

## Prologue

# GRIM WARS

FANTASIA HILLMAN

*IT STARTED WITH THE BLISTERS. A week ago, Thomas, the old cropper was the first. He had just returned from tending to the villages crops carrying sacks of carrots and potatoes. Two days later we saw them, red, pussy blotches the size of a thumb. They seemed to have sprouted overnight on his neck. The blisters then sprouted more on his legs and groin areas, but they were bigger than a thumb, nearly the size of an egg. Then came the fever and vomiting of blood. Thomas died on the third day. Soon more people in the village started experiencing the same thing as old man Thomas but worse. Some parts of the skin turned black and some villagers started experiencing chronic pain. There were even small bite marks on their necks and hands that looked like rashes.*

*No one knew what the cause of this was. We heard from a messenger that people in town experienced the same thing as us in the village. The town's people called it; The Black plague.*

*Some of the villagers who became sick died within three days. We were a poor village, there weren't many animals roaming around to kill and roast. The crops grew but some were just too bad to eat. People starved and died after catching the sickness. I didn't have much to eat either. My parents tried their best to feed me at least once a day but a growing girl needs nutrients and a meal of three at least every day. I too will die because I caught the illness.*

*I laid in my dirty bed crying into my dirty bloody hands. I heard the screams of my people outside in the night. The hairs on my blistered bruised arm stood on end. I couldn't move because of the chronic pain in my groin area mainly on the right side. If I were to stand up something inside me might snap. Just two days ago I was picking flowers for my mother out in the meadow, and then I got this tickle feeling on my neck like something bit me. I had the same symptoms as those who died last week, just two after the flower picking. My parents deserted me as soon as they saw the blisters and me coughing up*

blood. I thought they loved me, but I guess they didn't. I should've seen the signs, especially from my mother. She never appreciated the flowers I'd bring to her. Father never paid attention. I think it's because he wanted a son. It didn't matter, I was going to die, alone.

My mouth was dry like sand on a hot day and my stomach churned like butter from no food. I haven't eaten anything since my parents left; that was three days ago.

**"WE HAS'T TO BURN IT ALL"**

A crazed man shouted from outside. It startled me and I lifted my head up to look out the door across the room from me. Outside I saw some of the non-sick villagers burning down other huts with people still in them with torches.

**"KILLETH THE SICK!"**

My whole body tensed up from hearing that. They will eventually come over to my hut and burn me alive like the others. The flames will kill me faster than the illness.

I laid my head back slowly onto the dirty mattress and pulled the wolf's skin over my head. Thought I was inside under a cover, the smell of blood and smoke polluted my one room hut. "What has become of mine village?" I cried.

My cries turned to violent coughs. I coughed so hard I fell out of bed onto the hardwood floor. I fell on my side feeling the pus ooze out of my blisters once the floor put pressure on them. I slowly rolled onto my stomach and use my arms to slowly pull myself up. I coughed up more blood.

"Th're's anoth'r one!" I heard a woman yell. I looked up and saw a

mob of people standing in the doorway with torches. My heart raced in my chest that it sounded like drums. I wiped the blood my face nervously and slowly crawled towards the mob.

"P-Please," I begged slurring my words. "K-Kill n-not me." I stopped a few inches away from them coughing up even more blood that it flowed out of my mouth like a waterfall in bright red.

"Gaze out 'r the lady'll infect thee with black hands!" A man yelled with a raspy voice. I look at my fingers and saw that the skin was decaying away.

"Burn her!" Another man yelled. Then a torch is thrown into my hut. It landed on the bed catching fire instantly.

"NO!" I screamed. The mob retreated outside closing the door. Fire seeped in from under the door lighting up the hut. I crawled to the center of the room still coughing up blood. I stopped in the center on all fours. A beam from the ceiling fell crashing onto me leaving me trapped under it. It caught fire and burnt my back. I felt the flesh on my back melt away from the flames. It felt like one hundred thousand needles poking me. I screamed to the sizzling pain.

"I DONT WANT TO KICKETH BUCKET!" I screamed. The smoke around me began to make me dizzy and it was getting harder to breathe. I shut my eyes and laid my head down in the pool of blood; my blood.

"Do you wish to be saved?" An eerie voice said in a weird language. I opened my eyes but only saw blurriness. I wasn't sure if it was my

*imagination but I saw a dark figure. "Do. You. Wish. To. Be. Saved," the voice said more slowly this time in that same language. I didn't know what language this voice was speaking, but I understood the words, odd. The figure held out what I think was a hand to me. It looked . . . boney?*

*"I don't want to kicketh bucket," I said in a whisper, but it sounded more like a cry. "I want to live." I wiggled my arm out from under me and reached for the hand.*

*"So be it."*

*Everything around me fades and it became dark.*

## **Chapter 1: The Reaping**

No one saw me as I walked pass screaming-panicky humans towards the burning apartment building. I stopped by a young blonde girl with rosy cheeks sitting on the stone steps that led to inside. She looked so frightened and confused. Her eyes were wide open like someone was going to stick a knife through her throat. Tears flowed down the girl's eyes as did sweat from her head from the heat of the fire. I kneeled to her on one knee placing my palm on her cheek. Her body shivered, and she flinches away looking around.

