

# Introductions

Welcome! This book presents daily highlights from the year in which our novel *God's Furry Angels* unfolds. It uses the generally accepted calendar of humans, notwithstanding that under the Doctrine of Grakk-koth, cats rarely allow such limitations. To appease our feline readers, this list includes a few notable highlights that cats often link to popular lore of this sort and most everything else.

We start by introducing the major players opening this drama, set within a small, rural northeastern Kansas community, circa the early 1990s. To identify all animals except the hawk, we use names bestowed by the book's humans rather than their native titles, which may change over time or have symbols hard to convey in human speech. Our cast includes:

- John Ferguson, 23 years old, an energetic accountant completing his first year in the field.
- Jessica Andrews Ferguson, 22, an exobiology student and pre-med major who has dated John for more than four years.
- Sebastian, Jessica's 12-year-old male cat. Jessica thinks the silver-haired feline may be a Russian blue, but she's not sure. Sebastian, like most cats, sees Jessica as a mostly hairless giant, and he is quite sure. They both consider the other their pet.
- Scarface, an 8-year-old veteran alley cat and garbage-can warrior who has staked out the Ferguson home as his domain.
- Jason Alexander Scabbard, 70, the proud owner of an aging downtown pet store and self-appointed guardian of all the town's animals, domestic and wild. He takes special care of the many, many creatures who live in the city park.
- Pepper Janes, 67, a longtime downtown veterinarian and friend of Jason's. As the small town's animal control officer, Pepper works with the police and fire departments to advise them on such issues. He aids Jason in quite a bit of community work.
- Margaret James, 69, Pepper's wife and work assistant. She manages his business and just about everything else.
- Edna, a 9-year-old fox squirrel who acts as a mother figure for the city park's many residents.
- Butch, an 8-year-old golden retriever who lives in the storage area of the park's old windmill, a beloved landmark transported board by board long ago from Holland.
- Tom'alaxt, a 4-year-old red-tailed hawk who watches over the park and town.
- Old Snapper, a 59-year-old snapping turtle settled in the creek that runs through the city park.
- George and Gracie, 6-year-old married ducks who sometimes stay in the park.

## The events of *January*

1 – John marries Jessica in a cool little ceremony at the First United Methodist Church, with Sebastian serving as the best cat/man. (Arranging that feline participation took a fair bit of negotiating that we won't go into here.) The old silver-haired beast puts up with all the pomp until the time comes for circumstance, in this case, John slipping his ring on Jessica's gorgeous finger. As the beaming groom reaches down, the cat guarding the bride's golden circlet slaps that needed ring under the minister's podium. Jessica lovingly scolds her pet while the audience laughs. John bends down to retrieve the keepsake and tears his tuxedo in a silly place, drawing chuckles even from the pastor. Moved by John's sheepish acceptance of it all, Sebastian reluctantly decides to forgo all the other disruptions he had planned, which disappoints Scarface and the other felines waiting in the hallway. Scarface almost convinces the other cats to get on with it, but their respect (and fear) of Sebastian leads them to return home.

2 – To conserve funds, the newlyweds spend their honeymoon moving most of John's things into Jessica's college home, a rental house she's held for two years during her undergrad studies and engagement. Many of his treasures – college mementos, boxed books, bowling trophies, boyhood collectibles – go straight to the attic, for his immediate needs take more than enough time this day. Jessica cleared just one of her four walk-in closet bars for his suits, pants, and shirts. She assures him that he doesn't need more space, for she plans to give most of these old clothes to Goodwill. John wonders how his wife owns enough shoes to fill that rack on the back wall, but Jessica shows him how he's wrong, for she emptied the bottom row just for him. John points to a spot where he can place his dresser, but Jessica nixes that, saying the old thing should go straight into the trash. Instead, she cleared a drawer in her dresser for his socks, T-shirts, and other undies. His new wife also emptied a row for him in the bathroom cabinet, which he declares is not enough space. After some back and forth, she allows him to set his three-tiered wire rack stand in front of the toilet. It can hold his sports magazines, electric razor, and hair dryer, and as she looks at it, she's sure it can also handle her dryer, plus her curler, facial massager, razors, and other appliances. By the end of that discussion, John has one shelf on the wire rack, and Sebastian's sitting in it. The old cat has enjoyed listening to this afternoon of negotiation and triumph. Having scoped out the house's best ambush points long ago, Sebastian wastes no time plotting traps for the interloper.

