?”

“Yup.”

An unsettling thought entered Emma’s mind.

“Wait, he doesn’t fall apart into pieces or do anything fucked-up does he?”

Emma knew better than anyone, when dealing with Aliester, that it was wise not to take anything for granted. Assumptions had a tendency to backfire.

“Nope. He’s just a cute plastic goat,” Aliester replied.

“No blood?”

“No blood, just cute.”

“No goat sacrifice playset?”

“Nope. Just the cute.”

Her anger and skepticism faded—a little. “You promise?”

“Yeah, totally.”

“Okay. Then I guess we can have action figures. So long as I get a goat as a sidekick. What did you get?”

“My action figure will only be sold as a set—with Zombie Steve.”

“Ha!” Emma laughed.

“Yeah, I had to agree to Steve for you to get the cute goat. Obviously, it wasn’t their first choice.”

“What did they want to use?”

“The goat—except it fell apart and had gory red insides and your figure came with a big knife.”

“Oh, I would’ve killed you,” she stopped, looked him in the eye, and continued. “I *will* kill you.”

“I know, I know,” Aliester laughed, “that’s why I have Zombie Steve. The marketing monsters assure me that children in our target demographic will want to buy me and Steve as a set so they can make stop-motion

reenactments of my fight on the building. You remember my fight on the building? The one on national television?”

Aliester was referring to the cell phone footage taken by a woman named Regan MacNeil, showing Kenny G’s minion, the Zombie Steve, attacking Aliester on the roof of a building during the epic final battle against Brittany Spears.

In the recording, you can see Steve crash into Aliester, the two of them spinning and wrestling on the roof. Then there’s a momentary shake in the camera when Regan realizes the two of them are going to go hurtling over the edge of the building. In the video, you can see them plummeting off the roof, but then Aliester teleports himself to a mere foot above the ground and crashes down to earth with no real physical damage.

Zombie Steve doesn’t fare so well. After Aliester bashes his head in with a two-by-four, he fares even worse.

That video garnered nearly a billion hits on YouTube. Regan included ads on the video, which earned her enough money to buy a good-sized mansion overlooking the Puget Sound.

“Yes Aliester, everyone remembers the video,” Emma laughed.

“The marketing drones told me the video is so popular, they’re confident of high sales—thus making them willing to bend on your goat figure.”

Emma sighed. “Jesus Christ wearing a monkey mask—is this what I have to accept as romantic these days? My husband’s action figure comes packaged with his archnemesis so I can get mine paired with a cute plastic goat?”

“Yes, my love. Sadly, this is romance in the 21st century. Now, can I go take this call? I need to finish packing for the *Today Show*.”

“Go, memorialize us in plastic. How the world has survived without such vital pieces of consumer merchandise, I will never know.”

Aliester laughed and walked out of the kitchen while Emma’s voice chased him.

“I mean, the wheel and electricity were important, but a plastic figurine of a girl and her goat—now *that’s* how you change the world.”



“Good morning, everyone. I’m Matt Lauer and this is *Today*.”

Yup. That’s *the* Matt Lauer. On *The Today Show*.

Oh, we’ve skipped around a bit, perspective-wise. So, just to keep you oriented, this is Aliester Crewley talking to you. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, I will be your host and main character for the rest of the story.

Then again, I suppose I might die. That seems to be a trendy thing to do these days. You get to know a character, make him your friend, and then the cruel author kills them off—just to be spiteful. I’m hoping to avoid a similar fate, but one can never tell.

As you can see, big things are afoot. And by big things, I mean that I’m about to go on America’s favorite morning show. Not to brag, but this isn’t my first appearance either. No, this is a return visit. They personally requested that I return. That’s just how I roll these days. It’s one of the perks of being the most famous magickian in America.

Important caveat: I said “most famous” not “the strongest,” “the best,” or “the most powerful.” I am none of these latter things.

Even without overwhelming magickal power, in the fractured modern media landscape, I’ve still managed to achieve almost total market saturation. The first time I appeared on the *Today Show*, they received their highest ratings in the last ten years. “I am”—to quote Ron Burgundy in *Anchorman*—“Kind of a big deal.”

Oh, screw that. After we kicked Brittany Spears's ass, I became famous as fuck—there's simply no other way for me to describe it.

You already heard about the action figures.

All right, enough chatter, let's get back to the story.

