

The Abnormal Life of AI Norm

By Cody Knox

Chapter One: Summer

First Full Moon of Summer

My name is Al Norm.

I had always been content with living an ordinary life. Most people might find themselves bored spending the whole day at the office in front of a computer screen, but not me. I was brilliant working as a normal, average, everyday, mundane businessman.

In fact, I was so good at my job that my boss gave me an opportunity; I could move to a private office out near a small town, and work from home, the peace and tranquillity of nature just outside my window. Well, I couldn't say no to that. So I packed my bags and moved out to the town of Normal.

Normal. Population of 8362. A normal place without any major dramas. A fine change from the hustle and bustle of the big city.

Just opposite my new home was a small botanic garden. The scent of flowers wafted through the air and filled my nostrils with heavenly bliss. I could get used to this. Normal had a certain rustic charm which I loved.

In fact, upon the first day I moved in, I saw somebody wearing a hooded black robe, riding a white horse down the street.

I don't know why he wore that black robe. Maybe it's part of his religion? I'm cool with that. Whatever. Not my business.

I asked this hooded figure what his job was as he and his horse trotted past my home. To which they replied, in a deep, gravelly voice, "I am a reaper,"

So I guess that means he does farm work? I asked him what his name was. He replied, "Grim". So like the Brothers Grimm? I guess the guy must be German.

So, Grim is a nice guy. He said he was hosting a party over at this tavern, 'The Bloody Thorn'. He gave me an invitation. Pretty cool. I took the man up on his offer, and I made my way to The Bloody Thorn at 8 PM sharp.

The place had this whole late Victorian atmosphere to the place, like something out of a creepy children's book. The full moon shone through the glass-stained windows. There were quite a lot of people here – socialising, getting a drink, dancing, flirting, all of that.

A fair number of people appeared to be dressed up in costumes. For example, there were a number of people dressed up like fairies, and others were wearing what must have been fake vampire teeth. I felt a bit left out.

Why hadn't Grim told me this was a fancy dress party? I had a rather convincing ghost costume I wore last Halloween, and I can tell you it left more than a lasting impression on some of those trick-and-treating kids!

I could see Grim at the other end of the room. He was talking to some young woman wearing a werewolf mask. He looked like he would be there for quite a while. I went over to the bartender.

“No, wait, don't tell me. I have a gift for prediction,” a man with a thick Transylvanian accent said, “you want a blood orange vodka? No? Perhaps a wolf cocktail is more to your taste?”

“Just normal beer will be fine, thanks,” I said. He poured me a glass of normal beer, and I mingled amongst the crowd. This was a loud party, louder than I was used to. But I did my best to make myself comfortable. Eventually, a young woman with flowing ebony hair approached me.

“It's been a long time since I've seen somebody like you in a place like this,” she said. I turned around to look at her. She was dressed up like a witch, flowing red silk robes flattering the contours of her body, and a black pointed hat with red lacing. She was smoking hot.

Now, I've never been skilled at chatting up women, but this lady did not seem to care. She was just all over me, telling me how handsome I was. She told me her name. It was Arabella.

Eventually, she asked me to join her behind the gazebo. If she wanted to make out, wouldn't it be more romantic to do it on the actual gazebo? She didn't seem all that shy.

“So, what do you want to do?” I asked, playing dumb. She pulled out a long black stick. Is that like her eye liner or something? I think she looks fine without make up.

“I just needed some idiot to test this new spell I've been working on,” Arabella said. She began chanting in a strange, made-up language that I had never heard before.

She pointed the stick at me, and jets of hot, scalding flames shot out of the end, missing me by mere millimetres.

What the heck was that?!?

“What's wrong with you?!? Was that meant to be some practical joke? How did you do that anyway? Is there a miniature flame-thrower installed in that...” I paused. The stick was sparkling. Like a wand. No, that's stupid. There's no such thing as witches, right?

She looked at me and started another chant. I don't know what she chanted, but it sounded unholy. A strange glowing pattern appeared under her feet, and moved with her as she came closer. White jets of light shot out of her stick and shot me with full force. I looked down at my shoes, and saw that I was turning to stone.

“Ah, now that's more like it. You will make a lovely statue for the back garden,” Arabella said.

“Wait, stop! What is this? How are you doing this?” I asked, as my legs turned to stone. In a few minutes, I'd be this lady's garden ornament.