3 – The torture begins innocently enough. Sebastian nips John's left ankle when the man rises from bed to check a nightly disturbance. John cries out in mock pain, having expected something like this from the cat after all the

shenanigans endured while dating Jessica the last four years. But the attack leaves him a feeling of uncertainty, vulnerability. He's not used to that.

**4** – John calls a friend with a truck to help cart his big television console out of storage. Jessica stops them as they carry that long, oak-lined set into the living room. She understood they were going to buy a new TV, a smaller one, with a little CD player. John admits he had agreed to that, but then reconsidered and changed his mind, saying how they needed to save money, and besides, he really wanted this 26-inch screen to watch football.

"Football?" she exclaims, having not considered that he wouldn't just want her to go to games, but to experience them at home.

"Oh, yeah! The Super Bowl's coming up! And then basketball kicks into gear!" That earns a groan.

"But it's so big," she says, pointing out how the console almost fills a wall.

"That's because it has this great record player!" John says.

He lifts the lid to show a turntable that plays not just 33 and 45 speeds, but 78 and even 8 and a third and 16 and two-thirds.

"That's hard to find anymore!" John assures her. "You wouldn't want to give that up."

Jessica echoes him, although her tone suggests she doesn't believe this.

"And those speakers," John points out, "built-in, you know! They can fill this whole house with sound."

"The whole house," Jessica whispers.

John shares how great his record collection is, with its old Dixieland and modern jazz, the Beatles and Mozart, Doris Day and the Carpenters... which is all Jessica wants to hear this day. She walks out and leaves the set-up to her husband... until John starts to cart in several boxes of long-play albums. That's where Jessica draws the line. He can fill half of the cabinet beneath the bookshelf with his records, but that is all. John starts to protest, sees the anger in her eyes, and prays the attic is not too hot. For they still must carry his recliner into the living room, and he knows she won't like that.

**5** – Tom'alaxt the hawk cuts off two alley cats trying to chase some mice into the city park. One feline asks the bird why he doesn't go south for the winter. Tom'alaxt spins back and nearly takes the cat's right ear off, which ends that night's silly questions. Meanwhile, at the Ferguson household, Sebastian takes a midnight leap from the refrigerator onto John's head, catching the sleepy accountant totally unprepared as he wandered into the kitchen hoping the leftover coffee might still taste fresh. Sebastian's sharp claws tear through John's pajama top on the way to his skin. He cries out in real pain this time, wondering just what he did to deserve this. Sebastian speeds off before the giant thinks to retaliate.

**6** – Sebastian smacks John's right ankle with a run-by clawing while the newlyweds enjoy a candlelight supper. John girds his anger, wondering only now just what he's in for from this feline. Later that night, after Jessica wakes her husband to check out a strange sound, Sebastian smacks John's left





heel with a bite that surprises them both in its power. Jessica laughs, telling John to just ignore Sebastian's pranks and the cat will quit. John seriously doubts that, but in the spirit of pleasing his wife, he decides to stop charting these nightly events.

**7** – Jessica sees John bringing a box down from the attic. “Some of my old books,” he says, heading toward the living room. “I have some real classics here!” She follows him in silence to watch her beloved take different decorative flowers and knick-knacks down from her shelves, all to make room for his worn hardcovers and paperbacks. Surprised, and somewhat offended, she stops, takes a slow 10-count, and asks him why he didn't seek her permission first. John did not expect that. Touched by her concern, and a bit amused, he asks if he can do this, his tone confident she'll agree. After all, John really likes these books and is sure she will, too. “We've talked about this,” he reminds her, spinning through all the treasured history and science-fiction tales they've enjoyed. So she caves in and clears off a shelf, enjoying how her man revels in the memories these tomes generate. But she draws a line when John starts putting some VHS tapes out. “In the cabinet,” she declares. Considering the dust and spiders he encountered when he placed some LPs in there, John suggests a few tapes might fit beneath his light stand. But Jessica draws a firm line. She hadn't wanted that old, scarred end table or his ratty lounge in the first place. She wasn't going to totally trash her living room by displaying those cheap-looking videos.

