

Cap 1: the skinwalker

“I see you weren't lying when you said you don't remember anything about your past life” said the entity, showing a stack of images to a young man. Remember what happened.

The school year ended and a lot of teenagers were leaving the high school happily; among the crowd was Jean pushing the other students to leave quickly, the young man had only one thing on his mind. A blond was also walking quickly among a bunch of students down a corridor of the school, which looked like a New York street because of so many posters and advertisements stuck up since the beginning of the year. He turned his head looking both ways: only empty classrooms with messy desks and papers on the white ceramic floor; he reached the entrance of the school.

Many students regrouped in small groups, talking about what they wanted for the summer or how their school year was. Jean was alone, staring at the front door waiting for the blond; their quarrels had been going on for two years, every trouble Jean got into was for getting into a fight.

Jean was a white young man, his eye color was black, his hair was black also long tied in a small ponytail and he had a black bandana tied to his head and his forehead was covered by long locks of parted hair; upturned nose adorned with freckles, which crossed both cheeks his height was 1.77 . He wore a purple collegiate style sweatshirt with gray torso and sleeves, denim shorts and black tennis shoes.

The blond's name was Kevin and his height was 5'7". His skin was tanned, his nose was straight; his hairstyle was spiky, pointing upwards because he wore a red band that covered his ears. His eye color was blue, he wore a denim jacket, black pants and red tennis shoes; the typical outfit you would see in a teen series where the *bully* on duty appears.

“Finally I find you, now no one will be able to stop a good fight” said Kevin running towards the freckled man.

Jean stepped back a little, grabbed a student from behind who, confused, couldn't get away from him, spun on himself to gain momentum and threw him against Kevin. The blond was dragged a couple of meters and the *nerd* was on his body. He subsequently shook him off, sending him flying into the entrance doors and rejoining the fight.

The crowd put aside their business to focus on watching the confrontation, surrounding the pair of young men. Kevin struck Jean's biceps with his fingertips; both arms lost tension for a couple of seconds. The Australian continued to strike the nerves of his opponent's chest with superhuman speed.

Jean was trying to regain control of his body, but the blond would not let him rejoin, attacking his chin with his right palm and pushing him several meters away; the brunet got up from the ground taking momentum with his legs, as he was quite annoyed.

The freckled man ran lowering his height, made a couple of movements with his legs in the air, kicking the blond's right side several times. He hit him with his right knee and started punching him several times in the pit of his stomach and ribs; he wasn't going to let his opponent get back up either, but Kevin attacked his windpipe with two fingers to make Jean lose his breath.

Their rivalry went on for years. Kevin enjoyed beating up weak students, but Jean wouldn't let him bother them; it wasn't because he was someone noble, but because he benefited from helping the *nerds*, since he charged them to defend them. He learned to gain from the bad things that always happened to other people and even used to play practical jokes on the other students, including Kevin.

In other words, they are the same type of person who can stoop low and doesn't care if he will come out on top in the end, all to boost his ego. Kevin's family was not dysfunctional because he literally has no family; he remembers absolutely nothing or so he has told his "friends", so he doesn't care about disappointing anyone with his actions.

They were always fighting, as Jean liked to fight and the money the *nerds* gave him, he never said no when he had to stop Kevin's abuse, so their brawls were always a brutal spectacle to watch. That was how the other students were afraid of them both, although Jean was easier to convince or live with because of his childish attitude, but they still quickly moved away from him because of how extremely teasing he was.

Generally, the freckled boy would throw balloons filled with water; he would release the frogs in Science classes, causing chaos in his classroom; he would damage the school computers by putting pornography or websites that had viruses on them; he would almost always blame someone else, so that gave him quite a laugh.

Kevin, on the other hand, was very serious and quite bitter. Since the death of one of his friends he had changed drastically, he never laughed and the few things he enjoyed was music; he took out his frustration by hitting the weakest and he was quite angry that Jean intervened in his affairs. He also disliked her immature attitude.

In the distance, a gentleman was watching the fight as well. He was an experienced woodsman who had been lost since the night before and no one knew where he was; the police could not do much, as it is forbidden to go out at night because of the creatures that coexist with humans.