“Are you thick or something? Have you never heard of the supernatural? Hundreds of vampires, werewolves, fairies, and, of course, witches have called Normal their home for centuries! What a fool you are!” Arabella said, following this with an evil cackle.

“What a fool *you* are,” came a deep, gravelly voice. It was Grim. He was holding a scythe in one bony white hand. A shot of green light shot out of one of his skeletal fingers, and I was back to normal.

“Grim? Are you trying to prevent this man's death? That goes against the rules, and you know it,” Arabella said.

“You have already broken the rules. As the leader of witches in this community, the Reapers have forbidden you from using your powers for evil. Under Rule 389 of the Reaper Proclamation of 1251, you must leave this town and never return,” Grim said.

“And what if I don't?” Arabella asked with a smirk.

Grim took his scythe and dragged it through the air, opening a glowing portal.

“Then I am obligated by my superiors to send you to the next world,” Grim said. Arabella laughed, then drew her wand. Flames shot towards Grim, which he deftly blocked by spinning his scythe around like the propeller of a helicopter.

Green electricity shot from Grim's fingers and headed for Arabella. It struck her hat, which she quickly cast aside. She then launched a jet of ice from her wand, and Grim countered with a green energy beam. For a short time, the two attacks mingled in the air, fighting against each other, but eventually, Grim got the upper hand and she was struck with the full force of Grim's power. She collapsed down in tatters, unconscious.

“Let us hope that in the next world, you choose to be a nicer person,” Grim said, as he carried her body to the portal. She began to float away into the glowing void, and it sealed itself shut behind her.

I stood there in shock for a short time.

“You're the Grim Reaper?” I asked.

“A Grim Reaper. I have been the reaper of this town for a hundred years,” Grim said. He took off his hood, revealing his skull. Was it possible for a skull to look regretful? Because this one sure did.

“I thought you knew who I was. I never would have brought you to this party if I'd known you were a simple mortal,” Grim said, “Every full moon, the supernatural people of this town come together for a celebration. Despite what you just experienced, I can assure you that most supernaturals just want to go about their business, the same as ordinary mortals,”

“What was all that stuff you were saying about reapers and her being the leader of the witches?” Al Norm asked.

“Every community has its supernaturals. As the reaper of this community, it is my job to find a representative of each group to keep their respective group in line,” Grim said.

“But it didn't work. The leader of the witches in Normal just tried to kill me,” Al Norm said.

“Yes, and now I will have to appoint a new witch. But don't let this night's events discourage you, Al Norm. I believe if you continue to stay in Normal, you will live quite the fulfilling life,” Grim said. He snapped his fingers, and instantly before him was his white horse. He hopped upon this horse, and rode off into the night.

Wow. My entire world-view has just been changed. Before tonight, I thought things like the supernatural were just made up.

Should I ring up my boss, and tell her I'm calling it quits? No, I mustn't. A real businessman never quits. I must choose to stay here, here in this abnormal town of Normal.

Second Full Moon of Summer

Things went back to normal right after that, and the month passed with amazing speed. I came to think that perhaps what I had witnessed that night was but a dream, an illusion.

But then there was a knock at the door. It was Grim. And so, with Death knocking at my door, I reluctantly answered. Had he come to collect my soul? No. He was having a meeting with the other supernatural leaders at his house, and so, before long, I found myself at Death's doorstep.

His house looked suitably macabre and Gothic. I was curious, of course, as to why Death would require access to a bathroom, bed and kitchen, and I was tempted to ask. But I thought better of it.

We came to the dining room, where there were three other people. These were the people:

Victor, leader of the Normal vampires. He had pale, lifeless skin, as well as blood-red eyes and blood-red hair. Every time he smiled, his sharp vampire teeth shone in the light. He looked muscular. He was sipping absent-mindedly at a blood pack. I sure do hope that whoever he took that from gave it to him consensually.

Ruby, leader of the Normal werewolves. Tan skin, and messy blonde hair. Her eyes glowed golden. She had sharp teeth, which were chowing down on a large tuna fish. Most of her was covered in a light brown fur. I wonder if I pet her fur, would it be like petting a dog? Her tail thumped the back of her seat enthusiastically. This was, of course, only her werewolf form. In human form, she looked pretty much the same, except without all the hair. And the tail.

Daybreak, leader of the Normal fairies. Tan skin, and black hair. For the most part, he looked just like some normal guy you'd see on the street. But then you would notice the huge reddish-white wings sprouting from his back.

