

Lust is an urban fantasy novel that is 57,064 words, and the first novel in Favor of Ares series.

Lust follows Ares, the Greek God of War who has retired from being a captain from Paranormal Affairs due to losing his son, Phobos. He has become mistrustful of everyone except Iris, who needs his help on a case with a criminal who sexually assaults and kills couples. He refuses but ends helping a group of students by giving them a favor. The favor links them all together and after losing one of their own to the criminal, they join Iris which spurns Ares to help with the case. Before the investigation can begin, Ares and Iris train the new disciples in psychic investigations and how to use their powers. After graduating, the team starts their investigation an encounter disciples of Hades. The team begins to lose trust in each other when it is revealed that Ares accepted the mission that got Phobos killed. Hades turns himself in after an encounter but is killed by the criminal. This causes Paranormal Affairs to have Ares and his team stand down. While each group in the team splits up, they come together when they all find vital pieces to a case. Together, they learn to trust each other and go after the criminal who has ties to both the students and Ares.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this excerpt and I hope you find yourself wanting to be a part of the investigation.

Chapter One: Ares

“The coroner autopsy revealed that Andy Bacon was sodomized by an object and had semen found in his anus and throat. He also suffered blunt force trauma to his head. His girlfriend, Bianca Wagner is missing just like the other four cases. This is one of the most horrible cases I ever heard of in all my years of working.” Iris said as she took a bite from her Cabo salad.

She was no taller than five feet and no bigger than 100lbs. Her pale skin contrasted with her wavy brunette hair with red highlights. I remember when she first came to me years ago after defecting from the other side. I thought she was too small, too meek, but I trained her to be one of the best warriors in my division before she was transferred out.

Iris, the goddess of the rainbow, didn't change since that transfer. Still unwilling to eat anything that was alive and moved. A very strict vegetarian who loved animals too much to see them suffer. It was one of the reasons I let the transfer happen. Somebody that innocent would be a liability during a war. No matter how quick they learned if you aren't willing to kill you will get yourself killed, or worse someone else. A lesson I know all too well. Making that transfer to protect her was one of the few things I did right in my long life.

Her poker face has gotten better over the years. She was able to tell me about this case without looking disgusted. Even though I know she hated it.

“No witnesses?” I asked taking a bite out of my bloody rare steak. The only way meat should be eaten. It's been a long time since I've eaten out at a restaurant. Town & Country was located on Route 130 and wasn't expensive, but I've been struggling with finances since I retired. Teaching at Thomas Paine University didn't pay well as much as others think it does.

“No, not even on traffic cameras. The D.N.A recovered by the forensic team is ectoplasmic and not on file.” I could hear the pain in her voice. This wasn’t her line of work. She transferred to the 1st division and became a spy.

“So, that means the attacker is a male spirit or ghost.”

“I guess so.” She said. Taking more bites of her salad. “I can’t believe you’re eating that steak like that.”

“You should try it.”

“I’ll pass. You know I can’t stand knowing that you’re eating something that was once alive.”

“Iris, you are in the business of paranormal law enforcement. We...you deal with death every day. Didn't you see any action as a spy?”

“No, I was never sent on anything dangerous.” She looked around at the other patrons in the restaurant. A smile on her face as she took a drink of water.

“Poseidon took it easy on you, huh? At least he’s good for something. You said this was the fifth victim?”

“Yes. The pattern has been the same for over four weeks now. The attacker targets a couple at either The Ritz Lodge or Nova Motel. They forced the couple to have sex and then the woman is locked up while the male is raped with an inanimate object and then by penetration.” She looked like she was going to throw up, but she kept it together.

“If it’s a ghost or spirit they would have to be possessing a mortal, using a mortal familiar, or know the homunculus spell. The latter two means you will be dealing with a spirit most likely, a powerful one at that. If the former then it could be just a random ghost even a low

powered spirit.” I said. Spirits, like Iris, were pure-bloods born in the astral dimension. Ghosts, on the other hand, were the astral form of humans that died. Regardless, both ghosts and spirits with high enough psychic energy could manifest their aura. Aura could be used to manifest a psychic power. Aura had several applications depending on your origin. For mortals, it allowed them to see spirits and ghosts. For us, the ethereal, we could travel to Earth dimension but are normally invisible and intangible. Aura also manifests as a special ability like teleportation, flight, fire control. They were other spells that could be learned by using your special ability as the raw energy to imitate a mechanism to achieve magical effects. This is really difficult and takes years to master. Those who do could learn to give favor or perform the homunculus spell which gives an ethereal a human body, but no powers.

“I see.” She said smiling again. “See this is why I’m here. I mean I was assigned to scout the area and learn more about the attacker.

“What do you mean? You were assigned?” She was a pacifist soldier and spy, she had no business being assigned a case like this. What was Poseidon up too?