"Katie!" A woman called. I stood up and saw another blonde woman running towards the young girl. "Katie I've been looking for you everywhere!" She wrapped her soot covered arms around the girl embracing her.

A loud explosion on the third floor caused a window to shatter and fall to ground. The woman took her child and ran off before the shards of

glass could kill them. I looked up into the burning night sky to see the falling shards. They sparkled like diamonds in the flames light.

"Hmm, I was going to use the steps but now there appears to be an opening to the third floor," I said. I held out my right hand summoning my death scythe. I held it straight up so that it stood taller than I. The rod is smooth black marble in my hands and the blade hung just a foot or two above my head.

With a slam of the staff to the stone ground, my body became light and I levitate off the ground up to the broken window. I went inside of the burning apartment room and look around for my victim. It was hot and smoky, luckily for me smoke had no effect on me. But it did sting my eyes as I walked through it.

I looked around the burning room seeing that the fire has already engulfed everything. The couch in the living room, lamps laid on the floor with the lightbulbs shattered, and a bookshelf faced down on the floor with a person under it. I walk towards the scorching bookshelf and kneeled to see the body of a young boy trapped. I reached for the boy's arms with my free left hand. The flames of the rubble instantly burned away my skin, but I didn't feel any pain. The fire felt like I was washing my hand with hot water. I pull the charred boy out with my now boney-skeleton-like hand and stood over the boy. I held my boney hand to my face and saw flesh already growing back. I brought it down turning my attention back to the boy.

I couldn't really make out

the face of my *victim* because of how burnt he was. Poor thing, all blackened like charcoal, eyes were snow white, and his clothes burned into his flesh. A child like this didn't deserve such a horrid death. His parents must've forgotten him and left him here to die. They were probably too busy saving their own skin. Humans can be heartless.

"Well don't you worry, I promise you, you are going to a better place," I said. I held my scythe in both hands and shut my eyes. I deeply inhaled tilting my head up feeling the flesh around my eyes rotting away turning black. It felt like my flesh was pressing so tight against my skull just above my left and right facial nerve. I opened my eyes and looked back down at the body. I focused my eyes over his chest and saw a small white light crossing over his chest.

With one swing to the boy's chest I sliced through that light and his soul slowly emerged out. It was small but perfect sphere shape; the size of a clementine. I took the soul stuffing it into a large pocket inside my hooded cloak along with the sixty souls I had collected earlier today. In total I have sixty-one, Master will be pleased.

## Chapter 2: The Realm of Grim

I traveled to my home; The Realm of Grim. It's a home for every grim reaper my master, Azmaveth, had turned. There are two levels of this world, above ground was the lifespan graveyard, a graveyard filled with millions of stones with the names of every human on Earth from birth to death. In the very center of the graveyard was a huge patch of grass

with no stones in the ground. I went over to it and tapped the bottom of my staff twice against the dead black grass. The ground below my feet shook a little causing my scythe to vibrate a little. The ground opened revealing stone steps leading down. I went down the stone steps into a dimly lit cave. There were two paths in front of me both labeled. The right path lead to the afterlife of *Zion* and the left path *Damnation*.

I go down the *Zion* path passing the torches on the cobweb covered stone walls. I saw a dim blue light up ahead. I came up to a ledge that hung about twenty feet high from the ground. I looked down from the ledge and saw the *Holy Water* stream with billions of blue souls floating in it. I let go of my scythe and it disappeared. I then reached into the pocket of my hooded cloak and scooped up the sixty-one souls I've collected into my arms. I stepped up to the ledge a little further to the point where I could fall if I made a wrong move. "May you all finally have peace," I said then dropped them all into the holy water. They fell in illuminating the stream making it brighter. The more souls added to the stream the brighter it will get. Same thing for the *Damnation* only it's fire.

I said a quick prayer for the souls I've dumped then head back up to the surface of the realm.

I sat on the black grass staring at my own tombstone of the lifespan graveyard. It had my name in bold letters "**ALIZA THOMPSON**" and right under my name, the year I was born till the year of my *death*: **1331-1348**. 1348 was the year I died from the black plague and then brought back to life by the God of Death, Azmaveth. He gave me life in exchange for becoming

a grim reaper. I was hesitant at first but gave in and agreed. Ever since that year, that night, I've been reaping souls on a day to day basis for over six hundred years. The year was now 2017, December.

"Well well well," a male voice with a British accent said. From the sound of the voice I already knew who it was.