Matt Lauer did his normal introduction to the show and then moved immediately to my interview as the day's top story. I sat up straight and did my best to pretend I didn't feel nervous in the pit of my stomach.

I'd faced a demigod. What did I have to fear from Matt Lauer? If anyone should be nervous, it should be him. He couldn't throw fireballs from *his* fingertips, but *I* certainly could.

Fireballs or not, I didn't know of any magick capable of keeping the puddles of sweat from forming in my armpits. To my immense relief, my billowing black cloak camouflaged the evidence of the stains, but I still knew they were there.

Plus, I felt the moisture, ice cold against my skin. I blamed the cloak for the sweating. I'd told my publicist (her name was Karen) that I didn't like wearing it. She brushed away my criticisms and insisted I needed to wear the cloak for my image whenever I went on television.

Karen explained, "Without the cloak, you're like a doctor without his white coat and stethoscope. You have none of the authority of your office. I heard that even Keith Richards wears robes when he's not doing music these days. It's just part of the gig."

I didn't want to listen to Karen, because Karen's job freaks me out. I just can't wrap my head around the idea that I'm a product, like cereal or boner pills. But even if she freaked me out, I couldn't deny her ability to keep me on the television. She'd kept me working steadily for the year since the Brittpocalypse.

With Karen hovering over my shoulder, I cranked out my book, *Kenny G Must Die!!* in a month flat. Sure, the ghostwriter that Karen hired helped a lot, but the stories are mine and the book represents my voice. Regardless, *Kenny G Must Die!!* is both a best seller and considered to be the canonical work on the events leading up to Brittany's rampage across the eastern half of the United States. There is talk that it'll be nominated for several book awards, but I'm trying not to count my chickens.

Sorry, we'll have to talk more later, as the little red light under the camera just came on.

Matt Lauer introduced me by saying, "Our first guest today on *Today* is a man who needs no introduction anywhere. He might be the only face more well-known than that of the president, the man who is generally regarded as the savior of the Brittpocalypse, best-selling author of *Kenny G Must Die!!*, magickian, hero, husband—Mr. Aliester Crewley."

The crew, the people who had gathered outside the window, and even Matt and the other hosts applauded. I got horribly embarrassed and I absolutely loved every second of it. I soaked in the accolades like a fat kid going through a big-ass bag of Halloween candy.

I knew I didn't really deserve the amount of attention being lavished on me. Keith Richards, the legendary guitarist of the Rolling Stones and the most powerful Magickian on this plane of existence—*he* deserved all the *real* credit. We never could've defeated the demon Bukavac (more commonly known by the name Brittany Spears), if not for Keith. I'm not entirely sure why the media in America so blatantly ignored Keith's role, but I think it's because I'm an American and he's British. We don't want to be seen getting our bacon saved by our old colonial masters.

Or it might just be the fact he looks like a piece of shoe leather . . . and I don't.

I find it fascinating that it doesn't seem to matter to the media that—left to my own devices—I would've been dead halfway through my own book. Keith Richards saved my life quite a few times. He saved my wife Emma's life too. Kenny G would've killed me when he returned from the dead, thanks to the work of his minion Steve (who was later turned into Zombie Steve by Brittany Spears).

Whether I deserve it or not (I don't), I get credit for everything. I never claimed it, but I don't correct anyone when they attribute all the success to me either.

Now, before you judge me a complete asshole, you should know I talked to Keith about how the media reacted as soon as it started. I owe the man my life and I genuinely didn't want to do or say anything that would diminish his importance in what had happened.

He was the one who told me to take as much credit as they were willing to give me.

"I don't want the bloody attention," he said in his patented smoker's growl. "I'm Keith-fucking-Richards, and I certainly don't need to make it any harder to run out to the grocery to get a loaf of bread and a few bottles of this and that without being recognized and forced to take a hundred pictures and sign autographs till my hand bleeds. I need my fingers for the guitar."

Taking him at his word, ever since, I've just accepted compliments and claims of heroism from the public without comment, except for a polite smile and a "thank you."

Keith needed to minimize the media's attention. He'd been elevated to the top position in the mortal realm, the Head Magus of the Secret Chiefs—more commonly known as the Head of the Illuminati. Keith is the first human to hold the post in two hundred and fifty-seven years. His work keeps him very busy and he saw the media's fascination with me as an opportunity. In the magickal world, the place where it mattered most, Keith got his due credit.

