

# OPEN HOUSE AT MCGIVERS



J. P. SAN

AIRON PRESS

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Be Kind.

## About the author

**J**.P. San, also known as Jimmy, is an American novelist known for weaving suspense, drama, and a touch of the surreal. From a young age, he was deeply attuned to the spiritual world, receiving a profound vision through his grandparents' intercession. This sparked his lifelong journey as a dreamer, seeking hope and guidance through divine signs. Drawing inspiration from everyday moments and human complexities, Jimmy creates emotionally resonant narratives. Outside of writing, he enjoys hiking, coffee, and exploring new places. He currently lives with his family in Rockville, Maryland, USA.



*Jimmy San*



# Foreword

Friends,

I am Telel, Chief Prefect of Guardian Oversight, Supervisory Guardian Angel, Professor of Spiritual Warfare at New Haeven. My work is a matter of record. I observe. I file. I do not interfere.

The file on the evening you are about to read is four lines long. A minor Controller absorbed. A collection of trapped souls relocated. No corrective action indicated. Business as usual.

*I have read those four lines more times than a patient creature should.* Every clause in them can be defended before the Council of Ancients. Not one of them is a lie. I would only observe that the word minor is doing a great deal of work, and that reports are written by beings who were not standing in the dining room.

The man in the mismatched socks has been called many things. McGregor, before the family that kept him decided otherwise. McGruff, after. Professor, when it suited the door he was standing at. Long before any of that he was Sodo, last of the Watchers, the one who gave the Controllers their names. There is an old joke among my colleagues that a creature who can name a thing

will sooner or later try to own it. Sodo spent several centuries demonstrating that the joke is not a joke.

Watch the mantle. That is the whole of my advice to you. The house is a distraction and the man is a performance, and he built the performance himself, board by board, the way another man builds a porch. He wants you to laugh. He has found that laughter is the cheapest anesthetic available and that people rarely check the pockets of anyone who has just amused them.

The mantle is where he keeps what he could not say out loud. Hundreds of figurines, and among them three he never moves, never dusts, and never touches. He calls them tribute. He has called them tribute for so long that the word has worn smooth. I have watched a great many creatures mistake possession for devotion, and I will tell you that the mistake is almost never made by accident. It is made because the alternative is grief, and grief cannot be arranged on a shelf.

*I want to be clear about my own conduct that evening, since someone will ask eventually.* I did not intervene. I sent Ikart, my field investigator, to walk a street two blocks over on an unrelated matter, and he happened to be within reach, and nothing came of it. That is a different thing than intervening. I would thank you not to press me on the difference.

As for the woman who knocked early: I have no notes I am prepared to share. She is not in my jurisdiction. She was never in anyone's.

The door is open. He will tell you the foundation is sound.

It is not.

Telel

## Open House at McGiver McGrumps

"Where's mah striped tie, dang gummit!" bellowed Professor McGiver McGruff, his voice ricocheting through the cluttered old house.

He'd been born a McGregor: poor, loud, and raised by parents who treated restraint like a rumor. Fifteen children later, the pantry stayed empty and the house stayed full. By six, McGiver was passed to another family like an extra chair at a crowded table, and they made it official: McGregor was gone. He was McGruff now.

Free of other people's rules but never free of the name they'd taken, he'd spent his life shoving McGregor back into the world, waving it like a flag at strangers who never looked up, proving what the clan blood meant to people who'd never asked. He'd done well for himself despite it all. Now he just wanted to tie a neat bow on the whole messy business and call it finished.

But this morning he was frantic, flinging underwear, knick-knacks, and even a startled field mouse across the room like a deranged treasure hunter. A porcelain elephant sailed past the

window (close, but no cigar) and shattered against the hearth-stones in a spray of white shards.

The now-delirious mouse darted under the armchair, squeaking indignation.

