

1 or 38 Piece of Mind or The Real Reason the Parkway is so Backed Up

“I live to sever!”

“Ha!” I shouted over the sound of honking horns. “You missed, you heinous... piece of... half-chewed turkey jerky...” The chainsaw came swinging over my head again and I ducked just as it sliced a streetlamp in half. *Man, I’m really reaching today. Usually trash talk comes so naturally to me!* “Hey! Jackanapes!” He turned his huge, yellow eye toward me; that gruesome, green tower of ugly that men call *Piecemeal, the Living Jigsaw Puzzle!* The steel trap that formed part of his jaw was dripping with slime and his tiny other eye, hidden behind a mass of stitches, was burning like a red flame. “Come here, Freak Show, I want to show you the detailing on my club!” He snarled, shooting a blast of smoke from his decayed nostrils. Then, with a savage howl, he came bounding after me; leaping over cars and swinging his chainsaw in the air.

In case you don’t remember my good buddy, Piecemeal, from my last adventure, let me give you a refresher on just how hideous he is. Then maybe you’ll understand why the Parkway was so backed up. First of all, the guy is, like, nine or ten feet tall, okay? Big guy. Second, he isn’t built like you or me. He’s more like a mishmash of different things. For example, his left arm is big and hairy because its former owner was a werewolf. His right arm is actually where his right leg should be. Where his right arm should be is a gigantic spiked ball on a chain. His left leg is a regular human leg, and there’s a steel girder sticking out of his butt. He says it’s a third leg, but I’m still convinced it was some kind of accident that he never got fixed.

To make matters worse, he has two heads (neither of them very nice to look at); one is in his stomach. Like I said before, he’s got a big yellow eye and a little red eye that’s all stitched up, and part of his jaw is a steel bear trap. He’s got a few strands of gray hair growing out of (or rather stapled to) his head, and several sharp shards of metal sticking out of his skull. All over his body are these stitches shaped like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Just generally a mess. In addition to these vomit-inducing features are the following extras: an extra... one, two, three, four, yes... *five* hands! I think I see an extra face sewn onto the left side of his chest. That’s pretty gross. He’s got a few extra mouths here and there and a huge saw blade coming out of his crooked spine. He’s also got chains all over him, with various things attached to the other ends; a chainsaw, a harpoon and a hook; and all of these things were currently flying at me; left and right.

He latched onto the hood of a car with his simian hand-foot, shattering the windshield with his claws and steadying himself as he swung his tremendous spiked-ball. I watched it go around and around and had a mild heart attack when he finally smashed it into the pavement with a heaving thump. I somersaulted over the ball and dashed up the heavy chain. He was surprised to see me when I got to his shoulder and pulled back my club. I smashed it into his jaw and sent his head flying off. A chain that was tethered to his skull quickly issued out of his neck as the head went sailing, followed by another arm that was tightly gripping the chain. I told you he was a mess. You see, the thing about Piecemeal is that he was once a normal guy who was afflicted by some zombie curse. The curse made it so that he could survive any amount of physical injury. Not that he could heal, like me, but rather that he could survive severe injury or dismemberment. It just didn’t hurt him. So he started experimenting on himself; pulling things off and sewing them on someplace else; attaching machines and other gadgets onto him. And now he looks like this! But the advantage is that he can literally rebuild himself in the middle of a fight, so you have no idea what to expect. Thus, the hand that just popped out of his neck and punched me across the street. He’s basically indescribable, indestructible and unstoppable, and here I am duking it out with him on an overpass over the Garden State Parkway. My life is just one dream fulfilled after another.

A large hook came around and caught me around the waist, throwing me over the railing. I yelped as it swung me under the bridge and toward the oncoming traffic; drivers panicking and swerving to avoid my hanging form. I felt like a worm on a hook but, rather than taking the bait and biting me, the “fish” were hitting the brakes and causing a pileup that quickly stretched for as far as I could see. Once the danger of causing any accidents was past, I put all the momentum I could into a couple of swings and flung myself up over the other railing and onto the overpass again. I tugged on the hook and the chain pulled Piecemeal toward the edge, nearly falling. But he steadied himself and yanked it out of my grip, pulling it back under the bridge, up over the side and whipped it into the ground. I just barely avoided getting gutted.

