

The Three Angels

An Abraham Noonan Novel

By Terry DeMarco

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CHAPTER ONE

“Be gone foul demons!” I screamed. “Be gone! I smite thee and banish thee to the bowels of the Underworld!” I smashed my fist down hard. Jagged bolts of lightning cut crackling paths in the inky blackness before me. The demons wailed above the roar of thunder as again and again the lightning struck them, blackening their disfigured, scaly bodies. There were more demons than I had ever seen before. There were hundreds of them; thousands of them! They had a single purpose; to destroy me. Again I brought my fist down and again the lightning flashed and the thunder boomed. Multitudes of demons with the look of hatred in their eyes and the taste for blood, my blood, on their mangled lips and jagged teeth were fighting their way through the chaos.

I set my jaw. My eyes gleamed with steadfast determination as I raised my fist and brought it down one last time. With a mighty groan the earth opened up before me, swallowing the demons in the deep abyss. With shrieks and curses the demons fell. The earth yawned wider and deeper. The demons scraped at the sides of the chasm with their sharp claws. They climbed over one another trying to reach the top of the ever widening canyon. It was no use. They were defeated. When the last of the demons disappeared into the blackness of the pit, the earth closed its mouth; devouring the demons and sending them back to their world once and for all.

“Yes!” I shouted as I pumped my fists in triumph. “Yes!”

“What are you doing?” a voice from behind me asked calmly.

I spun around, took a defensive stance, and stood face to face with Al... my boss. I relaxed my stance and adjusted my clothes.

“Al... hi. I was, uh, preventing the apocalypse?” I offered weakly.

He looked around me at the video game.

“I see you got over 18 million gold coins for your trouble.”

“And I beat the high score,” I said proudly.

“You also broke the game.”

I turned around and looked at the arcade game I had been playing. Al was right. The console was

twisted and broken.

“I guess I got a little over excited,” I said.

“Indeed,” he said raising his eyebrows. “I hope you get that excited when you fight real demons.”

The thought of tangling with real demons made me shudder. It wasn't that long ago when I fought them off in real life. There was no video screen between us then. They were relentless and cruel; and their one goal was to tear me apart. Thankfully I was able to defeat them with help from my friends. But, it was touch and go for a while. For the first time in my angel career, I was truly afraid that I might be lost forever.

Did I mention that I was an angel? My name is Abraham Noonan, angel first class. Al is my boss. His real name is Azrael and he's an archangel. If you want to get technical, he's actually the archangel of death; but don't let the title fool you. He's not the grim reaper. He's in charge of a team of angels who help humans out in their time of need. He's also the guy who makes sure good souls find their way to paradise and souls on the fence get one last opportunity to redeem themselves; which is kinda how I met him.

I wasn't always an angel. I used to be a regular person living a regular life. Unfortunately I wasn't the kind of person anyone would miss if I were gone. I wasn't really a very nice guy. In fact I was pretty despicable. I died under very unusual circumstances, but that's another story.

For some reason Al saw something in me and decided I was worth saving. He took me in when I was a lost soul and trained me to be an angel. I have always been grateful, but I never truly got the hang of being angelic. I guess there is still a little devil left in me. That aspect of my personality has given me an edge when fighting the real devil. I think that's why Al puts up with me.

"Fix the game, please," he said quietly.

"Right," I said.

I placed my hand over the broken console and gave it a jolt of angelic energy. The video game began repairing itself. The dents in the metal straightened; the spider cracks in the Plexiglas untangled and disappeared; even the floor, which suffered a bit of damage when I smashed down on the *fire* button and pushed the side of the game through the tiles; fixed itself and lifted the game to a level position.

"How's that?" I asked.

He gave me that "you're not finished yet" bossy type look.

"What?" I asked.

He nodded toward the game.

"Really?" I asked with a little plea in my voice.

"Do it," he said.

"OK," I sighed.

I took one last look at my all-time high score and set it back so that Demon Stalker was once again the reigning champion.

“Satisfied?” I asked.

With a smile he said, “As it should be.”

