

THE DARKNESS

Written by

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Based on,  
A Chapter from  
*The Abaddon Anthology*

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**INT. LUMINALL CONFERENCE SPACE - DAY**

A projector shines upon a white pull-down screen displaying a cookie-cutter SMILING MAN in a sterile white suit. He speaks through a perpetual smile, equal parts disconcerting and disarming.

SMILING MAN

--we thank you for joining our  
unstoppable team at Luminall. With  
your help we will be able to bring  
so much more *light* into the world.

The screen fades to white, displaying the company logo for LUMINALL with the slogan, "Making the World a Brighter Place". REVERSE ANGLE of the two members of the audience sitting awkwardly next to each other: CIARAN (30s) and ALINA (30s).

The lights click on, both new hires squint. They glance at each other and chuckle nervously. Standing in the doorway is an ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT

Come with me.

**INT. LUMINALL LOBBY - LATER**

Ciaran and Alina are seated next to each other in uncomfortable-looking, abstract chairs. They spend these moments of silence pretending to look around the lobby with great interest. Alina gives up first.

ALINA

Weird building.

CIARAN

Yeah. Cool though...

ALINA

Uh... Yeah. Yeah, it's cool.

She laughs, somewhat sarcastically.

ALINA (CONT'D)

I've never actually... done a job  
like this.

CIARAN

Like a cubicle job or like an...  
administrative job?

ALINA

Neither? I've definitely never  
been... onboarded before.

He looks around theatrically before whispering to her.

CIARAN

You get used to it after a while.

ALINA

... Yeah?

CIARAN

I was at Bank of U.S. then L.T.  
Finance and they both had that sort  
of onboarding video... Pretty  
standard.

He winks at her. She fights a losing battle against rolling  
her eyes.

ALINA

Right...

ATTENDANT

Come with me, please.

He shoots to his feet eagerly. Alina stifles a scoff as  
Ciaran follows barely a pace behind the office attendant.

**INT. LUMINALL CUBICLES - MOMENTS LATER**

Alina trails behind the attendant and Ciaran who rapidly trot  
across the large floor filled with cookie cutter cubicles.

Looking over the many desks the space seems fairly empty.  
Less than a dozen workers on the floor, despite the dozens of  
cubicles.

ALINA

Are a lot of people working from  
home today?

ATTENDANT

No. At Luminall we believe that  
working in-person is critical to  
our work culture and the happiness  
of our employees.

The attendant points to two neighboring desks. Each has a  
THICK ONBOARDING BOOK and a LANTERN that is topped with a  
small red bow.

Alina picks up the onboarding book as Ciaran picks up the lantern, inspecting it.

ALINA  
(under breath)  
Jesus Christ...

CIARAN  
Is this some sort of... metaphor?

The attendant looks at both of them quizzically, glances down to their phone.

ATTENDANT  
Metaphor? You haven't had lantern orientation yet?

CIARAN	ALINA
Yes?	No.

The new hires share an uncomfortable glance.

ALINA (CONT'D)  
I... don't think so.

ATTENDANT  
Hmm... Well, your manager will reach out to you today or tomorrow and schedule you for the orientation.

The attendant nods to both of them, glances at their phone a couple more times and then begins to walk back towards the exit.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)  
Welcome to Luminall! Have a shining bright day!

Alina and Ciaran wave uncomfortably, obviously unsure what they are supposed to do next.

CIARAN + ALINA  
(in awkward unison)  
Have a... bright day!

The new hires look at each other in amused disgust. As the attendant disappears, Ciaran picks the lantern back up and sits heavily in his chair.

CIARAN  
What the fuck.

ALINA  
Seriously...

She scans the room, a couple heads poking out over the tops of the other cubicles pop out of sight like frightened gophers.

CIARAN (O.S.)  
But hey--

He rolls out into the aisle, pointing at their neighboring cubicles.

CIARAN (CONT'D)  
---... roomies!

Furrowing her brow she looks at him with a sort of disgusted incredulity.

ALINA  
... Neighbors.

CIARAN  
Bah! Same thing.

ALINA  
... No... It's not.