“I was promoted to 3rd Division captain after Persephone was pronounced dead.” Her voice even when sad, sounded angelic. Each word is spoken in a rhythm like a singer singing a carol. She spoke as if this was okay and when she looked into my eyes she could tell what I was thinking. “I know, I’m in way over my head.”

“No, kidding. This attacker sounds dangerous. You have a team with you?” I asked. Each division had a captain and a lieutenant. At the very least the protocol states you should have a team of four. There was no maximum size of the number of members you could have. Her head swayed nice and easy almost as if she was slow dancing to the rhythm of a song in her head.

“No,” she said. “Poseidon wants me to find out as much as I can about the attacks and create a team to take him down. He suggested that since I don’t know the Favor spell that it would be wise to recruit you since you live in the area.”

“You don’t know the Favor spell? And he has promoted you to the captain?” I asked. My blood boiled as I thought about the protocols. To be a captain you needed to know the Homunculus and Favor spells. Not just knowing them, but being able to perform them consistently. Iris had the Homunculus spell, but she didn’t know the favor spell.

“I was shocked too, but with Hades in custody for Persephone’s death, Poseidon needed to fill in those positions. All of her members asked to be transferred out and I granted them.”

“Why, now you don't have a team.”

“I have you.”

“Iris, you know I don’t trust Poseidon or the MIB. Not since...”

“Since he sent you and your last team on that suicide mission over a year ago. I know. Look I know you don’t trust him and you feel guilty about the deaths of your team, but you still have a responsibility.”

“Don’t tell me about responsibility.” I sneered and she looked concerned. “It was my responsibility to protect them and I failed. I knew it was a suicide mission, but I took it anyway. What do I have to show for it? I’m cursed with a form of multiple sclerosis and lupus. My son is dead. My team, my division, they’re all dead. I shouldn't have taken the mission when Poseidon didn’t give me all the details. You shouldn’t trust him either, promoting you to captain and sending you after this killer is its own suicide mission.”

“Oh, Ares, I know you’re in pain and blame yourself. I know I shouldn’t trust Poseidon after what he did to you, but I believe he meant well. You need to trust others and most of all trust that you can still be a good leader. I need help, I know that. You don’t even have to travel with the team. I just need you to help get them in shape. I’m building a team that I can trust because I know we can solve this case.”

“When did you start talking back to your superiors?” I said. She was a little firecracker.

“Let’s just say I’m not as naive as I used to be. I still believe in seeing the good in people. Please say you will help?”

“I’m sorry, Iris, I can’t. I just can’t. Go back to Poseidon and tell him you can’t either.”

“I’m not going to do that, not when there is a monster out there terrorizing couples. I have a job to do. It’s my responsibility and I’m going to succeed.” She stood up and put some money on the table. “One of the nature spirits around here reported that the male victims are still hanging around. I’m about to go to interview the last victim.”

“Andy Bacon?”

“Yes. It was good seeing you again. I hope you changed your mind, you have so much to offer. Don’t let your past define you.”

“And don’t let your present kill you,” I said as I stood up grabbing my cane to follow her out. Trying to resist the urge to say yes. I can’t protect her. I could fail her like my team, like my son. I looked around at the customers and saw families and friends laughing enjoying each other's company. My son will never know that feeling again. I would never feel that feeling again. No. if Iris wants to pretend she can do this, then it’s her own bed she is making. I won’t fail anyone ever again.

Chapter Two: Manan

The Paine Towers and Apartments of Paine University housed hundreds of students. I wasn't sure how many were staying in student housing this semester, but it was enough to keep me busy when I wasn't studying or in class. I was the Residential Network consultant for computing services. Our office was located adjacent to Paine Towers in the Business and Science building where Business, Computer Science, and other technology field students had classes. I took care of networking issues for the students in the dorms. I loved my job and I feel I'm great at it. There was nothing better than the feeling of successfully fixing an issue someone had. Most problems were simple, some people may have loosened their ethernet cables, the signal of their laptops was weak or not connecting to the network if wireless. There was a team of us, five students and our supervisor were Bob. What a plain name for someone in charge of making sure students were happy with the internet connection. Bob placed me as the team lead and I even worked some nights if I wanted too depending on the technical issue. Again most of the issues were simple, at least for me.

Jason, one of my suitemates, had come with me as I responded to one of the rare night tickets. The customer's name was Rebecah Baker. She was a tall woman, about eighteen years old, meaning she had to be a freshman this year. Her brown hair was shoulder-length, straight, and bangs reached down to her rather large glasses. She had a bookish, nerdy look to her with her black turtleneck and jeans that were loose. Apparently, she was the only one in her suite. Each suite on the Paine Towers side was for first-year students and there were forty-two furnished suites in all. With two students sharing one of the three bedrooms that came with a dresser, bed, desk, and closet. Suitemates shared a living room, vanity area, and a bathroom.

