

For They Shall Inherit The Earth

by

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Prologue

London 1980

The large Gothic church of St Ignatius stood in its ancient, snow-covered graveyard in the borough of Lambeth. The dark spire pierced the frozen star-lit sky as a chill wind swept around the headstones

Father Kennedy threw his cigarette butt out into the dark and watched the wind create a flurry of sparks, then closed the heavy front door. He shuffled along the central aisle of the dimly-lit church past rows of empty pews. Suddenly he stopped and felt a shiver run down his spine as he spotted a dark figure through the gloom kneeling before the altar.

The figure rose with blazing red eyes and turned toward the priest and said: "Do not be afraid Father they have sent me here to prepare the way."

"You're a demon! You shouldn't be in here!" said the trembling, holy man.

"A demon in a church," said the figure with a chortle.

"Prepare the way! What do you mean?"

The distant sound of a phone ringing distracted the priest and he turned his head toward the sound. When he looked back the figure had gone and the large Bible, which normally lay closed on the altar, was open at The Revelation of St John the Divine.

Meanwhile, in the New York City borough of Queens a boy child was born to single parent Mia Baumann. She named the child Thomas.

Part One

City Under Shadow

Chapter One

Present Day

A full moon shone over a wind-blown Balgay Hill as Dundee absorbed another Halloween. Children screamed and laughed in the distance as they tricked or treated their way around houses decorated with cardboard ghouls and pumpkin lanterns.

In the graveyard the trees and shrubs waved in the wind which caressed the headstones before heading over the sleeping river Tay. Small animals scurried around the foot paths, separating the lines of graves. A lone dog ran across the iron bridge which connected the cemetery with the hill where the pale-domed Mills Observatory sat.

The moonlight illuminated a large, silver granite monolith with an inscription which read: ‘A time which has ended in this world has just begun in another’. The wind made the rusty chain, which ran around the structure, creek.

Clouds passed over the moon as the graveyard quaked. A rumbling noise filled the air around the monolith as a huge hole formed where turf and soil had sunk out of sight.

A cruel, howling wind erupted as a figure rose from the pit and hovered before descending onto the path beside the stone.

Didier Grondin gazed around the cemetery with crimson eyes as the small animals ran back to the safety of their holes. He laughed! *It was good to be back in the physical again*, he thought. He didn’t need a fucking key to move between worlds he was way too powerful for that! He had gained power in the Dark Realm by destroying the demon Hel and her father Loki, then absorbing their energy. The extra power was enough to allow him to ‘bridge’ the worlds so he could begin his campaign.

Grondin walked across the iron bridge, passed the deserted observatory and descended the slopes of the hill. He strolled through the streets of the city among groups of people in fancy dress. Eventually he took refuge from the crowds in the Howff Graveyard where he sat on a wooden bench. *I need another name*, he thought. He gazed up at an old office block where light blazed out of every window before being permeated by the darkness. "That's it!" he said to himself as he stood up, “Derek Colin Thomson.”

Shadows flowed across the path as he walked past the darkened headstones and left the cemetery. *I need money*, he thought, walking through the city streets before coming to a halt in front of a blue illuminated sign high on a wall which read: ‘Discovery Casino’. *Perfect*, he thought with a grin.

Two heavy muscled men in poor fitting black suits stood on either side of the main casino door as well-dressed people entered the building. Thomson ducked in behind a man and woman in their late forties. The woman wore a dark, violet velvet dress under a black suede coat while the man wore a light, grey suit.

“Evening,” said the man as they approached the security men.

“Evening,” replied one man.

Thomson approached the bouncers as the couple disappeared through the open doors.

“Evening,” he announced.

The men looked him up and down before one asked: “Excuse me sir, but are you a member?”

“No.” Thomson replied.

“Well I'm afraid we can't let you in.”

“Can't I go in for tonight?” Thomson pleaded.

“I'm afraid not. You'll have to fill out a membership form and return it with an ID,” said the doorman as he reached behind one of the open doors and grabbed a form from a shelf.

Suddenly the other doorman screamed and clapped his hands over his eyes.

“What's wrong Tom?” shouted the other bouncer throwing aside the application form.

Blood oozed between the fingers of the stricken man as people in the line behind Thomson screamed and shouted. In the pandemonium Thomson slipped into the club and walked along a dark hallway which had glitter stars stuck to the ceiling and walls. He pulled back into the shadows as two security men ran past on their way to the front door. *His trick had worked well*, he thought with a laugh.

The main lounge was a mass of busy roulette and poker tables. Slot machines lined two of the four walls. A bar ran the length of another wall and waitresses flowed between it and the tables. Thomson walked up to where a young woman sat behind a barred window with a 10 cm horizontal gap at the bottom.

“I would like five thousand pounds worth of chips,” he said with red eyes.

The cashier gasped and absent-mindedly selected various chips and pushed them through the gap taking no money.

Thomson sat at a roulette table with two others: a middle-aged Chinese man and a younger man with cropped red hair. The croupier, a woman in her late twenties, was dressed in a dark, grey skirt with a matching waistcoat over a white blouse.

Thomson placed all his chips on red as the croupier announced: “Place your bets please.”

She spun the wheel after other bets were made and, as it slowed, the ball bounced a few times before landing on 21 red.

“Twenty-one red,” said the woman in a casual tone while pushing chips toward Thomson, who again put them all on red. They spun the wheel, and again the ball landed on red. The Chinese man let out a sigh as they shoved Thomson's winnings toward him.

After moving from table to table Thomson decided it was time to leave the casino as his winning was attracting the attention of not only the punters, but the management. He cashed in the chips and strolled along the hallway with the twinkling stars.

Outside, Thomson took a deep breath and patted the pocket where he had placed the cheque for £220,000; he had asked for the remaining £5000 in cash. He strolled along the street past two drunks who were more interested in fish and chips than him.

Back in the hotel Thomson lay back on the double bed in his Executive\Club room and switched on the television. The late news filled the screen; another body had been found in a field to the west of the city, announced the newscaster; that made three in the last four weeks all with the same markings. It now looked as if Dundee had a serial killer on the loose, the woman continued. Thomson raised his head and stared at the images of police in and around a field. “Mm... interesting” he said to himself.

Chapter Two

Matthew Wilson could only gaze at the vision of a huge vampire bat with crimson eyes as it hovered over him; the large, black wings flapping furiously. He tried to move, but it was as if his whole body was paralysed. Then, the creature turned into Didier Grondin and he woke up and jumped out of bed. He anxiously looked around the bedroom, but only the darkness stared back.

After showering and dressing Matthew yawned strolling into the kitchen. He opened the window blinds and watched the wind shake small shrubs in his back-garden through the early morning light. The shrill ring of the telephone brought him out of the reverie.

“Yeah, hullo?” he grunted into the receiver.

“Mattie, it's David de Longford.”

“Jeez! How are you doing?”

“I'm fine. Look, I'm sorry for phoning so early, but did you have a weird dream?”

“What, the one with the bat that turned into Grondin?”

“Yeah, listen I don't know how he's done it, but I think he's slipped back into the physical world!”

“Oh no!”

“Do you still have the Key?”

“It's safe; I checked on it yesterday.”

“Well, check again and be careful. I don't think he's after it though. I don't know where he is, or what he's up to, but it won't be for the good of the planet that's for sure.”

After finishing his breakfast Matthew strolled into the lounge and sat on the settee. His mind went back to the cave where he and David psychically pushed Grondin and the demon Hel back into the Dark Realm. *How could Grondin have freed himself without the Key and if he has managed it what was the point in protecting the Key from him, he thought?*

He left the house into a bright day with a cold wind which made him pull the zip of his jacket up to its fullest extent. Then, scurrying along the street Matthew glanced at the old abbey which brought back memories of the battle for the Key. He thought: *Grondin was desperate to attain the Key; so what has changed?*

He arrived at his work, Arbroath Library, and discovering no-one around he at once took the key for the basement from beside the computer on the main desk.

A musty smell greeted him as he pushed open the heavy, brown wooden door and switched on the light. He entered the old vaulted store room and searched along the lower shelf on one side of the room. After finding what he was looking for, Matthew stuck his hand behind an old book with a worn, brown cover and pulled out a grey cash box.

The lock resisted his small key at first, but relented when he applied more pressure. He gazed at the bronze key with its green patina as it sat peacefully in the packing. The inscription on the handle which could transport a person or something from one world to another, seemed to bewitch Matthew; so he slammed the lid shut. *If Grondin was back, it wouldn't be safe in here; or maybe it would be if he's not interested in it, he thought, as he locked the box and hid it back behind the book.*

Matthew felt a heavy gloom settle over him as he climbed the stairs. *Not back to this demon shit again, he thought, as memories of his girlfriend, Janey, flooded his mind, who turned out to be the demon Hel.*

“All this is supposed to be over,” he said to himself, shaking his head.

“What's supposed to be over Wilson?” Kelly, one of his colleagues, asked at the top of the stairs.

Matthew looked up in surprise, and said: “Nothing just singing, that's all!”

“I think you'd better learn to whistle then, mate!” she teased.

As he reached the top of the stair Matthew watched as she slipped behind the main desk. She had on a long, blue sweater over black legging. Matthew had been working up courage to ask her out on a date for weeks, and he had decided he would do it that day, or maybe... the next!

At lunchtime, in the common room, he read the local daily newspaper while eating a cheese and pickle sandwich. An article which attracted his attention was entitled: 'Mysterious Hole Found in Balgay Cemetery Dundee'. Workmen had found a large hole in the upper part of the cemetery next to a large monolith. Police suspected vandals, but were at a loss as to why someone would dig a large hole then apparently walk away. They found no other damage.

Matthew recalled that demons occasionally appeared out of holes in the ground because of the way they relate the physical world and other dimensions in space, and a shiver ran up his spine. Was Grondin close-by?

The next day, his day off, Matthew watched rain sweep across the rooftops from his bedroom window and then, stepping over the newspaper from the previous day, which was lying on the floor by his bed, he headed downstairs and made coffee and toast.

The mail delivery had brought nothing of great interest to read so he switched on the radio, and the kitchen filled with the voice of a newsreader discussing the upcoming General Election. Matthew abruptly turned it off and consumed his breakfast in silence. He then shaved and showered; deciding to go to Dundee... to Balgay Cemetery.

Raindrops chased one another sideways on the bus window as it sped along the dual carriageway toward Dundee. *Should I be doing this?* Matthew thought as he gazed at the wet countryside speeding by. *Maybe he should leave it well alone or phone David, but he couldn't go running to David all the time; or could he after all it was David who had phoned, and Grondin was his nemesis—the two demons had been feuding for eons!*

Eventually the bus pulled into Dundee Bus Station and Matthew climbed down the steps past the driver. He then strolled along the streets of the city after leaving the bus station as the rain clouds decided it was time to stop persecuting the citizens.

He entered Balgay Park where workmen swept up wet leaves. A foreboding coldness passed through his body as if something was telling him to stop. He followed the path in between the two parts of the hill connected by the blue painted iron bridge. Walking below it he wondered if Grondin *had* re-entered the world in the area.

Matthew entered the graveyard by the side of an overgrown, open mausoleum which had the words: 'This House is Appointed for All the Living' etched into the lintel, and he climbed up the hillside passing the ancient headstones of former Dundee citizens.

Beside the approach to the iron bridge a huge granite pillar reached for the leaden sky. Wrapped around it and three wooden stakes, was a yellow and black police tape, which surrounded a large hole with soil and turf spayed out around the perimeter.

There was no one around so Matthew peered over the tape. The hole extended down two metres he reckoned, but it was difficult to judge, because it looked like a lot of the sides had collapsed and filled in the bottom. He raised his head and gazed through the trees toward the placid river Tay. The hole was the right size for a human-sized figure to have risen out.

A dark shadow appeared behind him and he sensed evil. He turned around quickly, but there was nothing there. *Time to go*, he thought. Then, as he crossed the bridge, he pulled out his mobile; it looked as if he would need to phone David de Longford after all.

"Yeah, Mattie?"

"David, there's been a development.

"What?"

"You told me, or somebody did, that demons can rise out of the ground leaving a hole-right?"

"Yes, I've done that in the past."

"Well, I've seen a large hole in a graveyard in Dundee, where there's no obvious explanation."

"Was it conical and roughly human-sized?"

"Yup!"

"It could be where our friend re-entered the world, and he's come through in Dundee for a reason, other than to be close to where the Key is. We'll just need to keep an open mind on this one."

“Another thing: I thought someone or something evil was watching me while I was there!”

“Listen Matthew, I think you’d better take time off your work and come over to Amsterdam.”

“Okay, if you think I’d be safer?”

“I don’t know what he’s planning, but come over anyway, we need to talk.”

Matthew walked past the Mills Observatory as a class of excited schoolchildren were being marched inside by a stern looking teacher. *He had to find out what Grondin was up to and try, along with David, to stop him using his demon powers. For their sake, he thought watching the last of the kids disappear through the doorway—for everyone’s sake!*

Chapter Three

The winter sun began to set as Thomson stood in the arched doorway of a disused building which had been a jute mill in another age. He looked over the busy Marketgait on to the main front door of the Dundee police headquarters of Police Scotland a glass and steel building from the 1960s.

He watched as uniformed and plain clothed officers came and went until a thick set man in a grey overcoat, made him pay closer attention. The man had receding brown hair and a thick moustache which sat under a stubby nose.

Thomson crossed the road and followed the man along Bell Street past the pillared front of the courthouse where people stood on the steps blowing blue cigarette smoke into the air. He then followed the policeman along Constitution Road where he watched him stub out a cigarette and enter the Bread Bar.

The pub was filled with late afternoon drinkers, mainly students from the university next door. Thomson stepped up to the bar and ordered a pint of ale. A shout went up from a group sitting at a table in the far corner as a stalky youth balanced an empty glass upside-down on his head.

Thomson took a sip from his drink and turned to Detective Sergeant Willie Main who was standing next to him holding a half pint of stout to his lips. An empty shorts glass sat in front of him.

“Hard day?”

“They’re all hard,” growled Main without looking around.

“Yeah, well mine wasn’t great either, said Thomson as he took another slug from his pint.

Main turned to look at Thomson. “Why, what have you been up to?”

“Oh, I had to sack a few workers. You want another?”

“Aye, on you go.”

“What is it you do?” Thomson asked as he signalled the barman.

“I’m in the police.”

The barman, a man with a shaven head and a broken nose put a half pint of stout and a glass of Grouse Whisky in front of Main and took Thomson’s money.

“Funny place this to drink in, sir?” asked Thomson.

“I like it, there are no police: you get away from work!”

“You on that case they’re all talking about: the serial killings?”

Main gulped back his whisky and said: “Aye, I’m afraid so.”

“My mate was saying there’s something funny about the markings on the bodies.

“Something funny!” Main said in a raised voice as he gazed at the empty glass.

“I’ll tell you I’ve never seen anything like it: two small holes in the neck. The pathologist says there was massive blood loss through two small holes!” He then looked at Thomson, and said:

“Here, your no we the press are ye? I shouldn’t be talking like this.”

“Nah! I’m in sales. Pity about the victims.”

“Ach! They were all drug dealers.”

A cold wind rushed along the dock and climbed up the side of the ferry before tugging at Matthew’s jacket. He stood on the upper deck of the DFDS ferry 'The King of Scandinavia' and gazed at the lines of cars and vans in storage in a docklands yard.

The last time he stood on a ferry awaiting a journey to Amsterdam Janey was with him and they were looking forward to a night of dancing and cavorting. He smiled at the memory, but then the thought of the monster she had become stole the smile from his face.

The ship's horn blew and the P A system played a taped brass band piece designed to get people in the mood for a cruise. And, as the ferry eased away from its berth, the sun disappeared behind the Newcastle skyline. *Here we go again*, thought Matthew as he strolled inside the main upper-deck cabin.

The DFDS bus dropped Matthew off the next morning, in the centre of Amsterdam, and then vanished into heavy traffic. He strolled up Damrak past the many restaurants and souvenir shops which ran up one side of the street.

The bells of the Royal Palace chimed ten times as he crossed Dam Square and turned into Spuistraat where he saw the familiar frontage of 'The New Amstel Bookshop' on the corner of a small lane on the other side of the street.

The shrill ring of a bicycle bell made him jump back as a woman with two young children in a large wooden box on the front of her cycle pedalled by. He realised he had been standing on the cycle lane.

The Marriage of Figaro filled the shop as Matthew walked up to the desk where a woman stood pricing books.

"Hello Aada," he said with a gentle smile.

The assistant raised her head and said: "Ah Matthew. David's in his office through the back."

Passing car headlights cast shadows, which danced on the headstones of the Howff Cemetery in Dundee as Thomson strolled along the main path which bisected the ancient burial ground. He was on his way back to his hotel room and couldn't resist a walk through the darkening graveyard. Gnarled trees appeared out of the dark like spiny monsters creeping past the Gothic headstones. The lights shining from the windows of buildings which provided a total perimeter closure of the cemetery added a bizarre Hitchcock film set effect to the area.

Laughter erupted as he approached where the path he was on crossed another. He headed along the path in the direction of the sound and came across three youths sitting on a wooden bench passing a joint back and forth.

"Hey! Who's there?" shouted one of the youths, who was on the end of the bench nearest to the approaching Thomson.

"Where did you get the drugs?" Thomson asked.

"Go fuck yourself!" shouted the same youth, who suddenly tugged violently at an imaginary rope wrapped around his neck much to the amusement of his two friends. The laughter ceased and the sound of running and screaming filled the air, as the unfortunate boy rose, unaided, off the seat into the air.

"Now, I'll ask you again. Where did you get the drugs?" Thomson asked with eyes like two red-hot coals.

"Telephone box in St Murchar Street!" the youth gasped.

"When?"

"Most mornin's."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yeah!"

The youth fell onto the bench, gasping for breath, as Thomson disappeared through the forest of headstones.

The next day, as double-decker buses swept by, Thomson stood across from a telephone kiosk in a semi-derelict street. He noticed a few roughly dressed people standing around as he pulled the collar of his overcoat up and shrugged his shoulders. A few weekend shoppers scuttled by on their way into the city centre seemingly oblivious as to what was about to happen.

After half an hour a big, well-made man with a shaven head dressed in a black leather jacket and jeans strolled along to the kiosk and disappeared around the back followed by a group of the loiterers.

Thomson surveyed the area as he sensed someone was watching from a distance, but whom—the police? He redirected his attention back on the kiosk and watched the dealing unfold, and suddenly it came to him: there was someone or something lurking around—something without a soul!

After around ten minutes the drug dealer left the rear of the telephone box and, after checking for police, he walked along the street, then headed down Victoria Road and entered the Wellgate multi-storey car park. Thomson followed.

On the virtually empty top floor a black BMW came to life as the shaven-headed dealer approached it. He opened the driver's door and was about to climb in when a black blur pushed him onto the bonnet.

Thomson watched from behind a blue Toyota 4x4 as the blur formed into a tall man dressed in a black suit. His face was of sallow skin stretched over a thin skeletal bone structure with totally black eyes trained on the drug dealer, who seemed to be paralysed.

The attacker leaned over his victim and sank two large canine teeth into his fleshy neck and sucked the life force out of him. The dealer's eyes, however, told of another fear; a greater than death fear that approached.

The vampire raised its head with blood dripping from retracting fangs and turned to gaze in horror into crimson eyes. He tried to move, but found that it was as if someone attached him to the concrete floor.

"What have we here?" Thomson asked cynically.

The vampire emitted a hiss somewhat like a cat.

"Let me see if I have this right." Thomson said as he turned his back on the beast and stared across the city. "You're going around Dundee killing drug dealers." He then turned around slowly as the vampire rose into the air. "The question has to be... why? I mean besides your natural, or should that be unnatural, lust for blood, which you could I presume get from anyone."

The soul-less black eyes just stared at him.

"Looks like we'll have to do this the hard way. Why is it always the hard way?"

The beast screamed as Thomson released a million souls, the souls of the victims it had sucked the life from, to wrench at its mind.

"Okay," it hissed. "I supply most of the dealers in this area. Lately, however, some of them have decided that they would rather trade with some other supplier."

"So you felt all betrayed and helped yourself to a feed!" Thomson said with sarcasm.

"No one leaves me!"

"What was in it for you, did you take your cut?"

"Along with the drugs came type O positive blood - nectar!"

"Ah I see, you're paid in blood. So where do you pick up the supplies?"

The vampire hissed.

"I won't ask again."

"I go to Stirling Castle every Tuesday at midnight."

"Where—the esplanade?"

"Yes."

"Hmm..." pondered Thomson.

"Okay, I've told you all I know, now let me go!" The creature said as it gazed at him.

Instantly it slumped to the floor and then rose with a grin which turned to a look of horror as it turned to see a thin shape get larger and larger until the 'no entry' sign sliced its head off.

DS Main will have his work cut out trying to figure this one out, thought Thomson as he looked at the two bodies, then at the CCTV camera broken and dangling, before leaving the car park.

Chapter Four

The gargoyles on the old, turreted building that was the Barceló Stirling Highland Hotel stared down through the swirling mist as Thomson walked through Stirling's Old Town toward the castle. He had arrived by train and ambled through the city centre before climbing up Spittal Street where the fog mixed with street lights giving an eerie glow.

Thomson paused opposite the dark mass of the Gothic Church of the Holy Rude. He thought it would be better to view the castle esplanade from the side; so he jumped over the locked gate at the side of the building which led to the Valley Cemetery and disappeared into the gloom.

As Thomson moved deeper into the graveyard, the mist cleared and he saw the illuminated castle before him in the distance. He passed a monument of two statues encased in Perspex. The figures, two women, had pained expressions and seemed to be telling him to stop what he was doing.

A pyramid appeared out of the dark beside the esplanade wall. *How odd, to find a pyramid in Scotland*, he thought as a ghostly cackle filled the air and a clock struck midnight. A movement on the esplanade wall interrupted his thoughts: Something was scampering along the wall!

He jumped up high into the night sky and then landed on the wall in front of what turned out to be a vampire bat, which instantly turned into its human-like form.

"Who are you?" The creature hissed.

"I've come for a word."

"You're a demon, I don't talk to demons."

"Oh! You will talk to me."

The vampire made to jump off the wall, but found it couldn't move, which made it look like some grotesque gargoyle.

"Now, the drugs, where do they come from?" Thomson asked as he crouched.

"I'm telling you fuck all!"

As with the vampire in Dundee Thomson watched as its mind filled with a million dead souls. It screamed and then said: "I'm only a link in the chain. I gather the drugs in Newcastle and then supply Scotland. I supply one brother tonight and another on Thursday. Now let me go."

"Where and when in Newcastle?"

"Monument Metro steps; Sunday; midnight. I know no more that's the way it's worked."

"Where are the drugs?"

"In my vehicle over there," he said looking toward the road which led up to the esplanade.

"Okay, said Thomson, casually, as he jumped off the wall and walked away.

"Hey! What about me?" The vampire hissed.

"Oh yeah, said Thomson as the creature flew up into the dark air and tried, to revert to its bat form, over the pyramid before plunging with a horrendous scream onto the surrounding iron fence.

Thomson left the castle and walked through Stirling's Old Town where he heard a shout for help. He decided to investigate and headed down a close to find himself in a car park where two drunken men were abusing a young girl. He felt an immediate affinity with the female.

"Will you gentlemen please stop that!" He shouted.

The men looked toward him while holding the partially clothed girl.

"Fuck off baldie!" One of them shouted.