"Tanis," I said turning around. He was standing right before me looking down at me with his hood still over his head. I stood up so that we were face to face. "How long have you been standing there?" I asked.

"Not long," He said pulling his hood down revealing curly silver hair and pale face. He also wore an eyepatch over his left eye. If I remembered correctly he was a settler along with a group of Englishmen who set out to the New World during the 1600's. They were planning on building a town and the people already living on the land were not too happy about that. This was during the colonization of North America. Tanis fought in a war he did not plan to be in and was shot in the eye with an arrow by a Native. Like me, he was also offered a chance to live in exchange of becoming a reaper for eternity. His eye behind that eyepatch of his is as white as a ghost. It's a reminder of how he died. Every grim reaper has a scar on his or her body symbolizing how we died. I have a burned scar on my back from the fire and it will never go away.

"Do you enjoy watching me, watching my tombstone?" I asked crossing my pale arms over my chest.

"I think it's just interesting that you're the only grim here that actually reminisces about your past life and you're older than most of us."

"What makes you think I'm reminiscing about that? I hardly remem-

ber my past life," I lied.

"Hmm really? You're always here after you deliver your souls, that must mean something." He turned his back to me and walked off. "Well best deliver my thirty-one souls to the afterlife," He said before disappearing down the stone steps into the cave.

I unfolded my arms and sat back down and faced my tombstone once more. I touched the bumpy rock tracing my index finger over the numbers. What I told Tanis about not remembering anything was a lie. I remembered everything six hundred and sixty-nine years ago.

### **Chapter 3: The Change**

*I opened my eyes and saw a deep purple sky with no stars or moon. I felt little needles poking me in the back and my bare legs. I must have been lying on dead grass. I sat up slowly and rubbed my throbbing head. It felt like I've been hit on something, but what? That didn't matter; I had no idea where I was. I looked around and noticed that the dead grass I had been lying in was pitch black. I reached out with my hand to grab some of it but it immediately turned to dust in my hand. I looked around some more and saw withered and beyond that stones scattered everywhere.*

*A chill ran up my spine making my body shiver. I crossed my arms over my shoulders rubbing my hands up and down my arms. The air here was damp and cold, like death.*

*I stood up keeping my arms around me and began walking around the endless field of stones. They were unevenly shaped and size of a cow if they could stand on two feet. Each one I passed had names*

and numbers on them. Eight numbers total with a line in the middle that divided them into four numbers on the right and left. I then saw one with my name on it. I walked towards it staring at it. I noticed that it only had four numbers on the left side. It read "1-3-3-1." I was born on those numbers. Mother told me it was a cold year.

I reached out to place my palm on the rock until a gush of wind blew forcefully. My long brown hair blew violently in the wind. I put my back against the rock with my arms stretched out to keep me from blowing away. A black fog then formed a few feet in the front of me. It grew thick and thick like smoke. A figure emerged through the fog and began coming toward me slowly like a ghost. I look this thing up and down and saw that it wasn't walking on feet. It was hovering. The wind ceased, and I dropped down to the grass bringing my knees up to my chest. The figure was now within arm's reach of me. I stared at the thing in front of me. I couldn't see a face because it was hidden in the hood of its long black cloak. I saw its hands, but there wasn't any skin. I trembled with fear from the sight of that. What is it?

"W-What art thee?" I stut-tered. "Art thee devil?"

The figured scoffed, "No. Just a pawn in his and in His." He pointed up with his boney index finger. His voice was deep and eerie, and . . . I didn't recognize the language he spoke. But somehow, I understood every word he said.

"What language dose thee speak?" I asked.

"I am the God of Death, Azma-veth and this is my world. And in my world, anything goes my way. You can understand me, I can understand

everyone. I also know the names of every human on Earth."

"Earth?" I looked around at the stones, black grass, and ominous trees again. "Wh're am I?"

"My realm; the Realm of Grim and what you're sitting in is the lifes-pan graveyard. The numbers on the stones represent birth and death. This world exists between heaven and hell."

Heaven and hell? Have I died, and my spirit is trapped? "Has't I kick the bucket?" I asked. I stood up slowly keeping my back pressed against the stone behind me.

"Not quite my dear. The form you're is only an astral projection, but in this world, you will still feel as human as you did on Earth. Your body on Earth is still burning; however, but you're still alive, barely." He held out his skeletal arm and a rod with a thick blade appeared. He gripped the rod holding it up so that the blade faced up. "Come and see."

My body trembled as I walked towards him. I stood face to face with him, almost. He was very tall, so tall that he could touch a tree branch. He pointed the shiny blade to me. As I clenched my eyes shut I could feel my eyelash brush against the blade that was to poke through my eyeball. I clenched up imagining the tip of the blade piercing my iris with white pussy red liquid coming out.

"Open your eyes," Azmaveth said.