She pulls a calendar from her bag and pins it to the back of her cubicle, in between the giant onboarding book and the mysterious lantern.

CIARAN (O.S.)  
Woah, is that a real calendar? Nerd alert!

A laborious sigh from Alina as she sits back in her chair, rolling out of frame. PUSH IN slightly on the calendar that marks that it is the 2nd day of the month.

#### **MONTAGE CENTERED ON CALENDAR**

... days mark off of the calendar

... brief bits of conversation captured between the new hires

... the lantern and onboarding book are both gently nudged out of frame and begin to collect dust

... new items are added to the cubicle, TRINKETS, PHOTOS, and odd OFFICE ITEMS

... MONTAGE ENDS as we approach the end of the month.

**BREAK ROOM**

Yawning, Alina brews tea. She accidentally knocks over the tea caddy, exposing what looks like deep scratches in the wall behind the caddy, she traces her fingers along the gashes and they fit surprisingly well. She leans down to inspect closer: jagged tears that almost resemble claw marks.

A knock at the door. She jumps, startled.

CIARAN

Hey, Roomie!

ALINA

Jesus, fuck.

CIARAN

Is Sean still here?

ALINA

Haven't seen him.

CIARAN

Damn... I swear I saw him come in here like 5 minutes ago.

She shrugs.

*CLICK.* The far side of the break room plunges into darkness. Ciaran switches the light switch on and off a few times: nothing.

CIARAN (CONT'D)

This place is a mess.

He crosses into the break room and starts to walk towards the shadow.

CIARAN (CONT'D)

Do I have to switch the bulbs in this--

ALINA

Hold up.

She grasps his elbow. They both stare into the darkness. It creeps in its stillness, as if something that you can't see is moving within the void. In truth it is just an opaque slate of abyssal black.

*CLICK.* The lights switch on and the break room is as it was before: a lonely table with a single steaming mug of coffee on the table.

CIARAN  
Huh. Nice. Well, send Sean my way,  
yeah?

He slips out of the break room with a devilish grin.

ALINA  
Find him yourself!

**CUBICLES - NEXT DAY**

Alina flips the calendar page to the next month.

ALINA  
One month, tomorrow.

Ciaran pops his head over the top of his booth.

CIARAN  
Whassat?

ALINA  
One month. Tomorrow.

CIARAN  
Oh damn--

A hush falls over the cubicle floor.

CIARAN (CONT'D)  
Oh damn!

Emerging from the imposing manager's office door is the MANAGER who marches confidently down the cubicle aisle. As the manager gets closer, Ciaran pops down into his cubicle.

CIARAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Oh damn.

The manager stops beside their cubicles.

MANAGER  
You are the... new hires?

Alina and Ciaran glance at each other nervously, meanwhile the manager isn't even looking directly at them.

ALINA  
Yes.

CIARAN

Yes!

MANAGER

Our records indicate that you haven't completed your lantern orientation. Is that correct?

ALINA

Yes.

CIARAN

Yes?

The manager winces in annoyance then sighs deeply.

MANAGER

But you do have your lanterns?

They both have to scrounge for a few seconds to pull the lanterns out. They hold the lanterns aloft.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

You'll be fine then.

The manager turns on their heel. Dozens of heads poke out from above the cubicles to observe the manager as they walk back to their office. The manager stops just outside their door and turns on their heel to address the floor.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

And do have a shining bright day.

Alina and Ciaran look at each other in confusion.

CIARAN

What--

ALINA

--the fuck.

#### CUBICLES - SAME DAY, NOON

The clock ticks by slowly and finally the hands join together to all point at twelve noon. Alina looks annoyed at how arduous the passing of time is today.

*THMM...* A deep thrumming begins to vibrate through the cubicles. Alina's knick-knacks jump and vibrate across her desk. Alina and Ciaran both poke their heads above their cubicles, hearing the other employees beginning to mumble and whisper nervously to each other.

CIARAN

What... is happening?

Alina's hand reaches towards her lantern.

ALINA  
I'm not sure but--

*WHAM!* The thrumming stops suddenly as a portion of the cubicle space behind them goes dark. *WHAM!* Another portion goes dark. *WHAM!* The lights directly overhead go out. *WHAM!* All of the lights on the cubicle floor are off, plunging the employees into a deep, opaque darkness.

