

# Godhunter

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## DEDICATION

For Nick and Kai, may you live forever within these pages.

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## Chapter One

“There were of old certain men versed in sorcery, Thor, namely, and Odin, and many others, who were cunning in contriving marvelous sleights; and they, winning the minds of the simple, began to claim the rank of gods.”

Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 13<sup>th</sup> century

When someone asks if you're a god, you say yes!

Those were the words going through my mind the first time I met Thor. In my line of work, they should have been words to live by... literally. At least they would have been had I remembered them in time. Unfortunately, Bill Murray's voice taunted me inside my head mere seconds too late. Thanks a lot, Bill.

My forgetfulness left me facing the distinct possibility of an early and creatively painful demise. If only I'd remembered the movie wisdom sooner. Yes, movie wisdom. Scoff all you want, but it may surprise you how much useful information is hidden in movie dialog. At least that's what I tell myself so I can feel better about thinking in movie quotes half the time.

“So, Thor.” I smirked up at the giant, gladiator-muscled, Viking as he glowered down at me through a fall of his shimmering copper hair. “What's it gonna be? Hammer? Lightning? Fists of fury? Lightning might singe the rug a bit. Odin might not appreciate that; it looks kinda old.”

Maybe it wasn't a good idea to taunt a god but hey, what did I have to lose? He'd caught me red handed, bent over the new *Make War, Not Love* campaign plans I'd found in the Human

Relations room of Valhalla. I hadn't even heard the loud-mouthed God of Thunder coming in, if you can believe that. Loud-mouthed didn't automatically equate to loud-footed, evidently. Then to make matters worse, he asked me if I was a god. As if maybe I was a newbie or something, and what did I—the ever quick-witted one—say? I said no. Yeah; I wanted to smack myself silly for that one.

Then again, maybe I should cut myself some slack. It's a little shocking to be face-to-face—well, face-to-chest—with what had to be close to seven feet of gorgeous, vibrant, leather-clad Viking godliness. Did I mention gorgeous? And the leather? I don't mean that silky yuppie lambskin either. I mean hardcore, I'm gonna bust your ass if you look at me wrong, well-worn but still solid enough to wipe the floor with your face, leather. Just seeing the way it teased me by gripping all of that muscle, made me want to rip it to shreds and teach it a lesson. Bad leather; Viking gods should be naked.

“You wanna see my hammer?” Thor's eyes took on a wicked gleam as he looked slowly up and down my body; which took longer than it should have for all five-foot-three (and a half) of me.

“Whoa there, Viking.” I leaned back further on the table he'd previously planted me on as if I were a misbehaving child. “Raping and pillaging days are in the past. You gotta catch up on the times.” I snapped my fingers in his face. “Nowadays, there are laws on the treatment of prisoners.”

“Not for gods.” His lips twitched.

It was just a slight movement, but I caught it, and it gave me the smallest glint of hope that I might actually make it out of this mess alive. Get 'em laughing and then run while they're distracted. It's not the best plan, but it's worked for me before.

“Hey, like I always say; gods are people too.” I smiled my

best P.R. smile. *Gods are great, they're not at all out to manipulate mankind, really, and I'm definitely not here to foil their evil plans.* I smiled wider.

“No; we’re not.” The frown was back, and Thor set an intimidating fist on the table next to my hip for good measure; a fist that was nearly the size of my face.

The leather around his forearm creaked at me gleefully.

Okay; that was more like it. I could handle an angry god better than a horny one. I congratulated myself on the sharpness of my tongue until I felt his thumb scrape lightly over my jeans. I went still; listening to more creaky leather commentary as Thor leaned in closer, and I found myself wondering how much strain the stuff could take. Maybe he’d bust his seams before he had a chance to bust my face. I can’t say that the prospect didn’t have its appeal, even without saving me an ass kickin’.

The glimpse of chest I had through the V of Thor’s leather tunic was something straight out of a male calendar. It was made for women to drool over; the kind of sculpted, smooth, perfect chest that looked airbrushed. It was also mere inches from my face—rising and falling with his deep breaths—and I had an overwhelming urge to lean forward and rub my cheek against it. Then there was that smell. Being this close to Thor, I was practically enveloped in it. It was like standing in the middle of a storm while lightning struck nearby; a wild, exciting aroma of rain and electricity—of freshly washed man.

“Now, now,” I chided him like a school teacher as I tried to focus on his face. “You mustn’t forget your own history. Shall I refresh your memory?”