Since mankind has existed, various creatures and species have lived alongside it; if the nature of human beings is sinful and evil, that of some creatures is twice as bad. In any other world they are known as fantastic or mythological creatures, sometimes it is thought that they were born from a force of the earth to counteract or punish human beings, as in the Middle Ages, an even darker time due to the existence of bestiary entities such as wyverns or wolf-wolves.

But man found a way to defend himself against them, the Church decided to abandon the crusades and dedicate itself to fight against the entities that, according to them, opposed the will of God; although the pope still did not allow certain types of people who

developed the ability to defend themselves against creatures. Thus a three-sided struggle was formed, the third group being the smallest, but the most apt for the fight.

One way that proved quite effective in helping the population was to surround the towns and large cities with seals. When they wanted to unify them with roads and bridges, they would first call in someone able to put up seals and eliminate the creatures of the night. That town in the state of Oregon was no exception.

The woodcutter had pale skin, you could tell he was weak; his eyes were abnormally squinting, but he could see perfectly, and both young men caught his eye. He would wait for the right moment to attack. He walked up to stand behind one of the school buses, but his stench would give him away if he stayed too long. Both boys had their cheeks swollen from punching each other when a teacher and the rector stopped the teens when they saw the crowd surrounding the fight.

"What the hell are you two brats thinking" said the rector.

"It's a bloody settling of scores" Kevin replied, shaking his head.

"I have nothing to settle with this jerk" Jean lied. The reason they were fighting for the last time was because, in her last assignment, Jean smashed Kevin's locker, forcibly opening it, breaking all his stuff and writing on the walls and lockers "Kevin is a repressed freak", causing the other students to enjoy seeing the *bully* receive another punishment from Jean.

"Keep talking, asshole, you're going to bite the dust!" Kevin shouted, red with anger.

"Nobody's going to bite the dust!" The rector scolded, but hands came out of the crowd, grabbing him by the neck and pulling him backwards with such force that he seemed to be just a rag doll; the man was dragged more than twenty meters, everyone looked with horror at the owner of the arms, which had an almost black hue.

"That's..."

"It's not Donny!" shouted the rector in his last moments of life, as he apparently knew the missing lumberjack. The entity simply threw him through the air until he surpassed the height of the building; his body sounded like a gunshot as it hit the pavement, resulting in a viscous mass of blood and ground flesh, as the students looked on in terror.

The entity ran quickly in the direction of the two young men. The other students, seeing this, began to run away, shouting for help; the two rivals ran together, while, with each step the beast took, its human skin was shed and its real physical form was quickly revealed.

It was a black humanoid beast, with long, bony arms, its face barely visible because of how black it was and in which only the eyes and a large mouth were visible.

He leaped like a frog, propelling himself with his legs, and managed to crush the boys with his huge hands, letting out a raspy and guttural squeal at the same time.

“I...t...t... ten... go” said the beast as both young men screamed in terror, kicking and gasping, trying to free themselves from their captor. The *skinwalker* brought his left hand, which held Jean, to what seemed to be his nose; the boy breathed in the putrid scent emanating from the monster's face, he was pale with fear, as well as sweaty.

“I can't let this thing eat me” said Jean in fright, and managed to pull a Swiss Army knife out of his right pocket. He waited for the right moment to bury it in the eye of the beast, which screamed in pain, angrily releasing both boys and whipping them to the ground to rub its wound as if it were a small child.

The two young men were trying to stand up, but the pain did not allow them to move fast. The monster took off his weapon when he realized that his prey was trying to escape and was about to catch them again when a cloud of dust covered his good eye, preventing him from seeing. He sneezed and groaned, irritated by the situation.

“What... did you do?” shouted the *skinwalker* looking at Kevin. That confused Jean, since his opponent was stunned and didn't look like he was trying to fight. The monster threw a punch that sent him flying into a bus; Kevin felt a huge burning in his back as he bounced against the chassis of the machine.

“Run, Jean” said Kevin with his last words, falling unconscious.

