

# Godforsaken

Somewhere, lost in the middle of the desert like a dying animal, exists a small town with a peculiar property. It's the stereotype of a forgotten and dying old west town. Very few people. One general store. A tavern. Absolutely picture perfect image of this sort of town. Except for that one peculiar. This town is old enough, and out of the way enough, and unimportant enough, that not only has life forgotten about it, but death has forgotten about it as well.

Every single person who resides here and stays within it's incorporated limits, lives eternal. There is sickness, there is hunger, and there is thirst (oh god is there thirst), but no one dies.

If there is one thing this town has learned, it's this: Immortality is no prize. Cut off from the rest of a world that has moved on without them, while they cannot die, they also cannot truly be considered alive. When you have countless days, no one day ever stands out.

Forgotten by life, forgotten by death, and more than likely, forgotten by God.

Welcome to "Godforsaken, Arizona".

The perfect place to find peace and quiet, if you're the angel of vengeance.

If you want to see the face of a town, visit a library, or a town hall, or a community center. If you want to see the ugly heart of a town, visit the bar all the locals go to. As the true nature of a man can be found in his heart, so can the true nature of a town be found in it's seediest of taverns. The more dangerous, the more ill of repute, the more honest and true. And even in the darkest of cesspools, such as the heart of a man, all hope can be born, even if in the end it only lives for a short and painful moment.

This town is no different, and cleverly enough, whomever incorporated the tavern here felt the same way about truth and beauty, and named their establishment accordingly.

"The Heart of Man" is dark. Sullen. Miserable. Sunlight pierces through the clapboards in thin slices of sharp radiation, causing the motes of dust suspended in the air to glow and flicker like far away stars. However, any light that somehow makes it inside of this building is greedily lapped up by the ancient wooden architecture of the interior, causing the place to become unnaturally dark. Drowning in shadows,

every corner, and even the center of the room becomes a hiding place. Every emotion on every face hidden just as well.

Maybe we're better off this way, not knowing of the pain that hovers here somewhere between being unable to live and unable to die. How often can stories of despair and misery be repeated over the same bar until every word is used up? What's the point after that?

Dark and quiet, as a tomb, without the welcome cool air. Somehow, even with the lack of light, the inside of this bar is always just hot enough that a draught brought to the lips causes a small sprouting of oily sweat to appear on every furrowed brow in the place.

An unbalanced ceiling fan spins in the center of the ceiling, lazily and worthless. Not stirring the air in the slightest, it's greatest accomplishment is the random swatting of a bloated fly as it comes too close. Bare bulbs flicker inside greasy fixtures. Tarnished brass, collecting muck in it's joints due to ineffectual wipes of spit and cloth, once added an air of class but now only serve as a reminder of things long forgotten.

The floor, covered in dirt and layered with a glaze of spent tobacco juice and peanut shell dust, and covered with even more dirt.

As the town is forgotten, so is the player piano sitting in the corner. A small upright with nicotine stained keys announce it's birth on a brass plaque on the case as BOSTON 1903 by THE MASSACHUSETTS PIANO COMPANY. There is a very small handful of people that on seeing that would puzzle over the fact that the manufacturer never actually HAD a factory in Boston, but there's not a chance any of those people would bare witness to such a weird and uncanny instrument.

A coin in the slot will cause the piano to spin up and play out a song as the paper rolls under the machine are pulled up into the machinery in the cabinet. Next on the roll? "El Paso". Which probably hasn't been played by this piano since the year that song was top of the charts.

Ignoring the destitute and oddly quiet figures sitting privately at their own splintered and dusty tables, we bring our attention to the bar itself. If there was life that stood out in this town, it would be this spot here. A monolith of hard wood harvested from trees long extinct on this earth, it's dark corners hide a surprisingly mastered degree of woodworking and filigree. Kick plates engraved with wild beasts of yore, worn grooves of decades of boots left behind on the foot pipe running along the base.

Most interestingly, under the thick and yellowed veneer of the impossibly smooth surface of the bar top is burned and carved the image of two massive war machines. Two giant galleon ships running broadside against each other. All sails unfurled, all cannons fired. The detail in the workings so exquisite one could actually count the thick woven coils in every rope used in all the riggings. One could even see the expressions of the men fighting and dying on both ships, their faces permanently etched with the agony of defeat, and the glory of victory...

...if either ship actually had sailors carved with it.

One the business end of the bar sits “Pinball” Jackson, and in the grand scheme of things, he hasn’t been a resident here for too long. He came here as a young adult and managed to show up the same exact day the previous bartender left town. 30 years later he still doesn’t look a day over nineteen. He’s still a good 20 years from being there longer than the last bartender. He’s still a good 50 years from beating the one before him. Not that he thinks he’s in any sort of competition. He finds the numbers to be interesting, and when he’s not serving a customer, he sits still, stares at the bar rag he gently folds and keeps on the corner of the bar, and runs numbers through his head. Sometimes for hours, sometimes for days, his brain is on fire with math. Computations, formulas, mystic numbers dance in his head in sequence, as if he’s some sort of lock tumbler being spun to unleash the secret of the universe.

However, he’s still a long few decades from solving that riddle, and he’ll probably cease to exist long before then, if the world keeps turning as it has these past few days.

On the far corner of the bar, absolutely opposite of the entrance and the directly facing the door, sits a woman that looks like she has no real business being in such a rough establishment.