“Humph,” I grumbled. I had been hanging around this place waiting for Al for a long time. I wasn’t exactly sure where we were except that it was some kind of college of art. When he mentioned my new assignment, he opened a portal and told me to wait for him at the other end. When I stepped through the portal, I ended up in this student meeting place. The room was deserted. In the dim light I could see tables, vending machines, a full service food counter, and... video games! I hadn’t played a video game in ages. I wandered over to the arcade and there it was: Angels and Demons – The Apocalypse. It was like it called to me. I couldn’t resist.

I’m glad Al didn’t show up until I beat the high score. Of course, he may have been waiting in the shadows until I was finished. He’s considerate in that way. Then again, waiting until that exact moment gave him the opportunity to sneak up and scare the bejeebers out of me, something he must love to do because he does it all the time.

“So what am I doing here, Al?”

“You are preparing for your next assignment.”

“Here... in the student union of an art college in the middle of the night?”

“I like to call it the wee hours. It’s a good time to wander around without anyone seeing us.”

I was confused.

“Al,” I said. “You do know that we’re angels and we can wander around anywhere we want without being seen, right?”

“Of course I know we’re angels,” he said with a little annoyance in his voice. And, as if to prove it, he waved his hand in a circle and a shimmering vortex appeared.

“Follow me,” he said as he disappeared into the portal.

“OK,” I said to myself and followed Al through the opening.

I exited the passageway and stepped onto neatly trimmed grass. It was a beautiful spring evening. The moon shone full and bright above our heads. There was a slight chill in the air from the lake behind us. I looked around to get my bearings. We seemed to be in an oasis of lush greenery surrounded by tall buildings and wide streets. The place looked familiar.

“Are we in Chicago?” I asked.

“Yep,” he responded, “Downtown Chicago, the windy city.”

“This is Grant Park, isn’t it?” I asked as I looked around at the amazing structures and beautiful gardens.

“It’s Millennium Park to be exact. We are right across the street from the School of the Art Institute where you recently saved the world from the apocalypse.”

I grimaced a little sheepishly, but he paid no

attention to me. He was basking in the moonlight and the peaceful surroundings. He closed his eyes and breathed in the cool lake air. He was truly enjoying this.

“Is this why you wanted to come here so late? So you could experience this as a human would?”

Al smiled, his eyes still closed.

“It’s one of my favorite spots on Earth,” he said. Then he opened his eyes and gestured around him.

“Look at this place, Abraham. Have you ever seen art, nature, science, and architecture live together in such harmony? It’s beautiful.”

“No argument there,” I said.

Al doesn’t get much of a chance to stop and smell the roses, so I stood by quietly and let him enjoy the moment. After a few minutes he sighed and I knew it was back to business.

“So what’s the assignment?”

“An art student,” he answered grimly.

“An art student who is about to die?” I asked cautiously.

“No, dying is the least of this person’s worries, at least for the moment.”

That was kind of ominous, I thought. I pushed on.

“So... a problem with a relationship? Parent issues? Depression?”

I went through the list of typical issues an angel needs to deal with.

“Nothing so simple this time, I’m afraid. There’s an evil coming and it’s using this young person as its vessel.”

“Wow,” I said, “that doesn’t sound good.”

He turned and looked at me. The look in his eye sent chills up my spine. Was it a look of anger? Remorse? Fear? I decided it was a combination of all three and that terrified me. I had never seen fear in Al’s eyes before.

“Let’s just say you might get your chance to prevent the apocalypse after all.”

CHAPTER TWO

“You’re not seriously saying this in an end-of-days assignment, are you?” I asked with more than a little apprehension.

“Have you ever heard me joke about the end of the world?”

He had a point.

“Why me?”

He raised an eyebrow.

“Are you refusing to accept an assignment?”

“No, of course not, but I can’t help thinking that there are much more qualified angels than me to take on such an important task. You have angels that have been around since the dawn of time; warriors that have spent millennia fighting evil...”

“And those warriors will be at your disposal if you need them,” he interrupted. “We won’t let you face the demons on your own.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“Demons?”

Al sighed.

“Yes, Abraham, when you’re talking about an event that will bring about the end of everything, demons are usually at the top of the guest list.”

“That’s just wonderful,” I said dejectedly.

He grabbed me gently by the shoulders.