Grim said that the replacement witch would be coming by shortly.

I introduced myself to these three in as professional a manner as I could muster.

At first, they were sceptical about allowing a mere mortal in their sanctuary. But they did start to warm up to me, I think.

Victor bragged to me about how many hours he was putting in at the gym. He said he should train me sometime. Gym lessons from a vampire? That sure would be something.

Daybreak told me he had a large garden on the edge of town, where he grew all sorts of fruits and vegetables. Apparently, his 'fairy sense' or whatever gives him natural talent with growing things, because he's all 'in touch with nature' or whatever.

Ruby told me she was thinking of buying a cat. Interesting choice of pet for a werewolf. I'd have thought she'd prefer a dog. She also told me she has plans of becoming an artist one day. She's got hundreds of paintings back at her house. I may have to visit her one day.

Some time later, the new witch arrived. Her name was Dawn. She had light tan skin and blonde hair. She was a nice young woman, though very shy. She liked to keep to herself, and for the most part didn't even look like a traditional witch.

I don't want it to seem like I'm prejudiced concerning witches, but when a witch almost turns you to stone, it makes you a bit biased. So, to me, a witch who doesn't really use her powers is, well, preferable. But even if she did, I still would be all like, 'live and let live', so long as she wasn't using her magic to hurt people.

Anyway, the dining with death was over before it started. Grim confided in me that it's nearly impossible to get all the supernatural leaders to stick around in the same place for more than ten minutes. I sometimes have similar problems with my co-workers.

So what else happened during this month? Let me just think for a second here.

For a start, Victor (the vampire) took me to the gym for a training session. What are we even training for? Don't know. He carries an umbrella over his head wherever he goes. Don't want to run into the sunlight, do you, pal?

I hung out with Daybreak, too. We hung out in the forest with some of his fairy pals. He showed me he can make himself into this small little red sprite, where he parties with the other fairies. Most of the fairies tend to stay away from humans. I also learnt he likes his practical jokes. He made my pants start screaming until I took them off. That was not fun explaining to the cops.

I also went to the park with Ruby. Played a nice game of fetch. She licks me on the face whenever she comes back with the stick. I think it's a compulsion, she gets real embarrassed about that. To be honest, I don't mind. In fact, if I'm really honest, I actually kind of liked it. I might be developing a tiny crush on her. No big deal.

I did try to hang out with the new witch, Dawn, but she's just too shy to even hold a conversation with. And Death was busy most days, collecting souls and what not.

Oh! There was also the summer party. Victor held a party at the beach. He didn't even seem to care about the sun at first, as he showed up in some hot red speedos. (Though he still brought his umbrella) He hit on a lot of guys. He tried to hit on me, too, but I'm just not into him like that.

I mean, I had to put up with bloodsucking parasites all the time at work, and now I've got a vampire trying to make some moves on me? Sorry, is that a prejudiced thing to say? Probably.

Look, I'm just a normal guy. I'm still getting used to all this supernatural weirdness going on.

Third Full Moon of Summer

So what's new this month? Well, my job has been going well. I think being able to work in this private office has rather improved my mood.

Ruby told me she's gotten a job at the local police station. Turns out being a werewolf gives her a good nose for sniffing out crime!

Of course, it was that nose of hers which managed to sniff out my true feelings for her. Over a cup of coffee, she said:

“I can smell you have romantic feelings for me,” which is pretty dang blunt. So, now we're pretty much officially dating.

Our first 'official', proper date was on the third full moon of summer. It went pretty well. There was a carnival in town, we both got hot dogs. And we entered a pie-eating contest. Ruby won, of course. What a voracious appetite! We went to the park, and then watched a movie together.

It was a lot more exciting than I'm making it sound. It was a lovely date, and I spent the night over at her house, where I met her new cat, a white short hair named 'Amy'. Over the course of that night, well, one thing led to another, and, well, let's just say it was a fantastic way to spend the full moon.

Not a lot else happened that month, and I'm OK with that. I'm happy that things in this town tend to be normal most of the time, and I'd be happy if they stayed that way. Unfortunately, certain hands of fate had other plans for me...

Chapter Two: Autumn

First Full Moon of Autumn

The days were getting shorter, and there was a nippy feeling to the air as the seasons changed and the leaves began to vacate the trees. Everyone began dressing up warmer, and spending more time indoors than normal. And so, for a while I didn't hear from my friends... at least, not the supernatural ones anyway. Although of course I would see them around town now and then, like bumping into Dawn at the grocery store.

