

It all started on a peaceful October afternoon. A pleasant day for children to run about the park as their parents watched from a short distance. A day to unwind in a natural river, a day to visit grandma for sweet jellies and jams, a day to relieve yourself of the burden of farmwork. Today the townsfolk collectively agreed, today we will rid ourselves of burdens. But as night approached, something sinister came with it. It crept from a far away land, carrying with it the stench of its fallen victims. An unimaginable evil poured into the town, a flood creating a new river. The red fog.

It was the great equalizer. The difference between who gets to live and who gets to die. It commanded the townsfolk by its very existence. The fog met anyone who dared to challenge it with death, a caustic suffocation so vast it choked the soul. The fog ruled them all. The fog was their god.

Night came and went, as did the fog. At dawn's break, wives and children went to see the body of their beloved husbands and fathers, and found nothing. The fog ate them all in its ever consuming majesty. Life continued as normal, albeit in a way colored with grief. Families cried buckets of tears, people thought of drowning themselves, grandmothers sat in silent contemplation, and young men worked to distract themselves from the horrors from last night.

And again as night fell, so did the fog. The fog continued its assault on the town, extending its reach, snuffing the light out of anything that dared to cross its path. Not even the tiniest of organisms could withstand the tyrant. The path the fog traveled became inhospitable, no plants would ever grow there, no animals would continue to live there, it became the road of the fog.

And again, day broke. The citizens, angry and afraid, held conference after conference, debating their next move, but could take no action. The fog was too powerful, too mighty. It was their king of kings, their lord of lords. The choking, drowning, boiling air. The townsfolk could only barely go about their day. Everywhere, peoples faces were morphed into shock. Their eyes shrunk from the torment of the fog. The people were weakening.

On this night the fog continued to bear down its wrath. It seeped into the walls of houses, chased after people and animals unlucky enough to be caught by it. The fog relished in the fear it caused. It was the predator, and the puny townsfolk its prey. There is no escaping the fog.

Day broke again, the townspeople were angry. Angry and afraid at the mass extinguishing of the lives of their loved ones. "Why don't we just leave?" A mother shouted. "We need to send a troop into the fog!" An older man commanded. "Could we reason with the fog?" A noble scholar added. All would be in vain. However, there was a solution most of the townspeople seemed to agree on, and it echoed throughout the courtroom they were all gathered in. "SACRIFICE!" screamed a crowd. A crowd that kept getting bigger and bigger until it was in unanimous agreement.

The plan was simple. One-hundred people would compete in a game of great skill. Five of these people would be selected as the winners.. What the contestants weren't made aware of, however, is that the winners would be given to the fog.

The games started at five o'clock, three hours to sundown. These hundred randomly picked citizens tried their hardest, while a screeching crowd writhed and squirmed at the sidelines. There was panic in the air. To be caught last would be their death sentence.

The games continued until seven in the evening, at which the final victims would be called. The crowd gathered around the mayor's podium.

"Folks," He said, with an accent from somewhere far away. "There has been much strife these past few days. Much confusion. Much anger. However, all that ends tonight!" the townsfolk drew in with awe. "At my call, we will reveal our five candidates to the Red Fog." The curtains behind him drew back. Five people, three men, two women, were tied to poles and gagged. "Ladies and gentlemen, our victors!" The mayor expected hate. He expected to be swarmed off stage and into the mud. In his mind, he was cackling. But he was not met with hate. He was met with an uproar of cheers. He was met with the cheers of angry people who wanted to see these people be tortured by flames and forced to eat shit, and relished in it. "These fine folks are the key to our future! Their sacrifice will pave the way out of the control of the Red Fog!" The cheers grew louder. "Tonight, we cower in fear; tomorrow, we feast in prosperity!" The cheers grew to a deafening height.

At the minute, the fog rolled in. The sacrifices screamed through their restraints and protested all they could, but it was too late. The fog had already assimilated them into its hazy blood strained mass. In an instant, their skin was engulfed in an invisible flame. A sulfuric gas melted away their insides. Their stomach contents shot out of their mouth, burning the esophagus and melting the lips. The burning grew greater and greater. Soon, the skin evaporated and the muscles began to fuse with the wooden poles they were tied to. Every part of themselves were feeling the sum of all human agony.

The next day was filled with a joyful feast. Hours upon hours of celebrating their freedom, eating food for the first time in days, feeling well and truly free. With the sacrifices help, the world became hospitable again. At noon, the mayor delivered a speech.

"Folks, I want to extend my gratitude to our brave sacrifices last night. Our martyrs, our keys to a livable future. To them, we will erect a great wood carving. A symbol of our appreciation, so that they may know that even in the afterlife, we will never forget their noble sacrifice." The adoring crowd applauded and cheered in the mayor's honor. The mayor himself laughed at the lies he spewed.

The day continued as normal. People, finally, could move on with their lives. Stores reopened, people were able to relax again. Gone were the days of fog-filled torture. Now this town was pure, blessed by the spirits of those five false martyrs. Slowly, day turned to dusk and

dusk to darkness, and yet the celebration continued. Crowds only grew bigger as the sky darkened.

And again, the fog returned, packs and packs of people gathered in its wake. It wasted no time eviscerating any life in its wake. Screaming fathers begged their wives and children to run, to escape from town. There was a mass exodus. Those who could run, did and those who couldn't, succumbed. It was a mass scramble. Inside a courtroom, there was madness. People upon people all either shouting and arguing, or begging and praying. At the source of conflict, was the mayor. The townsfolk swiftly realized that the man who had promised their freedom was nothing but a fraud. Much argument occurred as to how to properly punish him. "Chop his head off!" One man screamed. "Castrate him!" A woman screeched. But eventually, it would come down to one option. "Make him suffer the torment he put others through." The mayor was subdued, tied and tossed out of a two story window. A crowd watched as he died an agonizing death.

The next day was nothing. What little people remained were now desperate to leave. The members of the court party stayed. As their final act of retribution, they would all let themselves be eaten by the fog. Their termination would lead to a great relief, they believed. If they all died, then they wouldn't have to deal with the fog anymore.

The rest of the day would crawl. Some members of the party would leave the town, some would die early. Some were nervous, some were ready. Regardless, at eight o'clock, they would all stand in a one hundred foot line, holding hands. A line directly in the fog's path. One by one, their consciousness would be devoured. Their essence instantly boiling in the fog's awe.

The last day arrived. The sole remaining member of the town was a young girl. Her mother had promised to come back for her, but she knew it couldn't happen. She left her daughter to die in the fog. Most of the day was a blur for her. She mostly spent it in places she normally was not allowed. Wandering the dead town before it would all be taken by oblivion. Before the fog arrived for the last time, she sat on the church's roof. She didn't know what to think. She had survived the fog until now, but how will she do it tonight? How will she live to tell the tale of the town tormented by fog? She didn't know, all she knew was that it was coming.

The fog came, and with it, nothing. No pain. No suffering. The town was dead. The sole member stepped into the fog. She was not harmed. She was not vaporized. Out of the fog, another figure approached. A tall man, encased in a solid black suit of armor, riding his steed, a horse of pure darkness. The man said nothing to the child. She said nothing to him. He left, and the fog left with him.