



August 10, 2025



The Smile Factor

It didn't look sick. It didn't act hungry. No fear or aggression as it approached. If anything, it displayed that submissive canine smile. Labradoodle, Jax guessed—until it stopped and showed its eyes. Or what should have been eyes. Instead, two sockets wept a dull pink fluid onto the sidewalk. It was over in seconds.

At the motel, Andi screamed into her phone about the grinning, eyeless, saber-toothed version of the husband who'd gone out earlier. No one heard.

Project Guardstar officers arrived with two cages. The squad captain smiled. The city's first two humanoid sentinels were up and running.