Their troubles would not end here, more humanoid monsters came out of the forest. They had heard the *skinwalker's* roar and were laughing maliciously. Their appearance was that of a human in a state of decay: they walked on all fours and were smaller than the *skinwalker*. Normally they are enemies of the latter, but this case was special, as they would finally enter a village after centuries to feast on the people.

“*Wendigos!*” Jean shouted, trying to wake Kevin up. They are devouring the rector.

The *skinwalker* kicked Jean in the stomach and held him on the ground, opened his mouth, letting out a long tongue, with which he licked the face of the freckled man, who gasped in pain.

The *wendigos* began to scatter through the town looking for something else to hunt, but a small group remained guarding their leader. The warning sirens began to sound; in a couple of minutes the specialized forces would arrive to act against the beasts and Jean knew it, but he didn't think it would last until that point and he didn't even know why they were not yet dead from the beast's blows.

The small group approached Kevin, grabbed him by the legs and dragged him into the forest; in the last seconds he came to his senses, realizing the fate that awaited him once there. He screamed in fear, desperate to get away from the beasts, stretching out his left arm towards Jean, but one of the *wendigos* cut it off at the elbow with its sharp claws. His screams of pain ceased to be heard as they entered the forest and noises of tearing fabric overshadowed his screams.

Jean was completely terrified and screamed in frustration knowing that he was now alone with that demon. He was losing his breath. At last he thought that his torment would come

to an end: he fell unconscious looking at the street, but before closing his eyes he saw a black car arrive a few meters from where he was.

“They're... here” said the *skinwalker*.

From the black van came down three people dressed in black with equipment consisting of a black helmet that covered the entire skull, with the part of the face resembling glass, also of a black tone, so their faces could not be seen; their suit was *expandex* and was covered with black plates that resembled armor.

The Association itself is a military institution that was founded around 1700. It was the queen of that time who saw the potential of humans with supernatural abilities. She decreed a law that did not allow to execute this kind of people because they could be a help against the magical beings and for that reason a lot of people offered their gifts to help the queen in her fight against the mythological beings.

Thanks to this, family branches of people with skills and, in rare cases, surnames that were almost extinguished by the Inquisition, managed to survive, but something this good could not be real: they must cover their faces by a direct order of the queen. Having your face discovered while you are in a government institution becomes bad if something shady is discovered and you will end up executed. It also serves not to be persecuted by some entity if the mission fails.

In the old days, members used their own techniques, trained themselves and were mentally prepared to face the monsters. Nowadays this has certain restrictions; you must measure certain strength if you are in public, if a companion is seriously injured by a carelessness of your skill it will result in an execution for treason.

Church members may not interfere in the affairs of the organization or the country. If one were to break that agreement, he can either fight to the death against a "soldier" or settle the matter judicially, where he will lose his stay in the Church. Unfortunately, men of skill choose to assassinate them, as it wastes less time and paperwork.

One of them was a woman. You could tell by the feminine figure in the costume. She carried a throwing weapon in her hand; it was a large *chacram*. She did not need to spin it with her fingers, for with her skill she could levitate it in her right hand. The weapon shot out at a high speed, embedding itself in the monster's neck; the *skinwalker* screamed from the pain and ran towards the girl, while one of the men rushed to Jean's position.

This man was constantly firing two shotguns at the monster's chest, so the *skinwalker* turned sharply to attack the man, using his long tongue and piercing his left arm through to the shoulder. The arm was hard as a rock and its veins protruded from the skin.

“Do it now” the man ordered the woman.

The *chacram* whirled like a saw around the monster's neck, spinning several times until the *skinwalker's* head fell dry on the ground. The man pulled his tongue hard, revealing a large gaping hole in his limb. Because he was in enormous pain, his arm was held stiff to

prevent bleeding. Nothing was supposed to get through his magic armor, until now that he was fighting a high''level *skinwalker*.

''The hard part starts now. "D, take the boy and get away from here" ordered the other man in a serious tone to the guy with the broken arm.

''Got it! ''shouted D. He grabbed the unconscious young man and ran to the other end of the street.