“Stay still, you little pest!” I heard him shout. **“I can’t crush ya if you keep runnin’ around like that!”**

“Thanks for the advice,” I replied as I ducked behind an abandoned car. “I’ll try to keep that in mind!” I peeked my head out, but curled back into a ball when the chainsaw came swinging through the air again. “This is getting ridiculous.” I heard someone laying into their horn behind me; the same horn I had been hearing since I started this mess. “Okay!” I shouted, spinning around. “I heard you! You’re late for work, but...” I ducked as the chainsaw came whipping around, followed by the meat hook. “But I’m kind of busy right now!” I turned to face my terrifying enemy once again and the horn blared. “Look, chill out dude!” The horn continued to sound until Piecemeal’s tethered harpoon impaled the engine and ripped off the front of the car as it retracted. The terrified motorist tried to sound the horn a couple more times before he finally tumbled out of the car and fled. I turned to Piecemeal with a nod and said, “Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it,” he replied, removing the mutilated wreck from the barbed spike. **“That’s one of two things that’ve been drivin’ me nuts this morning.”**

“Oh, *that’s* a short drive!” I leapt from hood to hood, circling him.

“Guess what the other thing is!” He swung the spiked ball like a chain hammer and wrapped it around the lamppost that I was clinging to so dearly. He almost turned me into pâté, but the fact that he didn’t gave me the opportunity to toss a monkey wrench into his plans. I took my club and shoved the handle through the wide links in the chain, locking it there.

“Aw! Now it couldn’t be little old me, could it?” I took a bow and jumped down to the hood of a red sedan. “I’ll take your apology and surrender now, in whatever order you prefer!” With a growl, he crushed the lamppost, sent my club flying and retracted his hammer ball. He was also very angry. “Oh...” Flexing his muscles, six harpoons came rocketing out from his body, digging into the surrounding pavement, each connected to him by a chain. Then the other big two came whipping around again; the hook, trying to fish me out of the air; and the chainsaw, slicing and dicing every car before I could step to them. I dropped to the ground once I realized that it was no longer safe in the world of hood-jumping, but I soon found that it was hardly safe anywhere. With another surge of strength, he retracted his chained anchors and tore up most of the overpass with them. I flopped around as huge chunks of concrete were pulled up around me, and were smashed to rubble against the spiky sides of his body.

A lot of motorists have abandoned their cars and left... well, the smart ones anyway. But there are still too many people here, and Piecemeal isn’t the kind to give up when there’s still more stuff he can break. I was about to take our disagreement elsewhere, when I felt a sudden pain in my stomach and noticed that, even though I was running forward I was moving backward. Looking down, I saw a large metal spike sticking out of my midsection. “Funny. That wasn’t there before.” I turned and followed the chain, running through my back and right into Piecemeal’s hands. “Oh, not good!” With a sinister chuckle, he hooked the end of the chain to a clasp on his neck. Then, rotating his furry arm like a crank, I felt the chain draw me toward him faster and faster as it spooled around his rotating head. As if that wasn’t bad enough, a row of sharp, rusty, metal teeth was circling around his collar, ready to grind me up like a strawberry and mango smoothie; and the gigantic saw blade was whirring with excitement, just in case some piece of me got away. What fun.

Brittany was sitting at the wheel, occasionally peering out the window, and pulling her head back in; anxiously rapping her fingers against the steering wheel. No matter how many times she looked it still didn’t change the fact that they were stuck in traffic and nobody was going to move. Not as long as Piecemeal and I were having it out a quarter of a mile away. “C’mon!” she shouted at the car ahead. “Move!”

“They’re not going to move,” Iggy replied shortly, hovering up to the dashboard. “There isn’t even anybody in that car!”

“What are you doing?”

“What?”

“Would you put your seatbelt back on before your little head flies right through that windshield?”

“Are you even listening to me? The traffic isn’t going to move!”

Freddie was staring out the window, nervously bouncing his leg up and down in the back. “Look,” he said. “Maybe we should just get out and walk. I don’t know what’s going on, but I’m sure she’s in trouble! We’ve got to get to her somehow... and Iggy’s right. There is nobody in that car.”

“Thank you,” the shrunken head replied with a stitched smile.

Eva leaned forward and, frowning, said, “Maybe there was an accident.”

“I have no doubt,” Brittany replied flatly. “And its name is Charlotte Bathory.” A few moments later, the smoldering front half of a car came flying through the air and smashed into the row of vehicles beside them. “All right. That’s it,” she said, unbuckling her seatbelt. “Let’s go.”