“Try me.” Thor made a sound halfway between a sniff and a snort. “Let’s hear what you think you know of gods.”

“Well, for one thing”—I poked my finger into his massive chest—“I know that you aren’t gods at all so you can just stop with

the holier than thou attitude, buster.”

A thick eyebrow arched up, and Thor’s lips went into mini-spasms.

“For another thing”—yes, I was still poking him—“I know where you’re from, Atlantean. I know that your god abilities are nothing more than technological and magical advances your kind kept from humanity in an attempt to rule the world. Advances that ended up destroying Atlantis, but still you all didn’t think that was any reason to stop practicing them.”

“Practice does make perfect.” His eyes started to spark with the very magic I’d referenced, and I knew I had only one shot to get out of there alive and un-hammered, as it were.

“I know something else too,” I whispered and cast my eyes side to side conspiratorially.

Thor couldn’t help it; his smile finally broke free as he leaned in closer to ask, “What’s that?”

“I know that if I do this”—I kicked my leg out as hard as I could and caught him where no man likes to be kicked—“god or not; you’re going down.”

I jumped off the table the minute Thor landed; groaning and cupping himself on the thick carpet. Then I bolted past him and out the door; already chanting the spell that would get me through the wards of Valhalla and out into the Aether. I felt the magic rush over me like a hot, tickling breath as I ran down a long hallway to the tracing room. It sparked eagerly across my skin; urging me back to where I’d come from. Everything in its place and all that.

As I crossed the threshold, I was pulled through the tracing point and into the Aether. The tracing point sealed behind me with a low murmur of magic and a pressurized pop in my ears. But that physical sensation lasted only a moment before my body became a

mere memory with a tingling, freeing ecstasy. I flowed through streams of pure magic; my spell propelling me along to my destination so that I didn't have to navigate the waters myself. With another pressure-pop that announced the reformation of my ears, I exited the Aether and felt my body reluctantly become physical again. Gravity was the worst; a jarring, sucking sensation that took a few moments to readjust to.

My momentum sent me straight into a wall. A dirty, alley wall. I pushed off it immediately and swung around to crouch into a fighting stance, just in case Thor had managed to follow me through. Tracing was a rush; add to it the adrenaline of the chase, and it left me panting for breath and shaking. My pulse beat heavily in my ears; the thudding drowning out the traffic I could see in my peripheral vision. I was holding my kodachi before me, and I hadn't even realized that I'd drawn the Japanese short sword.

Remnants of magic sparked blue and drifted to the ground in a roughly circular outline, but the wall across from me remained the same; no ripples, no blurring, no sign of Thor at all. I stood slowly, leaned back, and felt my heart rate start to decelerate as I slid the sword into its scabbard.

“God damn Buffy! Freakin’ vampire slayer gets all the props,” I muttered. “Vampires; please! Bunch of melodramatic parasites. And werewolves? I'd fight one of those puppies any day instead of a god. At least they can't pull magic out of their furry butts. Now faeries; I might not be thrilled to meet one of them in a dark alley... a dark alley kinda like this one.”

I shoved myself quickly away from the wall and power-walked towards the street; still bitching about a fictional vampire hunter under my breath.

“Vampire Slayer,” I grumbled, “Try killing a god sometime and then get back to me. Blondie wouldn't last a day. She'd be whining to her mommy about the unfairness of it all within minutes. Oh, and falling for your prey? Total amateur. You don't

poop where you eat, and you don't kill where you sleep. Or sleep with who you kill. No, wait; that's necrophilia.” I frowned and then shook my head. “Oh, whatever; it's just dumb to let your prey seduce you.”

Thor's striking face flashed through my mind—his ocean eyes sparkling with magic—and I decided to just shut the hell up. That guy Spike was sweet to Buffy; in a psycho kind of way.

Ugh. I threw my hands up and shook my head at myself. Staring death in the face can have an odd effect on people; especially when death's face was that of a Viking god. I had to let it go and stop acting like a crazy person; muttering to myself about vampires and werewolves in an alley. This was just another day hunting gods; nothing special about it.

You might be wondering how someone gets into the god-hunting business, and all I can tell you is; hell if I know. I pretty much stumbled face first into it. Like hitting a rock when you're riding a bike at full speed; I went flying and landed in a thorn bush. A burning one. A talking, burning one that proclaimed it was God in a booming voice.

I never really was the religious type. I'm more of a hands-on kinda girl. I've practiced witchcraft my entire life; which I kinda see as a religion of the self. I do mean witchcraft by the way, and not Wicca. I know that's a religion, but I don't practice it; I just do the spells. Wicca's a little too peaceful for me, although, I do like the clothes.

