



**MOONLIGHT  
SPECIAL**



**JUSTIN ROBINSON**



**FRANK HAD NEVER BEEN MORE UNIMPRESSED  
IN HIS LIFE AT THE SIGHT OF  
WHAT OPENED THE OFFICE DOOR.**

Moss was a short man, bearing a distracting resemblance to a weasel some joker shoved into a suit. He looked like he was trying to cultivate a mustache, but his five o'clock shadow was thick enough that it throttled any attempt at more refined facial hair. He didn't look great, either. Dark circles bruised the undersides of his brown eyes. Moss started when he took Frank in, as though he was surprised to see him.

Moss was the source of that nervous gasoline scent, and close up it caught more like the wrong side of a bender. Whatever dime-store cologne he'd sloshed over the sweat was losing the fight. That nervousness poked the wolf. The little man smelled like *prey*.



**PRAISE FOR MOONLIGHT SPECIAL**

Everything in *Moonlight Special* is delivered with the force of a prizefighter's haymaker, down to the last line. // Robinson takes us nose first into the scents and smells of the City of Devils, all the grit and grime, the nightclub's swirling smoke, orange blossoms in the hills outside of town, now and then a hint of boudoir. And blood. — A. J. Sikes, author of the *Redemption* trilogy

Robinson's writing is // elegantly grim and moody, sexy and inviting, rich and edgy. Naturally, I can't top his own wording: "honey drizzled on barbed wire." Fine-tuned, not a word wasted, until every moment, every understated look, every word, and most importantly, every character *bleeds*. // Justin Robinson is a master class writer that's as skilled as he is imaginative and soulful, making him the perfect storyteller. — Julie Hutchings, author of *The Harpy* trilogy and the *Vampires of Fate* series

## **PRAISE FOR UNWITCH HUNT**

With this fun fantasy, Robinson expands the world of his *City of Devils* series... // Robinson leavens the mystery with a lot of humor // and a charming heroine. This adventure is sure to delight with its embrace of being oneself whether others accept it or not. — *Publishers Weekly*

Justin Robinson has yet again sent one sailing out of the park, over the stands, and somewhere into the neighboring county. — A. J. Sikes, author of the *Redemption* trilogy

## **PRAISE FOR A STITCH IN CRIME**

Robinson's tale is a treasure trove of monstrous delights and, despite Jane's gruesome origins, she proves an endearing lead. With its heady blend of noir and campy horror, this rollicking adventure doesn't disappoint. — *Publishers Weekly*

## **PRAISE FOR WOLFMAN CONFIDENTIAL**

Robinson's writing is a delightful cross between H.P. Lovecraft and Raymond Chandler, and it revels in its oddities and dark tones. His eye for detail and entertaining side characters (a cornucopia of monsters that have overrun L.A. and often speak in tongue-in-cheek one-liners) create a delightfully rich atmosphere that the reader can plunge into. — *Publishers Weekly*

## **PRAISE FOR FIFTY FEET OF TROUBLE**

Once again, Justin Robinson provides an engaging and entertaining romp through the world of noir Los Angeles post-monster war. He's hilarious, his characters are endearing and boy, can he weave a mystery. — Ashley Perkins, *Game Vortexer*

## ***PRAISE FOR CITY OF DEVILS***

Robinson crafts a uniquely interesting world that is sure to please horror, science fiction, and mystery fans alike. — *Minneapolis Books Examiner*

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# ***MOONLIGHT SPECIAL***

***JUSTIN ROBINSON***



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For the Owl and the Turtle



# ONE

**T**he viscous puddle in the middle of the Persian rug used to be a gremlin. To the casual eye, say that of a patrol wolf on his first day in uniform, it might look like the remnants of a late-night meal of raw possum that a drunken ogre had upchucked on the way to the commode. It did have a half-digested look about it, with the green and yellow fluids caking on the threads of the rug and the bones gone all rubbery. Detective Frank Wolfman had seen more than one gremlin buy it this way, so he knew what he was taking in even before the fresh-faced kid who looked like he hadn't seen his first full moon told Frank where the ghoulish shat in the graveyard.

