

# THE INSANE GOD

JAY HARTLOVE

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

# 11

## “POMPEII” BASTILLE

**S**itting across the white linen covered table, Jefferson sized up Hiram as a bookie would assess a prize fighter. “How is the new training coming along?”

“Pruitt says I’m up to ten feet now. Hey, thanks for the grub. Real nice and fancy. We celebrating something?”

A waiter walked up the veranda, bringing two plates of steak, grits, and hushpuppies.

Jefferson noticed Hiram’s voice was deeper and more resonant than he remembered. The man had also cut his long blonde hair into a military buzz cut. “Yes, we are celebrating your progress. I can admit now that I wasn’t entirely sure the visualization technique would work. But you have proven my doubts unfounded.” He raised his glass of wine up for Hiram to toast.

It took the big man a second to catch on, but he clinked his glass with his own.

“Being able to inject your anger into men at a distance, you can use this gift tactically in a battle setting, acquiring allies on the fly.”

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“Sounds cool.” Hiram picked up his knife and fork, cleaved off a large chunk of his steak, and popped it into his mouth. When he opened his mouth, Jefferson noticed his lips opened quite further than looked possible. He stifled his alarmed reaction and looked again. Indeed, the man’s entire jaw was significantly wider than he remembered. So was Hiram’s neck. His gaze dropped to the two charm necklaces he wore.

“I see you’ve been working out a lot too. I imagine you didn’t get enough exercise in the institution. Are you feeling stronger these days?”

“Oh yeah. I’m seeing all kinds of bulk.” He held up his bent arm and showed off huge muscles.

“Your jaw is much better defined as well.”

“Oh, you mean my new mouth. Yeah, it’s a beaut!” he announced and then opened it to inhuman size. His lips spread all the way back into his cheeks and his teeth opened grotesquely far. He looked more alligator than man.

It was all Jefferson could do to keep a straight face. Trying not to clench his own teeth too hard, he said, “A most impressive unexpected benefit.”

“I keep hearing about this meteor shower that’s supposed to signal the end of the world. I take it that’s why you want to put me in the field.”

“That’s true, more or less. Rumor mills crank out as much chafe as they do wheat. Allow me to fill you in. In the Book of Job, God and the Devil make a bet that this poor sucker Job will buckle and doubt God’s love if God makes his life horrible enough. God throws the book at this guy, destroys his life, but Job stays true and never doubts his Lord’s love. It’s a long hard road, but the Devil loses the bet.

“We are faced with the same situation. God and the Devil have thrown pieces of their magic to Earth, to pit us against our fellow man. You are wearing two of the pieces of God’s magic. Our enemies are wearing pieces of the Devil’s magic. It is our mission to fight this battle, no matter how long and hard, to ensure our God is victorious.”

“How do we know we’re the Good Guys?”

Jefferson was surprised. “Your waters run deep, sir. Good question. Throughout the Bible and throughout history, God has instructed his faithful to take up arms against those who would

quietly, subversively turn the masses against us. Joan of Arc spread God's glory by force over those who tried to steal land from believers by rule of law. The archangel Michael used force to expel Satan after the Evil One threatened to turn the angels against God. Our enemies, the Lookers, have the power to convince people to put down their arms, to give up their righteous anger. It is subversive, it is the Devil's way. God has given us this vision of taking decisive action. We are Michael's sword."

Hiram took the last enormous chunk of steak in his huge mouth and savored it. "You got this all figured out."

"I think I do."

"Does that make men respect you more?"

Again, an unexpected question. "I like to think so. I've had very few men turn away from my call."

"Men just fear me."

"You are a fearsome figure. But as a leader, you will be inspirational. Being feared and being respected are not so very different."

"You think men will follow me into battle?"

"Absolutely. With your power and my intellect, we will draw men up out of their boring lives to strive for glory."

"Your brains and my brawn, huh?"

"Indeed."

"Let's find out." With no further warning, he reached across the table and seized Jefferson's arm.

"What are you doing?"

Hiram stood up, lifted Jefferson right out of his seat and held him aloft, grabbing a leg with his other hand.

Jefferson felt like a puppet under the giant's unbelievable strength. "Release me at once!"

Hiram opened his gargantuan mouth and dropped Jefferson's body down onto his face. Jefferson felt his teeth tear through his torso, shocked him. Feeling teeth slicing through him was terrifying.

Jefferson screamed in agony while beating Hiram on the back of the head with his free fist. Nothing worked. He was so frightened, he couldn't form words. *Can I recover from this?*

The giant swallowed and went in for another bite, this time tearing loose organs which fell all about. It was all he could do to not

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dwell on the sensation and what it meant. Jefferson tried to pull up his free leg to kick himself free, but his muscles all spasmed and wouldn't respond. His entire body went limp and he lost any remaining hope. Hiram must have torn through the aorta because then came a gushing waterfall of blood. Blood flooded Jefferson's mouth and gagged him, which added to the overwhelming sensation of doom. Jefferson wanted it to end, but he was mercilessly still aware when the next bite came, this one on his throat.

The last sound he made as he felt the teeth close down was to gurgle, "Why?"

He managed to open his eyes through the pain that crushed his entire being, just long enough to see that mouth open around his whole head. He felt and heard his skull shatter like a clay pot in those huge jaws.

The pain finally faded, for which he was hugely grateful. The release of death at last. But the pain was replaced by a sense of ... fullness? Jefferson felt an intense urge to belch. He opened his eyes, which were now over seven feet above the floor, and let out a window rattling croak. He looked down and saw an arm and two legs scattered on the table. He recognized them as his own from the blood-soaked linen suit shreds that clung to the severed limbs. He looked at his hands and, indeed, his entire towering body and everything around him was covered in bright red blood.

A waiter came running at him with a kitchen knife, followed by two other men. Jefferson flashed out his huge hand and, using only his willpower, forced the first man to enrage, then turn around and attack the two followers. He didn't much care to watch the ensuing knife fight.

He was much more taken with what had happened to himself. He was in Hiram's gigantic, muscled body, which seemed to be even bigger. He could feel Hiram's presence, his lust for life, his ever-present back burner anger. But he was still Jefferson. "Your brains and my brawn," Hiram had said. He looked down at the ripped shreds of meat that was what was left of his original body. He'd always liked that suit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Hartlove is the award-winning author of the urban fantasy “Goddess Rising” trilogy (*Goddess Chosen*, *Goddess Daughter*, and *Goddess Rising*) and the fantasy romance *Mermaid Steel*. He is also the playwright, director and producer of *The Mirror’s Revenge*, the musical sequel to the “Snow White” fable, which had its theatrical run in the San Francisco Bay Area in August 2018 to rave reviews.

His stories are filled with conspiracies and the supernatural, gods, dreams, angels, and hidden connections. His creative motto is “Dark Secrets Revealed”. He loves to take stories where the reader does not expect, with sympathetic villains, heroes with very dark pasts, and lots of plot twists. He turns victims into heroes. He was selected as one of the “50 Authors You Should Be Reading” by *The Authors Show*.

Jay is a former competitive costumer, having won Best in Show at both San Diego ComicCon and WorldCon. You can read more about Jay’s creative adventures, including much of the research he put into his books, at [jaywrites.com](http://jaywrites.com).

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