A well manicured finger runs along the lip of a decently washed tumbler of a whiskey that is harsh and unforgiving. Long fingers meet at the palm of strong hands. Hands terminate at wrists that are somehow both strong and delicate. Wrists retreat into the cuffs of a very expensive white silk shirt. Cuffs peak out from the dark fabric of a well-tailored british cut suit jacket. Even as the suit this woman is wearing carries a feeling of a thousand day travel in the high desert wastes, every thread is immaculate.

The jacket is unbuttoned, the butterfly collared shirt is open one button below “professional”. She is exposing an impressive colletege that would make a man swoon. Suspended on a thin silver chain, and nestled perfectly into the trailing edge of her cleavage rests a small gem that glows with an unnatural hue. She is also showing a

glimpse of a chest and neck that is ravaged by a multitude of raised scars. Gentle, soft pale skin, accented with a long history of violent wounds. No moment of pain forgotten, every instance carried forever.

The scars continue their journey over the clavicle and collar bones, and race up the sides of her neck, with only a few light scars reaching just under her ears, and a one or two triumphant victors reaching as far as just over the crest of her jaw line.

Thick hair the colour of ravens at flight frame her sharp and wide set face. Full lips the colour of bruising part slightly with each breath. Sharp teeth the colour of perfect white alabaster are licked glossy wet as she brings the glass to her mouth. Vermillion nails flash briefly as an errant beam of light traces across them momentarily.

Even hidden and unobserved, every living being holds their breath in unison as she swallows a gulp of the amber liquid. They breathe again as she rests her glass back down on the countertop.

Alexis is tall and statuesque. In another culture and era, she would've been called a valkyrie. She's of obvious mixed ancestry, but while the remains of wild and divergent genetics are visible, they are so wild they can hardly be recognized. Part Asiatic, maybe. Part Spanish, possibly. Striking and bold, she commands a room by simply entering. All who see her want to be her, or to be with her. By all accounts, every person who catches a glimpse of her accepts her as painfully beautiful. A visage that haunts all fantasies she invades. At first glance she is constantly mistaken as being one of the most beautiful humans on the planet. She is also always mistaken for being human.

Dead Alexis is not human. She is one of the seraphim. She is also one of the fallen, a member of the angelic choir that has been cast out by their creator and father. It was not always this way. At one time, she was a proud and beautiful member of the fold. This, however, was a very long time ago. There was also a time in which the fallen did not exist, but that was also a very long time ago as well.

However, that was a very long time ago, and we're not here to talk about the past. We're here to talk about the future, even if we don't have very much of it left.

As she signals Jackson for another pour, the light leaking in from outside suddenly flares briefly like an earthbound supernova. All the humans in the room are still blinking back tears from suddenly flexed irises as the door begrudgingly creaks open.

Silhouetted in the doorway is a broad-shouldered man who is both tall and

dark, and stands with an unnaturally perfect posture. He pauses for a moment, seeming as if he is drinking in the energy of the life in the room.

Realizing there is no life here, he slumps his shoulders for a moment and sighs. Correcting himself, he walks into the room, routing a path directly towards Alexis. He ignores the empty stools and sits next to her, nodding curtly at the bartender. Jackson snaps out of his reverie and quickly steps in front of him, at the ready.

The man is dressed much like Alexis. Smart suit, expensive and tailor made. The difference being is the suit he's wearing is white, and the wide collared shirt underneath is a dark green and textured with a gentle chessboard pattern. Buttoned with a collar tight against his neck, the tie shimmers like mother of pearl. Outside of a pinky ring on his left hand that won't stop slowly changing it's shape, his outfit is simple and unadorned.

The blonde and copper skinned man addresses Jackson with the air of an authority that is not used to being denied or confronted.

"I'll have what she's having, thank you."

With the first utterance, the hidden spectators in the room suddenly came to realize that they had much more urgent matters to attend to in places other than the room they were in. They all slipped out quickly and quietly, as if they might've actually caught the man or the woman's attention.

Leaning towards the man and lowering his voice, Jackson affected the temperament of a man gently warning his buddy to keep his hands out of a stray dog's mouth.

"She's been here a long time, and I don't think she's the sort of person that wants company. It might be be-", suddenly "Pinball" Jackson chokes on his last thought as the man's gaze connects with his. He is frozen as he suddenly feels a thick rivulet of blood pour from his nostril.

The man in the suit's eyes glow with a vague and dangerous light as he speaks.

"Child. You will pour me a drink. You will not question me. You cannot die in this place, but I will kill you regardless."

As the man ends his statement, Jackson is suddenly freed of his paralysis. His face breaks as he starts sobbing uncontrollably, his legs like pistons as he walks over to the shelf and retrieves the whisky Alexis is drinking. Emotionless, he moves with the calm grace of an automon, no movement wasted, except for the barely audible

weeping and the torrent of tears down his face. He places the second tumbler down next to the first, fills them, and places the bottle next to both. Without pause to his movements, and without an end to his weeping, he walks away.

“Pinball” Jackson, bartender and inheritor of The Heart of Man tavern, continues walking, leaves his establishment, and heads directly towards the desert. He does not stop walking. He does not stop weeping. Even as he crosses the town line, and death remembers him, turning him back into the dust in which he came, he does not stop weeping.

And he finds a peace the rest of the townspeople have yet to know.