The man who was the captain of the group stood on the roof of the establishment. He had no weapons with him, as he was merely relying on his ability as full support; the *skinwalker's* body convulsed on his feet, from his wound grew another head, but this time it was not humanoid, but similar to that of a deer. A green glow emanated from the inside of its mouth, as well as from its elongated eyes. Its lower jaw was open to 160 degrees, letting out three tentacle''like tongues; it attacked the woman by punching her in the stomach, pushing her several meters away from it and extended its tongues in an attempt to kill her.

The *chacram* flew again in the direction of the beast, it cut the three tongues in one cut and the green blood of the beast splattered on the ground; the weapon left a magnetic state in the wound, attracting the bus against the black body, crushing it against the walls of the establishment. The monster threw the truck angrily, the girl divided her *chacram* into three equal parts and directed them to quickly slash the monster's body, making deep cuts. The *skinwalker* grabbed the woman and was about to devour her when something bit her arm.

A two''meter black frog amputated the limb, chewed off the piece of the arm and swallowed it, going "glup". The *skinwalker* roared in pain and tried to kill the frog, which was spitting sticky slime around its much larger enemy. In those moments the woman tried to pull away from the limb, which was tense: if the frog failed, she might die on the spot.

Jean awoke to the noise of the fight going on beyond, he tried to get up, but the pain would not allow him to do anything. D was still fighting a pair of *wendigos*. One of the monsters grabbed his face with the intention of bursting it, but failed to do any damage. D blew its head off with a shotgun blast, reloaded the gun, loading it downward to kill a *wendigo* that was going to attack him from below and who fell dead as the back of his neck was ground down by the impact; he shot another enemy again and as he could not use his other arm to load the gun, he decided to use it as a club, hitting three with a single attack and bursting their jaws.

''Stay behind me, boy" said D as he broke the back of a *wendigo* who wanted to eat the boy with his rotting arms outstretched.

''How did those things get in? ''asked Jean trying to move his body away from the black blood that flooded the floor. The young man was making an attempt to remain calm in the face of the grotesque situation in which he unfortunately found himself rudely involved; his pride was by far greater than the beast that murdered the rector and probably ordered his rival to be eaten, so he would not allow himself to be seen pissing his pants.

“I don't know, and if I did, I'm not qualified to answer civilians about things they don't understand. It's impossible that the seals around the village were ruined out of nowhere” D replied. I also don't know why you survived the attacks from your little friend over there. “He pointed to the *skinwalker*, who was nearly paralyzed below the hip from the black frog's slime.

“Snaatch! “shouted the frog with a harsh, cavernous sound. It leapt at its enemy's head, opening its jaws to bite its jugular with its three rows of fangs, but the *skinwalker* punched it straight into its jaws and the arm pierced the back of Snaatch's neck, who fell dead.

The man on the roof let out a bunch of papers, which were seals to exorcise paranormal entities more easily, as they weakened or even succeeded in eliminating them. They stuck on Snaatch's slime and, consequently, also on the body of his semi“anthropomorphic enemy; the *skinwalker* counterattacked by pulling out six more tongues, which extended up to the ceiling trying to catch the man, who dodged it by spinning and running the six muscles with inhuman skill.

“From nothingness I come, to nothingness I go and nothing I have, manifest yourself, holy spear” said the man. From the ground emerged a two“meter spear with a thin tip that shone like gold. It was a pilum and came from the same place as Snaatch, a place where weapons and creatures that he himself had tamed during previous missions can be stored.

He cut with the tip of the pilum three tentacles that stretched in the direction of its thorax and disintegrated after being amputated. The rest of the affected tongues writhed like worms about to die as white lines appeared on them and reached the monster's body, which screamed in pain. He made a gesture with his left hand and then stabbed the remaining tongues with the tip; a glowing sphere appeared at the place indicated by the spear and caused the muscles to vanish as well.

The beast's body shuddered as it was enveloped in a luminous aura. A strip running from the stomach to the head opened, letting out something black in a fetal position; when the monster completely disintegrated, that thing began to move in a silly way. Humanoid in appearance and slender, it rose up completely furious. It sniffed the smell of D's blood, which was impregnated in the air, mischievously opened its human mouth resembling a smile and rose a couple of centimeters from the ground heading towards Jean's position.