“Listen, Abraham,” he said purposefully, “I chose you because I believe you can prevent this catastrophe from happening. I want you to look at this as an assignment to prevent a young girl from succumbing to her demons. You’ve done that a hundred times.”

“Yeah, but the demons didn’t usually have long claws and sharp teeth. They were demons of the mind.”

“All demons start in the mind. This girl is being tormented by things she doesn’t understand. If she gives in to them, there’s no telling what will happen. You can keep the evil at bay by helping the girl.”

“So, let’s say I help this girl. What’s to stop the demons from finding another vessel?”

“They won’t,” he said.

“Why not?”

“Because this girl is special.”

I waited for more, but it never came.

“That’s it? That’s all you’ve got for me? ‘She’s special?’”

I looked at him incredulously.

“Special is a kid who can play Mozart by ear at age three. Special is a person who can figure out how to change sea water to drinking water. Special is a guy who can work out a Rubik’s cube without throwing it out the window! You can’t just say the girl is special and leave it at that!”

I knew I was getting excited because my voice rose about a dozen octaves.

“Calm down, Abraham. You need to take a breath.”

I did take a breath. In fact I took two or three breaths just for good measure. Surprisingly, it actually made me feel better. I was much calmer when I asked my next question.

“What’s so special about this girl?”

“I’m sorry, Abraham. All I can tell you is that she was born under circumstances that make her particularly susceptible to the evil that is coming. There is no other person like her on Earth. Save her, Abraham. Keep her from letting the evil use her to gain access to this world and it will not be able to find another vessel.”

I stared at him for a long moment.

“This is heavy stuff, Al,” I said.

“I know,” he said grimly.

There was too much tension here. We could both feel it and it wasn't doing either of us any good.

"There's just one thing I need to know," I said solemnly.

"What's that?"

"When this is all over... do I finally get a raise?"

Al smiled.

"And a bonus," he said.

"Really?"

"No."

"Crap!" I said and waited for the inevitable rebuke. It didn't come.

"Go do what you do best," he said with a smile.

"I'll have your back."

"Where do I find her?"

"Where else would you find a budding artist? You're heading for Paris."

"Paris? Like Paris, France? *That* Paris?"

"Well, it's not Paris, Illinois."

"Ahhh... mais oui!" I said in my best Pepe Le Pew voice. "I'll have to dust off my beret for this trip. Should I grow a moustache?"

I waved my hand across my mouth and a pencil thin handlebar moustache sprouted from my upper lip.

"What do you think?"

He considered my new facial accessory but said nothing. Of course, Al says more by saying nothing

than most people say when reciting the Gettysburg Address.

“Lose the moustache?” I asked.

He nodded.

“Lose the moustache,” he said.

“Always a critic.”

My moustache sagged, turned to dust and blew off my lip. Al prefers his angels to be nondescript so we can blend into the woodwork; kind of like a ninja. Except, you know, without all the blood and violence and Kung Fu stuff. Someday I’ll get an assignment where purple hair and a goatee will come in handy. THEN he’ll see things my way.

“So, how do I find this budding artist?”

“You’ll know her when you see her. You’ll be briefed on your way.”

“On my way? Aren’t I just stepping through a portal?”

“Not this time. The girl’s name is Emma. She is a student here at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She’s in Paris on an exchange program, but part of her essence remains here. This is an important place in her life.”

“And this essence will tell me something about her?”

“It will.”

“OK, release the essence.”

I waited.

“I don’t see anything.”

Al folded his arms across his chest and shook his head.

“What?” I asked.

“It doesn’t work that way. You have to pass through the Cloud Gate.”

“The Cloud Gate? Never heard of it.”

He made a grand gesture as if inviting me into a theater. I looked in the direction where his was pointing. All I could see was a gigantic shiny silver bean. It was over 60 feet long and weighed over 100 tons. It was the artistic showcase of Millennium Park. Thousands of people have walked through the opening formed by its arched middle, making faces at their distorted reflections in its fun-house mirror like surface.

“You mean the bean?” I asked.

He rolled his eyes.

“*The Bean* is a colloquialism. The sculpture is called The Cloud Gate.”

“Do tell,” I said with feigned interest.