**8** – John lays still, trying to sleep, ignoring Sebastian's stabs at his feet through the sheets. The cat flexes his claws at John's toes, again and again and again. John prays for help and patience, then tries rolling his feet away from the cat. Sebastian just sits back and waits for John to rest, then dives onto the stung appendages once more. John takes a deep breath and bides his time, not wishing to bother Jessica with this. And that's how we find him as the sun begins to rise, having achieved very little sleep that night.



**9** – Jason Alexander Scabbard, owner of Jason's Pet Store, calls veterinarian Pepper James away from supper to care for a wounded, untagged dog Jason found along his walk home. She's a well-mannered collie, not uttering a sound as Pepper looks her over, identifying many scratches and an infected toe, but little else. After Margaret bathes the dog, Pep treats the wounds, gives the collie a vitamin shot, and puts her in a kennel with fresh water and some soft food. “Outside that toe, she just hasn't eaten well,” he tells Jason. “We can fix that.”

**10** – John puts a sign on the front porch proclaiming the Ferguson residence. This gives the newly married couple their first family picture opportunity since the wedding. Pleased with life, John leads Jessica back inside, considers the open nature of this afternoon, pulls out John Coltrane's *Live! At the Village Vanguard*, and drifts into his recliner, savoring the smooth jazz. Never having heard anything like that before, Jessica rushes in to

see what's going on. She spies John laying back, his eyes closed, a smile on his face. The serene sounds fill the house, just as John said. She leans back against the wall, wondering if she might just enjoy hearing this album and many others John may introduce her to. That's when the record skips. Surprised, Jessica glances over to see Sebastian standing atop the console, staring right at her. He plops his broad belly down, which makes the record hop again. John's eyes rip open this time. Sebastian stretches his limbs across the polished oak and starts adjusting his paws beneath him, seeking just the right fit. Each time the heavy cat shifts his bulk, the record needle skips. After its fourth bounce, John bursts out of his chair, shouting Sebastian's name. The cat lays there, watching him. Heedless of his danger, even though his pounding steps reverberate through the floor and record, John hurries across the room to slip his hands under the cat. Sebastian strikes, biting hard. The needle jumps once, twice, three times. John shouts. Jessica starts laughing. Sebastian bites again. John screams and pulls his hands away. The record screeches into a different groove and bounces yet again before the arm retracts. John girds himself, trying to contain his fury with that blasted cat. Sebastian shows no indecision, meeting John's gaze with absolute authority. The accountant looks at his wife, then the cat, throws up his hands, and stomps into the bedroom, closing the door. That sight both endears and saddens Jessica. "Now, honey," she says while picking up her feline friend, "you must be nicer to him. I love him. I really do." She sets the cat down to the floor with this command: "Now go play, and stay off this." Restarting the record, Jessica joins her husband on the bed. Sebastian lets them go, contemplating what more he might do to the interloper and his noisemaker. Drawing his wife in his arms, John wonders if there's anything he can do to win that cat over.

**11** – After a church gathering, the Fergusons enjoy a nice meal out before returning home. John makes sure to bring Sebastian some gristly leftovers from his steak, thinking it might endear him to the stubborn cat. Sebastian does give John a welcome eye, nosing with anticipation the foil bag that gives off some incredible smells. John sets several strips of fatty meat on a saucer and places it on the floor beside Sebastian's food bowl. The cat looks the beef over, grabs a greasy piece, and starts to carry it into the living room. That concerns John, but he doesn't know what to do. Jessica steps in, blocking the cat's way. "You know better than that!" she tells her beloved pet. Sebastian stares at her a minute, the gristle strand hanging from both sides of his jaw, then turns around and throws the slice across the kitchen. Before either John or Jessica can do anything, the cat surges onto his hind legs and pounces on the lumpy discard, kicking it around the room like a toy. Jessica cringes as bits of blubber and cartilage scatter across the wooden floor, and oily grease splatters against the polished boards. John starts to scold the cat, but Sebastian pays no attention, batting the meat fat from one side of the kitchen to the other. Jessica shakes her head and leaves the room. John watches her go, then picks up the plate, sets it in the refrigerator, and joins his wife.

**12** – John wonders aloud why Jessica is hanging her third set of new living room curtains in a year. She smiles and asks what he'd like for supper. He stops to consider that and forgets all about the curtains.

**13** – A blinding snow blankets their rural Kansas town. Wondering when the storm will break, Jason takes extra bags of chow with him for feeding the animals during his afternoon park visit. He also carries a few old blankets that he tosses into an auxiliary storage room, where Butch sleeps. The dog thanks him with a big kiss on the lips.