"Okay, it looks like we'll need to do this the hard way again," sighed Thomson raising his gaze to the sky with red eyes.

One man left the girl and rushed at Thomson, who raised one of his hands—palm up, and said: "Up."

The man froze and then rose into the air.

"Now that's no way to treat a lady," said Thomson as he approached the floating body.

The victim could only move his eyeballs, which flashed from side to side betraying the fear that was gripping his mind. Meanwhile the other attacker ran and pulled an old wooden fence post from the ground, then approached the demon.

“Tut, tut,” said Thomson as he spun round waving a finger.

The man stopped and hit himself around the body.

“Oh well, time to go,” sung Thomson leaving the car park, as the floating body spun covering the surrounding area, including the attacker clubbing himself, with vomit.

“Wait, a minute!” shouted the female, picking up and pulling on her scattered clothing, as she ran after Thomson.

“I’d like to thank you, but you scare me,” she said dropping to a walking pace alongside Thomson.

A gentle rain had begun.

“You’re welcome my dear—I think!” Thomson said as a taxi flew by, the swish of the tyres on the tarmac attracting the attention of the young girl.

“Your eyes...” she uttered turning back toward Thomson, but she was alone.

A flyer advertising 'Bon's Balls', an AC/DC tribute band, at DeVito's Nightclub in Arbroath the following evening scuttled along Dundee's Commercial Street propelled by the chilly wind.

Thomson, who was walking back to his hotel room after another successful night at a casino, trapped the leaflet with his foot then picked it up for a look. *Ah AC/DC*, he thought. *Time for a visit to the old town.*

A small car with a perforated exhaust cruised past with loud rap music erupting out of the open windows. A youth stared at him and screamed, “Hey you!” He then stuck his fist out and gave the masturbator's sign.

Thomson waved a hand; the car sped up and the front tyres blew out. The driver lost control, and the vehicle flew over the pavement and rammed into a large shop window. The two in the front, not wearing seatbelts, smashed through the windscreen.

As the soul of the driver escaped, Thomson grabbed him around the neck while standing in the void between worlds with blazing eyes. “Now what was it you wanted?” he asked the alarmed spirit. Then with a grin, he said, “Cheerio then,” as he released the essence and gave the masturbator's sign.

The crowd were a mixture of old rockers and young punks, as Thomson, with shaven head and a long black overcoat, strolled up to the DeVito's bar. He ordered two double Drambuie's and then took the drinks to a seat at one of the high tables in the darkened rear of the club.

As the band took to the stage, complete with a guitarist in schoolboys outfit, Thomson noticed a familiar figure in the swollen crowd. Matthew's cousin, Jake, was standing at the end of the bar nearest to the stage; he was easy to pick out because he had the only shaven head in that area amid a mass of hair that bobbed along with the music.

Thomson drank his whisky and laughed at kids around him drunk on vodka and Red Bull as they jumped around in the dark under the watchful eye of a bouncer. One kid threw a drink over another and was quickly thrown out of the bar.

The opening riff to Highway to Hell saw Thomson finish his drink and then move through the cheering crowd to stand behind Jake.

“That's a magic number, eh?” Thomson shouted in Jake's direction.

“Yeah, it's their best.” Jake answered as he put his pint on the bar and glanced at Thomson. He then looked back at the band before turning back to face Thomson.

“Jesus!”

“Nah! Other end of the scale!” Thomson said as the group reached the first chorus.

Jake then gasped as tightness gripped his throat.

“Where's that brat of a cousin of yours? He's not at home, I called by before coming here. It looked as if no one had been there for days.”

“Why don't you fuck off and leave us alone!” Jake whispered as the grip became tighter and he was about to pass out.

“Now listen to me. If you want this to stop tell me where he is.” Thomson said as he pushed his head forward so that his right ear was next to Jake’s mouth. Inevitability descended over Jake and he whispered: “Amsterdam.”

Chapter Five

The London-bound train eased into the gentle curve of Newcastle Station's platform four and came to a halt. Queues of tired looking people formed at the opening doors barely allowing room for the departing passengers to step onto the platform.

Thomson, with his shaven head and long black coat, rose from his seat and left the train. He then crossed the iron bridge, which spanned the tracks, and descended onto the main concourse. He pushed his ticket into a slot on a barrier watched by a disinterested guard and then walked through the open gates.

Out on Neville Street taxis and buses charged along in both directions. Thomson crossed the road when the lights changed and walked past a pub advertising Guinness and televised sports. Music flowed along the street from some distant bar as he turned onto Grainger Street and passed Yates Wine Bar. Two couples fell out of the doors and eyed him before linking arms and skipping away in the opposite direction.

As he neared the tall pillar that was the Earl Grey Monument Thomson glanced at his watch: *Five past eleven, still early*, he thought. A man with a banner which read: 'Jesus Saves' offered him a leaflet on the Gospel. Thomson turned to face the man while accepting the flyer, and letting his eyes turn deep red, he growled: "You follow the wrong master."

"Oh! Cried the man as he backed off crossing himself.

Thomson then held out his hand with the leaflet upon it, which burst into flames and then blew away in a gust of wind which had suddenly swept along the street.

Thomson gazed up at Earl Grey, who stood on top of his monument surveying the city, as he slid back into the shadows of a shop doorway, which had a view of the Metro stairway.

A tall man dressed in black appeared at the top of the subway steps allowing the crowds to pass around him. The man surveyed the square and then looked up at a large clock above a Jeweller's shop.

"These guys all look the same," whispered Thomson to himself as he left the shop doorway and walked toward the stairway.

The vampire threw off the mind-grip Thomson cast over him as he turned to look at the approaching demon.

"Who are you? Where is my brother?"

"He won't be coming I'm afraid. You have me instead," said Thomson, jovially.

The creature descended the stairs, but found he could only move down a few steps; so he ran up to the top and then ran down Grey Street. After a few yards he found the going very difficult, it was as if he was running through knee high mud.

This one's stronger than the others, thought Thomson as the man ran in the other direction, and climbed the few steps at the base of the monument. He kicked open the small door on the side of the plinth and disappeared into the dark. Thomson followed him and climbed the worn stone treads in the claustrophobic, spiral stairwell. When he reached the top, he looked over a metal railing at the Eldon Shopping Centre. He ran around the space between the railing and the base of the statue, but there was no vampire. A hiss from above made him move at great speed and catch the beast by the neck as it swooped down from the statue.

"Listen here you blood-sucker!" Thomson shouted as he felt the cold, dead flesh and stared into the soulless black eyes.

"What is it you want, money?" Hissed the vampire.

"Nothing that crass, I just want to know from where the supply of drugs come.

"Oh that! Well, no great secret—it's Amsterdam. They come over on tulip lorries."

"That's it?" asked Thomson in astonishment.

"Yeah, Amsterdam's where the brothers hang out."

"What do you mean?"

"It's vampire central man!"

"Hmm..."

"All right, now you know; let me go!"

"Okay," said Thomson as he released his grip allowing the vampire to plummet through the morning air.

Thomson watched as the creature took on the shape of a bat then flew away. He then raised his head and gazed along the curve of Grey Street and said to himself: "Well it's off to Amsterdam with no element of surprise, but who cares!"

Back in Dundee as Thomson threw things in his holdall, the hotel room phone rang. He strolled around the bed and grabbed the receiver while sitting. "Yeah, hullo?"

"Mr Thomson, it's Hayley in reception. I have DS Main of Police Scotland asking to see you. Can I send him to your room?"

"Yes."

"What's this fucker want?" Thomson asked himself as he replaced the receiver and rose off the bed.

Moments later there was a knock at the door. Thomson sighed, strolled over and opened the door. "DS Main, please come in," he said standing aside to let the man in.

"I know you, don't I, sir?" Main said showing Thomson his ID card as he entered the room.

"Do you?" Thomson said closing the door.

"The other day in the pub?"

"Ah yes, I remember. Please take a seat."

"Right."

"We've had bother tracing you sir... Mr D. C. Thomson. There's no record of you anywhere in the UK."

"Really! Let's just say I'm from another place."

"Okay, well that's not my concern. The hotel says you've been staying here for the last three weeks."

"Yes, I'm here in Dundee on business."

"And that business is...?"

"I'm in fire alarms."

"Oh, okay."

"So, what is this about Sergeant?"

"Well, do you recognise either of these two?" Main asked handing Thomson two photographs.

Thomson looked at the photographs of the drug dealer and the vampire. "No I don't, I'm afraid," he said handing the photos back.

"I have to ask for your whereabouts on Saturday past, the sixteenth?"

"Well I left the hotel at about 11 o'clock and strolled to the newsagent for a newspaper. Had lunch here at one, and in the afternoon went for a couple of pints in the Bank Bar in Reform Street."

"Can anyone corroborate on your whereabouts?"

"Look Sergeant, what is this about?"

"Well sir, I'm investigating the murders of these two," he said holding up the photographs. "And someone saw you leaving the Wellgate carpark at about the time it happened."

"Someone saw me?"

"You're on cc tv leaving the level. Unfortunately the camera on the level was unavailable on the day."

DS Main rubbed the back of his neck. "I think you'd better come down to the station, sir."

"Are you arresting me Sergeant?"

"No, you'll be helping us with our enquiries."

That night the fire alarm at the police station went off twice; the first time, the police escorted the prisoners out of the building along with any civilian staff. Everyone assembled in the carpark until

the fire brigade, who reported the sound of laughter and banging on the walls, checked the building. They assumed the alarm to have had a malfunction. The second time, an hour after everyone was ushered back in, was ignored. A blaze in a ground-floor storage room had then been discovered and the whole procedure enacted.

The next morning DS Main and DC John Taylor sat in interview room three.

“Okay bring Thomson in here.” Main ordered two uniformed officers.

After a few moments the men returned. “He's gone, sir!” one said.

“What do you mean gone?”

“The duty Sergeant opened the cell, and it was empty!”

Main and Taylor ran through to the cell block and found Sergeant Bob Young scratching his head while explaining to his superior that the cell was occupied all last night.

“Could he have escaped during the fire last night?” DC Taylor asked.

“Nah! They were all counted back into their cells-twice!”

Later that day Willie Main strolled into the Bread Bar with a tired look on his face. The barman finished serving and then headed to where the policeman was standing at the bar.

“Oh Willie, there was a gent in here today. He told me to give you this,” he said pulling a pint of brown ale. He then fetched a double whisky and put them both on the bar in front of Main.

“Bloke said something about you having to review your fire alarm system.”

Chapter Six

Matthew knocked on the mahogany door and then entered the dimly-lit room, slipping off his backpack.

“Mattie!” David de Longford shouted from behind his computer monitor. “It’s good to see you, he continued as he looked up.

“It’s good to see you too David,” said Matthew, who couldn’t stop from thinking his friend’s skin was becoming more sallow, more like the half-demon he was.

“So it looks as if our friend has returned.”

“How’s that possible?”

“I have a terrible feeling that he gathered so much power in the Dark Realm that nothing could stop him not even the boundary between the dimensions. Now, I’m afraid, he’s our problem again!”

Matthew looked around the darkened walls and tried to focus on the paintings as someone knocked on the door.

“Come in Aada!” David shouted.

The assistant pushed open the door with one hand while holding a small tray in the other.

“Coffee gentlemen?” she asked in her accented English.

“Thanks Aada; I don’t know what I’d do without you,” said David with a grin. She placed the tray on a coffee table in a corner of the room where there were two leather easy-chairs.

David left his desk and went to sit in one chair.

“Sit down Mattie,” he said as he ran a hand through his thick, black hair, which ended in a short ponytail. “I don’t venture out much any more,” he continued, waving a hand around his facial features. “I trade online if I can.”

Matthew sipped his coffee and nodded. “So the Key’s of no use any more?”

“The Key still has power over the Dark Realm, not Grondin!”

“Sounds like he’s become the most powerful of the demons!”

“Yes, said David ponderously as he stroked one of the chair’s arms. “The Key is safe for the moment; so we’ll leave it where it is and let Grondin make the next move.”

Thomson collected his large holdall from a carousel in Schiphol Airport and strolled through the large concourse. He then left the complex and hailed a cab.

The day was bright with a blustery wind which blew large clouds across the city as the yellow taxi entered the canal infested city centre and drew up at Hotel Pulitzer on Prinsengracht.

After checking in Thomson threw his bag on the bed of the elegantly decorated room on the first floor and then gazed out of the Gothic arched double window. The rays of the setting sun, which squeezed between the buildings, danced on the rippled canal. He looked at the moored barges, which lined both sides of the canal, and touched the glass, it felt cool. An echo from a time long gone passed through his mind, and a faint voice asked him what he was doing. The telephone beside the bed rang bringing him back to his senses.

“Yes, hello?”

“Mr Thomson, this is Lisle at reception. I have a call for you.”

Who could know I was here, he thought.

“Put it through please.”

“Do you want to meet us?” A hissing voice asked.

“Who is this?”

“Be at 51 Westerstraat in an hour.”

The line went dead and Thomson placed the receiver back in its cradle. He then strolled across the room and picked up a leaflet from the table which contained a map of Amsterdam. He traced Westerstraat and then left the room.

Huddled buildings of the Jordaan, the cultural quarter of Amsterdam, stared down at Thomson as he walked along the pavement in search of number 51. The sun had left glowing clouds as the night had taken the upper hand.

The address turned out to be the upper two floors of a deep, red painted building with walnut stained windows. A varnished pine door had a plaque on the right-hand side which read: 'Classic Wall Coverings Ltd.'

Thomson pressed the security button on a metal grille under the plaque. There was no answer; so he tried the door handle. The door opened into a narrow stairway with the steps painted white with a space in the middle where a carpet had been.

As he climbed the stairs jazz funk came from the apartment below accompanied by shouts. A dance class he assumed as a broad smile spread over his features.

The door at the top of the stairs was open slightly, so he pushed it open and walked into a large, open plan apartment with iron supports painted white, which held the upper floor from acting in a gravitational sense.

There were two small spotlights, which illuminated a central area of the large room. A man in a black suit came forward from a darkened corner and hovered around the periphery of the light patch. Another man slammed the door shut behind Thomson.

"What is it you want?" Hissed the vampire who had appeared from the corner.

Thomson stared into the black eyes and said: "I am here to take over!"

"And how do you propose to do that?" The vampire asked.

"Like this!" Thomson said with gaiety and eye colour, which flickered between grey and red.

As soon as the words had left his lips the two vampires rose into the air with limbs flailing against the levitation. They levelled out, and Thomson stepped aside as they flew, head on, at a proportion of the speed of light towards one another. As the bodies thumped together, one head being pushed in by the other, blood spurted and redecorated part of the walls.

Thomson stared at the grotesque amalgamation of the two vampires lying on the floor.

"I've heard of togetherness, but that's ridiculous!" He quipped as he turned and strolled out of the apartment. The music from below continued as he descended the stairs, and the same grin spread across his face as he opened the front door and disappeared into the night.

Chapter Seven

Matthew stumbled groggily into the back shop of New Amstel Books and found David sitting by a table sipping from a mug. He had spent the night in the spare room in David's house which formed the rear of the shop building.

"Help yourself to some coffee Mattie," said David with a smile.

After Matthew had sat down with his hands wrapped around a steaming mug David threw a copy of *De Telegraaf* down in front of him. The headlines told of two gangsters killed in a flat in the Jordaan.

"What's this? Two thugs killed one another!" said Matthew as he shrugged his shoulders.

"That's the way it reads—yeah, but you notice there's no photo. I emailed a friend about it and he says the bodies were found one part inside the other as if they were forced together."

"Oh no! You reckon it's Grondin!"

"Maybe. There's something I have to tell you about the Underworld here in Amsterdam!"

"Sounds like I'm not going to like it," said Matthew as he leaned back into his chair.

"The vampires control the drugs and the prostitution, in fact the city is a Mecca for these people of the shade."

"But I thought the drugs and pros were legal?"

"They are, well at least some drugs. The police have been forced into turning a blind eye on the supply of dope and the protection of the pro's."

Matthew took a long sip from his mug. "Nothing surprises me any more. So, what are you trying to tell me about the bodies?"

"Well, the reason I said maybe it was Grondin was because it could have been a vampire feud. These people have great power!"

Matthew grimaced. "So one vampire forces itself inside the body of another and they both end up dead!"

The small light above the handle of the hotel room door changed from red to green as Thomson pushed his key card into the slot. He then depressed the handle and pushed the door open and was surprised to see the wall lights sending cones of light onto the bed.

"Mr Thomson," said a soft female voice as a figure stood up from beside a coffee table.

"My name is Jinni. I work for Mr Van Hooft, and I'm sorry if I startled you."

She was tall and thin. Her long black hair fell onto a black jacket which sat on top of dark brown cords.

"How did you get in?" Thomson asked, closing the door.

"I'm well connected in this city. Please, Mr Thomson, this is not a social call. Mr Van Hooft asked me to invite you to meet with him here at eleven tomorrow morning," she said as she passed him a white business card.

"What is this about?" he asked while reading the card.

"Please, you will want to meet Mr Van Hooft, she said as she passed him and then left the room.

The next morning, after a brisk walk, Thomson smiled as he approached the large circular desk that sat in the centre of the foyer of the Brecht Clinic where a blond-haired woman sat at a computer.

"Can I help you, sir?" She asked.

"Yes, I have an appointment with Mr Van Hooft. I'm Mr Thomson."

"Please take the elevator to floor six, he's expecting you."

He crossed the well polished marble floor and pressed the call button next to the stainless steel doors. Turning round he gazed across the foyer as the digital lift numbers descended. People in the same type of lab coats as the receptionist walked back and forward, some with folders, others with small cases.

A soft ping announced the opening of the lift doors. A nurse pushed a gaunt looking man in a wheelchair past Thomson, who entered and pressed button six.

The doors opened onto a huge open plan office where a thick-set man with a well-trimmed brown beard sat at a desk in front of a large window. He rose as Thomson entered the room and said: "Mr Thomson I'm Peter Van Hooft."

Thomson walked across the carpeted floor and stood in front of the desk as Van Hooft continued: "Please, Mr Thomson-sit."

Thomson sat in one of two leather seats.

"I'll come straight to the point Mr Thomson. What is it you want?"

"Well, Mr Van Hooft, what I want... in fact what I will do is take over your 'other' business."

"Oh, and how do you propose to do that?"

Thomson's eyes became red, and Van Hooft, including seat, rose into the air and his head spun spraying the immediate area with saliva.

After a moment Thomson stood up and Van Hooft slumped back onto the floor. He grabbed his head and screamed as thumps and shouts erupted from behind a suddenly locked door to the rear of his desk. Thomson then put his face next to the quivering Dutchman and hissed: "Now Mr Van Hooft you will do as I say. First, tell those stupid bats behind that door you're okay!"

Van Hooft pressed a button on a box which sat on his desk and said: "I'm all right, get back to what you were doing before I alerted you."

"What's your arrangement with the vampires?"

Van Hooft stared at Thomson. "I supply them with blood of all types. This is the only clinic of its kind in Europe."

"What's stopping them from just taking what they need?"

"I'm a respected Haematologist. I can have any blood delivered from anywhere in the world—no questions asked, and no biting! Anyway, they prefer to stay in the shadows."

"Okay, I'll be in touch. I will have need of you and your vampires," said Thomson as he turned and walked toward the elevator.

"Oh, and one more thing: no attacks. I can destroy an army. And I'll know who to look for if there's one waiting somewhere for me," he said as he entered the elevator and faced Van Hooft.

As Thomson left the building and walked toward Dam Square, a shadow peeled off the darkness of a doorway and merged with the crowded pavement behind him.

In New Amstel Books Aada was pricing books when the front door opened. The shop was empty as it was early on a Monday morning so she hummed as she worked. After a moment she looked up, and then dropped the book she was holding, for before her stood Thomson with eyes a deep shade of red. She made to pick up the phone, but her hand wasn't working in fact her whole body wasn't working.

Thomson strolled about the shop grinning before pulling a security camera round toward his face. "Hello de Longford," he said in a calm, teasing voice. "I know you're there with that brat from Scotland. I bet you're wondering what I'm up to... yes?"

He pushed the camera round 360 degrees and then said: "I suppose the Key is well hidden. Well, you can stick it up your arse as far as I'm concerned!"

Aada watched him stroll out of the shop as she found she could move again. She ran out of the front door and looked along either direction of the street, but it was empty save for some window-shoppers.

Chapter Eight

A white frost glinted in the early morning sun as it clung to the two-and-a-half metre high steel fence topped with curled razor wire. The clear blue sky which hovered over Nieu Vosseveld prison in southern Holland promised another dry, but cold day as Thomson turned off the engine of his metallic green BMW. He was waiting beside a field of stubble which stretched toward the perimeter fence. Flocks of geese flew overhead in V formations.

Suddenly, he gripped the black steering wheel and closed his crimson eyes. He felt five dark souls merge with his as he shouted: “bliss!”

The poisoned heroin he had the vampire helpers of Van Hooft administer to various supplies was working—delivering the souls of the worst prisoners to him. The only trouble was that he had to be in the vicinity to collect the demonic power, which meant driving to these wretched places.

Thomson started the engine and then accelerated past the front gate of the prison. He was on his way to Belgium and another high security prison. He was going to maximum security prisons in the countries through which he passed on his way back to the United Kingdom collecting bad souls released through the deadly drugs delivered by the vampires.

In a room of the hospital wing of Holloway Prison murderer Susan Heyworth lay strapped to the bed in the darkness; the silence broken only by the bleep of the life-support monitor above her head.

“He’s here!” she shouted as the straps split and she rose into the air.

“Jesus!” shouted the night watch nurse as she watched Heyworth levitate upright through the corridor toward the doors.

The nurse shook herself from a daze and ran into her office to raise the alarm. Then she watched Heyworth smash through the locked doors and disappear into the gloom.

Thomson sat in his car outside the prison in the London borough of Islington. He was absorbing souls from the demise of prisoners when two metal doors flew open banging into the side of the building. Heyworth in her night dress came levitating through; her eyes blazing red.

Thomson watched as the murderess floated in front of his car.

“Take me!” She screamed as guards and police came running out of the open doors.

“Very well,” said Thomson watching the lifeless body of the woman fall to the ground and roll into the gutter.

He then gunned the car and shot away.

“I don’t know? Women breaking out of prison to be with me... must be my magnetic personality!” He said to himself laughing as he sped into central London.

He parked the car and walked out into the night. Then, sitting by the Thames, Thomson looked up into the cold, star-lit night. He gazed out into the universe; out, through the dimensions of time and space.

“Now I’m ready,” he growled, “now I know who I’m supposed to be and what I’m supposed to do!”

He lowered his vision to the Houses of Parliament dominated by the huge tower of Big Ben and said mockingly: “And they think they’ve got power!”

He then emitted a loud cackle as the seat rocked back and forth.

Part Two

Wilderness and Temptation, Again!

Chapter Nine

Mojave Desert

The silver bus rolled into Danville and stopped outside a Nine to Eleven—the only shop on the main street. A man climbed down the few steps and left the vehicle. Dressed in a loose, crumpled suit with a white shirt open at the collar he had short brown hair and bright blue eyes.

The bus door hissed shut as the vehicle began the rest of its journey to Phoenix. The man looked along either direction of the empty street and then entered the store. He purchased several small bottles of water and two large bars of chocolate, which he stuffed into a holdall.

Outside, he slung the holdall over his right shoulder and then walked along a wide street which had houses with the shutters closed on either side. Beyond, the rugged mountains rose into the cloudless sky.