He turned and headed toward The Cloud Gate. I followed right behind him. I thought “the bean” was much more descriptive than “the Cloud Gate”. You ask anyone in Chicago what that big thing in Millennium Park is called and they’ll tell you it’s “the bean”. I guarantee it. He stopped short of walking though the archway.

“This is it,” he said.

I looked around.

“Now what?”

“Now, you walk through the gate.”

“You mean under the bean?” I asked innocently. He glared at me.

“Sorry.”

I took a step, but Al put up his arm and blocked my way before I could enter the Cloud Gate. I looked at him quizzically. There was something he hadn't told me yet. I could tell he was struggling to put it into words.

“What?” I asked.

“When you walk through the gate, you'll see scattered visions of past and present events. You may not understand all of it, but it should give you enough insight to find the girl and expel the demons.”

He paused.

“You have three days.”

“Three days? What happens in three days?”

Al hesitated.

“In three days the warriors take over.”

“The warriors? You mean the warriors will come to fight the demons?”

I looked at Al. He said nothing but his grim expression spoke volumes.

“Al, you can't be serious. She's just a kid.”

“Three days from now, if nothing changes, an apocalypse will be inevitable,” he said slowly unable to meet my gaze, “we will need to destroy the vessel

before the evil uses it to enter this world. It's the only way to prevent the end of days."

"Destroy?" I was incredulous. "You mean like destroy, destroy? Body and soul?"

"It's uncertain how much control the demons have over this girl. Her soul may be compromised. The demons might still be able to use her as a vessel even if she were dead."

"Azrael, we're talking about a human being here. She's a girl, not just a vessel. She has a life. She has friends and family. How could you even think of destroying her? She's an innocent."

He lifted his head and looked me square in the eye.

"Angels do what is necessary to keep balance in the universe. We have kept the balance between good and evil intact since the beginning of time. This effort doesn't come without a price. In times of peace, we aid humans by helping them make the right decisions. In times of war, we fight. Some of the things we have to do are unpleasant. We don't make these decisions lightly."

I just stared at him. I couldn't believe my ears. Destroy an innocent? That was definitely not included in my angel training.

"We could have destroyed her as soon as we discovered what was about to happen," he continued. "I lobbied to buy her some time. I believe we can save her. More precisely, I believe *you* can save her."

“Couldn’t you have given me more time?”

“You have three days, Abraham. At midnight, the start of the fourth day, the evil will be released and the apocalypse will begin. One way or another, the evil has to be stopped before that deadline.”

I turned my head away from Al and stared at the unusual structure in front of me.

“OK. It looks like I have a job to do,” I said resolutely. “I’m not going to let those demons invade our world and I’m not going to let that girl be destroyed.”

He managed a half-smile.

“I knew I could count on you.”

He reached over and touched the side of the sculpture.

Clouds suddenly began forming inside the opening. I looked at Al.

“Cloud gate?” I asked.

“Told you,” he said with a wry grin.

I took a deep breath.

“Wish me luck, Al.”

“Good luck, Abraham.”

I made a move toward the Cloud Gate when Al stopped me again.

“One more thing,” he said.

“What’s that?”

“Don’t tell her your real name.”

“Why not?”

“You need to be incognito. No one can know you are on this assignment.”

I thought about that for a moment. Then I smiled.

“This assignment isn’t sanctioned, is it?”

He didn’t have to answer. I could tell from his expression it was true. I shook my head.

“Better be careful, Al. I might be rubbing off on you. How are you going to keep this from the big guy?”

“You let me worry about ‘the big guy’. You worry about saving the girl... and the world.”

“Right,” I said. “I’m on it.”

“And Abraham...”

“Yeah?”

“These demons are tricky. They will try to mess with your mind. Don’t let them get under your skin. They have had a long time to plan for this and they are capable of anything. Be careful.”

“Got it,” I said.

I took a step toward the Cloud Gate, but before I entered, I turned and pointed at Al.

“You keep those warriors in their cages. We’re not going to need them. You hear?”

He smiled and gave me a two fingered salute. I returned the salute and without further ado, I turned and stepped through the opening of the Cloud Gate. It was time to save the world.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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