I guess I haven't practiced witchcraft my *entire* life, but pretty damn close since Mom was teaching me spells in the cradle. Most babies got *The cow jumped over the moon*; I got sung to about drawing it down. Not that I'm complaining since it's actually helping me out these days, but I've just never seen the gods as a big part of my life.

Boy has that changed.

I walked out of the alley, into the bright Hawaiian sunshine, and held a hand up to shield my eyes. Well, where did you expect the gods to live? Okay, so they don't all technically live in Hawaii, but quite a few do, and those who don't seem drawn here. The land is still filled with old magic; practically spilling with it since there isn't much land, to begin with. So, it's a perfect place for a god to go on vacation. Whatever, it's my home, and I have to say that I'm getting a tired of sharing it with them. They have their own realm to live in; they need to go there. Or they can go to Hell, for all I care... which also happens to be in the God Realm. In fact, from what I understand, there's a few of them. They can take their pick.

About five years ago, I truly started developing a relationship with the Gods, and I'm not talking in the *Do you have a relationship with God?* Jimmy Swaggart sense. I'm talking about a thorough understanding of how truly evil they are. Read your history books, kiddies; most gods were revered mainly because they were so damn scary.

For me, it all started with sex. At least, it would have if my chosen partner for the evening hadn't been planning on killing me as a sacrifice to the Hawaiian God of War, Ku. You think you've got some bad date stories.

My young, Hawaiian escort for the evening was everything every female tourist—and some males too, I'm sure—fantasized about on the plane ride over. He was tall, dark, handsome, and built like a brick... well, you get the picture. He also had green eyes; courtesy of some white ancestor who got lucky with a wicked wahine. Green eyes have always been a weakness of mine.

He took me out on a romantic date which ended with us drinking an entire bottle of champagne at a Heiau (a Hawaiian temple). This particular Heiau was dedicated to none other than Ku. Now, I know that doesn't sound too romantic but take into account that the Heiau was situated on a mountaintop overlooking Waimea Bay and the sun was setting. A dark pumpkin sky painting the cerulean sea pink as it crept into a verdant valley spotted with

the flight of tropical birds. Can you see the sexy factor yet?

I may have been tipsy when we started. I'd just turned twenty-one so give me a break on the alcohol consumption, but when I looked up and spotted a large local man watching us from the tree line, I sobered up quickly. I shot him a nasty look, but he was focused on my date so he didn't see it. Something in his gaze set off warning sirens in my head—definitely sirens, not bells—and I turned back sharply to find a giant *Crocodile Dundee* knife plunging towards me.

I had seconds to roll to the side before the blade ended up embedded in the ground; merely nicking my upper arm instead of going through my chest. I turned back towards the knife—effectively removing it from my date's possession and my bleeding arm—as I kicked upwards. I don't know if I hit him *there* or not, but he howled as if he were in severe pain.

“Ku,” he managed to choke out, “Na waimaka o ka lani.”

He launched himself at me and in those few moments, I saw more than you'd think was possible.

I saw the local voyeur come striding to us; hand extended and face rapturous. I saw my hand gripping the blade and turning it. I saw the look of shock on my date's face as the knife slipped into his neck. Internally, I shouted; “That's not a knife, *this* is a knife,” Australian accent and all, and I almost started to giggle hysterically. It's amazing what the mind will do to protect itself and, as I warned you, I think in movie quotes a lot.

My mind had definitely needed some protection. I used to think those horror movies with blood spraying from neck wounds were ridiculous and inaccurate. I don't think that anymore. You hit a guy in the neck with a big blade, and he bleeds. A lot. All over you if you just so happen to be beneath him at the time. It was extremely messy, to say the least, and potentially mind breaking.

I think the only reason that I didn't start screaming was that

someone else beat me to it. The scream I heard was a terrifying mix of rage, frustration, and pain. It yanked my attention to the left, where I found the local man on his knees. He was right next to me; way too close for my comfort. He reached for me, and I didn't think; I just reacted. I didn't aim either. I just shot the knife out straight and followed through with my body.

I was suddenly grateful for all the self-defense classes Mom had insisted that I take. The biggest advantage training can give you is faster action; automatic reaction. Your body moves before your mind has a chance to process things, and it saves you precious, life-granting seconds.