Leaving the town behind, the man climbed up a gentle, dusty slope as Saguaro cacti stood in silence among the rocks. Even though it was November, the heat caused beads of perspiration to form on his brow.

A man appeared from behind a rock spur. He was well-built and wore a red checked shirt and jeans. Leather snakebite protectors covered his lower legs, and a hunting rifle was slung over his shoulder. “Hi,” he said looking the stranger up and down. “It’s hot for November?”

“Yes,” answered the stranger as he came to a halt.

“I’d watch out for snakes up there, it’s been a hot fall!”

The stranger gazed at the hunter with passive eyes and then said: “I have no fear of the serpent.” He then climbed on.

Matthew watched the door to the back shop open as he chatted to Aada by the till-counter. “I’d better go,” he said as David appeared and beckoned to him.

He made his way past several browsers and then followed David through the back shop area and into his office.

“You’d better get packed Mattie; we’re going to the US.” David announced as he slipped in behind his computer desk in the dimly-lit room.

“The States! What for?” Matthew asked as he lounged on a seat.

“There have been strange vibrations in the demonic worlds; so I did some digging, and I’ve found out something startling. Should have seen it coming!”

“Am I going to like it?”

“Well, yes and no!” David answered, his face bathed in the blue light from his computer screen.

“It’s Grondin, right?”

“Yeah, I’ve found out what he’s been up to; or should I say who he’s become. What all this has been leading up to is that a certain line thought to be extinct both physically and non-physically has produced an individual—the second coming if you like!

Matthew jumped out of his seat, interlaced the fingers of one hand with the other and placed them on the top of his head and applied pressure.

“What, like Jesus Christ’s back!”

“Yeah, but he isn’t going by that name.”

“But why America?” Matthew asked as he paced around the room. “Shouldn’t it be Israel or somewhere?”

“I’ll explain about that after, but apparently the guy has been raised and well sheltered by some religious group in the States.

“Where does Grondin fit into this?”

“This is the part you’re not going to like!” David said as his red eyes bored into Matthew's eyes.

“Oh shit!” said Matthew.

“Over two thousand years ago the Sin Gatherer condemned Satan to imprisonment in a dark dimension where there was no escape for one so powerful. However, after a few centuries his power, and memory, waned and he could pass through the dimensions.”

“So you mean that Grondin was the Devil all along?”

“Yes, he has been gathering dark power from souls, and he will now have remembered who he is!”

“And he’s going to what—challenge Christ again?”

David stared into space and grimaced. “I don’t know.”

“So where in America are we going?”

“We fly to Los Angeles and pick up a car.”

Chapter Ten

The day was sunny with a warm breeze which wafted along the jagged canyon. The congregation of twenty sang gently as a Baptist minister led a young woman by the hand into the tan coloured waters of the slow-moving river. A river which flowed along the canyon and passed the small wooden, white painted church.

He stopped when the pair were waist deep and placed one arm around her waist and dipped her upper body under the surface.

“I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,” he boomed. He then raised her up and asked: “Who’s next?”

A young man in a crumpled suit strolled into the waters. He had short brown hair and a thick stubble grew around his gentle chin. The singing came to a halt as he stopped in front of the minister who gazed at the stranger then knelt down in the river. Only his head and the tops of his shoulders remained above the surface.

“Forgive me my Lord, I cannot baptise you. It is you who should baptise me!” he said with downcast eyes.

The young man raised the baptist up with one hand under his left arm.

“It is I who must ask for your forgiveness as it is I who have brought this and further developments into being for a purpose. We are here in a different time and a different place my friend, but the message is the same and so the actions must be the same-so please!” He said as he opened a hand to the river.

So the man was baptised in front of the quiet congregation, who, after the ceremony, rushed into the water and knelt before him as he strode out of the river.

“Rise my friends for the Kingdom of Heaven is nigh. Spread the joyous news,” he shouted.

“I don’t understand my Lord: about bringing this into being?” The baptist asked as he caught up with the man.

“John, I have to find out who I’m up against this time, and the only way to lure a snake out of its lair is to present it with the prey.”

“I see.”

“The stakes are high this time John. You must make ready for a desperate war my brother,” the man said putting a hand on the baptist’s shoulder and then walking out of the river.

Chapter Eleven

Matthew yawned as he adjusted his sitting posture in the Pontiac he and David had hired at Los Angeles Airport. He gazed at the black strip that was Interstate 40 as it stretched shimmering into the distance. "I need something to eat."

"Well, haul into the next roadside restaurant," said David as he stretched his arms.

They pulled into a McDonald's Drive-Thru and ordered burgers and fries. Then Matthew drove into a rest area where there was only one other car. David lowered his window and threw the meat out of his roll and filled it with fries.

After eating, they stretched their legs by walking a little way into the desert. The sky was an electric blue and the cruel sun baked the landscape. *A sharp contrast*, thought Matthew, *to winter back home.*

"How are we going to find him," he said as he gazed up at the mountains.

David pushed back his homburg, which he used partly to conceal his sallow face from the public, and said: "I'm not sure..." A loud rattling interrupted him as a giant rattlesnake reared up behind them—blocking any escape to the car.

The skin of the serpent was grey with brown speckles, and at its thickest the body was 15 cm in diameter. The vertical part stood one metre tall and was topped by a head with the mouth open revealing two vicious looking fangs.

Dark red eyes stared at the men as the rattle from the tail was accompanied by a loud hissing.

"Shit!" Matthew shouted as the snake's head darted back and forth.

"You must return whence you came, or I will smite you down!" said the snake in a hissing voice.

David just nodded his head.

"What are we going to do?" screamed Matthew.

"Ha!" David said, now standing behind the serpent. "You're one of Grondin's vile manifestations!" he shouted as he grabbed the tail. He then spun the beast above his head before releasing it to soar through the air and land on a distant mountainside.

"Right let's go," he said as he passed a stunned Matthew, while brushing dust from his jacket.

"Keep going along I 40?" Matthew asked as he strapped himself into the driver's seat.

"Yeah. At least we know we're on the right track," answered David.

The dusk was cold as Christ—now known as Joshua Collins—sat staring into the flames of the fire he had started with brushwood. Shadows danced on the walls of the cave around him as a coyote howled in the distance.

He unrolled his sleeping bag and contemplated sleep, but meditated instead. And, after adopting the cross-legged position, he entered a deep trance-like state as a gentle breeze entered the cave.

After an hour Joshua opened his eyes expecting to see the dying embers of the fire, but the flames seemed to be as high. Through the blaze a young woman gazed at him. She had long blond hair, and wore a blue, checked shirt, which had the top three buttons undone revealing a deep cleavage.

"Hi!" she said. "I thought you could do with some company."

"Where did you come from?" Joshua asked in a calm voice.

"I was out hiking when I saw the light from the fire," she answered averting her gaze from his to the fire as she threw brushwood into the flames.

"I require no company, but you're welcome to stay."

"My name's Bonny; what's yours?"

"I'm Joshua. Would you join me in prayer?"

"I don't pray," she answered pushing her chest out provocatively.

"Please allow me to," he said as he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again a few moments later she was sitting next to him.

She ran a hand along the inside of one of his legs.

“Stop!” he shouted as he sprang up and jumped back from the flames which had shot up scorching the ceiling of the cave.

The woman rose and moved toward him with flickering red eyes.

“Come on,” she hissed, “you know you want me.”

“Back! Back!” Joshua commanded as he sprang up, “You’re the tempter!”

Chapter Twelve

Thomson grinned as he stood in the shaded part of the cave. His red eyes fixed on Joshua, who had collapsed back into a sitting position by the fire.

“You must be hungry after ten days in this hell-hole! If you are the Son of God turn these stones into a couple of turkey sandwiches and eat,” he said pointing toward some rocks by the fire.

Joshua raised his head and gazed at Thomson. “Man shall not put thy lord God to the test,” he said.

Thomson laughed harshly as the flames of the fire shot up again and spread across the ceiling.

“And your God would let you starve in a cave?” Thomson asked from his new position: directly behind Joshua. “If you bow down to me I will feed you,” he whispered conspiratorially into the man’s ear.

“My Father will feed me a thousand times over, in His house.”

Suddenly, they were standing on the viewing gallery of the Empire State Building. The lights of New York City twinkled into the dark distance in every direction. Joshua inhaled and then exhaled furiously as he grasped the safety fencing and glanced down. They were alone, the only noise came from the traffic below on the network of streets.

“So here we are again. A different age perhaps, but all this still belongs to me,” said Thomson as he stretched his arms wide, “I know what’s about to unfold and, to prevent the coming apocalypse, I say again: ‘I will give you it all—the world—if you will bow down and worship me’.”

Joshua Collins turned his head and gazed at Thomson. “So that's what this is about.”

“Well, I told you I would be back at an opportune time!”

“Get thee behind me Satan; for it is written: ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord God, and Him only shall you serve’. The righteous will be saved.”

Next moment they were standing on top of the Lincoln Memorial Building in Washington DC. The National Mall stretched out before them and the Washington Monument pierced the starless sky. Both men gazed down at the stairs, which led visitors from street level to the feet of the Lincoln Statue.

“If you are the Son of God cast yourself down from here,” said Thomson shifting his gaze from the steps to Joshua. “For it's written: ‘He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you. And they will keep you from harm.’”

Joshua looked up at the night sky and said, “It is also written: ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’”

Suddenly he was back in the cave sitting alone by the fire, which needed some brushwood.

David led Matthew across the dusty landscape past Saguaro cacti and rocky spurs. The sun was setting, and the temperature was plummeting. A wind blew tumble weed across the desert floor.

“You sure we’re in the right area David?” Matthew asked as he stumbled over some small rocks.

“Yes! Keep going. I want to get there as soon as possible.”

Matthew stopped and put on a windcheater he had pulled from his backpack. He zipped it up to his throat, then took a drink of water from a clear plastic bottle and strode on in David’s footsteps.

After a long trek, with the silent dark around him, David stopped and gazed up a hillside where a light flickered in a cave. “Here we are!” he announced.

The two men clambered up the slope and entered the large crack in the rock. Matthew halted and gazed at a man in a dark suit sitting meditating by a campfire.

“Please enter and sit by the fire, said Joshua Collins as he raised his head and looked at the pair with placid eyes. He then threw more fuel on the fire as David and Matthew settled across the flames from him.

“I sense the battle of good against evil in both you gentlemen,” he continued. Then he stared into David’s red eyes. “Much stronger in you my friend.” he said. Then, closing his eyes, he said, “I

know I'm in the presence of evil, yet I feel no fear. You have come in peace to help me, but as you can see I need no help. You must know that I am not who you think I am—well not quite. I am the Lamb!"

"Has the one known to us as Grondin... Satan visited you?" David asked.

Joshua raised his eyelids, and Matthew watched the reflected flames dance in his eyes.

"The tempter has been here—yes. I sent him away; though he may return."

Joshua eyed the two men and then said: "Now gentlemen, tell me your stories."

"I'm David de Longford, I was born of the union of a monk and demon. I fight against an evil in me. I have lived for over 700 years and have battled the one who came to tempt you though I did not know he was Satan—in waiting."

"I don't understand, why don't you side with him?" Joshua asked.

"Because my mother, the demon Hel, abandoned me, and I was reared by loving humans. And have considered myself, though not in looks or power, human."

Then Joshua turned to Matthew." And you, I sense more humanity—though there's a deep power in you!"

"Yes. I'm Matthew, I'm a descendant of David's; I was born of two humans. I too have battled Grondin and will do again!

"Well, I will need you two friends as disciples in the upcoming battle!"

David raised his eyes from staring into the flames, and said, "You want a demon as a disciple?"

"Why not? Nothing says my followers have to be human."

After a moment David, exchanging looks with Matthew, said, "This is a different world. There are forces of great power around. The country we are in controls vast fire power and agents trained in every type of infiltration and warfare."

"I know well of the United States. I am a citizen," Joshua said as he threw more brushwood on the fire. "There are also great and good people who desire peace and to feed the hungry are there not?" He went on.

"Well yes, but..."

"Then my quest is, as before: to prepare souls for entry to my Father's house, and I will muster help from these great people," interrupted Joshua, who then paused. "And now my friends, I must meditate," he continued.

David looked at Matthew and raised his head in the direction of the cave mouth. Matthew nodded then rose and followed David out into the dark.

Outside, Matthew gazed up at the myriad stars and then said, "What are we to do about Grondin? He'll be back, and Christ, I mean the Lamb, sounds a bit... naïve!"

"I agree," said David, "but he is the Son of God. Let's rest then head back to the car at first light. In the Bible Satan does not tempt Christ in the wilderness again!"

"Yeah but, who says it will be the same again?"

Chapter Thirteen

Beckman Institute Los Angeles

“Okay open your eyes,” said the calm, but firm voice.

Leon raised his eyelids, and the blurry image of a man formed in front of him. He cried out as the face of the man, who had startling blue eyes, smiled at him with such radiance.

“Now Leon stand up,” commanded the smiling stranger.

“I can’t, I’ve got SB!”

“Stand up!”

Then the kid, who had been in a wheelchair all his short life, began shakily to put his weight on his legs and rise. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he took his first steps with one arm around the man, who then guided him to the handrail which ran along the corridor.

“Right,” said the stranger who pushed the wheelchair away and started to leave.

“Wait!” Leon shouted. “How can I thank you?”

Joshua Collins turned and smiled, then said, “by loving God and others.”

A carer who had been on a break, appeared and rushed to help Leon back into his wheelchair.

“No Ivy, don’t! I can walk!”

“What?”

“I can walk and see,” he said wiping the tears away from his eyes.

“How’s all this possible?”

“I’ll tell you how it's possible Ivy: through Jesus!”

Chapter Fourteen

Ron Scrimgeour, chief director of the CIA, walked into the office of the White House where Bob Laverty, the vice-president sat writing behind a large, tidy desk.

“Okay Ron, I’ll be with you in a minute,” said the politician without looking up.

“Sir,” replied Scrimgeour as he gazed out of the large window at the snow shower which was gripping the city.

“Sorry Ron, take a seat.” Laverty said after a while as he raised his head. Then, after putting a folder in a drawer in his desk, he asked: “So what can I do for you?”

Scrimgeour put one leg over the other and leaned back into the velvet-lined chair.

“Sir, we have a problem.”

“Ron, we have a thousand problems!”

The Agency man stroked the side of his face; he needed a cigarette, but that would have to wait.

“Yes sir, but this is big.”

“Okay, what is it?” Laverty asked with a sigh.

“Have you heard about the guy who people are calling the new Messiah?”

“Yeah, I read about it in a newspaper—just some nutcase!”

“No, he’s not.”

“What?”

“We’ve monitored a few of his sermons that have been causing mass interest, and we’ve interviewed people who have witnessed miraculous healing. Sir, this guy’s influence is sweeping across the West Coast and pretty soon it’s going to engulf the whole of the country.”

“So, is it such a problem?” the vice-president asked shrugging his shoulders. “Send in your Black Op’s team and take him out!”

“Sir,” said Scrimgeour pulling his chair closer to the front of the desk. “We would have a volatile situation on our hands if we did that! He’s become high profile very quickly.”

“I see.”

Scrimgeour stared at the politician. “Sir, I don’t know how much of the Bible you’re familiar with, but it turns out there’s some kind of end-game about to happen! There have been reports of a rise in demonic manifestations, both here and around the world—particularly the UK. Sir, I think you will have to tell the president. I don’t know where we’re going with this one!”

“Right, I’ll have a word with him.”

Laverty turned and gazed out of the window. “This one will go beyond the White House.”

“Sir?”

“Okay Ron. Thanks for the briefing, I’ll be in touch,” the vice-president said turning back to Scrimgeour.

On the way back to Langley Scrimgeour lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. *What the hell’s going on?*, he thought, *some biblical prophecy about to go down. What did Laverty mean about going beyond the White House? Was he aware of the Inner Sanctum?*

Matthew walked out of the Days Inn motel on the eastern suburbs of Las Vegas and headed towards the car. He had his hold-all in one hand and a paper cup filled with coffee in the other. The sun shone through a hazy sky and the wind blew dust between the cars which then piled up against the side-walk.

Matthew opened the car boot and threw his bag in—spilling coffee onto the parking lot in the process. After slamming the boot he opened the driver’s door and slid in to the seat.

“Okay, where to?” he asked David, who was sitting in the passengers seat.

But before his friend could answer the rear passenger-side door opened and Joshua Collins climbed into the back seat.

“What the...?” Matthew spluttered.

“Gentlemen, I saw you at the sermon last night.”

“It was illuminating,” said David without turning his head.

“Yes, I must spread the word of God, even in such places.”

“Where are you going?” Matthew asked.

“I need to ask you for a kindness. I go to Washington DC, and would ask you for a lift, but if it is an inconvenience, I will travel some other way.”

David looked at Matthew and then said: “That won’t be necessary. We were going to the capital anyhow.”

“Were we?” Matthew asked in astonishment.

“Yes.”

Field after field rolled past the car on a freeway which stretched endless into the distance. They had left the desert states behind and were now driving through the mid-western state of Oklahoma on the second day of their journey.

“Pull in at the next convenience store,” said Joshua

Matthew signalled when he saw the signs for fast-food restaurants and shops standing in the near distance like giant lollipops.

“This do?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Joshua.

The sun had begun to set, throwing shadows across the land as the black Pontiac pulled into the parking lot of a Nine–Eleven. Joshua opened the passenger–side rear door and rushed into the store.

“You need anything David?” Matthew asked about to open his door.

“He hasn’t gone in there to buy something!” David replied.

“What?”

“Come on.”

The scene that greeted them after entering the shop made Matthew gasp. Joshua was standing next to a young Hispanic man who nervously held a shotgun to the head of the Asian shopkeeper.

“Stay back or I’ll blow his fucking head off!” the youth, dressed in a dirty green sweatshirt and jeans, shouted.

“Look at me.” Joshua ordered, “you don’t want to do this!”

The assailant took his eyes off the shopkeeper and stared at Joshua.

“I know your mother’s ill; if you take me to her I will heal her, and she will return to work, but first I must heal you.”

Tears rolled down the cheeks of the youth as Joshua grabbed the gun and handed it to David. He then put his hand on the kid’s head and said: “Leave this body Satan and allow this child the peace of the Lord.” His eyes flashed red as the youth slumped into his arms.

The shopkeeper fell back into his chair behind the counter and grabbed the receiver of his telephone. He punched in a number while wiping sweat from his brow with his other hand.

“You don’t need to do that,” advised Joshua.

“I need to call the cops,” replied the shopkeeper.

“No you don’t,” said Joshua in a gentle but firm voice.

“You’re right, I don’t,” said the man as he replaced the receiver.

“God will bless you a thousand times.” Joshua said as he carried the youth toward the door.

Matthew followed David out of the store feeling the power of the Christ.

The Mendez’s lived in a rundown house at the end of a dusty lane off the freeway. There were two rusting hulks in the yard which were once pickup trucks. A trailer lay on its side along by a fence which held back a field of crops.

Two dogs ran between the trucks toward the Pontiac as it drove into the yard and pulled up in front of the veranda where a large man in a pair of denim dungaree’s rose from a wooden seat.

“Papa, I have brought a man who can heal Mama!” the young Hispanic shouted excitedly as he ran from the open rear door of the car.

“Oh!” grunted the big Mexican as he eyed the three men approaching the house. “Are they doctors Johnny?”

“No papa they are holy men.”

Jose Mendez grabbed the cross which hung from a chain around his neck, and said: “They don’t look like holy men!”

Inside, Johnny led them through a lounge where an old three-piece suite gazed at a large television set which nattered incessantly in one corner. He then led them into a neat bedroom where a big bed projected from a wall and faced a small window. A bronze figure of Christ on a wooden cross looked down upon Maria Mendez, who lay on her back with a white medical collar around her neck. Her deep, brown eyes lit up when Joshua approached the bed.

“Mama this man has come to heal you,” said Johnny, who stood at the foot of the bed.

Maria tried to speak as Joshua put a hand on her forehead and said: “Stay calm Maria, and may God be with you.”

“What happened to her?” Matthew asked Jose in the lounge where he and David had remained with the husband.

“She was working, when a client of hers grabbed her and threw her across the motel room they were in. She landed awkwardly paralysing her from the neck down!”

“Did you seek vengeance?” David asked.

Jose looked at the demon and said: “You betcha! But I couldn’t find him. Maria told me that the guy had wild red eyes. The whole thing makes me feel so... useless!”

“Well, you don’t have to feel useless any more my dear Jose,” said Maria, who was standing in the bedroom door frame supported by Joshua.

“Maria! What?” Jose said.

“Light the oven Jose we have an extra three for dinner!”

“I don’t understand?”

“You don’t need to understand. Just praise this man—our Lord and God,” said Maria crossing herself.

After a meal of chilli con carne Maria carried dishes through to the kitchen and then returned with a basin of water and placed it by the feet of Joshua, and said: “Lord, I feel I must do this. I am a sinner for the work I do.”

She then removed his shoes and socks and washed his feet with the warm water.

“Maria, thank you, and bless you.” Joshua said after the ritual as he put his socks and shoes back on. “Now my friends we must leave,” he continued.

A cool wind swept around the flood-lit yard as the three men left the veranda and headed toward the car. The last of the day’s sunlight was a thin red strip on the western horizon.

“How can we ever repay you?” Jose asked as he watched the three men climb into the car.

Joshua turned towards him and said: “By praying Jose. Pray, and work will find you—I can guarantee it!”

The three members of the Mendez family then watched the dust rise into the air behind the car as it disappeared into the gloom.

“I think things will be better from now on Jose,” said Maria as tears welled up in her eyes.

Matthew yawned as a Lucky Seven Motel sign appeared out of the dark of the roadside. He glanced in the rear-view mirror at Joshua then at David next to him. “Gentlemen, I’m bushed. What do you say to a night in this motel?”

“Okay, pull in,” grunted David.

Joshua looked at Matthew in the mirror and said: “There is something we must discuss.”

Two rooms were taken: one for Matthew and David, and one for Joshua.

“We’d better go and see what he wants to discuss,” said David after they had settled in.

“Sit down, please,” said Joshua when the two men had entered his room.

David pulled out the chair which fitted under the desk in front of the window, and Matthew

slumped onto the bed at the opposite end from Joshua. The drapes were partially open allowing red neon light to spill into the room from the courtyard and clash with the light from the bedside lamp.

“Despite what you think I am not here this time to gather sin and teach people about my Father.” Joshua announced.

Matthew glanced at David, who raised his eyes from staring at the carpet to look at Joshua, and asked, “then why are you here?”

“I’m here, as the Lamb, to warn man that their ways must change. They must walk with the Heavenly Father!”

“What do you mean by their ways?” Matthew asked.

“Humans must cleanse their lives; they must release desire, lust and the pursuit of Mammon. They will need to pray for salvation to achieve spiritual growth. This will not be easy because money culture has created the illusion of civilisation aided by the unseen ones who feed off the light produced by the illusion.

David nodded his head, and said: “You mean Satan and his hordes?”

“Yes, they are happy to supply easy lives for those who are weak.

“I don’t understand. What will happen if we don’t amend our ways?” Matthew asked.

Joshua gazed at the ceiling. “You have read the Book of Revelation in The New Testament?”

“Yes—some, answered Matthew.

“Well, it has already begun!”

Joshua pulled a laptop from his holdall.

“This gentlemen, is the end of the world for Satan and his associates.”

David stared at the slim black object. “A computer!”