In addition to a healthy boost in my notoriety, the destruction of Bukavac gave me a tremendous boost in magical strength, raising my national ranking to fourth and my world ranking to nineteenth. Before New York, my ranking stood at forty-fifth nationally and ninety-eighth in the world. In addition to a great deal more magickal stamina, I also have several new powers, the best of which is the ability to teleport multiple times without much trouble.

Before my magical steroids, teleporting a few feet wiped me out for hours. Now, I can travel a few hundred miles and suffer only a mild headache afterward. All I have to do is grab an aspirin and I'm fine in fifteen minutes.

Believe me, a minor headache is infinitely preferable to dealing with airport security—especially when you're me. I still travel on planes a lot, but it's nice to know I don't have to worry about crashes. And if I get annoyed with a crying baby or something, I can just stop off and have a drink and then pop onto another plane when it passes overhead.

Matt Lauer brought me back to the moment. He said, "Nice to see you again Aliester. How are you doing?"

"Nice to see you as well, Matt. I'm doing great. How're the kids?"

(Note to anyone who goes on a national talk show: it's always good to look up a few personal things about a celebrity interviewer so they think you watch their show).

"Growing too fast," Matt reported.

"I believe it." We both chuckled.

"So Aliester, the new book has been met with a great deal of critical acclaim. How does it feel to be both an author and a magickian?"

"I don't feel like an author Matt. I just wrote what happened to me. Besides, I had help. The other writers who took a pass on the book really added to the descriptions and they were great about talking to me about the changes, making sure things were accurate. In a lot of cases we went back to where the events happened, so they could see the locations for themselves. I think that helped a lot."

"Judging by sales, I'd say you're right."

"I know it's a weird thing to say that the world nearly ending is the greatest thing that's ever happened—but to say anything less would be a lie." I tried to keep my face as calm and sincere as possible.

Karen the publicist recommended I work harder on relaxing my face and keeping my expressions neutral. When I asked her why, she told me I had a very "reactionary face" that tended to alienate me from the crucial female 18-35 demographic.

Emma told me to tell Karen to piss up a flagpole. But I didn't. Instead, I sat in front of a mirror for five minutes every night and practiced looking pleasant. I had improved a great deal.

I'm not a nobody anymore. I need to think about things like how the public perceives me. I am a hero, a pop icon, and a celebrity—all at once.

Emma doesn't understand how different things are now. Sure, she married a dorky guy with a magick habit, but I'd come quite a long way from the underpowered magickian who just wanted the annoying guy in the cubicle next to him to stop playing Kenny G records all the time.

"Are you worried that saying things like 'the Brittpocalypse was the greatest thing that happened to you' makes you look like a person cynically profiting from the pain everyone suffered that day?" Matt asked.

I nodded solemnly. "In a lot of ways, yes, I can see that perspective and where it comes from. Maybe there's even some truth to it. But I am giving a significant portion of my earnings back to a number of different charities. I have the names and the amounts listed on my website for anyone to see if they are interested. I stood on the roof with the All-Star zombie band and faced Bukavac. I fought in the streets. I will never forget the pain people suffered on that day. I lost friends too, just like so many others. A very brave woman named Lucy died and without the help of the brave flying monkey Khadomas, we might've lost the day."

This elicited a patented Matt Lauer chuckle.

"I'm sorry for laughing. I am not trying to minimize your pain. It's just that even after months, I'm still having a tough time believing in flying monkeys. Not just them, but zombie armies. It's just hard to wrap your head around. You know?"

"I understand it's a whole lot to swallow. But now that the cat is out of the bag, I'm curious to see how the world shakes out. Will magick be embraced by the masses or will life for my kind degenerate into the second age of Salem? Will we return to the ways of the Inquisition to stomp out this new knowledge that is, admittedly, quite frightening to the uninitiated? Or will we see magick for what it is—an opportunity for growth? Underneath the rituals and the symbols, there is a science. There are forces at work. Measurable forces. All we need to do is to discover the correct instruments."

"And so far, no one has invented them?" Matt asked.

"Not yet. But if science embraces the lessons instead of making outrageous claims of mass hysteria, I believe such instruments could absolutely be developed."

"Fascinating. Okay, another thing that has generated some controversy of late is the use of the 'k' in magick. You've received criticism that the 'k' is an affectation and marks you as obnoxious."