"Name's..." The kid paused. Frank didn't blame him. Of all the hinky handles going around, gremlins had the hinkiest. "Lord High Decoratorius, Maker of Things and Breaker of Illusions. Says here, most people knew him as 'Ducktail.'"

Frank grunted. They got pretty lucky, all told, what with gremlins' habit of growing a little signature bit of hair. Kept folks from stumbling over those godawful names like something out of a Flash Gordon serial. Didn't take a detective with Frank's years to know exactly what had happened to Ducktail. Fact was, the east-facing window was wide open, and had it been morning, the sun would be making the rapidly drying remains glisten like fresh ambergris. A motion picture of the crime couldn't have told Frank more.

**JUSTIN ROBINSON**

“Time of death was—”

“This morning,” Frank said.

“Uh, yeah. That’s right.”

Frank nodded to himself and checked the curtains. The pull was a gold braided rope, making the window resemble a movie screen. He fished in his pocket for a pen, then lifted the cord with that, squinting at it. It glittered, like whoever made it had worked real gold dust into the thread.

“We’ll dust it for prints,” the rookie said.

Frank nearly laughed. Prints weren’t something you found all the time anymore. Or even most of the time. Half the monsters out there didn’t leave them, either for lack of fingers or some other cockamamie reason. Prints would still put away meatsticks, though—and if you looked hard enough, there was usually a meatstick involved somehow. If not a meatstick, then a zombie. That’s who they were supposed to pop for these crimes, and the reason they all still packed lead in their heaters.

Still, something didn’t ring quite right here. Frank stared at the cord. Specifically, at a silvery crust that ran up it in short streaks. Wasn’t much of it, but enough that he couldn’t stop staring. He gave it a sniff; smelled like a hard rain. He dropped the cord.

“Who else was here?” Frank growled at the kid.

“Huh? Oh, let’s see. The housekeeper. She’s a haunt-in. We have her over in the kitchen. We think there was one more, though.”

“One more?”

“Follow me, Detective.”

Frank followed the kid out into the front hall, then up the stairs. He wished that these rookies would just spit it out, but sometimes they ran into something they couldn’t quite put into the neat and clean boxes of “upstanding citizen” and “punk killer.” Or maybe they just loved a little bit of drama. They *were* in Hollywood, after all.

The place even *looked* like a gremlin’s flop: a big old Victorian pressed flush up against Mount Lee. From the roof, Ducktail could have seen the *Hollywoodland* sign launch itself into the air every few hours, shooting off

## **MOONLIGHT SPECIAL**

enough fireworks to make it seem like D-Day. It was quite a sight; Los Angeles was famous for it. Other than that, the house was as dark as a cave, with drapes that smothered every bit of light and warmth that got within spitting distance. Everything was low, too; furnished with a two-foot-tall inhabitant in mind. Meant Frank kept barking his shins on end tables at perfect shin-barking height, and he'd have to stoop uncomfortably to take a gander at all the pictures. The upper parts of the walls were decorated with expansive scenes of the desert at night. Pretty in the sort of way you didn't have to look at them all the time. Frank liked that.

The rookie led Frank through a half-open door. Heavy locks, all on the outside and bolted firmly to the wood, stood open. Frank didn't have to look to know what was in there, but he did anyway. The room was likely the smallest in the house; he hadn't done a comparison, but these usually were. The one window was barred with thick iron. Most of the room was taken up by a big, square cage, like something Barnum would have used to move a tiger. Inside was a fairly clean bedroll and a bucket that stank exactly like a bucket in that situation was supposed to.

"Guess it happened before he cleaned the bucket," Frank observed.

"What's this, sir?"

Frank looked at the kid for the first time. *Really* looked. He could have come directly from a cornfield. Blue eyes, blond hair, a body for the gridiron. His face was honest and guileless and in the next couple years he was going to burn every last bit of that out.

"Nursery," Frank said. Newfangled tradition with monsters. He'd never had one, but he was a rougher generation, already riding off into the sunset.

"Where's the crib?"