“Yes, a computer which has the Book with Seven Seals emblazoned on the hard drive.”

Matthew stared at David wondering about God being a computer expert.

Chapter Fifteen

Ron Scrimgeour pulled down the zip at the back of the bubbly blond girl's dress, and she giggled as it fell to the ground. She then stepped out of the garment and led Ron toward a bed with silk sheets.

"Ron," said the girl as they were writhing away, "where and when is the next meeting of the Inner Sanctum?"

"Oh!" shouted Ron as he spurted, "Faraday Room, Tuesday at five pm!"

He looked up into the girl's red eyes and then woke up screaming.

"What is it Ron?" asked his wife.

"Just a nightmare dear," he answered as he felt the wet patch on the groin area of his pyjamas.

The room was darkened with lights illuminating a table where ten figures sat as Thomson appeared, like a ghost, through a wall. Two guards in uniform pulled out their guns and pointed them at the intruder, but the guns had other ideas and rammed up their owners bottoms.

"Goodnight gentlemen," said Thomson as he waved a hand and the guards pulled the triggers.

Also in the room were black-suited agents who took their hands away from the guns inside their jackets after witnessing the event.

"What the fuck!" Ron Scrimgeour shouted as he jumped up looking at the man next to him, who was pulling him back into his seat and shaking his head while staring at him with knowing eyes.

"So this is where you've been running my world from in my absence," said Thomson as he circled the table.

"So glad to see you again my lord," said a blond-haired man whose eyes flickered red.

"The Lamb is here so there isn't much time, gentlemen—I need an update!"

"The Lamb is indeed here and we suspect that he has the Book with Seven Seals," said the blond-haired man.

"We're certain he is on his way here to Washington," said a man in a generals uniform.

"Good news!" Thomson said.

"He's with two men: Matthew Wilson and David de Longford," continued the military man.

"Not so good news," said Thomson as he looked at the palm of his right hand.

"Who are they?" Ron Scrimgeour asked.

"They're part demon part human. Wilson's an annoying little shit. And de Longford... de Longford's an old adversary of mine, he's dangerous!"

Matthew pulled off the freeway and parked in the lot of a coffee house as a dark storm cloud rumbled its way across the distant mountains.

"Anyone for coffee and a muffin?"

"Yeah, I'll go for that," said David pulling on his hat.

"I won't," said Joshua. "I'll stay in the car and meditate."

After Matthew and David had left the vehicle Joshua prayed and placed himself in a deep meditative state. Suddenly there was a sharp knock on the window beside him. When he opened his eyes Joshua was shocked to see the head of a screaming man close to the glass. He was unshaven, had unkempt hair and blazing red eyes.

Joshua opened the door, pushing the stranger back, and stepped out of the car. "Calm yourself, sir," he said as the man lurched toward him.

"I know who you are!" the man yelled.

The Lamb put his hand on the strangers forehead and said: "Hold thy peace and come out of him!"

The man slumped to the ground and Joshua pulled him up and took him over to rest in a seat in front of the coffee house.

David and Matthew came running out.

"What happened?" Matthew asked.

Joshua looked up at them, “This man had an unclean spirit and I cleansed it. Can you bring him a drink please?”

Matthew fetched a cup of water from the café.

“There you are sir,” he said handing over the drink.

“Thank you son,” said the man.

“Gentlemen, I think we should now continue our journey,” said Joshua turning toward the car.

Soon they were driving along the freeway in cruise control. David turned around on hearing rustling from the rear seat. “What’s wrong?”

Joshua searched around the seat and the floor. “It’s my holdall—I can’t find it!”

“Not the holdall with the laptop in!” said Matthew.

“Yes I’m afraid so,” answered Joshua.

“Back to the coffee house Mattie—quickly!” said David.

“It couldn’t have been the man with the unclean spirit. I was with him all the time, and he was never in the car.” Joshua said as he looked underneath the front seats. “Must have been an opportunist thief.”

“Or the man you cleansed had an accomplice,” countered David.

Matthew left the freeway at the first junction and then raced back along the opposite side toward the café.

“He’s gone,” said David pointing toward the seat at the front of the coffee house as the car bounced into the parking lot.

The three men searched in the café and the area round about, but there was no trace of the cleansed man.

“I have a feeling Grondin’s involved here.” Matthew said to David as the two men walked back to the car followed by Joshua.

“Yes, so do I. After all, his destruction is assured when the file with the seals is opened.”

“Only I can open the seals,” said Joshua as he caught up with the two men.

“What now then? Did God make a back-up!” asked Matthew as they opened the car doors.

“That’s blasphemy I think, but no—he didn’t make a back-up. Nor did I,” said Joshua.

David turned to Joshua, “What happens if someone other than yourself opens the seals?”

“They would be burned alive!”

“How about Satan?”

Joshua watched the illuminated Best Western sign bounce around in the night as the car entered the parking lot of the motel in Alexandria.

“Wakey Wakey lads,” said Matthew reversing the car into a space.

Opening the rear door, Joshua stepped out and stretched as he watched the other two men walk toward the well-lit reception. Suddenly the darkness reached out and grabbed him. A bitter chemical entered his lungs, and the darkness invaded his mind.

Part Three

Holy Orders

Chapter Sixteen

Monsignor Michael Manzi sat in the back of a taxi and gazed at the passing Virginian mixture of residential and commercial properties. He had flown in to Dulles International from Rome and was now speeding toward Washington DC.

Manzi, an exorcist for the catholic church, was on a different mission this time. Authorised by His Eminence-the Pope himself-he had to find Christ.

He had read the reports of some guy claiming to be the Second Coming, but had dismissed it as nonsense. Cardinal Canale, the man who gave him his orders, had asked him to check it out.

One thing he couldn't figure out was why the Vatican knew the exact place to send him. He had been told that the so called Christ was on his way to the capital. How did they know?

He yawned. *Once he had exposed the charlatan, he would visit his family in Baltimore and have some time off*, thought Michael. The past few months had been hectic, he had never been involved in so many exorcisms.

"You here for some convention Father?" The cab driver asked as the towers of down-town Washington raced toward them.

"Nah, I'm here for something else."

"You're from the States then?"

"Yes, I'm from Baltimore."

"Do you follow the Ravens?"

"Oh yes, that's my team. I keep up with the scores."

They crossed the Potomac and pulled up in front of the Days Inn Hotel on Connecticut Avenue. *A rare privilege*, thought Michael, who normally stayed in priest houses or rectory's.

He checked-in and then took the elevator to his room on the third floor. His mobile phone rang as he pushed the door open; so he dropped his suitcase and flopped into a seat by the window. He pulled out the phone and gazing at the picture of Cardinal Canale he pressed the accept button.

"I take it you're settled into your hotel room Michael?" Canale asked in his Italian accented English.

"Yes, Thank you. I'm just in."

"Michael, I have news that will help you on your quest."

"Okay, Your Eminence."

"While you were flying over the Atlantic the person who was claiming to be Christ disappeared. The two men he was travelling with are staying at the Best Western motel on North Washington Street Alexandria outside Washington. Their names are Matthew Wilson and David de Longford."

"Alright," said Michael wondering where Canale received the information from. "I'll check it out."

"Hire a car, you'll need one. Good bye my boy." Canale said as the phone screen flicked to a picture of falling leaves.

Don't know about hiring a car, thought Michael as he threw the mobile on the bed then rose and pulled off his coat. He then opened his suitcase and unpacked a few items before heading into the wash room for a rejuvenating shower.

The next day Michael stood at the reception after an early breakfast.

"Can you book me a cab please?" He asked the Asian assistant.

"Certainly sir, please take a seat," answered the young woman.

The early start would hopefully catch the two men before they left, thought Michael as he gazed

at the passing traffic through the large window behind the seats.

A grey car came to a halt by the front door.

“That’s your cab,” said the receptionist.

A hazy sun shone on the freeway as the taxi sped along against the flow of the other carriageway busy with cars heading into Washington.

The old town of Alexandria jumped up and ran toward the cab which had left the freeway.

“Here we are, sir,” said the driver as they pulled up in front of the Best Western motel.

“Thank you,” said Michael paying the man.

He then strode into reception.

“I have friends staying here. Can you tell me which room they’re in?” He asked the bearded assistant.

“What’s their names, sir?”

“Wilson and de Longford.”

The man clicked a mouse and then, staring at the computer screen, said: “Room 237.”

Michael climbed the stairs and knocked on number 237.

A young man with dark brown hair opened the door.

“Yes, can I help you?” Matthew asked.

Michael showed his Vatican ID card. “Could I have a word with you?”

“Oh! Then you’d better come in,” said Matthew opening the door for Michael to pass through.

David, who was sitting by the table staring at his mobile, looked up as the priest entered the room.

“Who’s this Mattie?”

“I’m Monsignor Michael Manzi,” said Michael unsettled by David’s appearance.

“What is it you want, Father?” asked Matthew flicking on the kettle.

“Well, I was hoping there were three of you here!”

David tapped his phone screen. “What’s your interest?”

“Okay, I’ll come straight to the point.”

“Coffee?” Matthew asked holding up a cup.

“Yes, please,” said Michael sitting in a chair by the table. “The Vatican sent me to investigate the reports that Christ is here among us again and in particular, travelling with you two gentlemen.”

Matthew looked at David as he carried a cup of steaming coffee over to where the priest was sitting.

“Well, the man that was travelling with us has left, in fact he disappeared when we were checking in here the other night.” David said accepting a cup from Matthew.

“What do you mean: disappeared?” Michael asked taking a sip from his cup.

“The three of us left the car, but only two, Mattie and myself, entered the reception downstairs.”

Michael sat back in his chair and gazed out of the window. “What could have happened?”

“We rushed back outside, but there was no sign of Joshua anywhere,” said Matthew as he sat down on one bed.

“You called him Joshua. Was he, for want of a better phrase, the real article?”

“We’ve seen him heal, and cast out unclean spirits,” said David.

“I see,” said Michael stroking his chin.

“Oh, and one more thing,” said Matthew looking at David, “he has the Book with Seven Seals!”

“What!” said Michael jumping up.

“Yeah, but it’s been stolen.” David added.

Chapter Seventeen

Joshua opened his eyes slightly and watched lights change from green to red. Then full consciousness flooded in and he opened his eyes fully.

He was in some control room, and he couldn't move his arms or legs. Clamped to a metal cross Joshua felt the irony flood through him as he looked around the room.

"Well, hello your Lordship, or should I call you the Lion or the Lamb?" asked a grinning Thomson.

Joshua turned his head and focused his eyes on the figure who spoke.

"Why have you done this Satan... or should I call you the serpent or the dragon?"

"Why? To keep you away from this," said Thomson waving the laptop in the air.

"I will, open the seals." Joshua said.

"We'll see, oh, and don't bother with all that calling up your Father stuff because this man has his finger on the trigger of a nuclear missile that will wipe out New York City if there's the slightest bit of that business," said Thomson resting his hand on the shoulder of a figure sitting before a computer monitor.

"And he's one of us!" said Thomson laughing as he left the silo.

Chapter Eighteen

“What I have here gentlemen is the Book with Seven Seals,” said Thomson holding up a laptop as he walked into the meeting of the Inner Sanctum.

He placed the computer on the illuminated desk, around which sat the seven figures, opened it and pressed a few keys. He then turned to one of the black-suited agents standing around the periphery of the room.

“You!” he shouted pointing at the man, “come here.”

The agent just stood and watched with passive eyes.

“Come here,” growled Thomson as the man flew forward and was suddenly standing beside him. The others drew their guns, but were told to stand down by Ron Scrimgeour.

“Here, open this file,” said Thomson pointing to the screen.

The agent shrugged his shoulders and tapped the touch pad. Suddenly he screamed as he burst into flames activating the sprinkler system and fire alarm in the room.

One of the other agents rushed toward his burning colleague with the room fire extinguisher and hosed as the members of the Inner Sanctum made to leave the room. But before the first man could leave, the handle of the door flew out of his hand and the door slammed shut.

“No one’s leaving.” Thomson said in a mocking voice. “You, cancel all this,” he said pointing at Scrimgeour and then waving his hands in the air. He then looked at the agents and the two guards while kicking the smouldering ex-agent, “you gentlemen, pull this out of the way!”

After the sprinklers had been extinguished, and the alarm switched off Thomson put his two fists on the desk and looked around. “Now, please take your seats, and I trust that little demonstration has wiped any doubts from your minds of what we’re dealing with gentlemen.”

“Just what are we dealing with?” asked a grey-haired man as he sat down.

“Now now, you gentlemen haven’t been reading your Bibles. Let’s see. What do we have? The Lamb of God, the Book with Seven Seals and hmm... well, me!”

“Okay, we get the gist. What can be done about the position, because I’m sure I speak for us all,” said the grey-haired man. He looked around at the nodding heads, “we’re happy with the way things are?”

“Of course you’re happy with the way things are, your Illuminati!” said Thomson as he circled the table.

“Why not destroy the computer?” Ron Scrimgeour asked.

“An intercontinental ballistic missile couldn’t destroy it!” Thomson said. He thumped his fist off the table. “The upcoming apocalypse can be stopped only one way, and that’s by keeping the Christ from opening the seals!”

“And how do we do that?” A man with dark hair and a moustache asked.

“Well, you could pray,” answered Thomson with sarcasm. Then he looked around the table.

“Probably not a good idea.”

“If you weren’t... I’d...” said a fair-haired man.

Thomson, with blazing red eyes, turned on the man, who rose into the air, and said in a thundering, other-worldly voice: “Well, I am fucking Satan, and you will do nothing!”

Then putting a finger on his chin, with eye colour restored, Thomson again circled the table as the fair-haired man crashed down onto his seat. “You could take this person into custody.”

“I’ll get right on to it!” Ron Scrimgeour shouted as he jumped up.

“Sit down Mr CIA man it’s already been done.” Thomson said as he walked from the room.

Chapter Nineteen

Matthew turned to David after Michael Manzi left the motel room. "What now?"

"Well, what have we got, or lost? We're about to enter the time of the Book of Revelation, but we've lost the Book of Seven Seals, and the Lamb has been taken, or walked away to goodness knows where." David said with a grimace.

"Things have been better," said Matthew looking out of the window.

"Aye, things have been better."

Matthew switched on the kettle and grabbed two mugs. "Grondin's behind all this!"

"We've got to stop thinking of him as Grondin or Thomson or whatever. He has gathered so much dark power he has become, releasing the super entity from his prison, the devil."

"In the Book of Revelation isn't there an antichrist?"

"Yes, the Beast. We must beware!"

Matthew poured steaming water into the two mugs, stirred the contents and handed one to David. "So, we going Gron..., I mean devil, hunting?"

"Well, I think we'll shake a few trees and see what falls out."

"Where do we start?" Matthew asked taking a sip from his mug as he sat down in a chair facing the window.

"We'll start with the Illuminati. Might as well start at the top!"

"The what?"

"The Illuminati are the elite of the world if you like. Many are descended from fallen angels, others are billionaires and people in high places. Captains of industry and the like."

"Jeez! How are we goin' to find them?"

"I'll find out from a contact, and we'll... ahem, introduce ourselves."

Michael Manzi left the cab which had taken him into the centre of Washington DC and the church of St Thomas. He required time to think and pray before he reported to the Vatican. As he ran out in front of a bus a speeding car knocked him onto the side-walk outside the church.

The car, a silver BMW, screeched to a halt in front of a parked truck and the driver switched off the cell phone he had just been talking on and slipped it into his pocket. Tom Baumann then ran up to where the priest lay on the side-walk.

"Oh Father!" He shouted as he watched the life force leave Michael. He shook as the energy of a thousand evil spirits and dark souls flowed from the priest into him.

"You okay son?" An old man with a kaki army cap and grey beard asked.

Baumann looked at him, and then up and down the street. The side-walk was empty save for the man. Disinterested vehicles streamed past on either side of the road.

"Yeah... yeah, I'm okay."

"What happened here?" asked the man looking at the dead priest.

"Hit and run, I guess. I'd better phone an ambulance," said Baumann as he pulled out his phone.

Two priest's came running out of the church followed by a group of people. Baumann decided it was time to slip away, so he walked down an alleyway. Suddenly he bent over, breathing heavily, before slamming back against the wall of a building. He then slid up, working against gravity. When he reached the top of the four storey building, he stepped backward onto the flat roof and laughed hysterically.

After he calmed down Baumann walked past the dark structures that were the air vents of the building.

"So, you're finally here!" announced the dark.

"What... who's there?" shouted Baumann.

After there was no answer he looked around the roof fortified by his new powers. "Come out! I know you're there."

A swirling form grabbed him and hung him over the edge of the building

“Now, Mr Baumann.” said the form.

“What the fuck is it you want?” asked a struggling Baumann.

“I've waited through eons of time for you!”

“Well, I'm flattered!”

“Listen you bastard, you're not in a position to be flippant!”

“Yeah well, if you've been waiting for me you're not going to do anything to me, are you?”

Then, after a moment Baumann was standing on the roof looking at a demon.

“I'm the false prophet of the Book of Revelation. I was sent to prepare the way for you.” said the demon.

“And have you... prepared the way for me?”

“When I was first given the task, I looked all over this miserable dimension, but could find nothing, then in the year 1980 the stars pointed me to New York.

“Wait a minute, time out! Why me? What's this all about?”

“Come on Tommie haven't you felt you're something special,” whispered the demon who was now standing behind Baumann.

“Well there was the time when I was twelve and being set upon by a gang of thugs in a park in Queens. I remember passing out with fear as they caught me...”

“And when you woke up they were lying unconscious around you apart from one who I chased out of the park!” interrupted the demon.

“That was you!”

“Yes.”

“Of course... there was that time when I was drunk and stole a car. I never understood why the police that were chasing my friends and me ended up in the Hudson. It was like a giant hole opened in the bridge!”

“Yeah that was pretty good wasn't it? I didn't let them die of course, just get wet!”

“It's all coming back now. I always thought I had a guardian angel.”

“More of a guardian demon!”

“If you're the false prophet aren't you supposed to be trying to convince people you're the second coming of Christ or something like that?”

Sirens filled the night as the false prophet gazed up at the stars and then lowering his head focused his red eyes on Baumann. “Hey, look at me!” he said raising his arms, “you think there's maybe something just a little wrong with that notion?”

“Yeah, okay, point taken.”

The demon walked over to the edge of the roof and stared out into the night. “Nah, what you're talkin' about is the biblical interpretation of my role... this is real life,” he laughed. “I've had a good time in this dimension waiting on you, I'm not going to pretend to these poor fuckers I'm something I'm not!”

After a moment he walked back to where Baumann was standing. “Anyway, it's over to you now Tommy-boy!”

Chapter Twenty

The members entered the room where the meeting of the Inner Sanctum was about to begin. Around the periphery stood the agents dressed in black suits. Two armed guards opened the door after eye recognition had been confirmed and closed it after the member had passed.

The grey-haired man stood up and looked around the table as the room lights dimmed leaving only the large table illuminated. “Well gentlemen as our new, or should I say old, master isn’t present I’ll carry on my duties as Chair,” he said. He looked down at some notes in front of him.

“Now gentlemen, don’t be alarmed,” said David as he took off his hat, “I suspended your brother in the toilets down the hall.” Then looking at the two guards, “You’ll find that your guns are disarmed.”

“Take him down!” Ron Scrimgeour shouted at the black-suited agents.

“Oh, I forgot to mention these guys in black cannot do anything but breath.”

“My name is David de Longford. I mean you no harm as you can see I am powerful. My colleague also means you no harm.”

David nodded to the guards, who robotically opened the re-enforced door. Matthew walked in and looked around the room.

“I am half-human half-demon, and I have been around for a long time. I remember visiting your meetings when they were based in Rome,” said David instructing Matthew to stand next to him as he put both of his hands on the table.

“What is it you want?” The grey-haired man asked.

“I know that some of you are Illuminati and others are not. Anyway, we’re looking for a friend of ours—Joshua Collins.”

The man stared at David. “And what makes you think we’d know where this person is Mr de Longford?”

“Okay, let’s not play around, we all know what is at stake here—the Earth! There will be an apocalyptic war. I know your master is here, he’s an old adversary of mine. If you go along with this abduction, then the planet is finished.” David said and then looked around the room.

After a short time the Chairman said: “Will there be anything else Mr de Longford?”

“Okay then,” said David lifting his hands off the table, “let’s go Mattie, this lot have forgotten what it’s like to be human!”

Outside in the car, Mattie turned to David as they were heading onto the freeway, “Do you think that will do any good?”

“Of course, did you see the look on some faces?”

“What’s the real story behind all this Illuminati thing?”

“They’re the elite rulers of the Earth.”

“So you said before.”

“Look, the Earth is Satan’s given to him by Lucifer. He wanted to give it to Christ on Mount Sinai remember? If the Son of Man would worship him, but he refused.”

“I’m still not making a connection here!” said Matthew as he indicated to overtake a truck.

“Well, Christ put Satan, and Lucifer, into an inter-dimensional prison for two thousand years, and his followers—the fallen angels - have been pulling the strings from behind the scenes until he returns.”

“So, they’re the Illuminati?”

“Yes, they’re influence is everywhere, in politics, the media and large commercial corporations.”

Matthew watched as two cars raced one another and then turned to David. “What about this Lucifer?”

“He’s in charge of many other worlds. I doubt if we’ll need to deal with him!”

“We’ve no chance then? Humans I mean?”

“Don’t give up Mattie. Grondin is the major worry, but even he can’t defy the will of God.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Ryan Cahill parked his Audi and walked along the tree-lined Washington boulevard where he lived at number 24b. The night was moonless, but warm for the time of year. A couple walked past him as he looked up at the myriad stars. When he looked back a man in a black leather jacket was pointing a handgun at him.

“You Ryan Cahill?” he growled.

“Now look, if you want my wallet, here it is,” said Ryan pulling out his wallet.

“Aw, what the hell!” said the assailant as he fired two shots killing Ryan, who’s body crashed back onto the sidewalk.

The killer grabbed the wallet and ran along the street before disappearing into the shadows.

“Hey stop!” shouted the man from the couple who had passed earlier, as he ran back to where Ryan lay.

Tom Baumann sat back in his chair and put his arms behind his head as Pantera’s 'Cowboys From Hell' filled his lounge. Unfortunately the front door bell disturbed his relaxation.

“Yes, what is it?” He asked over the building security system.

“It’s me. Open up—the jobs done,” said a voice.

Baumann pressed a button after checking the street monitor.

“Ten grand we agreed on,” said the man entering the apartment.

“Yes, come in,” said a grinning Baumann as he followed the man through to the lounge.

“You see, I don’t have ten thousand on me I’m afraid. Even if I did, I would give you fuck-all!”

“I thought this might happen!” said the thug who pulled out the handgun and pointed it at Baumann.

“Oh, come on now,” said Baumann with open arms as the gun swung round and pushed its way into the killers mouth.

The man moaned with wide, frightened eyes.

“You see, I’ve found out who I am, and I’m indestructible. You, my friend, are not,” said Baumann as the thug pulled the trigger blowing off the back of his head, splattering the wall behind with blood, pieces of brain tissue and skull.

The body seemed to hover for a moment as if doubting that it had been killed before slumping onto the floor.

“Oh shit! I’ll need to clean all this up,” said Baumann staring at the blood. “Oh well, where’s the paint roller,” he continued as he walked over the body of the killer.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Tom Baumann sat upright at the bar of Kings Nightclub in central Washington and pulled out his cell phone. Then, pressing in a number, he sat back and took a slug from his bottle of beer as he put the phone up to his right ear.