From somewhere off to my right I heard a loud crash followed closely by a scream.

"What was that?" Matt Lauer stood up from his chair. "Someone go check on that."

I stood up too, a little grateful to avoid Matt's question. The "k" might be a conceit, but it represented a valid distinction. I don't do illusions or tricks.

Magic is tricks.

Magick isn't.

Magick is using will to warp the edges of what is possible.

If they want to call it something else—superpowers, even—I'd be fine with that. But I'm not going to start calling myself a superhero. I can't think of a faster way to create a volatile public backlash.

I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise. A sense of dread filled the room. Judging from the corresponding tightening in my stomach—whatever was about to happen, would happen to me.

My new line of action figures would have to get their plug on another show. This appearance had gone south.

By now, some of you are probably starting to worry that this ominous screaming might lead to my demise. I know I am. If you're really concerned, you can flip to the end of the book and check if my name is still popping up. If it's there, I'll probably make it (unless my name comes up in conjunction to Emma crying and wailing in despair over my loss).

I heard a second scream, then a third. Although no one knew the source of the screaming, Matt Lauer, along with most of the production staff, started running for cover. Rampages perpetrated by lunatics armed to the

teeth were as common as Starbucks in recent days and everyone who worked on the *Today Show* had been run through multiple evacuation drills. After the initial shock of the screams, everyone's training took over and people started moving quickly away from the source of the sound.

I didn't move because I didn't hear gunshots. I just heard screaming, which either meant we were dealing with someone armed with a knife or a sword or something else—something like magick.

Sure enough, when the source of the mayhem showed himself, he held no weapon except for a wooden staff in one of his gnarled old hands.

When I heard the crash and the screaming, I immediately assumed whoever or whatever it was wanted to kill me. It's not like demons have a shortage of available vessels these days. There are tons of people jumping into the magick game. Considering the amount of press given to what happened in New York, the spike in magickal interest felt inevitable.

However, the rise in curiosity created a correspondingly sharp increase in the number of possessions and poltergeists active in the world. Thanks to the internet, many explosively powerful spells are available to the uninitiated—ignorant fools whose mystical knowledge extends to the ability to search Google for “powerful magick spells.”

That said, I didn't expect my attacker to be ex-Vice President Richard “Dick” “Darth Vader” Cheney.

To be honest, I felt a little touched. I didn't think I would rank interest from an evil as lofty as the Dickster. He has held the title “High Magus of the Dark Arts” twice, which puts him in a very elite club of assholes. Like me, Cheney wore robes. His were deep purple with a high collar of the type in vogue fifty years ago.

“We've had enough, Crewley. You're done,” He growled, sounding, as he so often did, like someone doing a poor imitation of Edward G. Robinson or (more contemporarily), Chief Wiggum.

With no further warning, Cheney brought up one hand and let loose with a barrage of lightning from his fingertips. The air filled with the smell of ozone and I barely had time to put up an energy shield to deflect the strongest part of the blast. Even with my greatly enhanced magickal powers, I knew I had only the slimmest chance of escaping Cheney alive.

Acting fast, I made a fireball in either hand, brought them together into a single large fireball and blasted it at him. Such an attack had enough force behind it to knock down a small house.

Cheney didn't even try to dodge away. The ball struck him and exploded in a fury of fire. Only, when it cleared, Cheney's hair wasn't even singed.

Cheney growled, “We have a file on you three inches thick. I'm carrying enough fire protections to survive a volcano. The people of my generation know how to do their homework—not like you kids today.”

My stomach clenched. Unlike Dick, I didn't plan for a fight. I didn't have the benefit of pre-planned protections and individualized battle plans. Quite the opposite, I had eaten three delicious cherry scones in the green room and my tummy felt full to bursting.

Cheney was no newly minted demigod drunk on his power. His voice carried neither passion nor significant anger. Since I deflected his first blast of lightning, Dick raised his staff to his shoulder like a shotgun. A split-second later, the staff belched out a pulsing orb of darkness. It flew across the room with terrifying speed. I dodged out of the way and it missed, but only barely.

The weirdly glowing ball of darkness passed just over my shoulder and hit a table. I heard a terrible sucking sound as the table disappeared into the orb. Then the whole thing turned itself inside out and disappeared.

A mini black hole. Somehow, Cheney's staff could conjure them at will. If there's a defense against a black hole, I'd never heard of it.