McGruff muttered curses as he searched through piles of junk, oblivious to the chaos. His home was a kaleidoscope of oddities from centuries past, bursting at the seams. He'd kept everything: bits of string, half-broken instruments, a large bird's skeleton still wearing a tiny hat. Each had a story he'd forgotten long ago. Or tried to. Some of them still remembered.

At first glance, McGruff seemed the very picture of a bumbling, scatterbrained old man. His thinning hair stuck out in wild tufts as though perpetually caught in an argument with gravity. His spectacles perched crookedly on his nose, magnifying the bemused gleam in his eyes. His belly bulged slightly over his belt, straining the buttons of his shirt.

And yet, as he liked to say, appearances were "a dastardly mislead."

Beneath that shuffling, eccentric exterior lay a mind like a steel trap: razor-sharp, endlessly cunning, restlessly coiled. The contradiction wasn't just performative. It was survival. For centuries, McGruff had lived by being both: the fool you dismissed and the predator you never saw coming. He'd learned that people rarely feared what made them laugh.

His fingers closed around the crumpled tie, half-buried beneath old newspapers from a decade he could barely remember. "Ahhh, yeah, yeah, yeah! Done got it!" he crowed, holding the tie aloft like a trophy.



As he shook the fabric loose, something small and pale tumbled from the pile, rolling to a stop at his feet.

His breath caught.

The white Siberian tiger emerged from shadow, small enough to fit in his palm, her large round eyes shimmering with frozen mischief, her pose caught mid-pounce. Playful. Elegant. But beneath the smooth glaze ran something deeper: a subtle tension in the jaw, a barely raised brow, the hint of muscle coiled in her haunches. To those with the right sensitivity, she spoke. Not in words, but in the language of aura, memory, and power.

McGruff's grin faltered, then spread wider.

"Whooo-wee! Lookee what we got here!" he yelped, his voice bursting with delight.

Memories stirred. A wild hunt in Odisha, centuries ago, when he was still called Sodo. He'd tracked this marvelous creature for months: fierce, magical, clever enough to earn his respect. Instead of killing her, he'd done something rarer: preserved her essence. Bound it in porcelain and gold, mingled with Chauvin material. His rarest, most prized creation.

His hands trembled slightly as he carried her to the mantle, placing her among the others with reverence. Hundreds of figurines crowded the shelf: animals, people, strange hybrids caught mid-motion. They lined the wall in patient rows, glinting in the amber lamplight.

Among them stood three he never moved: Louie with his knowing smirk, Pam with her hand raised mid-gesture, Tom frozen in boyish laughter. "Ohhh," he breathed, dropping his voice to something soft and wondering, "dere's my teachuhs. Dere's my mentors. Dere's mah Mama an' my Daddy." He touched none of

them. He never did. "Good peoples. De best peoples." His greatest regret, dressed up as baby talk, because some things you could only say sideways.

They were gone now: Louie and Pam taken by a rockslide in the mountains, sudden and without witness, the kind of accident the world produces without explanation or warning. McGruff had never been able to prove it was anything more than that. He had his suspicions, old and unresolved, that sat in him the way a splinter sits when it goes too deep to reach. Their son Tom had followed years later, not by accident. The Black Brigade had seen to that, with a warrant and a firing line and the full procedural theater of institutional justice. McGruff had mourned them all. Then he'd done what he did best: he'd vanished. But not before gathering what remained. Through the power of Chauvin gold, he'd reconstructed them, not as they were, but as something smaller, safer.

He told himself it was tribute. Some nights, he suspected it was something darker.

"Ain't no time for gawkin', darlin'," he muttered, fingers lingering on the tiger's spine. "We got an open house to pull off."

McGruff tugged his tie straight, studying his reflection in the warped mirror. "Right. Time to sell this blasted house," he said. Then, almost as an afterthought: "Just another chapter in the grand farce of life."

He'd arranged the open house weeks ago. The agent who'd made the appointments had mysteriously disappeared. Of course. His likeness was on the mantle now, displayed with the others: Gerald, frozen mid-laugh in his sharp suit.