“You have to move” D ordered, looking at the *skinwalker*'s real body.

“Even if I wanted to, I can't, I'm burning all over” replied Jean, exhausted and breathing heavily.

“Then you will die here” said D, “I will not allow that thing to reincarnate in another body and obviously it will not devour me. Maybe you thought that by saving humans we would be something like heroes, but it's the opposite; we do what is necessary to prevent these beasts from emerging, no matter what method we use. You are going to die now.

Jean remembered that phrase with anguish, the same threat from years ago. It happened when he was six years old and was in a similar situation. In those days, his older brother

was a role model, always looking out for him in case of danger and staying to play when the freckled boy was bored. The older brother was a sophomore in college, so his parents didn't see the change in his attitude as a bad thing, blaming it on the stress of college students. His brother was having trouble paying the rent on his apartment at the same time as his studies. He made the risky decision to get into drugs to make more money, because his salary was bad enough and he couldn't make it through the winter.

One day when he was taking care of Jean, a man stood outside his house circling around it to enter the home; he was looking for his brother inside the house cautiously when he saw the young man and the boy in the living room. The college boy owed money to his boss and had ratted them out for money, so she sent him to kill him.

His brother pushed the boy behind the sofa when he saw the armed man, seconds later he pulled out his gun to defend himself from danger, shooting his adversary in the chest; the enemy, at the same time, also pulled the trigger, giving him an accurate shot to the heart. Jean came out from behind the sofa dazed and frightened by the dry noise of the gunshots, only hearing a high'' pitched whistle. It was then that he saw his brother on the floor covered in blood and the other man, who was already dead; the little boy remained in a state of *shock* for hours.

As neighbors heard the commotion inside the property, they decided to take action, finding an unresponsive child and two dead men. They called their parents as well as 911, but, unfortunately, the police never managed to find the hit man's boss and closed the case. For the Thompson family, however, that wound in their lives would not close with the passage of time. The freckled one still has that trauma, his feelings were cooling as he realized that his brother sought that lifestyle, having a weak will, and decided not to be like him, living no matter what.

The *skinwalker* was closer, but the man on the roof summoned a fat toad with a four'' meter wingspan, mounted his familiar and ordered it to jump. The animal landed a couple of meters away from the woman and then gave another boost until it reached its enemy. The monster, noticing this, accelerated its movement and arrived behind D.

D was choking Jean, who was spitting foam for lack of air, when the *skinwalker* stabbed him in the back, piercing his chest and killing him almost instantly. The freckled man fell to the ground, coughing as he caught his breath; D's body writhed on his feet as he was enveloped in a black aura, all his bones creaking like thin branches. At last he got a new body and the void man tried to skewer him with the holy spear, but the monster's back stiffened and the beast turned sharply, taking the weapon from his hunter; white lines appeared on his arm causing him the same burning pain as before, but thanks to his new ability he could resist more, he broke the spear and threw the broken part away.

''For fuck's sake! ''Void shouted, leaping off the animal and summoning a pair of daggers tipped with the design of half of King David's star. The *skinwalker* killed the toad by smashing its snout with a punch before it could do anything and after that he lunged punching at Void. The soldier also landed several blows, but none were lethal, as the entity covered its torso with both hardened arms, incapacitating the summoner with a punch to the chest.

Jean stood up as best he could, almost hunched over, managing to lift the heavy tip of the pilum, which took effect against the young man, causing white lines to appear all over his body. The being looked at the young man and grabbed him by the neck to indulge in his scent. Four metallic blades were embedded in the back of his neck, which gave the boy several seconds of advantage by rendering him unconscious, and the young man thrust the weapon into the heart of the enemy. From its chest emerged a sphere of light that grew with the seconds until it exploded half of the monster, finally killing it.

The freckled man fell to the ground with his nose and mouth bleeding, just as he was crying from the pain, becoming unconscious again. Void and the woman approached the teenager curiously.

“What are you, boy?” asked Void.

“You'd better not do anything to him yet” said a young blond man coming out of the forest with his jacket sleeve torn and his arm amputated. He was as good as new and smiled proudly. I knew it.