“Yes, hello,” said the voice of Ernest Illingworth, the financier, after several moments.

“Ernest, it’s Tom Baumann,” said Baumann taking another slug from his bottle.

“Tom, it’s good to hear from you. Sorry to hear about your partner—Ryan. Shot and killed for his wallet! What is happening to this country?”

“Listen Ernest, this isn’t a social call. I’m putting the price of the development up from 2 million to 10 million.”

There was a pause, and then Illingworth said: “What? Have you gone mad! I know Ryan’s death must have affected you, but this is crazy!”

“I’m in sound mind, and that’s the new price.”

“Oh come now Tom, I’m not going to pay that!”

“Oh come now Ernest, think of your family,” said Baumann while watching some women dancing.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Baumann signalled for one dancer to join him. “Well, take your daughter Katie for example, she’s a nice girl. Oh here she is!”

“Who is it?” asked the blond girl dressed in skin-tight black leather trousers and a white blouse.

“It’s your father.”

“Eh?” said the girl as she gulped down what was left of her cocktail and took the phone from Baumann. “Hi pops!”

“Katie, you be careful.”

“Oh dad, I’m with my friends.”

“How do you know Tom Baumann?”

“I met him at the reception party for the new development. I am a PA in your office—remember?”

“Yes well, don’t stay out too late.”

“I won’t.” she said, sighing as she handed the phone back to Baumann and accepting another cocktail from one of her friends.

“Now listen Baumann, I don’t want a hair on her head hurt. You understand?”

“I understand nothing until you agree to the new price.”

“Okay, I’ll put it to the board tomorrow.” Illingworth said with a sigh.

“Atta boy Ernie! And make it sound compelling—eh!”

“You leave my daughter alone!”

“Sure! I’m goin’ home. I’ll be in touch,” said a grinning Baumann.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Matthew was awoken by shouting and screaming. He sat up and watched as David wrestled with his duvet in the next bed.

“David! Wake up!” He shouted as he switched on the above-bed light.

David sat up and rubbed his face. “Sorry about that Mattie,” he said climbing out of his bed and pulling on his house coat. He then walked over to the sink area and switched on the kettle. “The Seals are being opened, or, at least someone has tried,” he said casually as he held up the instant coffee jar to Matthew.

“What?” shouted Matthew jumping out of his bed.

“Do you want some coffee?”

“No... I mean yes, but... the Seals!”

“I’ve seen what we would call The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse pass from a dimension into this dimension. Not pass into the physical, but into human and demon consciousness.”

“Yes, I felt something had happened.” Matthew said accepting a steaming mug from David.

“What can we do?”

“Nothing. The main period of the Book of Revelation has begun!”

Chapter Twenty-Four

A light rain had begun as Thomas Baumann opened his front door and picked up his mail. Suddenly four burly men in suits pushed him into his hallway and slammed the door shut.

“We’ve come to talk to you about being greedy,” said one man, who had a scar across one of his cheeks.

“I thought this would happen,” said Baumann as he snapped on the light. “I don’t want to talk; I’d rather that you danced like ballerinas,” he continued.

The men burst out laughing as they approached Baumann and then twirled on their toes and did little jumps.

“Now stop, and heads up to the ceiling,” growled Baumann.

The four men froze and tilted their heads up to the ceiling.

“You poor fools do not understand who I am,” said Baumann as he walked around the statuesque thugs.

The men looked at him with terrified eyes; the eyeballs being the only thing they could move.

“Right come on, I want blood!” Baumann shouted as the men opened their mouths and spurted out blood.

“Right, now for your boss,” said Baumann as he walked through the kitchen and then slipped out the back door.

He jumped over the brick backyard wall and landed silently behind a black sedan. Opening the nearside rear door he slipped in.

“Hello Ernie,” he said to the figure behind the steering wheel.

“What...?” uttered Illingworth.

“Oh I see, you’re surprised to see me. You were expecting them to beat me and drag me before you.”

“Now listen Tom.”

“No, you listen,” growled Baumann in an otherworldly voice. “You will find your thugs in my hall—quite dead. Not that I’m letting you go.”

Illingworth’s hands clamped onto the steering wheel and the car shot off on its own. After turning the corner they screamed along the street at the front of the building. They shot through a red light before screeching round a corner heading toward the city.

“What is it you want Tom?” screamed Illingworth.

“All I wanted was my money Ernie.”

“Okay, okay I’ll give you your money,” said Illingworth as police sirens filled the night behind them.

Illingworth, finding himself back in charge of the vehicle, pulled into the side of the street and was surrounded by police cars.

“Step out of the vehicle, sir!” said the officer pointing a torch into Illingworth’s face

“It was him officer, he made me do it!” Illingworth shouted pointing to the rear seat.

The policeman pointed his torch beam into the rear of the car, but there was no one there.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Matthew rose off his bed and strolled over to the window and gazed out at the parking lot. "We got to find Joshua!"

"I've tried to find him mentally, but Grondin has put a block around him."

There was a sharp rap on the door as David rolled off his bed and headed into the shower-room.

Matthew opened the door to find Michael Manzi. "Father! We wondered what happened to you?" he said stepping back to allow the priest in.

Matthew noticed the man looked dishevelled and now walked with a limp as he passed by.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" Matthew asked as he closed the door.

"Nah!" said Manzi.

"Father!" said David as he appeared from the shower room. "Any news on the whereabouts of Joshua Collins?"

"Nah!"

David looked at Matthew and knitted his eyebrows. "We believe an elite group headed by a dark entity is holding our man."

"Then he is beyond reach and we should leave it alone."

Matthew turned his head round from making coffee. "Leave it alone!"

"And, why is that Monsignor?" David asked holding a hand up to Matthew.

"I have told my contact in the Vatican City of the happenings, and I was ordered to stop the investigation. I have to ask you two gentlemen to respect the situation and return to where you came from."

"And if we don't?" Matthew asked.

A flicker of red passed over the priest's eyes. "Well then..."

"Please father, sit down while I have a word with Matthew," said David in a calming voice. He then signalled Matthew to follow him outside.

"That's not Michael Manzi," said David gazing at the clear sky then focusing on Matthew.

"No, something's happened to him!"

"The body... it's dead. He's been killed then possessed."

"What... like a zombie?"

"Yes.

There was a loud crash as Manzi walked through the door. "I can hear all you say in my mind. Now, as you don't believe me, I will have to destroy you!"

David grabbed Matthew, and they flew backwards over the parking lot. They landed on top of a small grassy banking. Manzi roared revealing large pointed teeth. His eyes shone bright red as he scrambled over cars toward the pair.

David leapt over the zombie and landed behind him. "Didn't anyone tell you it's not polite to take someone else's body," he quipped as he grabbed the head and broke the neck.

He left the body lying on the parking lot and walked toward Matthew. "Well, let's get on with finding Joshua and the Book."

"Eh... David, you'd better look behind you!"

David turned around to see Manzi walking toward him with the head resting on a shoulder.

"Michael," called a voice from the side of the lot.

A man in a black suit with a dog collar and a brown homburg, stood beside a grey van.

Manzi turned around in the direction of the voice with the head still on his shoulder.

"Michael, it's Cardinal Canale."

The zombie was about to walk toward the cardinal when he snarled and turned toward David.

"Michael, come to me," commanded Canale.

Manzi stopped for a moment and then turned around and limped toward Canale.

"What has happened to you?" Canale asked with tears in his eyes.

"It's not Michael," David said to the cardinal as he approached.

“I know.”

“What are you doing here?” Manzi growled.

“Michael, I'm here to take you home.”

The cardinal grabbed his metal crucifix which hung around his neck and began the exorcism.

Manzi's eyes shone bright red and his head swung round off the shoulder as he emitted an ear-piercing scream. He then went quiet and dropped onto the tarmac. Canale signalled to the van, and two men dressed in protective suits appeared and lifted the body into the back of the vehicle. Canale turned to David and Matthew. “American Police alerted us that Michael had been killed in a road accident in the centre of Washington. I came to collect the body and sort out any remaining details. But, as you saw someone or something beat me.”

“Yes, I'm afraid it's a sign of the dark times we're in.” David said.

“Now gentlemen, I must go. God bless you in your search. Yes, I have been informed all about you by the authorities! Here is my contact details should you require any help from the Vatican,” said Canale handing David a white card.

Chapter Twenty-Six

A smiling Baumann walked into the vast open plan office of Blumberg Enterprises in Manhattan accompanied by several thugs dressed in black suits.

"I want to see Mr Blumberg, honey," he said to the prim, blond-haired secretary sitting behind the front desk.

"I'm sorry Mr Blumberg is in a meeting at the moment and asked not to be disturbed," she said giving a dismissive smile.

"Is that so!" said Baumann gazing out over the New York skyline, "well little missy," he said looking back at her, "you tell him that if he doesn't come and talk I'll take the ten million I'm about to invest in his company somewhere else, then I'll come back and hack his balls off with a rusty saw."

The secretary reached down and pressed the security call button.

"No good missy! I'm afraid they're... incapacitated."

She then pressed a button and said, "Mr Blumberg I think you should talk to this gentleman." Then after a moment, "No, Mr Blumberg, you need to talk to this man!"

A small man in a neat suit with a fashionable, dark beard appeared in the foyer area after a few awkward minutes. "Can I help you gentlemen?"

"Yes," said a grinning Baumann, "I've come to invest in your company."

"Then, perhaps you'd better come to my office," said Blumberg walking through the office toward a green door.

"Please come in," he said opening and leaving the door open as he walked toward his desk, which sat before the vast buildings of Manhattan standing behind a sheet-glass window.

"Stay out here guys I'll handle this," Baumann said turning toward his thugs.

"What's your name sir," said Blumberg.

"Thomas Hassan Baumann," said Baumann holding out his hand as he crossed the room.

"I'm Jonathon Blumberg," said the small man shaking Baumann's hand before sitting down behind his desk.

"Now Mr Baumann, I'm a legitimate businessman. There will be no need for your associates outside the door. I do not do business with people of, ahem... ill repute, and I should inform you that the police have been alerted. You have, I would say, ten minutes to illuminate me as to the real purpose of your visit."

"Well in that case I would say you, ahem... have ten minutes to call them off." Baumann said lounging back in one of the two seats at the front of Blumberg's desk.

"And why would I do that?"

"Well, I'm holding your family captive in your more than ample house in Scarsdale," said Baumann as he pulled out a mobile phone and pressed a button, said a few words then passed the device to the business man.

"Hello... Dee, you okay?"

After a few words Blumberg passed the phone back to Baumann and pressed a button on his desk phone and instructed to cancel the police.

"Okay, you have me at a disadvantage. You breeze past my security; just who are you, and what do you really want?"

"Let's just say I'm someone you don't want to mess with, and I'm here to take over your business!"

"What! Do you know what my business is worth? Then there's the board and the shareholders. And I have the ear of the president."

"I know all that. That's why I want your business."

"Impossible!"

"You have no choice I'm afraid. I'm going to keep you on, however, as a silent partner with ten

million in your back pocket for any trouble caused to you and your family,” said Baumann. A small table with a sculptured figure upon it moved half a metre across the carpet toward Blumberg’s desk.

“Hey! That... table behind you moved... on its own!” said Blumberg looking past Baumann.

“Oh, I can do better than that. Watch this!”

Blumberg jumped off his seat as the desk shook violently causing all the things which were lying neatly on it to fly off toward the walls.”

“Okay, okay you can have the company, just don’t harm my family,” said Blumberg staring at Baumann in fear.

Baumann walked around the now stationary desk and shook hands with the businessman. “That’s more like it Mr Blumberg.

“What’s all this about?” Blumberg asked as Baumann walked toward the door,

“Well, let’s just say your life and everyone else’s won’t be the same again!”

Baumann closed Blumberg’s office door and strode through the huge outer office followed by his henchmen.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

A children's choir sang 'The Sun has got his Hat on' on the radio as the grey Chrysler van sped along the freeway toward Dulles Airport.

"Right gentlemen, the jet should be waiting—ready to go," said Cardinal Canale to the other men sitting beside him in the front.

Suddenly there was a thump behind them.

"What the...?" said the man driving as he looked in his rear-view mirror.

A dark shape welled up and smashed through the steel mesh which separated the front passenger's area from the rear of the van. The body of Michael Manzi, now with head back in an upright position, snarled as it grabbed the head of the driver and tugged back.

Canale and the other man howled as the van veered across two lanes and was clipped by a pickup truck hurtling along the inside lane. The van toppled off the lane and up the verge at the side of the freeway. Stopping upright, it rolled down ending up on the flat area next to the inside lane.

After a moment the rear doors flew open and Manzi jumped out. He gazed along the buzzing freeway with dead eyes, then he looked up the verge. A figure stood on the crest staring at him with a full length jacket which flapped in the wind.

"Ironic, isn't it?" Thomson asked.

"What?" Manzi grunted.

"Well, you exorcising all those demons, now you have one of the worst in your body!"

Manzi glowered at Thomson. "What do you want?"

"You're to find the Antichrist, Baumann, and join him. You're to be a leader of the Dark Army.

"What about them?" Manzi asked turning toward the damaged vehicle.

"Let them burn!" said Thomson as the vehicle burst into flames.

A burning figure crawled out of the open passenger's door, rolled over on the grass to extinguish the flames and stared into Thomson's red eyes before passing out.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Baumann sat in his BMW and watched a man shout his good byes as he left a bar in Queens New York. He followed the man along the street. "Yeah, that's you... you fucker!" he growled.

In a flash he was back in the same area in 1993. Tommie Baumann and two other young boys sang as they walked home along the empty sidewalks on a calm fall night. They crowded into a call box and pretended to call someone.

The neighbourhood bully Ian Ritchie walked past the call box and then turned around, opened the door and grabbed Baumann by the neck, pulling him out of the box, then said, "What were you looking at fuckface!"

"Nothing," answered a shocked and trembling Baumann.

Ritchie pulled back his fist about to punch Baumann, but a siren scream made him push the young boy back into the call box.

The shouts of a large gang of youngsters brought Baumann out of his reverie and he pulled up beside Ritchie and lowered the front passenger-side window.

"You'd better get in fella!" he shouted.

"Thanks," said Ritchie climbing into the passenger's seat. "I live up on Huron Street."

"Okay," said Baumann

Baumann shifted into drive and the car eased along the road.

"I recognise your face," said Baumann as he switched his attention from the gang to Ritchie.

"Yeah! I'm well known around here. I don't recognise you." Ritchie said shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh come on now Ian Ritchie. Twenty-three years ago you asked me what I was looking at when I was playing with some friends in a call box."

"I know nothing about that and... look thanks for the ride, but I'll be getting out now."

"Oh no fuckface you're going nowhere, in fact you will be with me into eternity," said Baumann in an other-wordly growl as his eye colour changed to red.

"Right! Stop this fucking car!" Ritchie shouted as he pulled on the door handle, but nothing happened. He rammed an elbow into the window smashing the glass and then tried to clamber out. But Baumann gunned the car, and Ritchie fell back into the passenger's seat.

"You crazy fucker!" shouted Ritchie as he grabbed the steering wheel sending the car over the sidewalk and into the side of a building.

After watching the crash from the side-walk Baumann walked around and ripped off the wrecked passenger's door. He pulled the dazed and bleeding Ritchie from the car. Sirens heading in their direction made Baumann step back into the shadows of the building with Ritchie in his arms. Then, with his back against the wall, he slid up the six storey building. When he reached the top, he stepped back onto the flat roof with the groaning Ritchie.

"Come on Mr Ritchie, wake up," said Baumann holding the injured man in an iron-like grip over the side of the building.

Ritchie screamed as he came too and realised his plight. He stared down in horror as the police investigated the smashed car below where a small crowd of onlookers had gathered. He then looked up into the crimson eyes of Baumann.

"Okay, Mr Ritchie here's the deal: you come and join me and live forever, or you die and take your chances."

Another squad car pulled in behind the first.

"So what's it going to be Mr Ritchie?"

"I'm coming with you," groaned Ritchie.

"Good," said Baumann with a grin as he released his grip on the man's neck.

A horrified questioning look flashed across Ritchie's face as he hovered for a few seconds.

"Oh yes I forgot to add that you have to be dead to join me." Baumann said as he watched Ritchie succumb to gravity and plunge toward the wrecked BMW.

The crowd, including the police officers, jumped as the body of Ritchie crashed into the roof of the car.

“What the...?” shouted one officer amid the screaming crowd.

“Where did *he* come from?” a young white man asked no one in particular.

Another officer called for an ambulance while looking up and around.

“Jeez, is it going to start raining bodies?” wondered a middle-aged black woman.

The body which had been lying dead on the roof of the car moved. First an arm rose into the air and tensed the muscles followed by a leg. Then Ritchie raised his head up and groaned as he moved it from side to side.

The crowd gasped as he rolled over and jumped onto the side-walk. He looked around at the crowd of on-lookers and shrugged his shoulders, “been arguing with the wife again!” He then strode quickly along the sidewalk and disappeared into an alleyway.

“Hey, wait a minute!” shouted a police officer, who had recovered from confusion and ran after him.

But after searching the alleyway he returned shaking his head, “don't know how we're going to write this one up!”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The day was bright as Michael Manzi stood gazing across the cemetery where headstones swept over a hillock and flowed off into the distance. A soft breeze caressed him as he raised his arms. "Come, my brothers and sisters the master has need of you!" he said in a gentle but firm voice with burning red eyes.

He watched as a column of white mist shot out of the sky and then, hitting the ground, the mist flowed over the graveyard. After a moment the soil in front of the myriad headstones erupted, and bodies crawled out of the plots. The rejuvenated bodies had new souls and looked perfectly human, albeit dressed in burial clothes.

"Now follow me, there is a world to conquer!" Manzi bellowed.

The mass army of dead followed the former priest off the cemetery.

Ian Ritchie left the elevator and strolled over to the double doors of the penthouse suite on the top floor of Manhattan's Baberton Tower. He stamped the doors open and entered. Two suited black men with long hair pointed automatic pistols at him.

"Now, take it easy gentlemen. I'm here to see your boss. I have a proposal for him; something he'll like, in fact you'll all like!" Ritchie said with a grin.

A man also in a suit stood up from a table surrounded by other dark figures. His hair was tied back in a ponytail and he had a beard. He raised a hand up to the two guards. "What makes you think I'll be interested in what someone who bursts into a private meeting has to say?"

"First, a little demonstration. You're a vampire, right? Take a bite!" Ritchie said tilting his head to the side exposing his neck.

The man flew over the room revealing two large pointed teeth and sank them into Ritchie's neck, but instead of sucking blood he jumped back. "Hey man! You got no blood. You're cold as stone. It's like you're..."

"Dead!" interrupted Ritchie.

"Yeah, dead."

"Now that we understand each other: the proposal! I was recruited by a powerful man, Thomas Baumann. He's on the planet for a reason. You may or may not know we are entering the period of the Book of Revelation."

"Hold up!" howled the head vampire, "look around, you're not the only undead. This ain't a Bible class we holding here."

Loud laughter erupted around the room.

"I know what you do, supplying drugs and all, but this is the real deal. This guy Bauman he's the Antichrist, and he's here to raise an army to take the Earth."

"Why doesn't he come himself, if he's so high and mighty?"

"I suggested you people to him and he told me to bring you to meet him and hear what he has to say. This is it gentlemen," Ritchie said looking around the room, "no more hiding in the shadows from security services, because there won't be any government."

Silence drifted among the host.

"Okay, okay," said the head man looking at his colleagues, "I'll think about it and get in touch with the other brothers around the country."

"Don't take to long, things are moving fast. You don't want to know who else is here!"

"I'll be in touch."

"Gentlemen," said Ritchie as he turned and left the suite.

Chapter Thirty

David walked through swirling mists, which hissed and whispered inconceivable things. The further he walked the thicker the mist became until he stopped; something was whispering in English!

“What is it you want David de Longford? You are not welcome here.”

He moved on, then, with a swishing noise, the ethereal mists cleared like drapes being pulled apart.

The sun shone from a clear blue sky on David standing in a country glade. A beautiful woman with blond hair bouncing on her shoulders approached him.

“Mother, I was wondering when I would see you?”

“My dear boy,” growled the demon Hel. The voice incongruous with her human form. “What do you want here? Are you still protecting those miserable creatures on that planet?”

David grimaced. “As charming as ever I see. Nice to see some things never change!”

The sun faded, and the mists wafted back. Hel's eye colour changed from blue to red.

“Don't bother trying to scare me with the dramatic's.”

“Why would I bother with that!” hissed Hel.

She grew in size as the dark returned.

“Grondin seems to think he destroyed you and Grandfather.

“That miserable fucker! We led him on somewhat!”

“So the power he's using just now isn't real?”

“Oh, he absorbed power here. Just not ours. We let him go... or more correctly, we kicked him out despite what he says.”

“He's now calling himself Satan, and he's on the Earth to challenge the Second Coming.”

“It's possible he has attained the power to reach that escalated height. And now I have realised why you are here: to look for the one who claims to be the master of your universe.”

“And do you know where he is?”

“No!” She growled.

David turned around and strode back the way he came.

The whispering returned. “Do not despair, the one you seek is with a dark group known as...”
The voice faded causing David to peer around the mists.

After a moment it returned. “Freeing him will not be easy, you will have to use great power!”

David looked around again. “The name. What's the name of the group?”

“The CIA... seek Meddings!” hissed the voice as laughter echoed around the mists.

David woke up and looked over at Matthew. “Come on Mattie we've got things to do.”

Matthew opened his eyes and looked at the clock by his bedside. “What... but it's four in the morning?”

Chapter Thirty-One

The night was black, sombre clouds covered the stars as Baumann watched the dark mass creep toward him. He stood atop an ancient monument in Nevada grinning. *Now*, he thought, *this is why I was born*.

Manzi held his hand up and stopped the flow of dark below Baumann. “Here is what you asked for Master.

Baumann looked over the ranks. “You have done well Michael.”

Screams erupted as another mass of black approached, this time from the sky, and stood alongside the others.

Ritchie appeared and bowed.

“Now, we take the Earth for ourselves!” Baumann shouted amid cheers from the dark gathering.

In Nevada, US infantry walked alongside tanks as a military exercise played out in the countryside intensified. The aim was to take a camp occupied by rebel soldiers.

As the infantry neared the make-shift camp a darkness approached from the south and engulfed them. Soldiers yelled as their weapons were whipped out of their hands and they were knocked to the ground. Tanks came to a standstill as the dark oozed into the cabs. The 'enemy' soldiers were disarmed and rounded up then marched out into the scrubland to stand with the others.

A jeep bumped its way over the scrub to where the large group of soldiers stood surrounded by the Dark Army. Baumann, Ritchie and Manzi jumped out of the vehicle and walked to a vantage point over-looking the gathering.

“Gentlemen, my name is Thomas Baumann. You see around you the new army which will conquer the world. I would like you to join us.”

“What if we don't?” shouted a soldier.

“You are free to leave, but I will advise you that resistance is ,as they say, useless.”

Some soldiers obeyed their officers and left the site. Most, however, stayed to swell the numbers of the Dark Army.

All over the country military bases suffered the same fate as the exercising regiment. After only a week the number of men and women in the Dark Army had risen to approximately a million and a half.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Matthew looked in the rear-view mirror before pulling out as he and David sped along the freeway south out of the city. “So, it's the government that's holding Joshua?”