“Thanks for coming by so late, I thought I had to wait till tomorrow.” Her voice was deep but pleasant as she walked us to the door.

“Oh, usually don’t respond to nighttime issues, but when I checked the query log and saw your issue, I figured I could stop by. I live on the apartment side, so it wasn’t a bother. Just make sure the next time that you check your ethernet cables, both of them. Most people only check the connection of the computer port and not the wall jack. I’m sorry you had to deal with that.” I smiled and meant every word. When you help people with technology issues they think of you as a savior. I prided myself on being good at my tasks because that meant more customers.

“I will and thanks again,” she said closing her door. Jason and I started to walk towards the elevator. We were on the 8th floor of the Towers.

“I can’t believe you decided to work on our movie night,” Jason said. “As she said, it could have waited until tomorrow.” He stretched and yawned, something he does a lot of. If you didn’t know him you would think he was just bored all the time or at least with you. He was about an inch or so shorter than my own five foot five self. He was definitely the thinner of the two of us. I was a little overweight, a slight beer belly, and I knew I could lose some weight or maybe tone up a little, but I was happy with myself. Jason looked almost like a twig standing next to me.

“You could have just stayed in the apartment.” Still smiling, I said, “We could have just met at Crystal’s apartment. The Paine apartments were on the other side of the Towers connected by a small lobby where two security officers and the housing office were located. They had to buzz in visitors to either side. Students could just use their Id cards as fobs to get into the Towers or Apartments side.

“If I didn’t come with you, I might not have gone to a movie night. In fact, we really should be studying for the upcoming chemistry test.” He looked at me and shook his head. “Stop smiling all the time, it’s creepy.”

“It’s only creepy because you lack confidence,” I said. I believe that in all honesty. I smile because I was good at what I did. People trusted you more when you smile. Yeah sometimes they thought it was creepy, but in general, people respond better when you smile.

Jason yawned again. “Whatever. I just didn’t want to go by myself.”

“And the truth comes out. You know you shouldn’t be so dependent on others.” I told him. Jason was sort of a recluse. If he didn’t go to class you would think he was a hermit. He stayed in our dorm room. He wasn’t my roommate though. He shared his room with David. I shared mine with Shalin.

“I’m not dependent on others, I just like spending time alone to study or practice my guitar.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that, but you also need to get out more, experience the world, the campus. Trust me, you don’t want to look back at your college life and feel like you didn’t live.”

“Says the perfectionist who is willing to work at night even though he is off and makes no extra money from doing so?”

“I’m not a perfectionist,” I said as we walked to the apartment side and buzzed ourselves in. The security officer on duty was reading his paper. An older black guy with readers and a bald head.

“Now, you trust me, you are a perfectionist, a control freak, I might add.”

“You’re just mad because I’m calling you a recluse.”

“Maybe, but if I were a recluse why do I come to Crystals for movie night? You know why? Because you’re my friend. Reclusive people don’t have friends, much fewer friends they consider family.”

“Wow, if you would have said that with some more emotion, I might have shed a tear.” I pushed him softly. “You’re right, you do hang out with us, but you still don’t get out much. You’re right though these weekly movie nights feel like the seven of us are more like a family. Almost like the seven dwarfs which fit for you being short and sleepy all the time.”

Jason rolled his eyes. “I feel shorter today, do I look shorter? I know it sounds crazy, but..”

“No,” I said That was weird for him to ask, but I have to admit that the last couple of days he did seem shorter sometimes. I thought it had more to do with shoes than anything else though. Sometimes it even seemed like he was four inches shorter. It’s not the first time he brought this up and I had similar issues. I’m only 5’5 and while I was at the gym I was able to jump and grab the rim when I was with David. He was impressed, but I never jumped that high before.

“I feel short.”

“Because you are short.” We both laughed as we got on the elevator. “You’re right though tomorrow we should start studying, tonight, we enjoy our campus family.”

“Sounds like a plan.” he yawned again. “Speaking of studying have you seen Andy? I haven’t seen him since Halloween. That was like three days ago.”

Jason was right I haven't seen him since the Halloween party. "No, the last time I saw him was at the party that you decided to skip. I saw him leave with a tall white girl dressed as a bee.

"It's not like him to not check-in. I hope he's okay." Jason said.

"I'm sure he is. You know he loves having a good time. I wouldn't be surprised if he showed up at Crystal's. After all, he's the one who kind of started this tradition, remember?"

Jason smiled but it looked like it took effort. "Yeah, he did. That goofball. We started last Fall so it's been almost a year."

"That's right. If he isn't there tonight, I guess we should call him." I said as the doors to the elevator closed. Something inside of me told me something else was going on with Andy. Like Jason said it wasn't normal for Andy not to talk to us. Not this long. I hope everything is alright.