

## Westcrest

### Season 1: Epilogue

Kung Mao watched the bald-headed woman shiver and pull the threadbare rug around her shoulders. The old monk was impressed—many of his own initiates still wouldn't have been able to endure such an extended length of meditation out in the freezing courtyard, but the woman named Helena had been sitting still for hours.

Mao would have wondered if she had frozen to death had he not just seen her shiver, for up here, high in the Himalayas, the wind was not just cold... it could be deadly. But Kung Mao's lodger would not be cowed by the weather.

Chatravati had written a letter informing Mao that he would be sending one of his students to stay at the temple with him, but the monk had not expected her to be so beautiful. At first he had worried that her presence might prove distracting to his other pupils, since she looked more like a movie star than a monk.

That had been helped my Helena's willingness to adopt the simple robes worn by the monks and on her second day at the temple she had asked Mao if he would cut off her hair. He had seen relief dawn on her face with each jet-black length of it that he had sheared away.

Truly it *was* attachment that caused all human suffering, Mao mused.

Since then, Mao had been teaching Helena various meditation techniques and educating her about the ascetic lifestyle lead by the monks. According to Chatravati, the woman had a demon in her. If that were the truth, Mao could see no signs of it now.

Out in the courtyard, Helena could barely feel her body anymore and *still* the voice raged within her. It whispered, it lisped and it cajoled. *You came to me for help*, it rattled. *I granted you my power*.

But Helena wouldn't listen. Instead she opened her eyes and stared out at the snow-capped mountains. The Himalayas were massive; immutable except for the ravages of time. Not even Hel herself had the power to affect them.

"You saved us," Marcus had told her after that night at Club Mojo, but he had known as much as she did that it had been the Goddess who had saved them; and in order for that to have happened, Helena first needed to have lost control.

She was terrified that it would happen again.

That was why Chatravati had sent her here, to Kung Mao's silent, snowy haven. Here she could attempt to find some inner peace; to silence the Goddess.

*You bitch*, said the voice inside her head. *You killed them. You killed THEM ALL.*

“Helena,” said a voice from behind her and Helena let out a little gasp. “I’m sorry to startle you, but you should come inside,” said Kung Mao. “There is bread and tea...”

Mao seldom saw such dedication in those that visited the temple. The monk was certain that Helena was making progress, but doubted Chatravati would be happy if he sent her back frozen solid. “Please, come inside,” he repeated. “It is too cold out here.”

“Yes. Thank you,” said Helena with a little nod and the monk could not help but be shaken once more by her beauty, which had diminished little (if at all) by the shaving of her head. The monk bowed and left her alone with the mountains.

On the other side of the world, Marcus was loading bodies onto a trailer. The night was cold in Genoa City and every time Marcus breathed out he made clouds of warm mist that lingered and luminesced beneath the orange streetlights.

The bodies beneath the tarpaulin belonged to zombies. Since the night of the Massacre the streets had become overrun with them. Zombies were like the rats of the demon world, Marcus reckoned, and in the absence of a modern-day Pied Piper, the citizens of Genoa City needed to rely on Marcus to protect them.

They weren’t actually calling them *zombies* in the newspapers, of course. The media always had some sort of logical explanation for this sort of thing. The events at Club Mojo had been blamed on drugs. “Mass hysteria” the Tribune had called it. Mass murder was closer to the truth.

A car pulled into the end of the street and Marcus swore at the sight of the flashing red and blue lights. He had been performing zombie patrols for two weeks now, but had so far avoided any run-ins with *Genoa City’s finest*.

“Heyup,” said the police officer as he drew up alongside the trailer. He was chewing gum and wearing reflective sunglasses, despite it being after midnight. “Need any help?”

“No,” said Marcus as he finished securing the tarpaulin over the bodies. “Just helping a buddy move across town,” as he said this he swatted the undead load with his hand. On the trailer, something groaned.

“Mind if I take a look?” Asked the officer as he cranked the hand-brake of the patrol car.

Marcus felt his eye twitch. He hadn’t been expecting this. He had hundreds of years of military tactics programmed into his brain, but dealing with 21<sup>st</sup> century police officers was an entirely different matter.

“I’m in kind of a hurry,” said Marcus. “Hanging out for a ‘dog. Extra mustard.”

In truth, Marcus hadn’t eaten a hot-dog since he had been caught in Wormwood’s gas station explosion.

"I know *exactly* what you mean," said the police officer, who was still chewing and chewing. At that moment a grey, undead hand slipped out from beneath the tarpaulin and clutched at Marcus.