"Not that kinda nursery, kid. These days, you get monsters who want the whole experience. They got someone in mind, but they want to raise 'em first. They take 'em, put 'em on ice in one of these nurseries, then change 'em when they're good and ready."

"That's not illegal?"

**JUSTIN ROBINSON**

Frank shrugged. "Search me. Alls I know is, good luck getting the DA to prosecute." He nudged the cage door. It creaked wide open.

"The cage was empty when we got here."

"I figured. We know who was in it?" He poked his head in, sniffing first the bars, then the bedroll. Sweat, mostly, and enough of it that if he smelled the same sweat again, he'd know it.

"Sure do. Neighbor called in a half-naked meatstick prowling around their property. We arrested him. He's waiting for you at the station."

Frank nodded. Easy enough to put together. The kind of case the LAPD ran on. Some monster was trying to give an ungrateful human the good life, and that human turned it around, melted him with the sun. Wouldn't be the first time, and Frank had solved cases like that. This time, though...this time something smelled off.

"Hey, Detective. You think we got him?"

"Got who?"

The kid looked around, like saying the words would summon the thing that went bump in the night. "The Monster Slayer."

Frank snorted. "Monster Slayer's a myth, kid. Press made him up to sell papers. Now where's this housekeeper?"

The kid's shoulders slumped. Everybody and his uncle wanted a piece of that case, but fairytales didn't get hauled before a judge. "She's down in the kitchen," he mumbled.

The kitchen was the one place that didn't have blackout curtains on the windows. Frank glanced outside and saw why: a canopy, formed from the branches of trees with multicolored sheets bridging the gaps. Blocking the sun in style. The backyard was an oasis, with multilevel pools, waterfalls over glistening rocks, and ferns that looked positively prehistoric. Lawn furniture, all done up in gold, shimmered by the pool.

A hiss that sounded like it was pulled from the neck of a cheesed-off dinosaur made Frank jump back like a startled cat. On the other side of the glass door leading out to the patio, a white bird beat its gigantic wings against the window, desperate to commit a second homicide in the place.

## **MOONLIGHT SPECIAL**

Its black-and-orange bill was open, hissing like a cobra Frank owed money to. Frank had been in the presence of things that wanted him dead more than a few times, but nothing had ever wanted it more than this bird. It pecked the glass with its massive bill and Frank had a vision of the whole thing shattering and that monster bird making good on its threat. He halfway reached for the gat under his arm—lead was good for birds too, if he remembered right.

“Don’t be afraid.” The voice was a sepulchral moan, and Frank turned to find a ghost floating in the kitchen. Her throat was cut, and she appeared to be bleeding spiders. Her eyes were haunted by the atrocities she’d seen in Hell. Frank sighed in relief. “She can’t get in.”

Frank jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the bird that was still entertaining fantasies of carnage. “What is that, a goose?”

“A swan,” said the ghost. “My employer’s pet. Meanest thing you will ever meet on either side of the veil.”

“Why did he keep it?”

“He was a gremlin.”

Frank shrugged. “Yeah, that adds up.” The ghost smelled a lot like ghosts tend to: mist hovering over a graveyard. “Name?”

“Mourning Fogg,” the ghost said, and spelled it.

“All right, Ms. Fogg. I need you to tell me everything that happened.”

# Two

**F**rank let the ghost's statement rattle around in his attic like a phantom who just found where they kept the chandeliers. Fogg was a transplant from St. Louis, coming west with nothing but dreams and a small box filled with her mortal remains. Wanted to be a set decorator and wound up as a gremlin's maid. Just another Tinseltown dream turned sour in the harsh light of day.

He was still gathering cobwebs when he stepped out of the dead gremlin's house onto the sleepy Hollywood street. It was the middle of October in the City of Devils, meaning it was a little chillier and a little drier than the months around it but was otherwise unrecognizable as being distinct from the rest of the year.

"Detective?"

Frank looked around, momentarily unable to figure out where the voice was coming from. It was silky and rich, the kind of voice that should be on a radio. The crawling eye slithering up the sidewalk solved that mystery. They always had voices that should be introducing jazz standards or advising exhausted armies to surrender.