She really doesn't look like a witch at all. In fact, I've never seen her perform a spell at all. I kind of wonder if Grim just pulled some random woman off the street and was all like, 'you're a witch now,'.

One thing that did happen upon the first full moon of Autumn was that Daybreak invited what must have been at least a quarter of the town to come to his harvest dinner. He didn't want to waste any of his food once winter came, so every year he would hold this big harvest shin dig at his house. Man, there was so much food there! And a fair bit of variety too.

There was pumpkin pie, vegetarian chilli, apple pie, pumpkin soup, tomato soup, mushroom soup, vegetarian burgers, vegetarian lasagna, and vegetarian dumplings.

By the way, I forgot to mention this, but Daybreak is a vegetarian. You may have guessed that by the constant presence of vegetarian meals that he was serving. He says meat drains his fairy powers.

We got a demonstration of these powers later that night, when the dishwasher broke down. Daybreak shrunk down into his red sprite form, got into the machinery, and fixed everything right back up again. Man, I wish I could do something like that. But I don't want to become a fairy. Not that there's anything wrong with fairies! Fairy magic is kind of cool. He showed me a small jar he keeps in his pocket for emergencies. It was full of magic fairy dust.

To be honest with you, I'm sort of starting to get used to all these supernatural people around, although I certainly have zero intention of becoming a supernatural being myself.

Admittedly, this makes me stick out like a sore thumb. I'm the only normal human surrounded by vampires, werewolves, witches and fairies. Which makes me the not-normal one, at least in this situation.

So, what else happened at the harvest dinner? Well there was a lot of dancing, for a start. Also, Grim ate way too much chilli and spent the rest of the night next to the sink, serving himself glass after glass of cold, refreshing water. Why would the/a grim reaper have taste-buds or whatever? I think it's best not to think about it.

Victor brought his boyfriend along – some guy called Chuck. The two were all over each other almost the entire party. I noticed he kept on looking over at me, as if he was trying to see if I was getting jealous.

I'm not jealous. If anything, I'm happy for them. I just hope Chuck knows that Victor's a vampire. But I'm not jealous. I've got Ruby.

Speaking of Ruby, she was disappointed in the lack of meat at the harvest dinner, but she kept her chin up and kept up a positive exterior until it was time to go, after which she moaned about how boring it was.

Dawn didn't show up to the harvest dinner at all. I guess she couldn't handle such a large crowd.

Anyway, that was it for that month. No bad omens or portents that were about to warn me that this little event would be the last time I would feel at peace for quite a while.

Second Full Moon of Autumn

Ruby and I went to the library, where they were holding an art class. Everyone was standing around a big bowl of fruit. I'd have thought it would've been some naked guy or gal, but in this cold weather, I can't blame them for not wanting to leave the house. The library didn't have heaters, so I had to wear an extra jacket. That was annoying.

I was not an artist myself, of course, so I spent most of my time hanging around the main entrance of the library.

It was then that I noticed a book at the front of a stack titled 'Most rented'. The title of this book was "FOR A NORMAL WORLD", by Gordon Johnson. I picked up this book, and looked at the back cover. This was what it read:

30 years ago, divorce and single parents were almost unheard of. Boys are falling behind girls in class and Men are growing up unmotivated and unemployed. Society is collapsing, and nowhere is that more apparent than in the town of Normal.

Who is to blame for this? We all know the answer, though nobody dares to speak about it openly. They are the supernatural, and they are the enemy of all that is natural and normal. They are real, and they are dangerous.

That is why I have written this book, to bring awareness to normal people like you and I. Together we can make Normal normal again.

I was taken aback by this. I was under the impression that the vast majority of ordinary humans like myself had no idea of the supernatural.

Surely this person would just be dismissed by everyone as some crazy guy ranting about witches and dragons, I assumed.

Out of curiosity, I turned to a random page and began to read.

The town of Normal has the largest population of supernaturals gathered in one town. Based on demographic studies, I have confirmed that at least 46% of the population in Normal are supernatural in one form or another. Soon, they will outnumber the normal, and not just in Normal. We cannot let this happen.

I turned to a different page.

Is the female obsession with vampires driven by the biological female desire to be dominated by a strong man? Scientific evidence would suggest so. But let's not just blame supernatural men, here.