I was in even more trouble than I thought. Something told me the black holes weren't the most dangerous things Dick could produce. I needed to run, but I couldn't allow him to chase me away like a scared kid on national television—it would ruin my reputation.

Powerful or not, Cheney still had weaknesses. For one, he couldn't move quickly. For instance, he might find it hard to dodge if I did this.

I reached out with my mental forces to several lighting rigs set up around the *Today Show* set, and carefully grabbed things spaced all the way around the set so he would have to try to defend every direction at once. Once I had a good grip, I flexed my concentration and pulled . . .

Seven lighting rigs flew through the air at Dick Cheney all at the same time. To add a little more oomph to my attack, I brought my hands together in a “Hulk clap.”

The move used to be called the “thunder clap,” but these days, everyone calls it the Hulk clap because the Hulk does it in the comics and in the movies. It causes a visible wave of sound to erupt outward in an arc that gets weaker the further it gets from the caster’s hands.

I stood only five feet from Cheney when I clapped. The concussion should’ve sent him flying back at least twenty feet.

Instead, like someone swatting away some especially annoying gnats, Cheney dropped his staff and moved his arms around in a circle. A shimmering field of energy enveloped him. The lighting rigs hit the field and bounced harmlessly away. The sonic wave hit the field and caused it some clear stress, but not enough to make it collapse.

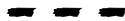
I prepared to attack again, but before I could, the field surrounding Cheney vanished, and he fired two palms full of fresh electricity. This time, I didn’t have time to get up a proper shield. The electricity enveloped me, making my entire body convulse with pain and singeing off most of the hair on my arms. Even my teeth hurt. I can’t tell you how uncomfortable it is to feel like your teeth are on fire.

With a cry of anguish, I felt my body cartwheeling out of control. I slid across the floor and slammed headfirst into the wall.

The pain hurt unlike anything I’d ever experienced. It somehow seemed to get worse instead of better over time. Panic bit deep into my brain. I understood I wouldn’t be able to dodge a second attack and another full blast would surely kill me.

Pride stopped being important. I needed to survive. Either I would get out or I would die.

With no thought beyond escaping with my life, I recited my teleportation spell in my head and vanished from the famed *Today Show* set at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York.



Cheney grunted in annoyance once he accepted that Aliester had teleported away and had not just invoked an invisibility spell. He reached out and beckoned his staff back into his hand. It flew up as if on a string and smacked into his palm.

“Lauer!” he yelled.

Matt Lauer had gone into hiding. He knew about a stage maintenance hatch and he’d crawled into it while Aliester and Dick Cheney fought. He had remained safely under the stage with his hands over his head until he heard his name being called. The shock of it caused Matt to bring his head up—right into the low ceiling. He cracked it hard enough to see stars. The resulting crash allowed Cheney to identify his location.

“I hear you, Lauer! Get out here before I start catching things on fire!”

“Coming!” Matt yelled.

Feeling like a prisoner going willingly to his own execution, Matt crawled out from under the stage to face the creature who once held the office of the vice president of the United States.

“I want an interview,” Cheney growled.

Fifteen minutes later, the vice president sat in a smoldering chair demanding he be shot “from his good side.” No one could tell which side he considered his good side, but the DPs did their best.

“Any particular topics you want to discuss?” Matt asked.

“I have a statement. Just introduce me. I don’t need to hear any of your bullshit.”

“You’re the boss,” Matt agreed, swallowing nervously.

Matt Lauer’s Survival Rule #456: *Never disagree with a guy who can launch black holes out of his walking stick.*

“Are we on?” Matt asked, looking over to Yolanda, his producer. She gave him a thumbs-up.

Matt took a deep breath, looked into the camera, and started talking, “Welcome back folks, sorry about the delay. I gotta tell you, things just keep getting more and more interesting around here. The *Today Show* used to be a relatively casualty-free place to work,” Matt smiled at the camera, but the terror peeked through his usually impenetrable veneer.

“Mehhh!” Cheney growled.

“So anyway, I have been asked to introduce ex-member of the U.S. House of Representatives, ex-Secretary of Defense, ex-Chief of Staff, ex-CEO of Halliburton, ex-Vice President of the United States, Mr. Richard Cheney.”