"And look." I did as he said and gazed into the blade. It started to glow red, like fire. I looked closely and realized that it was fire, but the blade wasn't on fire. It was somehow showing me an image.

"How art thee doing this?" I asked.

"Just look." I looked even closer and saw a figure in the fire, trapped

under a beam. Her flesh was slowly burning away, and all the hair on her head was gone. I recognized that girl and my heart sank to the bottom of my feet. I started to cry. The tears came down my eyes like a waterfall.

"Fear not child," Azmaveth said. "There is a reason why you are here." The blade then disappeared, and he stared at me.

"Wherefore am I h're?" I asked.

"You called to me Aliza. You wanted so badly not to die, I'm here to offer you a second chance to live."

I remembered screaming; my screaming. I swallowed still terrified of this creature. "How?"

"Simple, I'll save your life in exchange that you become my grim reaper. You will collect souls on a day to day basis for eternity." He took a step closer to me and placed his boney index finger on my forehead. Images of blue and red lights, black cloaks, tall and thin marble rods with long and sharp blades at the top, and finally ... me? Only it didn't look like me. This me had skin as white as a ghost and silver hair. I gasped when the images disappeared, and my attention focused back on Azmaveth who was now standing fewer steps away this time. "So, what's it going to be Aliza?" Azmaveth asked.

Living forever collecting . . . souls for all eternity seemed like a wrong choice. This breaks everything about nature, humans aren't meant to live forever. "Nay," I said taking a step back from him. "I-I cannot." I turned my back to him. I felt his presence behind me. I then felt his bony hands on my shoulders. His touch sent a strong chill down my spine making my body tremble. It was like cold water running down my neck.

"Aliza," Azmaveth said. "I know this isn't what you really want, otherwise I wouldn't be here before you." He tightened his grip on my shoulders digging his skeletal fingers in my flesh through the fabric of my gown.

"How doth thee know what I want?" I asked turning around to face him. He dropped his hands back to his sides. "Didst I very much call to thee?" I looked up at him staring into his black hood.

"Again, I wouldn't be standing here before you if you didn't. I felt your pain and sorrow Aliza. Now, you must hurry and decide. Become my grim reaper and live forever or die?"

I looked down at the black grass thinking. Even if I died, will anyone even miss me? My parents abandoned me and the villagers, people who I thought were my friends nearly killed me. Maybe this was another chance to live. "Y-Yes," I finally answered looking back up at Azmaveth.

"Yes what?"

"Y-Yes, I shall become thy grim reaper for all eternity."

"Is that your final answer?"

I hesitated at first then said, "Yes." I then felt a sharp pain in my chest like I was just stabbed with a sword and my mouth tasted like blood. Blood filled my mouth and rolled down my lips. I looked down at my chest and saw Azmaveth's long-pointy-boney finger sticking out of my chest right where my heart was. A purple mist came out and my body went numb. He then pulled it out of my chest through my back. Blood leaked out from the hole in my chest as I turned around to face him. I held my twitching hand over the hole trying to stop the bleeding, but it kept pouring

out of me.

"And so it begins," Azmaveth said.

*My vision went fuzzy, my head pounded like I was getting hit over and over by rocks, and my legs felt weak. I didn't realize that I had fell to the ground swimming in a pool of my own blood. Every nerve in my body erupted like volcanoes. It felt like hot magma running its way through my body. "W-What. H-Has't. Th-Thee. D-Done. T-To. M-Me?" My words slurred.*

*"You're dying," Azmaveth said.*

*"I-I. B-Bethought. Th-Thee. W're. S-Saving. M-Me?" I rolled on my back still holding my blood covered hand over the wound.*

*"The reaper serum is making its way through your body, Aliza. Everything inside you is shutting down." I looked up and see him standing over me. "The last thing you should feel is your heart stopping." Inside my body it felt like my lungs were being crushed by a boulder. It pained me to breathe. My esophagus burned every time I swallowed.*

*The pain in my body finally subsided and all I felt was my heart beat slowing down. I heard the slow thumps of my slow heartbeat. Thump . . . Thump . . . Thump . . .*

*"Now, something you should know before I leave you," Azmaveth said. "Throughout time your skin will turn pale and your hair; silver. Human weapons won't be able to penetrate your skin. Blood will no longer flow through your veins. Humans will not see you unless you want to be seen. You will be death . . . When your heart stops, you will be a grim reaper." He disappeared.*

*I lay there in my blood. I listened as my heart continued to slow*

*down. Thump . . . Thump . . . Thump. . . I turned my head to the right to see the stone with my name on it. I rolled on my stomach and crawled slowly towards it. I placed a bloody palm on the stone making a hand print over the numbers. My vision then went fuzzy again and I couldn't breathe. My heart finally stopped.*

*The numbers "1-3-4-8" was the last thing I saw before darkness consumed me.*