David pursed his lips and gazed at the sky. “No, it's the Black Ops group within the CIA.

“What exactly are they?”

“Although they exist within the CIA network, they are pretty much a law unto themselves.”

“We gonna have a word with Scrimgeour?”

“I don't think he would know anything about what happened to Joshua.”

“So where are we going?”

“Dale City Virginia, I want to visit someone.”

Grant Meddings stuck the key in the latch of his second-floor apartment and turned. He pushed the door open and held it with his right foot as he turned to pick up two well stuffed grocery bags. Once inside he allowed the door to close as he moved into the lounge.

“Mr Meddings,” said a voice from the darkness.

Meddings dropped the groceries and pulled out his handgun as he ducked behind an armchair.

“Mr Meddings, my name is David de Longford I am a colleague of Joshua Collins.”

“I don't know you or the other name.”

“Really! Oh, you can put the gun away as you'll find it's not working.”

After a moment Meddings rose from behind the chair and flicked the lights on. “Okay, what is it you want?”

“I know you're involved with Black Ops, and it would save me time, and you pain, if you would just tell me where he is being held,” said David moving toward the man with eyes glowing red.

“Now... wait a minute! You've no idea who we're dealing with here!”

“Well, right now you've got me to deal with!”

Chapter Thirty-Three

As the Dark Army marched through the Mojave Desert toward the West Coast the mass increased. Men and women unhappy with their lives in America, due to poverty, losing their houses, the current political scene or having a rebellious nature, joined. They came from all over the country. The Army even drew people from affluent areas. Bored individuals looking for something different.

The dark soldiers trained the civilian recruits and controlled the captured equipment. A convoy of trucks carried the weapons and supplies.

Shops and stores were raided and set ablaze after they attained supplies. Everything in the path of the army was absorbed or destroyed. Law-abiding citizens packed what they could and fled putting strains on neighbouring authorities which lay away from the direction of the dark hordes.

Interlude

I

“Graam, bring my boy back!” demanded Queen Auria.

“Yes my love,” said a bowing Graam. “He pleaded with me to let him command the attempt to push the Mercians further back.”

“Just bring him back!”

“I will see to it myself.”

Into the fields within Dragonbreath Castle strode a lightly armoured Graam.

“Rose! To me,” he shouted to a large grey mare.

“I have one last favour to ask of you old girl. I know we have been through many battles together and I granted you the rest of your life free to frolic in this field. My grandson, however, is lying in a battlefield—as told by Herdegraad the Seer.

The mare snorted and then splayed her front legs and bowed her head.

“Nay, rise fair lady it is I who should bow before you. I would not be here today if it were not for you—a thousand times!”

Graam then snapped his fingers and two men prepared Rose for travel and battle. He then rode out through the castle gates and over the meadows surrounding the castle. He stopped for a moment on a small hillock and glanced back at Dragonbreath before galloping on.

II

The mists swept over the dead as Mercian death squads roamed the field. Any Anglo-Saxon who groaned was shown no mercy.

Alfred raised his head up through the pain and saw a squad of five men heading toward him. As he prepared himself for death, he heard a distant galloping and, raising his head back up, he saw something incredible.

III

A lone horseman galloped across the battlefield his long, blond-grey hair flapping in the wind. He rode into the death squad and loped off the head of a Mercian. He then jumped off the horse and battled three of them eventually cutting them down with his sword.

As he retrieved the sword, the fifth man, realising who he was, crept up on the king. In a flash the battle-mare Rose galloped out of the mist and pummelled the Mercian into the mud.

IV

Graam stabbed his sword into the mud and rested an arm on Rose’s neck. Then, the two stared at Alfred.

“Granddad! I’ve seen nothing like that!” said Alfred through clenched teeth.”

Graam strode over to where the boy was lying and held out a hand.

“Come on lad—you can die some other day!”

Mounted on Rose, the two men rode off through the mist.

“Thanks Granddad!” shouted Alfred.

“Thank your Granma. She’d kick my arse if I returned without you!”

The two men laughed as they galloped toward the far-off Dragonbreath.

End

Part Four

The Black Sermon on the Mount

Chapter Thirty-Four

The beams from giant spotlights pierced the dark, moonless night as a shout of anticipation erupted through the masses gathered around a small mountain in the Mojave Desert.

A figure with arms out stretched and engulfed in flames, descended into the spotlight beam intersection. Thomson then hovered for a moment before the flames extinguished as he dropped his arms and continued his descent followed by one spotlight.

“So glad to see you all my friends,” bellowed Thomson doing a perfect imitation of a southern television evangelist. “Always liked a quiet entrance,” he quipped as he dropped to the ground. He then burst into maniacal laughter.

“Now to business. You all know why you’re here. You are descendants of my bloodline; of the Fallen Angel blood line.” Thomson said and then paused. “And we rule the Earth,” he then growled in an other-worldly voice as his eye colour turned to deep crimson.

Cheers rose from the dark crowd.

“As you will no doubt know we are in the opening stages of the Book of Revelation. They have released the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and even though I don’t mind a bit of controlled war and famine. They’re not exactly on our side, now, are they?”

Large moths fluttered around the spotlight beams.

“This will not go down as written brothers and sisters. The meek will not inherit the Earth!” Thomson shouted amid loud cheering. “Well not this one, anyway!” He added.

The lights went out as the cheering grew louder. A huge, illuminated Thomson flew, belly down, over the crowds with blazing red eyes. “I want you to gather your armies for the coming battles. We will take the Earth!”

He then turned upward and disappeared into the starry sky.

Part Five

Way-out West

Chapter Thirty-Five

Jez Boyack leant on a gate in Nevada and gazed across one of his fields. The cloudless sky was a brilliant blue, and the heat was building after a cold morning. He puzzled over a dark figure in the distance which seemed to hover over the Winter Wheat. Strange, he thought, he couldn't remember the last time his hired hands put scarecrows in the fields. They used propane cannons nowadays.

He pulled out his cell-phone and was about to press a quick-call button when the figure seemed to move. He blinked his eyes. The scarecrow was again stationary, but there was another one five metres to the left of the original.

"Whoa!" he shouted as he pushed himself away from the gate.

Suddenly another black figure appeared five metres to the right of the original. Jez dropped his phone and backed off toward his pickup as dark figures popped up all over the field. He opened the driver's door and jumped in, then slamming the door shut he searched for the keys. The realization hit him: the keys must have fallen out of his pocket when he pulled out his phone.

A sharp rap on the driver's window made him glance round. A gaunt face stared at him through the glass. "Are you looking for these?" asked the demon in a rasping voice while dangling the keys by the side of its head.

Jez looked around, the dark figures surrounded the vehicle. "Jesus!" he shouted as the pick-up rocked. After a moment the truck rose and then moved through the flattened gate and across the field. He tried to open his door, but it was unmovable even without the lock. He tried the passenger door, but found the same result.

The farmer pulled out his shotgun from under the passenger's seat and held the butt to the window. He then pulled the gun back, forced the butt through the glass and then tried to climb out of the broken window.

"Oh no you don't," said a demon voice as the shotgun swivelled around and knocked him out. He slumped back on the seat.

At length, the procession entered a field where alfalfa bails were left to dry. The bails rolled toward the centre of the field and climbed on top of each other forming a huge pyramid. Demons carrying the pickup stopped as the alfalfa ignited. The whole structure soon turned into an inferno. Jez came too as the vehicle flew into the heart of the fire and disappeared. After a few moments there was an explosion, and a figure appeared behind the watching demons.

"Where do I sign-up?" growled the undead Jez Boyack.

A deep drone emanating from underground interrupted a desert morning. Suddenly a great sinkhole formed in the Mojave between Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

At first, smoke appeared from the dark depths, then came whirring as Apache attack helicopters rose from an underground base exposed by the pit. Like giant flying scorpions they headed toward Los Angeles.

The helicopters launched a viscous attack on the black hordes spreading west.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Matthew and David pulled into Lorton for a break after dealing with Grant Meddings.

Matthew threw a few dollars into an old man's begging cap as he entered a café.

"Thank you Matthew," said the man, whose eyes glittered red.

Inside the café, news filled the television in the background with the advance of the Dark Army and what the president would do about it.

Matthew grabbed David, and said: "Hey David, that beggar outside knew my name!"

David walked out of the door and looked up and down the street.

"No-one there," he said, when he returned.

"One more thing: he had red eyes!"

They took a table by the window and stared at the passing traffic. The coffee house was filled with gossiping housewives and workmen on their morning break.

A figure approached their table. "Can I buy you gentlemen a coffee?"

"Yes. Please sit down Mr Scrimgeour," said David without looking up.

"The man from the Inner Sanctum." Matthew said gazing at the man as he sat at their table.

"As you will know, and I admit you predicted, we have a big problem on our hands," said Scrimgeour after the waitress left with their order.

"You're the New World Order sort it out!" Matthew said.

Scrimgeour pushed his head in toward the two men, and said: "Listen, as I've said before, I'm not one of these Illuminati, I'm an American Christian."

"Why are you involved with them then?" Matthew asked.

"As head of the CIA there are certain things you've got to do."

"Like controlling the parts of the world that are oil rich," said Matthew.

"What is it you want from us Mr Scrimgeour?" David asked.

"Well, the problem is the Dark Army, spreading over the country, is of mainly Americans, and this guy Baumann, who seems to control the whole thing, is recruiting more as it moves. A new civil war is at hand—I fear!"

"The Book of Revelation is being played out here—in America," said David as the waitress approached with three mugs on a tray.

"Yes," said Scrimgeour.

"You realize that this Baumann is the Antichrist," said David staring into Scrimgeour's eyes.

"Yes, he's been doing some supernatural things."

"And that's just the beginning!" David said before sipping from his mug.

"If this plays out as told in the Bible—okay, but if not we could be in trouble."

"Oh, you of little faith," said Matthew with a grin.

"So you want us to take out this Baumann?" David asked, looking disapprovingly at Matthew.

"Well, you're the only person I know that has the powers to do it. I could send in a black ops team, but I would never see them again."

"Okay, but you understand that I probably must deal with Grondin, that's Satan, as well. The only advantage being: Baumann doesn't, as far as I know, know who I am."

"I'll inform the president we may put a lid on this," said Scrimgeour.

"Now wait a minute, this is a war against Satan; we might lose."

"Come on now Mr de Longford with you two and the Lamb on our side I reckon we stand a better than evens chance of winning!"

"Okay, all that rests on whether God will let me on your side and whether Grondin opens, or leaves sealed up, the portal to the Dark Realm."

"Talking of the Lamb have either of you heard anything of his whereabouts?"

"I would ask you the same thing," said David.

Scrimgeour sipped his coffee, then replaced the mug on the table. "I'm afraid in the limited time

I've had, I've drawn a blank.

62

David grimaced and puffed. "This is the main reason I wanted to talk with you. I have it on good authority that a certain black ops group associated with your agency are holding him. No doubt they will be in league with our friend Thomson.

"I see, I'll have to investigate this."

"May I suggest a soft approach on this may be better," said David looking from Scrimgeour to Matthew. "Anything we can do to help; you have but to ask."

"I agree with you, and thanks for the offer, but I would rather you concentrated on this Baumann."

"It will be tough, but if I succeed in reducing his power level, the problem will be containing him. He will need to be isolated from a possible demonic power load."

"You mean tainted souls."

"Indeed."

"Okay gentlemen," said Scrimgeour finishing his coffee and rising, "till we meet again."

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Tom Baumann raised his binoculars up to his eyes and gazed upon the helicopters attacking the Dark Army in the hills east of Los Angeles.

“Bastards!” He shouted as a hellfire missile fizzed past and demolished half a hill side behind him.

Suddenly he was sitting next to the pilot in the helicopter who had fired the missile.

“These choppers are your enemies. They fucking hate you. Blast the fuckers,” he said.

The pilot glanced at him and then at the other Apaches. He then fired a hellfire missile and destroyed the tail of a helicopter sending it crashing to the ground.

The pilot looked at him as two missiles headed toward them.

“Who the fuck are you?”

“I’m the Antichrist,” Baumann said as the aircraft erupted in flames.

Baumann laughed as he watched the burning wreck of the helicopter crash to the ground from his original position.

“Right, lets head west,” he said heading off the hillside.

Ally Efron tensed as they injected the needle into his arm. They strapped him into a bed in front of a chosen audience. The eternity he had spent on death row for murder had now ended and he gazed through a re-enforced window at the name-less faces.

Finally, he closed his eyes with pure hatred for the righteous lot staring at him. Power surged through him, and he opened his eyes again. He was standing behind his audience.

After grabbing his semi-automatic firearm Efron struck the yelling officer sending him flying into a wall. The ten men and women screamed at the sight of the sallow faced murderer with red eyes and panic erupted.

Casually the demon opened fire killing all ten along with the doctor, nurse and priest. “You self-righteous fuckers!” he shouted as he left the room. In the passageway police, running toward the sound of gun fire, were mown down as Efron walked out of the facility. He then walked off into the Californian night led by the dark calling.

In United States Penitentiary Alts Maximum Security Facility California Rudi Meyer dreamed of pure energy-dark energy. When an officer pressed the buzzer on his cell door, he opened his eyes and looked down on his bed.

“Hey where’s Meyer!” the guard shouted looking through the viewer.

He opened the cell door and entered. Meyer dropped from the ceiling crashing the man to the floor. Then rendering him unconscious with a blow to the head Meyer rose and exhaled with a grin. “Such power,” he said to himself. He ran out into the passageway to be confronted by many officers.

“Right Meyer! Face down on the floor! Now!” commanded a supervising officer.

While Meyer was being handcuffed, and the officer in the cell was being seen to, he said: “They’re coming!”

“Oh yeah! Who’s coming? Asked one officer.

They raised Meyer up. “They’re coming, and you’re all going to die!”

“Right, get that bastard back in his cell,” ordered the supervisor.

An ominous gloom hung over the distant mountains as the governor, Steven Wells, stared out his office window. He had just received the email from his superiors telling him to evacuate the prison and to head North to Oregon. *Head to Oregon*, he thought. *Where in Oregon? Someone would call him with the destination. They don’t know what to do with the prisoners!*

He had watched the television news reports of the spread of the Dark Army. *Fuck the prisoners, he thought. I'm going to make sure my family are moved out of harms way.*

The inmates became increasingly agitated as the days passed. Officers patrolled with firearms. Rudi Meyer was under solitary confinement because he empowered other prisoners when in contact with them.

One day, five coaches arrived at the prison accompanied by armed guards and three armoured vehicles. The day was clear, and the sun illuminated the sandy terrain which ran empty in all directions away from Alts.

The officers led the handcuffed inmates out of the various buildings.

“Fuck this!” Rudi Meyer shouted. “We ain't goin' anywhere-look!” He nodded through the iron mesh fence to a black line in the distant east which stretched from one side of the plain to the other. He pulled his arms apart breaking the handcuffs and grabbed the semi-automatic from one guard and shot him dead. He knocked the gun from a supervisor and held him with the firearm at the man's head.

“Now listen up! Drop your weapons and take the cuffs off my brothers!”

With no option the officers released the inmates, who cheered when they were uncuffed. The officers then backed off into their vehicles and fled. The army guards crammed into the armoured vehicles.

The cheers turned to shouts of fear, however, as a dark wave swept up to and over the outer prison grounds then crashed across the perimeter fences.

Demons tossed the inmates around before killing them. Rudi Meyer climbed on top of one coach. “Stop this! My brothers want to join you!” He cried.

The bus started and sped forward crashing into the admin building before exploding.

A dark figure walked from the burning hole and stood facing the dark wall stretched across the prison. “Okay you fuckers, what now?” Meyer growled.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

The towers of downtown Los Angeles smoked in the background as the Dark Army marched behind armoured vehicles. The strategic placement of burning vehicles cleared the freeways.

Fires raged across San Francisco and people flowed out of the city across the bridges as the hordes rampaged through the streets. Gun battles ensued between the police, who were hopelessly outnumbered, and the invaders.

After the Dark Army crossed the bridges to the north and the east they blew them to pieces. Heading East with many new recruits the swarm stretched across the country from North to South. Nowhere escaped the demonic ravage.

“Now I know why I came into this world at this time,” roared Rudi Meyer as he tramped away from a burning gas station in Nevada. He was surrounded by laughing vampires, blood dribbling out of the sides of their mouths.

Captured US Army tanks rumbled along empty freeways, the white star on the sides obliterated by a single black paint brush stroke.

The sun was setting in New Mexico causing shadows to lengthen as Ali Efron approached Malden Maximum Security Prison surrounded by the dark. Gunfire erupted from officers who had been told to sit tight with the inmates until help arrived.

Efron leapt over the perimeter fence and attacked the fearful officers. The Dark Army knocked the fence down and swept through the prison.

“I’m going to enjoy this,” growled Efron as he kicked open the secure doors of the building which contained the death row cells.

Bullets pinged round him as he flew through a passageway breaking the necks of officers as he passed. He pulled an iron bar gate off its fixing and threw it away. Then, destroying a digital panel, he shouted: “you’re free now brothers,” as the doors of the cells opened.

At first, a few heads peered round the open doors, then men appeared warily in the passageway.

“Come on, you’re free,” rasped Efron.

“Who are you?” An inmate with a shaven head and tattoos covering both arms asked.

“I’m your liberator. I’m part of the Dark Army. Once I was like you: on death row, but they came and freed me!”

“Yeah but, you don’t look or sound... human,” said another prisoner with red hair and beard.

“That’s because I’m undead. Now I’m going. You can join us alive or dead, or just go. There’s no more law and order.”

Efron left the building and fused with the dark wave heading east. All the death row prisoners followed him and were absorbed by the dark.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Ron Scrimgeour walked into the Oval Office and watched as President John Cavendish sat on the phone gazing out of the window at the White House gardens.

The president turned and waved for Ron to sit on one seat by the front of his desk. “Ron, thanks for coming. What are we going to do about this... this disease spreading across the country?” he asked replacing the receiver.

“Well Mr President, I have enlisted the help of two, eh... agents who have the power to deal with the leader of the Dark Army.”

“I can’t believe this is happening on American soil, and we’re helpless to stop it because American citizens and soldiers are making up a large part of this so called Dark Army,” said Cavendish watching his Vice President Bob Laverty come into the room.

“Mr President—you realize that this is the biblical Book of Revelation?”

“Oh, come now Ron!”

“He’s right Mr President,” said Laverty laying a piece of paper in front of Cavendish.

“And what of the Inner Sanctum?” Cavendish asked looking up after reading.

“Half of them can’t be trusted.” Scrimgeour answered looking from Cavendish to Laverty who had sat in a seat next to the CIA man at the instruction of the president.

“Why so?” the president asked.

“Well, the ones I’m talking about are descended from fallen angels... Satanic blood line, or they are a weird hybrid thing I don’t understand!”

“What? And this lot have been ruling the Earth for ages!”

“Sir, the world is Satan’s, and now he’s back to claim what is his and throw God’s people to the wind.”

“So what do us good Christians do Mr Scrimgeour?” Laverty asked.

“Well, there’s no guarantee that this will go down as prophesied. The entity now known as the Devil is much more powerful than the one in the Bible.”

“Why is this?” Cavendish asked as he leant forward.

“What I’ve learned is that he draws power from evil individuals who have been killed or die. He broke out of where he was being held—the Dark Realm—by absorbing dark power from the entities.”

Scrimgeour looked from one man to the other.

“He then gained power in this dimension by absorbing power from the death of evil prisoners in high security prisons—killed by taking poisoned drugs supplied from, wait for it... vampires.”

“So, how do we take him down?” Laverty asked.

“That’s just it. The answer is... with difficulty, and I’m not sure he is the whole problem!”

“Send in a team!” Cavendish said.

“Sir, we’d never see them again. Anyway, we never know where he is.”

“What, like here?” Thomson said, suddenly standing with a pistol against the president’s head. “Or here!” he said as he held the pistol, in a flash, against the head of the vice president.

“No! Stop!” Scrimgeour shouted.

“It’s okay, I have no real physical power in this world,” said Thomson removing the gun from Laverty’s head. I can however control humans by implanting thoughts into their minds.

“What... you’re the devil?” Cavendish uttered.

“Why yes Mr President—I am.” Thomson said as he circled the three men.

“So, you can mentally control people?” Bob Laverty asked.

“In a manner of speaking—yes. What you saw just now—I planted in your minds.”

“We can conjure you up?” The president asked as armed men appeared at the windows.

The doors burst open and black-suited men rushed in with weapons drawn.

“Stand down!” Scrimgeour screamed.

The men looked from face to face at the three men in the office and then lowered their weapons.

Part Six

Capital Target

Chapter Forty

The Dark Army crept east over the United States like a seething mass of rot spreading across a dead body, absorbing people and repelling others. City after city fell to the horde.

Tom Baumann laughed as he rolled into Denver in a captured tank.

“I like the smell of fear in the morning!” he shouted as dark entities sped through the streets raiding shops and killing anyone who got in their way.

A shell erupted from the barrel of the tank and took out the side of a small office block. “This is too easy,” he said to himself.

The sound of gunfire rang through the air as the police and anyone else who had stayed behind challenged the Dark Army soldiers.

Chapter Forty-One

“I want this Dark Army stopped!” President Cavendish shouted as he hammered his fist off the desk in the Oval Office. “I want a military line right across America. This lot are not to be allowed to reach the seats of power in the East!”

“Okay Mr President,” said General David Jarold, “We’re putting together an army of loyal troops—a Christian Army.”

“Gads! How do we stand?” Cavendish asked as he looked out over the gardens.

“Sir, two thirds of the army are on our side—that reflects the position of the nation as a whole,” said Bob Lavery as he looked at Jarold.

“Gentlemen, I don’t care how it’s done, just stop this lot.”

“Sir, does that mean we go nuclear on American soil?” Jarold asked as he returned Lavery’s look.

“No it doesn’t General—only as a last option!” said Cavendish. He then turned to Ron Scrimgeour. “What’s happening with your agents of infiltration?”

“I await word Mr President.”

Chapter Forty-Two

“How are we going to handle this guy Baumann?” Matthew asked David as he watched the lines of cars and buses heading east.

“I don’t know, what we must do is lower his power level somehow and return him to his human persona.”

Matthew ran a hand over his hair then sighed and asked, “If we take him out won’t we be going against what’s written in the Bible?”

“Does that matter? We’ll be ridding the world of evil!”

“Yeah, you’re right! That has to be the way to go.”

“This won’t be easy!” David said as his eyes flickered between red and blue.

“Is it ever?” Matthew asked with a nervous laugh.

Chapter Forty-Three

The sun crept in behind a cloud as Tom Baumann watched a figure speed through the empty countryside of Kansas and then stand next to him on a track which led to an abandoned farm.

“What the fuck!”

“Charming!” David said.

“I’m the Antichrist,” growled Baumann.

“Really!” said David as he looked at Baumann. “What, like that’s supposed to frighten me!”

Baumann looked at David with red eyes and a flicking long tongue. “I’m going to send you back to where you came from,” he hissed.

“I’d like to see that,” said David taking hold of Baumann’s neck. He then bent down and bashed the demon’s head off the track several times before throwing him into the scrub at the side of the track. David then ran after the body and viciously kicked it sending it flying into a field. He then walked back toward the track as Baumann came flying toward him. He turned and grabbed the Antichrist then pulled him face to face.

“Now listen, you son of a bitch! If you’re sending me back to where I come from. I’m taking you with me, and believe me, you won’t like it!”