“Thank you, Matt. I am here to tell you people to go shopping. Do it right now. Get up, get out of your house, and go buy something. Some of you people are lazy and don’t have any money. I don’t care, scrape together some coins from the couch cushions and go out and buy yourself a pack of gum. There has been altogether too much talk lately of economic inequality and how the rich aren’t paying their fair share. There isn’t enough talk about peace and what we need to do to preserve it.”

“I’m afraid I don’t really understand what you’re talking about,” Matt said.

“I’m saying that my people are done hiding in the shadows. I have a master and I will no longer hide this fact.”

“You have a master? Someone who tells you what to do?” Matt Lauer asked, his journalist’s instincts making him move his mouth even though he knew it would be better to keep it shut.

“Yes.”

“Who is it?”

Cheney laughed, which was not a pleasant sound. “You ask so easily, as if such information were of no more value than who I picked for Secret Santa this year.”

“Honestly, I thought you would want to tell us when you brought it up.”

Dick raised an eyebrow. “My master is the sage and elemental force of self-reliance and responsibility known as Ayn Rand.”

“Really?” Matt said, surprised.

He had figured if Dick Cheney had a boss, it would be someone obsessed with war and large-scale violence. Like most people, he didn’t understand most of the evil things that Cheney did were done purely out of self-interest. The death and suffering were just perks, like the oil in Iraq.

Cheney ignored the surprise in Matt’s voice. “We aren’t just going to quietly move the levers behind the scenes anymore. We live in a world of magick. We kept this secret from the masses for hundreds of years, but now everyone knows the truth thanks to the idiotic bumbling of that talking chimpanzee Aliester Crewley. He will be dealt with in due course. My Master would’ve preferred to keep the reality of magick a secret, but if the cat is out of the bag, we’re going to hit the motherfucker with a big bag of hammers.”

“That’s quite an image,” Matt Lauer said.

“So is this.”

With a casual flick of Cheney’s finger, Matt disappeared in a wisp of smoke a few screamingly painful moments after all of his skin disappeared².

Dick Cheney turned and looked directly into the camera.

² *Author’s Note: Long after this book’s completion, Matt Lauer lost his job at the Today Show for having a hidden button that he would use to lock female employees into his office so he could sexually harass/molest them (allegedly). The author doesn’t regret Matt’s fictional fate one bit.*

“What happened to Matt Lauer is going to happen to every one of you if the population of the United States doesn’t get up, right now, and go buy something. Of course, I insist every copy of my master’s books be purchased and read. Her name is Ayn Rand. That’s A-Y-N, R-A-N-D. Our economy must grow. You will buy things or the consequences will be quite dire.”

Then he fell silent, just staring menacingly at the camera with his patented sneer.

No more than two seconds passed before Al Roker appeared from out of nowhere and slid into Matt’s chair. Cheney stared at him for a long moment.

“Been waiting for that for a while, haven’t you? Mehhh,” Dick cackled.

“I, for one, would like to welcome Ayn Rand and our new magickal overlords,” Al said, slightly misquoting Kent Brockman.

Cheney continued to cackle like a deranged version of Burgess Meredith’s Penguin before finally vanishing into thin air.

Within ten minutes, just about every channel on the television had the Matt Lauer footage playing on a loop. The few channels who refused to change their programming saw their number of viewers fall to nearly zero in less than two minutes. Word of Cheney’s demand for everyone to go shopping exploded across the country with the speed of rumor—a velocity that makes light look lazy.

Had the threat come from almost anyone else, the result would’ve been a big whistling nothing. But if people believed one thing about Dick Cheney, it was that he’d happily perpetrate any level of heinous shit. Heinous shit had been his stock and trade for most of his career.

After all, one time when Cheney went hunting, he shot his friend in the face and then made the guy apologize on television for having the audacity to get between the barrel of the gun and the bird being released specifically for Cheney to kill.

Cheney didn’t say things just to hear himself talk, and everyone knew it.

All over America, people streamed out into the streets to go shopping. The shopping malls looked like the day after Christmas, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and the Super Bowl all at once.

One hundred and ninety-seven people died and countless others were injured in the ensuing capitalism. Bookstores were hit the worst—copies of every author named Rand flew off the shelves, just in case.

Many of the people who bought one of Ayn Rand’s books made the mistake of sitting down and trying to read it. Maybe one in a hundred made it to page twenty without putting it down or trying to find a better use for the brick of paper.

Most people discovered it made a handy doorstop.