Barely illuminated by ambience, Alina blindly searches across her desk. In the background lanterns click on across the office floor. A deep slithering sound, wet and heavy begins to get closer and closer... It seems to pick up speed... It's almost upon them--

*CLICK.* Alina's lantern turns on, illuminating a messy desk across from their cubicles, papers settling, drifting downwards onto the floor, littered with office paraphernalia.

The manager's office, with its floor-to-ceiling, frosted windows, still spews a rich golden light. All across the floor everyone else has their lanterns on. Ciaran, with the aid of Alina's lantern light, finally pulls his lantern out and flips it on.

*THMMMM...* A reverberant thrumming comes from all around as a voice, crackling with an evil, power-hungry mirth, emerges from the loudspeaker overhead.

MANAGER (LOUDSPEAKER)  
Three pulses today, folks! Remember they come in pairs! There goes the first.

A tittering of fear ripples through the employees gathered across the dark floor. A still but charged silence...

*CRASH!* In a cacophony of frightened noise employees stampede across the cubicle floor towards the manager's office, ramming into each other, knocking over chairs, and barreling through the thin facades that separate the cubicles. Like a herd of desperate cattle they slam against the warm light of the manager's window. The cruel silhouette of the manager paces back and forth on the other side, bathed in safe, bright light.

*THMMMMMM...* The ominous buzzing pulse ripples through the office, growing and growing and growing until--

The office goes silent. The lights flicker and the employee's lamps all across the cubicle floor sputter out.

CIARAN  
Ah, fuck.

Alina turns her still-lit lamp to her compatriot: his has extinguished. He holds it up in confusion, a smattering of fear creeping into his eyes.

They turn back to the other employees. One man, CARL (40s), is separated from the group, holding up a lit lamp in one hand with the other hand held up as if to usher the others to "stop". He whispers, audible across the crushing silence of the office.

CARL  
... please.

MANAGER  
Congratulations to our two top employees of the month! Hope to see you on the other side!

With a sickening *CRRRAAAANK!* the manager begins to slowly lower the blinds of their window. Employees begin to turn away from the window as the light begins to narrow and disappear.

CARL  
Please. I can share-- I want to share.

Like feral animals the employees lurch forwards, bounding across the threshold of the darkness and towards Carl who screams and turns to run, the light of his lamp swinging erratically.

The quickest of the pursuers slams into Carl's back and his lamp flies from his hand, cartwheeling across the floor to land face up. From the darkness the scuffle of the employees is drowned out by that same slithering and slapping noise moving impossibly quick across the cubicles.

A trembling hand slams down upon the lantern from the darkness: not Carl but GERRI (20s). He swings it back towards his fellow pursuers. A deep maroon smear is painted across the floor where half a dozen employees had tackled Carl to the ground.

On the other side of the smear are two more trembling employees now bathed in the light of Carl's lamp, gripped tightly in Gerri's fingers.

Both of the employees take a step towards Gerri.

GERRI  
Stop.

They take another step. Gerri backpedals one step.

CIARAN

Hey, Gerri, lets--

Alina puts a hand on Ciaran's shoulder. He turns towards her questioningly but doesn't say another word. Gerri hasn't taken his eyes off of the advancing employees.

GERRI

Don't fucking do it.

The older of the two, DONNIE (50s), holds out open palms, appealing to the younger man.

DONNIE

C'mon, Gerri. We just gotta all keep cool and we'll make it to next month.

GERRI

Don't come any fucking closer.

DONNIE

I'm just trying to get in the light, Son. I'm trying to get in the light.

The other pursuer, LAKEN (30s) nods, eyes wide and unblinking.

GERRI

I said--

The pursuers leap forward, Gerri turns, the beam of light arcing away from them. A repulsive wet crunch cuts off a sudden high scream. Blood splatters across Gerri's face, back and lantern, casting a devilish red light across the young man's face.

Gerri, breathing hard, turns the lamp's light back towards where Donnie and Laken had been standing seconds before: now nothing.