**14** – Waking to a strange sound, Jessica swoons over how her cat chose to nest on John's back. "You see? You see?" she says with love for them both. Having tried to ignore the feline for hours, John kisses her and locks away all other thoughts. Jessica never notices the many scabbed pinpricks left on John's back by Sebastian's claws.

**15** – Sliding into his lounge, John enjoys one of the Duke's finer westerns on TV. As the second act begins, he feels something wet soaking through his pants. He reaches back and finds a chewed-up string of smelly steak gristle.

**16** – Leaving for work, John finds Jessica sitting on the back porch, tossing an old catnip mouse to a rough-looking alley cat John's often seen lurking around their yard. The accountant starts to question his wife but says nothing after the scarred feline gives him a stare that would cower a grizzly bear.

**17** – Butch, the golden retriever who watches over the city park, tries to sneak up on Edna the squirrel as she comes down to check on a rat stuck in an old windmill board. When she lands on the ground, the dog charges forward, barking in a savage fury. The motherly squirrel stops, then hops back a few steps, pretending Butch surprised her. That pleases him to no end. Edna smiles and moves on, having already acted this out for the dog five times this month.

**18** – Pepper stops by to help Jason open his shop. The veterinarian looks over the kittens, gerbils, mice, fish, birds, and dogs, finding them all in good spirits and health. It's Jason who appears a bit run down. Pepper asks why his friend doesn't get someone to help him out around here. "Take away your only real source of work?" Jason replies. "Why, I couldn't do that! No sir! It'd be the most unfriendly thing I ever did. You'd fall so completely out of shape if it wasn't for me gettin' your blood flowin' each day." That starts their next argument, which stretches on through the week.

**19** – Jessica finds Sebastian sleeping among John's favorite books yet again. She scolds the old cat while lifting him off the living room shelf... but Jessica only smiles when she finds her purring pet has



returned there later that afternoon. Sebastian appreciates the view that bookshelf provides and the breezes that pass by, carrying scents of other rooms. Such information helps him plot the best moments to attack John.

**20** – Facing a bitterly cold night, Scarface takes shelter within the heating vents that run under the Ferguson home. He reminds himself once again to widen that hole in the rectangular metal tube. Perhaps dusting the aluminum tunnel would also help, before the spiders become too much of a nuisance.

**21** – John's redirected mail starts arriving with Jessica's afternoon deliveries. She sorts through it, seeing all she expected, until she gets to a sports magazine swimsuit issue. The scantily clad woman on the cover draws her envy and ire, and not a little curiosity. She's always wondered what these publications were like. Holding one in her hands for the first time, she opens the pages to find pretty girls scattered over all sorts of beach scenes. Indeed, more than half of the issue is filled with these ocean shots. Some of the most beautiful women Jessica's ever seen grace those pages, in some of the briefest clothing she's ever imagined outside of a lingerie shop, but she can't picture what it has to do with sports. It burns her to think John would order this, until she's reminded that her women's magazines often feature such flimsy swimwear, and that this is but one issue in his annual subscription... or so she assumes. She determines to pay far more attention to what he reads and watches from now on.

**22** – John almost slips on the old woven rug Jessica keeps in their bathroom. He appreciates its protective warmth from the cold wooden floors, but he's still not used to how that small mat bunches up under his feet. Then Jessica steps in, cuddling beside him to squeeze onto the rug's remaining space, and John whispers endless blessings to its weavers.

**23** – Driving home from church, Jessica asks if John would be interested in joining the choir. He wonders if she has time between all her schoolwork. She admits it might be hard while she takes classes, but she could always participate in-between semesters. Beyond that, she sees no reason why he couldn't sing with them if he wanted to. John hesitates, saying she's the singer in the family, but Jessica defends his voice. "Your screams are in such good pitch!" she says with a smile.

**24** – Jessica sees Sebastian lying on the chill living room windowsill. Scarface rests on the other side, curled up within a wind-blown snowbank. Jessica pauses to observe them, but even though she sees all that happens, she doesn't understand the many ways they communicate without saying a thing. Their nonchalant attitudes to each other also surprise Jessica, though she prefers that to fighting. She likes the idea of Sebastian having a feline companion, even if just through a pane of glass.



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