“Now, it’s my turn!” Baumann said as a big lizards tail coiled around David’s neck and lifted him off his feet then spun him round.

David tried in vain to release the tail from his neck as he was lifted higher.

“Fuck you! How does it feel!” snarled Baumann.

“Daddy, what’re you doing?” asked a young girl standing on the track.

“Saffy!” cried a stunned Baumann as the tail fell away from David’s neck. Suddenly he and Baumann were standing facing one another.

“Where... are we?” Baumann asked.

“We’re in your head, and I’ve got to reduce your power level. This won’t hurt,” said David reaching into Baumann’s head and pulling out a bunch of ghost-like entities with red eyes and gnashing teeth. He then threw them away. Their howls followed them into the distance.

Back in Kansas, Baumann looked around, and then uttered: “What... what am I doing here?”

“It’s a long story son,” said Ron Scrimgeour guiding him into a black BMW.

As the vehicle sped away David turned to Matthew and said “You got Scrimgeour to look into his background then?”

“Yeah, he found out about Saffron, an illegitimate daughter, and I projected her onto the track.”

“Nice work my boy.”

Matthew gazed at David. “So, that wasn’t so bad!”

“Not so quick man, there’s still Grondin and heavens knows what to deal with!”

“So, wrapped up, and home for Easter!” Matthew quipped.

David looked at Matthew, and the two men laughed as David patted Matthew on the shoulder.

Chapter Forty-Four

Thomson reached for the dancing flame, which faded when he grasped it and appeared in another place.

“I know there’s someone around! What is this place?”

The flame grew stronger and danced more vigorously.

“I give you one more chance to come back to the fold and hold place, or I will wipe you and your kind away,” said a commanding voice.

“I think you over estimate your position. You cannot do to me what you did to lucifer.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m way too powerful!”

“Ha! I think it is you who over estimates your position.”

“I have the Book with Seven Seals!”

“I will regain it.”

“I will wipe away the Book of Revelation and reclaim the Earth... my Earth!”

“Why put the Earth through this?”

“Because it’s mine to do with as I please!”

“The Book of Revelation will stand!”

“Fuck that! Looks like the battle in Heaven just moved to Earth.”

Chapter Forty-Five

CIA Headquarters
Langley Virginia

After being questioned they took Tom Baumann to a holding cell where he sat at a table staring at the white walls with hands clasped. A guard entered and offered him a plastic cup filled with coffee.

As he took the cup, he felt the touch of the man's skin and power surged through him. He flew up and was pinned with his back to the ceiling. The guard laughed as he showed three sixes on the palm of his right hand.

The room exploded and Baumann soared up through the night toward the cold stars. He laughed as wings caught him and swept him down to the ground.

"Baumann's escaped," said Ron Scrimgeour.

"What?" asked David.

"He blasted out of our headquarters!"

"Shit!"

"I thought he was de-powered?"

"I can only assume that he was re-powered by someone in your camp. Mr Scrimgeour we have to read the Book of Revelation and try to anticipate the oppositions next move!"

Baumann landed in a field and was approached by the guard who gave him the coffee.

"We've been waiting on you," he said pointing toward a mass of black dressed men and woman.

As Baumann approached the mass, some took off their hats to show three sixes on their foreheads. Others opened their right hands to reveal the number.

"Ah, the Children of the Serpent!" said the grinning Antichrist.

"The Dark Army will break through a military line formed by the Christians across the country and head toward Washington. When they join up with us, we'll have America on its knee's."

"Yes, and do I finish off the Christian... the religious world on my own, or is the old serpent going to show up!" Baumann asked himself as his eyes became crimson.

Chapter Forty-Six

The western side of the state of Missouri looked like a futuristic version of The Somme from WW1. A huge bunker ran all the way from Minnesota in the north, to Arkansas in the south. The Christian, and other religious, troops massed in and to the east of the bunker.

The Dark Army had forced a break through the military line at this point due to most of their troops being in the area although large numbers were approaching the line from Minnesota to Louisiana.

Drones and helicopters flew over the bunker from both sides and attacked the opposing enemy. Screams and cries came from either side as the deadly missiles exploded ripping bodies apart on either side, the only difference being that on the dark side some bodies reassembled.

Flashes and explosions of warfare on an apocalyptic scale lit up the sombre Missouri skies. F16 jets flew into the area, but the pilots were unsure which side to attack.

War ships in the Atlantic launched missiles at the side that opposed the crew's beliefs. This was curtailed by F16's screaming across the coast and attacking the opposing ships.

Thomson flew upright, slowly along the bunker between the two sides. His black jacket flapping in the wind, and his crimson eyes looking from side to side.

There was a lull in the fighting as both sides gazed in amazement at the sight of the devil levitating above the bunker.

"I've done this before somewhere! Must have been in another life," he said to himself as a broad grin spread across his face.

He stopped and turned toward the Christian side of the bunker.

"Now for the parting of the Red Sea... oh no! I mean the parting of the bunker," he said laughing as the piles of earth on the east side rolled away and the black spawn that was the Dark Army oozed.

The Christian soldiers tried to fire, but found that their guns had jammed. The only thing they could do was run.

"Come join us!" shouted Thomson as he flew past the abandoned armaments. "Join us, or be damned. Well, you'll be damned if you join us, but at least you'll be alive or should that be undead!"

The Dark Army flowed east absorbing all before it and spitting out dedicated Christians and any other religious people.

Chapter Forty-Seven

“Mr President, sir the Dark Army are closing in on Washington, you and your family must go down into the PEOC,” said Aaron Edelman the white house head of staff.

“Okay Aaron, looks like it’s time.”

The metal shutters slipped down over the White House windows as Cavendish and his family along with Bob Laverty, the vice president, and his family descended the stairs to the President's Emergency Operation Centre under the East Wing. Some government members, the president's cabinet, and secret service agents were already there.

Across town the senators and military brass crept down into a vast concrete bunker with enough supplies to last fifty years. Meanwhile over the Potomac the shutters slammed down around the Pentagon and in McLean the CIA shut up shop.

“It’s time to examine the nuclear option Mr President,” said Laverty as seven dignitaries sat around the table in the main control room of the underground centre.

“Is it Bob?” answered Cavendish in a weary tone.

“I agree with the vice president. We have to take drastic measures to stop this Dark Army,” said senator Dick Goodman the secretary of defence.

“But, gentlemen, an attack by us on American soil! And, on an army largely made up of Americans!”

“These soldiers have sided against us... against the United States and I’m afraid they have to be stopped,” said Secretary of State Mary Shields.

“Well,” said the president looking around the table, “it looks like I’m in the minority.”

He stood up and stretched. “What’s my options Brig?” he asked General John ‘Brig’ Neilson chairman of the joint chiefs of staff.

“Well, Mr President we can use short-range missiles with nuclear warheads from various land positions or from warships along the East Coast. But, the reports I’ve been receiving have showed that the supernatural elements of the army put their selves back together after a strike, and they move on and recruit American citizens to replace the human loses.”

“These American citizens have waited behind rather than be evacuated,” said Mary Shields.

“We have to protect Washington and the eastern seaboard! Okay set it up Brig,” said Cavendish raising his eyebrows and assuming a placid look as he held up his hands.

Chapter Forty-Eight

Matthew and David had moved east, after an arduous journey, and were now encamped in an abandoned motel in a northern suburb of Washington. The sound of explosions from the television filled the room as a news channel covered action from the bunker.

“What are we going to do? Go home!” Matthew asked David who sat gazing out of the window at the steady stream of cars and buses heading north away from the city on the freeway.

“No, we have to stay here and take down Grondin and his accomplices.”

“But shouldn't we keep out of the way and let the Book of Revelation run its course?”

The golden rays of liquid sunlight from the dying sun flowed over the parking lot as David stood up and stretched. “Well, as we've seen so far, this will not roll out literally. In fact I'm not sure about it at all!”

“Wasn't the book of Revelation about the fall of the Roman Empire and the ultimate triumph of good over evil?”

“Yes, but who's to say it wasn't a prophecy for what's happening now. We have the characters: Christ, Satan—the Antichrist. I'm not sure what roles we play though?”

“Angels!” laughed Matthew.

Chapter Forty-Nine

The short-range ballistic missiles screamed off from sites fifty miles west of the capital and sped through the clear sky toward their dark target. People pointed toward the streaks of white set against the blue background.

The projectiles were over their apex when they hit an invisible wall and exploded causing shock waves which destroyed towns, villages and farms all around the area.

A figure flew upright through the air at about three hundred feet toward the capital.

"I am the Prince of the Power of the Air, and nothing shall pass," boomed Thomson.

"Try the missiles from the warships in the Chesapeake!" The president shouted jumping out of his seat in the PEOC.

"Sir... it won't work. We'll just destroy more of our land and people. There's our problem," said Neilson pointing at the image of Thomson on the screen before them.

Thomson landed in a field next to Baumann who immediately stepped back and bowed.

"You wondered when I would help you?" he asked holding up his arms. "Now for something that's going to blow your mind!"

Satan walked into Baumann and disappeared.

The crowds of serpent children cheered as Thomas Baumann flew toward the stars. He felt a million dark souls flow through his heart as he flew higher and higher unable to control the power that was coursing through his system.

"Right, get back down and take care of business," said a voice in his head.

All of a sudden Baumann found himself at the head of the Dark Army, which blitzed on bolstered by Satan, pushing the US army further and further east.

"Look," shouted a dark soldier by his side, "the lights of Washington!"

Baumann peered through the dark and saw the rim of light on the horizon.

"Right gentlemen, there's our target, let's push these bastards off the face of the Earth!"

The Dark Army swarmed on the west bank of the Potomac firing missiles into the city where the Christian army had retreated. Demons danced on graves in Arlington Cemetery as others tried to break down the Pentagon defences.

Burning lit up the night sky as the dark masses led a charge to reconstruct the bridges destroyed by the defending army. Vehicles were thrown in the waters to build up make-shift platforms for crossing.

Soon the burgeoning troops of the Dark Army oozed off the west bank and invaded the beleaguered capital. The city was also being attacked from the north west as dark soldiers had crossed the river further inland.

Traffic jammed the free-ways heading north and east toward other major cities and the Canadian border. Cars filled with people who had abandoned belief in their army.

Part Seven

The Whore of Babylon

Chapter Fifty

Knute Olufson the NATO representative for Norway turned around in his hotel bed and stared into a pair of green eyes.

“What...?”

“Oh Knute, you know you've been dreaming of me,” said the redhead as she pulled the sheets back to reveal a perfectly formed naked female body.”

“I'm a happily married man,” stated Olufson.

“Well, fuck-it!” growled a human-sized red dragon with horns in an other-worldly voice as it grabbed Olufson and threw him at the window.

The window exploded as the man's body hit it and then passed through, out into the night air of the eleventh floor of the hotel in Brussels.

The next day most of the representatives were sitting around the large meeting table at Nato headquarters when the doors swung open and a stunning woman strode into the room. She had short red hair and white porcelain-like skin. A white blouse which showed an ample cleavage accompanied a black dress-suit.

“I am the representative for Norway. I will be standing in for Mr Olufson who, unfortunately was attacked and killed at his hotel last night.”

Murmurs erupted around the room as she made her way to the Norway seat followed by many pairs of lustful eyes.

“Gentlemen and Lady I would like to start this meeting of the NATO countries,” said Neils Gordland the chairman as the last few delegates took their seats.

“Now, as you are aware this so-called Dark Army is sweeping across America. I will ask Jack Kellor the US representative to update us.” Gordland said as he sat.

A man in a grey suit stood up he had dark swept-back hair lined with grey.

“The position is desperate my friends; our forces are fighting an unbeatable foe. They are converting ordinary citizens to their cause as they now move eastwards. Several cities have fallen to them. We can't destroy them with conventional or nuclear capabilities because we would be killing our own people.”

The German representative stood up and said: “My friends, maybe we need to wipe this army away before their disease spreads around the world.”

He started sweating as thoughts of the Norwegian delegate writhing on his erect manhood invaded his mind. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He then stuttered and sat down.

Gordland stood up and said: “Yes well, are there any other comments?”

“Yes, I have,” said Marla Morgenstein the Norwegian representative as she climbed onto the table and strode around pulling off her clothes.

The guards ran forward from the door area and then froze.

Many of the other representatives climbed onto the table with a growl as they loosened their clothing and chased Marla. In their minds each one of them made love to the Norwegian woman.

Suddenly they were all sitting back in place.

“So it's agreed; we monitor the situation,” said Gordland as he looked around the table at the nodding heads.

Kellor the US representative sprang from his seat. “Now wait a minute! The US Army could do with a hand!”

“But we don't want to kill your citizens who have been taken over by this dark force against their

will,” said Gordland as he looked at the Norwegian delegate.

“Okay, I'm wasting my time here,” said Kellor as he collected his things and strode out of the room amid evil laughter from the representatives most of whom gave the masturbator's sign.

Prime Minister Pyotr Teplov watched the various members of the emergency meeting of the cabinet in the White House in Moscow. Their mouths moved, but his mind was back with Katya the escort sent to his Moscow apartment the previous evening. She danced for him as she stripped the clothes from her perfect body. Her long red hair swung in time to the music as Teplov felt a craving start in the pit of his stomach and then rise and explode into his head. He lay under silk sheets with a protrusion between his legs.

“Ooh! What can we do with this?” Katya asked as she knelt on the bed next to him and stroked his sheet covered manhood.

She was the most gorgeous woman Teplov had ever seen, and the desire within him became unbearable. He pulled her toward him as he threw the sheets off the bed.

“What do you think should be done Mr Prime Minister?” Alexi Burov the deputy prime minister asked.

“What... oh yes, well what is the opinion of the cabinet?” The prime minister asked as he looked around the members seated around the large table.

“Well, with the United States on its knees with this Dark Army now is perhaps the time to cast off our differences and help them before we are attacked!” Viktor Redunski the minister of foreign affairs said as he thumped a clenched fist off the table.

“But, what of this thing of our dead soldiers being used against us!” Anton Gavrilov the minister for internal affairs said.

There was a general agreement around the table for both views.

“And where is the Dark Army now?” The prime minister asked.

“With respect Mr Prime Minister haven't you been listening?” Burov asked.

“I'm sorry I feel unwell this morning.”

“I'm sorry to hear that, sir. The Dark Army are at this moment closing in on Washington DC.” Burov supplied, then looked around the table. “It would appear then, gentlemen, that we are unagreed on any possible action!”

All members nodded.

“Okay, keep me posted on the position Alexi,” Teplov said rising from his seat.

The Prime Minister unlocked the door to his apartment and entered his spacious hallway. Music wafted through the air as Katya appeared from the lounge dressed in a tight red dress.

“What... how did you get in here?” Teplov asked as he dismissed his bodyguards.

“I have my ways,” said Katya taking a sip from a cocktail glass.

“Whatever! It's nice to see you.”

“It's nice to see you too; come and have a drink.”

“I don't want a drink; I want you!” He said as he grabbed hold of her.

“Ooh! Mr Prime Minister!” Katya sighed as she broke loose from him and ran upstairs.

He followed her upstairs and into the bedroom stripping off his clothes as she wriggled out of her dress. They fell onto the bed where they embraced.

After a bout of lovemaking Katya jumped off his erection and rolled over the bed, then slipping a hand into one of her stockings she pulled out a switch-blade. She rolled over toward the prime minister, then, with crimson eyes, grabbed his genitals and sliced them off.

He screamed as she held his blood-dripping genitalia up in front of him, then with an other-worldly voice said: “I will attach them back, but tomorrow you will tell them not to attack the Dark Army or I will return and nothing will stop me!”

Teplov passed out and when he awoke he desperately pulled back the silk sheets and felt his genitals, which were as normal. He gasped and looked around, but he was alone. He pushed back

the sheets fully to rise out of the bed and pull on his housecoat. After looking around the house he unlocked the front door and stared at his bodyguard, who was rising, sleepily, off a chair.

“Did the girl pass you by?”

“No one passed here, sir,” answered the guard rubbing his face.

“You sure?”

“Yes sir.”

The next day at a hastily arranged cabinet meeting Teplov announced that there would be no attack on the Dark Army in America.

The Israeli Security Cabinet met in the Knesset Building on a sweltering Jerusalem day. Prime Minister Daniel Hassan as usual addressed the meeting.

“My friends, we must help America in its hour of need.”

“How can we, a small country, help a super-power against such a foe?” Micha Meyer the defence minister asked.

Hassan raised his hands. “We must find a way because not only good Christians are being killed, but good Jews as well!”

“Perhaps we could aid them by sending our crack troops.” David Chagrin one of the director generals of the defence added. He then looked around the table and arched his shoulders, “Well, we’ve all heard nuclear attack is no good!”

“From the Americans perhaps, but what about a surprise attack from us!” proclaimed Meyer.

“Yes, this is a secure room - they won't know what we're planning,” said Amos Avram the military secretary to the prime minister.

“Oh they know!” growled an other-worldly voice.

The dignitaries looked around at each other and then around the room. The only other person was a secretary typing up the minutes of the meeting; a secretary with red hair!

The typing became louder and louder.

Suddenly a red dragon appeared and thumped a large claw through the table sending the ministers and military men flying. The doors crashed open and three armed guards entered in response to the noise.

The dragon turned and sprayed fire incinerating the guards and half the wall. Then, turning back, it growled in a breathless, other-worldly voice: “Now, let's have no more talk about nuclear attacks on the Dark Army in America, because if there is a strike I will know where to look!”

With that the beast was gone leaving a room with a large smoking hole and shaking men.

The Whore of Babylon pulled off her evil subversive activities around the other countries of the world; from India to Saudi Arabia and from China to the Middle-East. Her focus being on military and nuclear capability.

Chapter Fifty-One

Matthew darted from window to door as the sounds of battle grew closer. The darkened motel room lit up occasionally as David, sitting in a chair staring at the ceiling, sipped from a mug of coffee.

“David you gotta do something, man!” Matthew said as he turned toward David.

“I will, but I am one demon against many,” replied David as he continued staring at the ceiling.

“Maybe we should concentrate on the head man. You know, our old friend Grondin.”

All of a sudden the ceiling burst open and Thomson descended into the room.

“Speak of the devil.... Right, it's time to end this!” David screamed as he threw his coffee mug away, grabbed Thomson and pulled him up through the hole in the ceiling.

Matthew gaped up through the hole at the night sky and said: “Looks like the final battle just started.

As they hurtled through space Thomson freed an arm and grabbed David around the neck he then threw him at right angles to the direction of their forward momentum. David shot away and crashed into the Moon.

“You must be getting old de Longford!” Thomson shouted after he stopped moving. He laughed as he turned around and headed back toward the Earth.

“Where are you going?” David growled.

Thomson spun around to gaze into crimson eyes. “What! How could you...?”

“What... be in two places at once. Oh, you know... Quantum Mechanics!”

Thomson tried to strike out at David, but found he couldn't move.

“You're coming with me,” said David as he flew back toward the Earth followed by the paralysed figure of Thomson.

“You can't do this to me; I'm Satan!” Thomson shouted.

“Right,” said David.

As they flew on toward the Earth David heard a sound like a swarm of bees and turned around to see a group of small demons flying toward him. He sped up, but it was useless. The demons swarmed around him.

He swung his arms around trying to protect his body from the attack while holding Thomson in the paralytic trap. He then summoned up a psychic blast which scattered the swarm.

Then a dull shock wave spread through space, and he turned to see a red dragon fly toward them with a struggling baby in its mouth. David attacked the beast and rescued the child from the sharp-toothed mouth.

“Your trouble was always an empathy with the human state!” Thomson shouted as he shot away toward the Earth.

David looked down at a small demon with red eyes and large teeth.

“Fuck you Grondin!” he shouted as he threw the beast away.

The door to the silo control room crashed in and shadows flooded the area. A red dot appeared on the forehead of the man sitting at the desk before his head exploded and his body slumped back on the seat.

“Clear!” shouted a shadow.

Ron Scrimgeour walked in and pointed toward Joshua Collins.

“Release him!”

After the clamps were opened Joshua was helped down, cleaned and given food and water. After a while he went to stand by Scrimgeour, who was staring at the computer screen in front of the dead operative.

“Do what you need to do son,” said Scrimgeour without taking his eyes off the computer screen.

“Why did you do this?” Joshua asked.

Scrimgeour turned and looked at him.

“I’m not one of these Illuminati. I’m an American Catholic.”

“God will allow you into heaven.”

“Nah! I don’t care about myself, but it’s my kids.”

“And they shall be allowed entry,” said Joshua putting his hand on Scrimgeour’s shoulder.

“Along with your men here,” he continued as he turned and walked toward the door.

“You’ll need this,” said Scrimgeour holding up a computer disk.

“What is it?”

“The Book with Seven Seals. I copied the files when Thomson, or whatever you call him wasn’t around.

“Mr Scrimgeour, you’re a wonder!” Joshua said walking back toward the CIA man.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Ron Scrimgeour loosened his tie as he drove along the freeway in Delaware. He had fended off the requests of the president for him and his family to stay in the PEOC. His wife had taken their two sons and drove to her family coastal house at the onset of the trouble.

“Now, Mr Scrimgeour,” said Thomson who was suddenly sitting next to him.

“What... what do you want?” Scrimgeour asked, squirming in the driver’s seat.

“Oh, I think you know what I want.”

“Why don’t you tell us Grondin?” David, who was sitting in the back of the Chevrolet, asked.

“de Longford!” said Thomson turning in his seat. “Nice to see you—not!”

David grinned. “Flattery will get you nowhere Grondin!”

“Now listen, I know you two have been fighting through the centuries, but we need to focus,” said Scrimgeour doing all he could to keep the car on a steady course with such energy flowing.

“No need for any focusing Mr Scrimgeour. You will tell me where Joshua Collins is, or you and your family are on a one-way ride to the Dark Realm.”

“I don’t know! Okay, you know I freed him, but he has his own agenda to follow.”

“And you don’t have special ops agents following him.”

“No, and your threats don’t bother me! The Saviour has guaranteed me entry into heaven.”

Thomson laughed, “Well, let’s put it to the test. Farewell gentlemen,” he said before disappearing.

A front tyre blew-out and the car veered sideways. A truck crashed into the front side and caused the car to topple over along the busy freeway.

When the car came to rest on its roof David, looking behind and seeing the oncoming traffic, released Scrimgeour from his seat belt in the blink of an eyelid. He then forced open the driver’s door and flew, in a blur, over the inner lanes with the unconscious man. Landing on the sloped, grassy verge he left the CIA boss for the emergency services then ran up the slope at high speed. As he disappeared into the trees that lined the freeway, David heard the sounds of screeches and crashing fill the air behind him.

Part Seven

Tribulation and Woes

Chapter Fifty-Three

And so it began....

Chapter Fifty-Four

2nd February 10:45

The neon jungle that was Times Square in New York was awash with people. It was midmorning and tourists were gazing at the changing displays. Locals passed through oblivious to what was happening above their heads.

A figure clad in white with flowing, fair hair descended from the cloudless sky and raised a large trumpet to its lips.

The tourists gazed in awe. “Must be an advert for the new Disney movie!” A man with a baseball cap on shouted.

A sudden loud, deep monotone made everyone in and around the square scream and cover their ears. Windows shattered and car alarms erupted as the sky darkened and lightening streaked across the city. Then hail stones, many the size of human eye balls, sent people running for cover. Soon the hail was half a metre deep in the square and movement was nigh impossible.