Female werewolves, for example, have been destroying society by challenging traditional gender roles. They are much more assertive than their normal female human counterparts, often making the first move in relationships and shunning traditional marriage structures. From a biological perspective, normal females who do not marry tend to end up depressed and suicidal. This is not the case for all females, but the exceptions do nothing but prove the rule.

I turned to a different page.

For years, reality-denying terrorists have been trying to shut down any and all attempts at legitimate scientific discussion of fairies. I'm an evolutionary biologist. Why are so many people afraid of rational debate?

I turned to a different page.

I am not saying that we need to hunt down and burn anyone suspected of being a witch. I am just saying the world would be a much better place if they were all killed somehow, preferably with fire.

Good grief! This guy sounded completely off his rocker. nobody would ever take a guy like this seriously. I put the book back.

Another thing that happened this month is that I was attacked by a clown. And trust me, it's not as funny as it might sound.

I had gone for a late-night walk through the forest, seeing if any of the fairies wanted to talk with me. No such luck. I didn't see so much as a glowing sprite. I guess Daybreak is just a lot more social than the other fairies in Normal.

It was then that I saw the clown. He looked back at me. He did not look like a very happy clown. He looked like something had been depressing him for quite a long time. I also noticed that everything around him was dead. He came towards me, and as he did so, every tree, every flower, every blade of grass shriveled.

I got the distinct feeling that if this man walked all the way over to me, I too would shrivel. I began to back away, slowly. The clown reacted by beginning to run towards me. I turned and ran, not knowing which way went back to town. I eventually came to the river. I could see my house from here. I looked behind me.

The clown was quickly gaining, leaving a path of dead birds and flowers in his wake. Against my better judgment, I dived right into the river. It was as cold as ice, but I swam and I swam as fast as I could. I managed to cross the river, shivering and almost frozen. Kind of reminded me of the time I'd almost gotten turned into a statue.

I looked behind me again, and I saw the clown was swimming across the river, headed straight for me.

What could I do? Would Grim show up and help me like with the witch, or would he just help me move on to the next world? All I could do for now would be just to run. I had made it halfway to my house when the clown was struck by an arrow of red lightning. I turned around to see who my saviour was. It was Dawn. She looked terrified. The clown began to make its way back up. Dawn blasted it again, and it turned to dust.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

“He was never alive in the first place. He was a malevolent spirit. We get those sometimes,” Dawn said.

“How did you know where I was?” I asked.

“The fairies saw it happen. They called Daybreak, who called me, and I came over here as fast as I could,” Dawn said.

“Well, tell the fairies I said thanks. And thanks to you too,” I said. Dawn blushed.

“I just did what I'm supposed to do. Protect the town,” Dawn said.

“Alright. You keep up the good work,” I said, and made my way back home.

When I got there, I found a flyer advertising Gordon's book – FOR A NORMAL WORLD. I wondered what Gordon might say about a man like me having their life saved by a powerful woman like Dawn. Nothing good, I imagined. I threw it in the bin. I don't need that kind of nonsense in my life.

Third Full Moon of Autumn

I have been getting into the habit of going on morning runs, to keep my level of fitness up. I guess all those trips to the gym Victor had taken me to had an influence on me, for now I welcomed the morning runs that I once spurned.

This particular morning, I saw Grim grooming his horse and showering it with affection. He sure does love that horse. He told me its name is Midnight. He seemed somber this morning for some reason. I asked him why, and all he said was that something might happen tonight, or something might not happen tonight. He said he didn't know because it hadn't happened yet. But he had alerted all the supernatural leaders to be on their guard.

I admit, all of Grim's grim talk had made me a fair bit paranoid. However by lunchtime I had practically forgotten all about it.

In part, this was due to Ruby Brooke, sitting next to me on the park bench as we cuddled. It was unusually sunny today, and we welcomed the heat with open arms.

It was then that we were approached by a tall man. He had with him a Labrador retriever. I could tell just by looking at him that he was a werewolf, just like Ruby.

"Hey, Chase. I wasn't expecting to see you in town this full moon," Ruby said.

"I wanted my visit to be a surprise. I trust I'll see you tonight at The Bloody Thorn?" Chase asked.

"Of course," Ruby said.

"Who's the human with you? I can smell he's not one of us," Chase said.

"He's my new boyfriend, Al Norm. And you better be nice to him," Ruby said.

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