The officer *must* have seen the hand before Marcus stuffed it back beneath the tarp, but he gave no indication that he had witnessed anything unusual. "Have a good night, Sir," he said with a nod and lifted off the hand-brake.

"You too," said Marcus as the police car drove away. He would have to mention this to Chatravati when he returned to the island tonight. Something wasn't right.

Police Chief Hogan Dale stood in the blue glow of computer monitors that dominated the the Sanctum, the central hub of the Genoa City Police Department. There were dozens of monitors set into the walls of the room and each provided real-time reports from officers as they patrolled the streets.

"There," said Dale to a technician who sat hunched over a keyboard. "Patch me through to *that one*."

The chief pointed to an icon that looked like a strange red squiggle and the technician rolled his eyes—like anyone actually said "patch me through" anymore.

"Heyup," came a voice over the line. "Was definitely one of *them*. Must've had at least two dozen under there."

Video footage of Marcus standing beside the trailer began to play on a large screen set into the centre of the back wall. Dale watched as something that looked like a hand fell free from beneath the tarpaulin.

"Good," said the Chief. "Whoever they are, there's no way we'd be keeping the streets clear without them. At least, not until we launch the *prototype*."

But that's a story for another day.

Quite a distance away from such silliness, Conor was sitting in Westcrest's library and struggling to keep his eyes open.

"What are you looking for?" Chatravati asked as he entered the library.

Conor jumped, startled by the question. He rubbed his eyes with the fingers of one hand. "Nothing," he said. "It's not important," and then he asked: "How's Helena?"

"Kung Mao says that she is doing well," said Chatravati. "Or... as well as can be expected."

Conor nodded. "And the zombies?"

"I fear that Genoa City won't *ever* be the same," said Chatravati with a sigh. "The people have changed. They are beginning opening their eyes to things beyond their understanding. I fear that... the wheels are in motion. So to speak. What exactly are you looking for in those books, Conor? Perhaps I could be of some assistance?"

"Nothing," said Conor. "It's nothing."

Chatravati raised an eyebrow, but he didn't ask again.

Jeremy and Sarra sat together on a swinging seat beneath the domed glass roof of the conservatory. Strange and exotic plants loomed all around them, regularly tended to by Chatravati. There were birds of paradise and leafy green ferns and lilacs and petunias and even a ragged, overgrown tangle of daisies.

"How are you feeling?" Sarra asked and Jeremy groaned in response.

"You need to stop asking me," he said. "I'm *fine*."

She poked him in the ribs and he laughed, throwing back his dusty blonde hair. It was getting long, Sarra realised. Or maybe it had been long to begin with and she'd never noticed.

"Your life before you came here..." Sarra began. "Do you miss it?"

"I don't know," said Jeremy. Fireflies bumbled around them.

"You don't talk about your past much," said Sarra.

"I don't really feel like I have one," said Jeremy and he was telling the truth. His oldest memories were of living on the streets—stealing food from takeaway joints and supermarket rubbish bins before he had been hired by DuPont.

"Well..." began Sarra. "You have one *now*. Since being with Westcrest,"

"Since I was *kidnapped*," said Jeremy and they both laughed.

"It's true though," Sarra continued. "Think of all the things that you've done! You met Nessie..."

"I still think that's a stupid name," he said and Sarra elbowed him even harder than normal.

"If you *must* know, it's not her *real* name, but I can't pronounce the other one."

"Really?"

"Yeah, Chatravati knows it. Go ask him!"

"He's probably too busy brewing tea," said Jeremy and they laughed some more.

"What else?" asked Sarra.

“I fell into a painting.”

“Thankfully it wasn’t a priceless antique,” said Sarra. “Is it still hanging up?”

Jeremy nodded. He had taken to avoiding the entire corridor of the mansion where the painting hung. It made him nauseous just to think of it. The memories of his visit to the Crimson Court seemed vague now—more like a dream than something that had really happened.

“I have an idea...” said Sarra.

Later, Jeremy and Sarra stood on the front lawn of Westcrest while the red painting sizzled and spluttered on the bonfire. The smoke that rose from the canvas was thick and tinged with red and Jeremy couldn’t deny that it made him feel a little better seeing the painting go up in flames.

“Look,” said Sarra, grabbing Jeremy’s hand and pointing it out at the lake. A tiny speck of light floated in the distance and it was coming closer.

“Marcus,” said Jeremy, stepping back from the smoke and squinting into the darkness. He could scarcely believe that he had arrived on the island that very same way only a few months ago.

And on the other side of the painting, the Crimson Court burned...