

# An Institutional Problem

Jim, Gabriel and the New Universe

Good Omens 2 is said to be the bridge between the two apocalyptic seasons; the stakes are low, nothing of importance happens to the world, and the plot just gets the characters where it wants them in order for the Big One to begin. That's inarguably what it is. However, apart from simply moving the plot along, it also foreshadows the very end of the story by answering questions that were bound to be born by it in advance.

Good Omens 3 ends with a peek to the godless universe that has been created, in which angels and demons shouldn't, on paper, exist. Despite that, we see two people, Asa and Anthony, who resemble Aziraphale and Crowley in more ways than just looks, and we see all the familiar faces of the angels and demons we once knew. The narrative goes out of its way to hint at Aziraphale, Crowley, and everyone else's persistent existence, but one might ask "in what form do they exist in these people?" and "why is that better than their previous existence?" To answer these questions, we have to review what we learned from Good Omens 2. More specifically, we have to review what we learned from Gabriel.

## What happened to Gabriel?

At the end of GO2, we learn that Gabriel was meant to be punished by being demoted, and in the process he would have his memories erased. The Metatron explained that sending him to Hell would make it look like an institutional problem. Funnily enough for him, the depth of that institutional problem was instead proven by the act of Gabriel removing his memories. We will get to that.

Gabriel, then, faced with this punishment, does what any rational person would do, and gets naked. He takes it a bit further than just clothes, of course, and removes his memories as well, storing them in a fly. This is what he resorts to in order to hide from those who want to punish him. In this context, it is an act of suppression in the face of fear.

In the end, everything turns out okay, and Gabriel has his memories restored. That makes narrative sense to be his happy ending, as it signifies the act of finally coming out from hiding, and escaping the certain punishment he was facing until that point.

Despite that completely logical narrative, when we meet Gabriel without his memories, or Jim, he's not portrayed as someone we have to pity for not remembering, or someone reduced to his lack of memory. He's a version of Gabriel that's being explored throughout the season, and his character raises questions.

## Who is Jim?

It would be easy to say that, since he doesn't have his memories, Jim is definitely not Gabriel, and then move on with our day. However, that's not quite what is being shown to us.

When introducing Jim's character, the series doesn't try to answer the question "is this the exact same person as Gabriel?", but rather, "what remains of the archangel Gabriel when you remove his memories?"

In Jim, we see a person who speaks and acts quite a lot like Gabriel. He's equally annoying, blunt, and eager about things. These are character traits he's always had. However, at the same time, we see a person who hugs Aziraphale, tells him he loves him, wants to make friends with him and Crowley, and who is genuinely kind and nice to people. These are not things the Gabriel we knew from series 1 would do.

As a side effect of Gabriel losing his memories, he also lost the association he had with Heaven. This is visually represented by Jim having brown eyes as a contrast to Gabriel's purple, which were always representative of his status as Supreme Archangel. His entire existence has revolved around that status, and removing that left him with the same personality, but with potential to become someone kinder, someone who looks for connection and who is capable of expressing love. Jim was Gabriel with the potential to evolve into something human without being doomed by his role in Heaven.

Jim is the core, then, of Gabriel; the starting point, the blank canvas. He's not nobody, though, he's still an individual, he still has his own character traits "built in" him, but he has the potential to be someone who's not dictated by Heaven. The role he was created for doomed him to be cruel from the beginning, and that is an institutional problem.

Is being Gabriel's *core* sufficient for Jim to *be* Gabriel? That's a question extended to us rather than fully answered. That makes sense — after all, it is an ontological debate, or several ones. What makes something what it is, and someone who they are, isn't something that has one correct answer.

*"It's perfectly safe. He's not... you know who... any longer. Well, I mean, he is, but—"*

Aziraphale himself struggles with defining “you know who”. What he’s trying to say is that he’s not a threat, which is certain, considering that the threat he posed was associated with his role in Heaven, which wasn’t part of him. But he also knows that’s not all Gabriel was, and that Jim has traits of him.

*“I know someone who looks like you.”*

*“That’s probably me then. I think that’s one of the main ways you can tell.”*

*“...when you told my only friend to shut his stupid mouth and die. And I did not care for it.”*

*“I don’t think that was me. But I am very sorry.”*

These quotes might seem contradictory, but, while the first one contemplates identity as a whole, the second one points at the removal of his institution and the actions caused from it from the equation. Jim doesn’t claim the action but he apologizes anyway, he feels the continuity of responsibility without him necessarily being the agent, which makes Gabriel’s identity even more of a grey area and a question.

Jim isn’t the person who told Aziraphale to die, but does that action define Gabriel anyway?

Is Gabriel all the things he did, or all the things he had the potential to do but didn’t? Both are actually answers given to define the self, as are many others that blur the lines. One thing is for certain; *at his core*, Gabriel isn’t the Supreme Archangel of all Heaven. He is some annoying, goofy guy. He was a person with infinite potential, and Heaven stole that from him by giving him a role that was always going to make him cruel.

In short, Gabriel’s *essential* self survived the loss of memory, and that is who Jim is. Whether that’s enough to constitute Gabriel’s personal identity, that is a philosophical question up for discussion.

## Who are Asa and Anthony?

Asa and Anthony are to Aziraphale and Crowley what Jim is to Gabriel. They are Aziraphale and Crowley’s essential selves, two people given the potential they always deserved. That doesn’t make them tantamount to the entirety of Aziraphale and Crowley’s existence, but rather, Aziraphale and Crowley merely somehow exist through them in the form of their essential selves.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the situation that led to Asa and Anthony's existence and the situation that led to Jim's existence. Asa and Anthony aren't people with their memories erased, they are constructed by the removal of the Heaven/Hell system. The non-existence of memories in their brain was an unavoidable consequence. The exact opposite happened to Jim: Gabriel's memories were removed, and the non-existence of the system's influence in his brain was the unavoidable consequence of that.

Furthermore, those "removals" (of the memories and of the system, respectively) signify vastly different things. As was mentioned, for Gabriel it was an act of hiding in fear of punishment, and it was the content of the punishment itself. For Aziraphale and Crowley it was an act of liberation. Gabriel accidentally proved how one can have infinite potential without this institution, and Aziraphale and Crowley chose to give that to everyone.

These things render those two narratives fundamentally different, while, at the same time, Jim acts as a prelude, mostly philosophically, to Asa and Anthony.

Jim is and isn't Gabriel, and Asa and Anthony are and aren't Aziraphale and Crowley. That might not feel like a satisfying answer, but how much they are and aren't depends on one's own philosophy. However, what is clear is they are neither the exact same thing as Aziraphale and Crowley, nor are they entirely different people.

Nevertheless, in the narrative, Asa and Anthony are at the very least representative of Aziraphale and Crowley as people that aren't burdened by a system that steals their potential away. They are one version of the people they could be if their institution hadn't doomed them. They are a representation of Aziraphale and Crowley as free; free to love, to exist together, to get married and be themselves. That was who they always wanted to be.

The thought then that, despite everything, their love survived this transformation, is a beautiful one.