This one was dressed more than most, with a gray-checked collar and a small cape right under where her tentacles and eyeball met. The eye, though a couple feet across, was a fetching shade of green, complete with long, fake eyelashes. She was the closest thing to a cartoon Frank had ever seen.



## MOONLIGHT SPECIAL

“What?” he growled at her.

“Pearl Friday, *Los Angeles Minion*.”

Frank’s grunt of disgust could have curdled milk. “Yeah, I know who you are.”

“I want to talk to you about the murder of Lord High Decoratorius.”

“No comment.”

“Detective Wolfman, isn’t it?” she asked.

Frank stopped. “What do you want, Friday?”

“People deserve to know what’s happening in their community.”

“And you aim to tell ’em.”

“That’s why I’m here.”

“Then what are you doing working for the *Minion*?”

“Is that your way of telling me *No comment*?” she asked.

“Chops like that, you could be a detective.”

“I thought all it took to be a detective was pointing at the nearest human.”

“A bleeding heart, is that it?”

The edge of a word tickled Frank’s ear, but Friday swallowed it before she gave it voice. “We got off on the wrong foot. I just want to know if you have any suspects. A pillar of the community murdered, it helps to know the brave detectives of the LAPD are getting their man.”

“Which makes me wonder how you got here so fast.”

“Don’t be naïve. It doesn’t suit you.”

Frank had to admit, she kind of had a point there. Any reporter on the crime beat worth the salt would be paying off somebody at the station. “Fair enough,” he grunted. “What do you know about this...” he waved at the dead gremlin’s house. Saying the name made him feel ridiculous.

“You’ll talk to me?”

“Yeah, yeah. You know something?”

“Reputation, mostly. You read the gossip columns?”

“Do I look like I read the gossip columns?”

“No, but in a town like this one, petty gossip can be a motive as sharp

**JUSTIN ROBINSON**

as a blade, you know? Decoratorius doesn't have the best reputation, if you follow me."

"Find me a gremlin that does."

"More than most. He was a set decorator on a lot of big pictures. Good enough at the job that no one minded he was..." She paused as one crimson tentacle plucked a notebook from the pocket of her cape. She delicately turned the pages, and read, "...a scaly tyrant."

"Who called him that?"

"If you read the gossip pages, you'd know that. You got someone or not?"

"Not."

"So, what do you say, detective? Do I have a friend on the force?"

Frank fixed her with his full attention for the first time since the conversation began. "Way I look at it, you don't need a friend. You write whatever you're gonna write. I can't stop you. Only ones who can have mansions on Mulholland and offices with doors and such. Ask them who your friends are and let me do my job." He stalked for his car. Maybe a year or two ago, the wolf would be snarling under the surface, ready to be let off the leash. Not now. He was already too tired. Friday was a dime a dozen, and she had to know it.

Friday called after him: "We're all just trying to do our jobs, detective."

"If you figure out what that is, let me know," Frank muttered as he got into his car.





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I also need to thank Athena Andreadis of Candlemark & Gleam. She continues to believe in this series and gives me the kind of leeway that any author would kill for. C&G remains the gold standard of small presses under her able leadership.

No book is easy, and this one gave me more trouble than most. Maybe because I wrote it in early/mid-2020 when I wasn’t in the most optimistic of places. Kate Sullivan and Julie Hutchings both lent me their editorial skills, helping me craft what ended up being a strong, if extremely dark, entry in my flagship series. Kate and Julie are two of the finest editors in the business and I am lucky to be able to work with them.

Lastly, I want to thank you, the reader. Whether you’re picking this up on a lark or you’ve been with me since the beginning, I am eternally grateful. I couldn’t do this without you.





## ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Much like film noir, Justin Robinson was born and raised in Los Angeles. He splits his time between writing and taking care of a small human. Degrees in Anthropology and History prepared him for unemployment, but an obsession with horror fiction and a laundry list of phobias provided a more attractive option. He is the author of more than 15 novels in a variety of genres including noir, humor, fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Most of them are pretty good.

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