The man was suddenly gasping beneath me; the blade buried in his chest. He started to murmur some words in a language unfamiliar to me. Surprisingly, it wasn't Hawaiian. I panicked and stabbed him again. I knew a spell when I heard one, and I also knew that any spell this guy managed to cast would not be beneficial to my health. He kept going, and I kept stabbing; shutting my eyes to block out the carnage. I felt as if I had a starring role in *Psycho*; the original not that stupid Vince Vaughn remake. All that was missing was the shower curtain and that ridiculously horrifying music. Although, the sounds he was making were even more horrific. I didn't open my eyes until he went silent.

The Heiau was gone; replaced by an elegant room in what must have been a multi-million dollar home. That's when I realized that Ku had been chanting a spell to open a tracing point; a doorway to the Aether. The Aether, or the Astral as some call it, is a place of pure consciousness. It's also the link between our world and the realm of the Gods. Think of reality as a spiritual sandwich. The Aether would be all the tasty filling packed between the bread of our worlds. If you wanted to go from one slice to the other, you had to get through the tuna salad first.

Okay; now, I'm hungry.

Anyway, the Aether is also where magic happens. As a

witch, I use it for crafting spells. I can tap into it with my mind and create new realities there. It's called spellcraft. Of course, it's not as simple as it sounds. There's a lot of work and usually a few ingredients necessary for magic, but once a witch casts a spell in the Aether, it manifests on the physical plane.

When I was little, my mom told me stories of people who could travel the Aether—a practice called tracing—but the ability had been lost to history. The spells had become scarce and unreliable, the destinations vague, and the potential risks high. To take your physical body, make it pure consciousness, and send it shooting through the Aether to another location was a mind-boggling concept to me. Yet there, beneath me, was proof that it could be done. This man could trace—had in fact taken me along for the ride—and I had just killed him. Great.

His body was a bloody mess; I'd nearly decapitated Ku in my blind attack. I didn't know it at the time, but it's one of the few ways you can kill a god. Don't laugh; there are monsters out there who can put their head back on and keep going without missing a beat. Or just sprout two more. Can you say Hydra? Beheading doesn't always work. I repeat; *beheading doesn't always work*. Remember to take the heart too. Oh, and burning is usually quite effective as well, but with Gods, the head is the most important part to target. But I digress.

After I had stopped screaming—I was thankful that I'd been able to delay the screaming portion of the evening for as long as I had—I tried to wipe away the blood in a very Lady Macbeth fashion. Out damn spot, out. It was useless. I found the bathroom—not even caring that there could be someone else in the house—and went into the shower fully clothed. I can't even remember how the bathroom looked. All I recall is the way the water ran bright red, and how I stared at it; mesmerized as it swirled down the drain. It was the first time I'd ever killed; as in anything. Well, except for bugs, but I think we can all agree that they don't count.

I stood under the spray, and my body began to shake so I kept adding more hot water. It never occurred to me to take my clothes off. I just sluiced the water off them when I was done and patted myself dry with towels. I remember leaving the towels on the floor like I was an obnoxious hotel guest. What did it matter? Leaving a corpse in the living room trumped towels on the floor every time.

I came out of the bathroom to complete silence. I don't know what I'd been expecting: shouting, screams, perhaps police officers waiting to gun me down. There was no one. I was alone... in the home of a god. It all sank in. The man praying to Ku. The Hawaiian in the trees. The Aetheric Plane. I had killed Ku. One of the main gods of the Hawaiian Pantheon was lying on a white tile floor with his head barely attached because of me. What the hell kind of karma had I just racked up? Would it matter that it was clearly self-defense? I decided that it did. Then I decided to snoop around.

I mean; I didn't even know where I was. As I said, I knew about tracing but had been warned at a very early age never to attempt it. So, I had no idea if I was still in Hawaii or even on the same plane of existence. I had just traced! I could've been anywhere. Tartarus. Niflheim. Minnesota. Oh, please, don't let me be in Minnesota. Well, then again; there is that big mall there.

I crept through the god's house and hoped he that was a bachelor. The last thing I needed was the Mrs. walking in. What's the proper thing to say in that situation? "Hello, Mrs. Ku; lovely home you have, sorry about the corpse of your husband. Oh, and for making your husband into that corpse." That was one conversation that I didn't want to have.

The place was deserted, though. I walked past room after room full of modern Hawaiian furniture—go figure—but no people. The golden gleam of Koa wood merged with Hawaiian textiles everywhere. Wood beams crossed over the high ceilings and creamy white walls were a stark contrast to dark, hand-carved

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