“Just a little closer, Zombie Girl! Heh heh heh! Just a bit more and the two of us can become real close friends!” I struggled to remove myself from the harpoon, but the barbed sides had me fastened tight. **“You might say we’re going to be inseparable! Heh heh. Or, if you prefer... you’ll always be a part of me! Hahahaha! Doesn’t that sound like fun?”** I was getting so close I could feel his breath, and the sound of the spinning metal teeth was drowning out everything around me. **“I’m becoming very attached to you! Hee hee! Or is it the other way around? HA HA HA HA!”**

I was close enough now that it was sink or swim. “I’d love to stick around and listen to your idiotic taxidermy jokes all day, but I’ve got things to do.” I backflipped over his spinning head and, narrowly avoiding the circular saw, latched onto his back, so as to poke him with the spike that was protruding from my stomach. With a yelp of pain, he tightened his muscles and brought the chain too close to the blades, destroying them both. Now that my devious leash was broken, I reluctantly removed the harpoon from my body (the *hard* way) and threw it to the ground. As he recovered from the shock of my sudden escape, his frustration came to a boil and he hurled a car at me. “Hold on,” I growled, ducking low. “I’m still trying to fill in this hole you made in my stomach!”

“I’ll do worse than that, you little punk!” He shot his head out at me like a rocket, the chain whizzing behind it. At the last minute, I threw open a truck door and watched the imprint of his face punch through the metal. Once he finally dislodged his head, his eye was spinning and changing colors, and part of his jaw was off the hinge. **“Ooooooh... now you’re askin’ for it!”** He retracted his head, manually fixed the jaw with a snap, and lunged at me again, this time biting the door and tearing it off the hinges. **“Heh heh heh! Nothin’ to protect you now!”** His fiercely chomping head snapped at me over and over again, each time coming nearer to taking a bite out of me. I scrambled for safety, finding my mislaid club under a car. The next time he snapped at me, I let him have it right on top of his green head. Then he snapped once more, hard this time, and aiming at my legs. I stepped to the side and brought my foot down on his chain, just behind the back of his head.

He gnashed his jaw like a maniac, but I wasn’t about to let him go. I lifted my club up and, hard as I could, slammed the handle through one of the chain links like I had before, this time tacking him to the street. His body tugged and tugged to free the wayward head, but it was too tight and my club was powerful enough to hold him anyway. I had been hurling an awful lot of insults at him, after all. I stepped rather casually up to him and avoided his flailing arms as the face in his stomach eyed me menacingly. With a crank, he started up the chainsaw and swung it at me, but I caught it quite easily and used it to cut right through his head chain.

“What... what’re you doing?” he yelled from the ground. I removed the club and took the chain in my hands, lifting his irate head into the air and leveling my eyes with his. **“What’re you doing?”**

“I was told you can’t be destroyed, no matter how many pieces you’re in. Let’s see if you can find the rest of yourself when you’re searching from the bottom of the Passaic River!” I spun him around like I was in the hammer throw competition and let him fly, his chain fluttering through the air like a kite’s tail.

“I’ll get you for this! Crush her, body of mine!” Moaning and swearing revenge, his head disappeared into the distance where, I truly believe, it landed in the Passaic River. But I did still have his confused body to contend with. He did have a head in his stomach, but it wasn’t as smart as his real head, so there was no reason for me to be afraid. At best, his aim and dexterity were horrendous. He came lumbering toward me, trying to squash me with his massive body, but I went low and flipped him over as he came. The road shook when he fell, leaving cracks three or four inches wide. He struggled to get up, but I already had him right where I wanted him.

“Look at you. Half of you belongs in a junk heap, the other half belongs in the morgue and, to make matters worse, your zippers are showing all over the place.” My club began to glow and I knew it was time to put this baby to bed. “You are a joke, my friend. So big and yet you can’t even stand up!” I didn’t realize that while I was taunting him, another arm was growing out of his back to help him to his

feet. “You should quit, now that you’re just a head... no, wait... that didn’t sound right. You’re a head, so you should... no... gimme a second here.” Apparently he couldn’t spare a second, because he leapt to his feet and started up the chainsaw again, eager to cut me down to size. “Oops. Long story short, I came, I saw, you crapped out.” I swung just like... oh, I am really bad today. I swung hard, is the point. So hard that I watched his giant silhouette hurtle into the air and split into pieces as he fell. Who knows what happened after that, but I all I know is that Piecemeal the Living Jigsaw Puzzle is living all over New Jersey now. “Come back and visit when you’ve got it together again. Ha! Got it together again! That’s pretty good. It’s too bad he didn’t hear it.”

“Charlotte!” I saw Freddie down on the road below, with Brittany, Eva and Iggy with him.

“Hi, guys!”

“Are you okay?”

“Sure! Why wouldn’t I be?”

They were confused. “Well,” Brittany shouted. “What about Piecemeal?”

I looked around and shrugged my shoulders. “What *about* him?”