*THHHMMMM!* The deep reverberations course through the office then: *SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! SLAM!* The lights turn on in sequence, bathing them all in bright light. Alina releases a puff of air, an exhaust of immense tension. Her lamp clicks off.

Gerri's lantern falls to the floor from limp fingers.

GERRI (CONT'D)

I-- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it...

He stumbles forward hands outstretched, a plea for forgiveness.

GERRI (CONT'D)  
I wouldn't have if they-- if they  
had just--

*TTHHMMMM...* The familiar, threatening thrum begins to build around them. Gerri glances back at Carl's fallen lantern. Then back to Alina and Ciaran, her lantern still gripped tightly in one hand.

MANAGER (LOUDSPEAKER)  
Tsk, tsk, tsk! Remember to pay  
attention! Three pulses! They come  
in pairs!

*SLAM!* The lights begin to shut off in sequence from behind Gerri. *SLAM!* He sprints towards the new hires, fingers curled like talons, teeth bared.

GERRI  
Please! Turn it on me! TURN IT ON--

*SLAM!* Ciaran grasps Alina by the shoulder and shoves her backwards. Gerri hurtles into Ciaran as-- *SLAM!* --the office is plunged once more into darkness.

Gerri and Ciaran's grunts turns to a sudden cacophonous scream, cut short by a wet, slithering crunch. Alina army crawls towards her fallen lantern as--

*SLAM!* Red emergency lights dimly illuminate the whole office floor, casting light on an ungodly writhing mass of limbs and flesh behind Alina as she crawls desperately towards her lantern.

The DARKNESS slithers towards Alina as she gets within reach of the lantern, dozens of hands reach out, grasping her shoulders, hair, arms, and legs.

Suddenly, she is pulled backwards violently, sliding fast across the floor. She screams defiantly as she turns, flipping on the lantern. The DARKNESS shudders and seems to vanish in the beam of light from the lantern. Alina is catapulted across the floor to slam up against the manager's window. Her lantern slams violently against the glass, shattering.

She raises the broken lamp back towards where the DARKNESS had released her. It flickers pathetically, revealing an empty aisle. With one final flash the lantern dies. She slaps the broken thing a few times before casting it to the ground.

She turns to the manager's window, a tiny sliver of light visible from the bottom of the drawn blinds.

ALINA

Please! It's only me! You need at least one! Don't you--

She interrupts herself with repeated slams against the glass.

ALINA (CONT'D)

Please--

To the right, the disgusting slithering wet sound of the DARKNESS. She does not hesitate, she sprints down the aisle.

*THMMMMM...* The thrumming builds: the final pulse. Alina sprints hard down the aisle but the DARKNESS is gaining. The writhing mass of limbs topples behind her, an amorphous rolling mound of flesh.

*SLAM!* The lights far ahead turn on. *SLAM!* She continues to sprint, the grasping hands of the DARKNESS reaching out, attempting to grasp at her clothes, hair and legs. *SLAM!* The light is just out of reach but the DARKNESS is almost upon her! *SLAM!* She stumbles into the light and the DARKNESS disappears behind her, as if it had never existed.

Alina collapses to the ground, sobbing, retching, and out of breath...

At the sound of a cacophony of slapping she starts, yelping in terror. But as she looks up she realizes that MANAGEMENT has emerged from their closed office doors and they are all... clapping for her. She, covered in blood, sweat, and tears, cowers from this gaggle of immaculately dressed suits as they gather around her in congratulations.

A mass of voices, barely distinguishable from one another, offer "Congratulations!", asserting that she must be "... manager material", and how lucky she is to "be the last one". She looks up at her superiors in horror and confusion as the voices gel together into a mass of loud nonsense, until we--

CUT TO:

#### **MANAGER'S OFFICE - MONTHS LATER**

*Silence.* Alina sits in the manager's office, sorting through papers and clicking across her desktop. She glances at the clock. Barely visible above her desk is her old calendar, indicating that it is the first of the month.

The hands join together to point towards twelve noon and Alina sighs. She pulls over the loudspeaker microphone.

ALINA  
Lamps out, Everyone. Two pulses  
today.

END.