Chapter Fifty-Five

2nd February 10:45

A figure with long fair hair descended through the morning mist and hovered above Lake Michigan. Then a loud trumpet blast followed which echoed through the downtown canyons of Chicago Illinois.

A tidal wave swept in from the lake and flowed through the streets bringing chaos to a stunned city.

Chapter Fifty-Six

2nd February 10:45

The citizens of Miami were going about their normal Tuesday morning business when a figure clad in white descended from the sky. He blew a trumpet, piercing the atmosphere of the downtown area. There was a flash across the sky followed by a massive explosion and the air burned destroying buildings and humans.

The blame was later put on the Russians, then terrorists, who had laid their hands on Iran's nuclear capability, until NASA stepped in and declared that a near-Earth asteroid crashing through the atmosphere took them by surprise. The name of the asteroid: Wormwood.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

2nd February 10:45

A trumpet blast accompanied the start of a blanking of the sun in Atlanta Georgia. The blanking was being caused by smoke drifting across the land from the destruction of other towns and cities. The city centre came to a halt as a blond-haired angel descended between the buildings.

People emptied out of stores and stood transfixed at the darkened sky. The angel glanced at them before disappearing.

“This is the end!” Shouted a man with long hair and a beard who had walked out between the now stationary traffic with arms raised.

Army and police vehicles drove along Peachtree Street, skirting around the immobile cars, instructing people to leave the area and head east away from the approaching Dark Army. Helicopters flew above the city broadcasting the same message.

Part Eight

Armageddon

Chapter Fifty-Eight

Thomson and Baumann stood on the west side of the Potomac with the mass of the Dark Army stretching back into the distance behind them. Banners fluttered in the afternoon wind. The US Army had pushed them back over the river, but more troops had turned up along with Satan and stopped any further retreat.

On the east side of the river Matthew stood with the Christian Army. David flew down and landed beside him as the light of the day faded

“The final battle.”

“I would have thought there would have been help from other countries,” said Matthew as he stared at the Dark Army.”

“They've been dealt with,” replied David.

“What way?”

“The Whore of Babylon.”

“What happened with Thomson?”

“Oh, let's say the fight goes on!”

The waters of the Potomac beside the Key Bridge boiled, and a large object rose from the depths and broke through the surface. The Red Dragon flew up into the air and then turned toward the Christians. David instinctively rose to high altitude taking Matthew with him as the dragon sprayed fire around the US Army.

Screams and the smell of burning flesh filled the air as David grew in size to match the dragon. He anticipated that the beast was about to swoop again down on the Americans; so, leaving Matthew hanging in mid-air, he shot down and grabbed the dragon around the neck. The two descended into the waters of the Potomac.

Thomson turned to Baumann and said: “Now!”

A black surge flew over the Potomac giving the Christian Army no time to recover from the attack of the dragon.

As night settled over the Chesapeake the over-whelming smell of sulphur infused the air. The people who had remained in the area moved away from the water.

A column of fire shot down from above, piercing the darkness, and set the whole bay alight. It was as if a match had been applied to a basin of petrol. A wall of fire spread in every direction. Fish fried on the surface of the water and any craft unlucky enough to still be out on the water burned or melted.

The rollicking flames obscured the stars of the early night as they rose high into the sky. Bayside towns and villages were set alight by flames that slithered through the streets like large fiery snakes. Woods and fields blazed, and gas stations exploded as the inferno reached inland from the waters edge.

Eventually, the advance of the flames stopped and the bay just burned. The whole area was a large red cauldron with the clouds reflecting the intense colour.

The US Army shot an artillery barrage at the attacking blanket of darkness, but years of conventional training could not prepare them for this enemy. Tanks drew back while firing wildly at the black mist that crept over everything. Demons killed the artillery men and turned the canons around and fired into the city.

whom rose again to be black servants. The clouds over Washington grew dark as the Christian Army disappeared.

Black entities crawled over the Lincoln Memorial and up the Washington Monument. Darkness flowed along every street choking the heart out of the city. People ran screaming out onto the sidewalks only to be engulfed in the gloom. Cars were piled on top of cars. The blackness crept up buildings smashing windows and pulling out horrified people and throwing them to their deaths.

Lightning streaked across the dark sky as the Beast grabbed the US Army general and pulled him alongside the smouldering wrecked shell of the White House.

“Watch this, you’re going to like this. The Rapture with a twist!”

Naked Christians floated out of homes across the city and then rose toward a life in Heaven. But, when they reached the under-layer of black cloud, they were repelled and descended back to Earth with flailing limbs.

Holes opened in the ground across the city and Satan’s spawn gushed out. They grabbed the helpless Christians and ripped them apart. One demon with withered black skin grabbed a screaming woman, and growled “Welcome to Heaven,” before laughing and biting off her head.

The general turned away from the scenes of carnage as grinning demons walked around with severed human heads and other body parts.

Then, a great wind blew up the Potomac and crashed into the city, picking up the Dark Army soldiers and casting them over the water. A tornado sucked the dark mist up into the heavens.

Thomson and Baumann were pulled up with limbs flailing into the maelstrom and taken along the Potomac toward the Chesapeake.

“You can't do this to me; I'm the Devil!” Thomson shouted.

But there was no reply, just the whistling of the wind as it carried him and Baumann away from Washington DC.

Under the surface of the river the dragon, sensing something above was wrong, shook off David and shot up causing an eruption of water. Anyone left watched in amazement as the red blur sped up and then across the sky toward the helpless Thomson and Baumann.

After a moment the beast's flight became erratic, and it tried to reduce its speed by flapping in the opposite direction. But, nothing happened, so it swung around 180 degrees and tried to fly back the way it had come. But again, nothing happened, and the dragon was pulled along backwards toward the inferno that was the Chesapeake. The beast growled and sprayed fire all around.

David rose out of the river and gazed at his friend still hanging in mid-air. He lowered Matthew to the ground and flew off after the dragon.

“David!” Matthew shouted, but David did not look back.

The flames from the Chesapeake reached for the sky as the red dragon was pulled down growling into the lake of fire. A terrible scream erupted as the beast sank below the surface. Then all went quiet save for the sound of burning.

Baumann tried to claw at the air as he was pulled down into the inferno. He howled as the flames licked at his feet as he was dragged down. Then in a flash he was tugged below the surface.

Thomson spun at high speed, but this did no good as he was dragged into the fire.

“Fuck you!” He growled as he came out of the spin. He crossed his hands over his chest as he dropped into the fire.

As he was about to touch the surface of the burning water a black blur appeared and pulled him away. A burning hand reached out from the fire and latched onto his ankle.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

“What the fuck have you done?” shouted Matthew as David landed beside he and Joshua. Thomson was left hanging above, hands still crossed over his chest.

“What did you save him for, it's against what's written in the Book of Revelation?” Matthew continued.

“Matthew, we would be the same as them if, with my abilities, I did not save him!”

“What about the other two, you didn't save them!”

“The dragon is a different entity. And as for Baumann, well... let's say we'll bump into him again.”

“And what about God? I mean you've gone against the Bible!”

“Oh, I think we'll be okay in that direction,” said David, smiling at Joshua. “Grondin's my nemesis. I would not, you would not, exist if he wasn't around! Anyway... he's not the Devil now that I have lowered his power level.”

“So, he's now good ol' Grondin.”

“Well... yeah!”

“What about the people killed from the Dark Army rampaging through the land?”

David shrugged his shoulders as he turned and walked away. “Book of Revelation,” he said over his shoulder.

“So, you save Grondin, but not these innocents?”

“You forget Matthew,” growled David stopping and turning with blazing eyes, “I'm a demon!”

Interlude

The flame of the burning light flickered as the king sat gazing into the near distance amid the royal tent.

“Father, I cannot sleep,” said Prince Alfred as he entered the tent.

“Sleep is a precious quantity on a night such as this.”

“I keep thinking I will be killed on the morrow, and what of mother and my sisters?”

“If it's any comfort, I have been through this many times, and I will guard your back,” the king said as he cursed in his thoughts: the fact he and his son had been born to such times!

End

Matthew turned toward the Christ figure with a puzzled look.

“Matthew, in the Book of Revelation the Beast was the Roman Empire, meant obviously for earlier times. It was not a man, and now today the same is true.”

“What, the Beast isn't someone?”

“The Beast is the American Empire, which is now in its death throes.”

“American Empire! I don't understand.”

“Oh come on Matthew, the US has been empire building for a long time and is now over the top and on the way down. The masters are not best pleased.” Joshua said after gazing at the red sky in the distance.

“The president and his senators?”

“Ha, the president and his senators—Rulers of the Earth, I think not!” David laughed as he walked back toward the pair after calming down.

“An elite rules the material world Matthew—the president does what he's told.” Joshua said.

“What's this about death throes?”

within the global set up, so the elite and war-mongers are trying to take over as many countries as they can: Iraq, Libya, Syria. I think the idea is to take over, physically and mentally, as many countries as possible, and to form a one world government before the end.”

“Satan must have had a great influence on America, what was *he* trying to do?” Matthew asked.

“Same thing; the ultimate plan was to create a one world community which would have been easy to control.”

“So he wanted to control the world,” said Matthew and then paused for a moment. “But what about all that stuff about bow down in front of him and he will give Jesus or Joshua the world?”

“He has the Earth to give away yes, but he has no real control over independent thinking humans.” Joshua said.

Matthew looked at his feet for a while, and then said, “Okay let's get this straight: Thomson and Baumann were to be killed in the lake of burning sulphur otherwise known as the Chesapeake.” Matthew then looked at David. “But, you saved them!”

“Well... yes.” David answered.

“So, where do we go from here?” Matthew asked

The sound of laughter made the three men look at Thomson, still hanging above them.

“You go nowhere from here, and the plan's back on,” hissed Thomson as he unhooked himself from the force David had on him and disappeared.

“Damn, he must have received power from somewhere,” moaned David.

“From you David,” said Joshua.

“What?”

“He absorbed your anger. You absorbed some of his power over the Chesapeake and you unwittingly gave it back by becoming angry.”

“Sorry my friends. I did not mean for this to happen. I was trying to figure out what to do with him!”

Flames spread around a field of wild grass beside the Chesapeake as Baumann rolled over after releasing his hold on Thomson's ankle. He came to a halt at the bottom of a hillock. For a moment the only sound came from the burning, which was petering out. Then, Baumann emitted an ear-piercing howl as he pushed himself up onto his knees. He raised his head, and flames burned in his eyes until he shook his head. After another moment his abdomen jerked violently as if he was about to vomit. When he opened his burnt mouth flames shot out and scorched the grass in front of him.

Baumann pulled himself up and felt his face; felt his arms; felt the burnt tissue. He staggered as if drunk toward a darkened farmhouse and crashed through a wooden gate. He looked around the property. The occupants had fled. Baumann, walking more steadily, headed over to a light coloured pickup sitting beside a barn. He opened the driver's door, found the keys in the ignition and started the engine. He grinned as he looked at himself in the rear-view mirror. His skin was healing. “Now I'm back in business!” he said as he shot off along the driveway.

The sun shone down on Washington the next day like a blessing from above as the city slowly emerged. People who had stayed crawled from hiding places and looked nervously around not knowing what to expect.

The Pentagon remained closed down as did the CIA Headquarters. Helicopters from unaffected air force bases flew over the city and sirens from a thousand ambulances filled the air.

In the distance the Chesapeake waters had returned to their natural state. In the city many of the buildings were burnt out shells. Smoke from many sources curled up into the sky.

Matthew coaxed David, after sleeping in their room at the motel, to head to Canada to secure a flight to the UK. Matthew acquired a black pickup truck, filled up at an unmanned gas station, and the two headed north.

"I've got a bad feeling about running away," said David sitting up in the passenger's seat.

Matthew sighed. "I knew this was coming!"

"Maybe we should just stay put for the time being,"

"Och, and here's me looking forward to getting home!"

"There might not be any home if we don't stay and confront what's to come."

"Aye, now the Devil's got his power back, and we don't know where Baumann is do we David," said a sarcastic Matthew, "And how's it solely our fight?"

"I'm not going to answer that my man!"

Matthew left the free-way at the next exit and crossed over to the other side, which was empty as all the traffic was heading away from the Washington area.

"What we gonna do, boss?" Matthew asked

"Well, we'd better find Joshua and get his take on things."

"There's something I feel that you and Joshua are not telling me; hell, not telling the world!"

The pair drove back to Washington and moved back into the room in the empty motel they had vacated that morning where Joshua was waiting for them.

"Joshua!" said Matthew as he opened the door.

"Gentlemen, I knew you'd come back!" Joshua said moving away from the window he had been looking out.

David threw his bag on a bed and said, "We still have work to do."

Matthew placed his bag on the other bed. "And here's me thinking we were clear of all this stuff!"

"Oh, it's not over yet," said Joshua.

"What can be done?" Matthew asked.

"Nothing to stop them coming."

"What...? Who's them?"

"Entities who have been here before," said Joshua looking meaningfully at David.

"They've been popping into this dimension at will," said David.

"This doesn't sound good!" Matthew sighed.

"No," said Joshua.

"So, they've been here before have they?"

"Oh yes," said David looking at Joshua, "a long time ago they walked the earth and they mucked around with the early human DNA so they are involved in things that evolved humans take for granted."

"So what we have coming is a battle for the Earth!" Matthew said throwing his arms into the air.

"Not only do we have the Devil and his side-kick to handle we also have some... things!"

"And we don't know who we can trust," added David.

"You have to trust in me and my Father," said Joshua.

"We are half-demon!" Matthew stated.

Part Nine

From the Shadows

Chapter Sixty

Walter Plethy Junior woke from an alcohol induced dream. He gazed through the darkness of the large bedroom at a figure silhouetted by the glow of Manhattan through the window.

“What the...? he stuttered as he switched on the bed-side light. He rubbed his eyes as if doing so would remove the figure from the room in the penthouse flat he used when he worked late. In fact he used the apartment to escape the tedium of life at his family mansion in Connecticut. He told his wife he would work in town. Most of the time he drank and listened to raucous music. He never had affairs with other women because he considered himself not the kind.

“It's time,” said the figure in a breathless growl.

“Time! Time for what?”

The figure moved toward the light. “It's you!” Walter gasped.

“Yes it's me,” said the reptile as he gazed at Walter through green eyes. He was over six feet and dressed in black.

“You've visited me before haven't you?”

“Yes, I or another have entered the light to see you.”

Walter rolled over his bed and sat on the edge. “I don't feel any threat from you, but I still don't understand.”

“It is time to mobilize our hybrids on Earth to join our troops to fight the threat of the Dark Army.”

“I'm a hybrid... I had dreams!”

“Yes.”

“Why should I do what you say?”

“We control everything on this planet, and we control you!”

“What if I say no!”

The reptile raised his head and gazed at the ceiling. “Then I will take your easy life away from you. How did you think a family of immigrants to the USA became so fabulously wealthy... hard work... luck?”

“So, all my family have stood for over the years was due to you?”

“Yes.”

“But, we're Ivy Leaguers!”

“As they say here in the light: get over it! Time to move; you will contact the other hybrids in the Inner Sanctum. I have awakened them like you along with others around the planet.

“But...!” uttered Walter as he looked around the room then back, but the reptile had gone.

He rose, switched on the main light, and walked around the bedroom looking in every corner. He then called security, but there had been no break into the building.

His mobile phone rang. He gazed at the screen. “Christian?”

“Walter, I have just had a visit from a strange, yet familiar, entity!”

“So have I, and it looks as if we will have to act!”

“I never believed I was one of these hybrid things. Did you?”

“No, but... oh I don't know!”

“What should we do?”

“We'll call a full Inner Sanctum meeting in the Draper Building and find out who else is involved.”

Helicopters landed one after the other on the top, and security guards rushed the occupants into the building as the sun leaked through the clouds in the midday sky.

The members took their seats around a huge table in the penthouse office. Guards stood around the room and patrolled outside around the helipad.

Walter stood. "Gentlemen I am a hybrid."

There was a murmur around the table, and a few nodding heads.

"On the outside I am human, but underneath I am apparently reptilian."

The room filled with reptiles.

"Perfect, the people who rule the Earth all in one room," said the alien who had appeared to Walter, as he strolled around the table.

At length, a fair-haired member emerging from the shock stood. "What the fuck's this?"

"Please sit down," said the reptile glowering at the man.

"What is it you want?" asked another member.

"As I have told others we need your help to defeat the Dark Army."

"How can we help, we're not soldiers?"

"True, but you're leaders of men who need to know of the peril they are in. The danger is far from over my friends!"

The members all looked to Ron Scrimgeour who stood and said, "The agencies within the USA will handle it."

"What of the rest of the world?" asked the lead reptile.

Ron Scrimgeour drove up to the army checkpoint and showed his CIA identity card.

"A minute, sir," said an MP as he pressed a button on his walkie-talkie while another MP looked around the inside of his car then knocked on the passenger side window. Ron lowered the window.

"Open the trunk, sir."

He released the catch for the trunk.

A soldier looked along the length of the under-side of the car with a mirror/detector.

"Okay sir, on you go," said the first MP after getting a nod from his colleagues.

Ron Scrimgeour drove through the ring of steel around the White House. He had driven from New York City and was desperately tired, but sleep would need to wait until he had seen the President.

He entered the PEOC and was shown into the presidents office.

"Mr President, there may be a glimmer of hope. You may move out of here soon," Ron said as he sat on a proffered chair.

"How so Ron? That Dark Army is gathering in power again," said the President waving away the black-suited guards.

"The reptilian aliens that have controlled the Earth are about to enter the fray-on our side!"

"What's this now?"

"Come on now, sir... you know of what I'm talking."

The President shifted in his seat and gazed at the floor. "Okay," he said raising his gaze to Ron. "Cards on the table. There are dark entities, aliens, above the Inner Sanctum I and every leader answers to around the world."

Chapter Sixty-One

Goran Veselov with a flat cap and beard paced back and forth on the stage while looking at the gathered crowd within the town hall in Pavlovo. *The meetings of the Neo-bolsheviks were becoming popular*, he thought.

“Friends, dare I say it: Comrades!” He stared at the ceiling and smiled. “I am heartened to see you all here tonight.

A roar echoed around the room.

“I know...” he said holding up his hands. “I know you're fed up, like all the others I meet around the country, with the rich and their easy lives as you toil away.”

He looked down and then raised his head. “Brothers and sisters it's time to ditch these nouveau rich-the modern aristocracy-and regain what is rightfully ours.”

A loud cheer and clapping erupted.

“The days of subservience are over. We will rise up and take back our country.”

More cheering and applause spread around the crowd.

“I will be in touch comrades!” shouted Veselov as he left the stage and strolled through the crowd shaking hands and slapping backs.

“The new revolution... it will happen?” an old man asked Veselov.

“Oh yes,” said Veselov as he shook his hand.

Sitting in the Neo-bolshevik coach Goran Veselov stared out at the passing dark countryside, and the reflection of Thomson stared back at him. His plan to get into the hearts and minds of the ordinary Russian people was doing well. He had realised the best way to take Russia was not to face a large mainly Christian army funded by billionaires, but to break up the army at grass roots. The growing resentment for the rich was perfect for cultivation.

The coach pulled into Dzerzhinsk and Veselov took to the stage of a city hall at the allotted time aided and guarded by his entourage. He gazed around the crowd and was shaken to his core by a figure sitting in the second row.

“Well, well comrade,” said the dark as Veselov made his way to the coach after the meeting.

“de Longford, so nice to see you as ever,” said Thomson as David appeared in front of him.

“You drumming up support for your sad army in Russia?”

“Listen here, we have a common enemy!” Thomson said waving away his approaching guards.

“The reptilians? I thought they were on the human side.”

“Come on de Longford, I didn't think even you were that gullible? They want rid of us because we've exposed them and they want to carry on ruling the Earth!”

Thomson then turned and entered the waiting coach.

Baumann turned to Thomson as he sat next to him on the coach. “What was he wanting?”

“Oh, just the usual... to carry on our cosmic feud!”

“So, he let you on the bus?”

“I convinced him of our common enemy, but I didn't say anything about wiping out his lot after we take care of the Aliens.”

Both men laughed as the coach pulled out of the car park bound for Moscow.

After a while Bauman ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “Okay so, we've just about captured Russia. What do we do next?”

“Next, we raise hell in Moscow!”

Chapter Sixty-Two

In the PEOC the president sat staring at the news reports of the Dark Army on one side and the US Army on the other; no-man's-land being the Potomac River.

"It's depressing, isn't it?" asked a voice as a reptilian appeared behind him.

"Oh, it's you Mourak," said the president spinning round. "Yes, I need to do something."

"That's why I am here."

"Can you surprise them? I mean just appear and destroy them!"

The tall reptile looked at the television then spun around as Bob Laverty knocked and entered. He then turned back and re-focused his green eyes on President Cavendish.

"Not that simple. The soldiers of the Dark Army who are human can be taken by surprise, but the demons can see further into the electro-magnetic spectrum, and can therefore see us coming."

Cavendish looked at Mourak and then shifted his gaze to Laverty. "So, what can we do gentlemen? The nuclear option is out because of the destruction of land and people."

"Nuclear weapons should always be the last choice," said Mourak. "Though if all else fails you may well need to sacrifice land and lives!"

Looking toward Laverty the president said: "What can I do for you Bob?"

"Sir, there are reports coming in from Russia."

"Okay, what are they?" The president said looking at the alien.

"We're hearing there could be another revolution!"

"What!"

"A neo-bolshevik party is rousing up ordinary folks across the country."

"Could be a flash in the pan? Anyway, we have our own problem!"

"Mm Mr President, sir, one reliable source has informed us that the Dark Army agents are behind it. In fact, the main man is directly involved."

Cavendish stared at Mourak. "I see! So what we need to do is stop this."

"Question is how?"

Chapter Sixty-Three

The neo-bolshevik coach entered the eastern suburbs of Moscow on a bright, but cloudy day. The entourage had slept in the coach on the outskirts of the capital and were now en route to the city centre. Modern office blocks mingled with older 'skyscraper' buildings as they passed under ring roads and headed along a two-lane freeway.

"You know we're being tailed?" Baumann said as he stretched his neck muscles by moving his head from side to side.

"Yes, SVR!" answered Thomson. "Let's give them something to think about."

As the coach drove over Bolshoy Krasnokholmsky Most it suddenly veered off the road and crashed through the siding and into the Moskva River.

The vehicle sank fast as the SVR car pulled up with flashing hazards. Vehicles behind blasted their horns and then pulled out into the outer lane.

After a while sirens filled the air as police vehicles and ambulances pulled in behind the SVR car. The police cordoned off the inner lane of the bridge then approached the two SVR agents, who were standing by the damaged siding gazing into the silty water. "What happened?" A Sergeant asked.

"We were following a coach known to be carrying subversives, at a distance, and it crashed through the siding, plunged into the river and sank."

The policeman scanned the river. "But where?"

"Well through here," said one of the SVR men pointing to the damage.

"It happened minutes ago... yes?"

"Yes."

"A coach should float for a while until it fills with water. Anyway, I would expect survivors in the water."

"I tell you Sergeant the coach crashed through here and plunged into the river," said an SVR man as more police and paramedics arrived.

"Okay, we must get an under-water team," said the Sergeant pulling out his radio.

Police scanned the river from along the length of the bridge and from each bank.

Baumann stretched as the bus left the inner ring road and headed for the city centre. "I don't know what you've done, but there's no-one tailing us now!"

"Oh, just a little subterfuge," said Thomson with a grin.

After a while the bus pulled into the car park of a large building off New Arbat Avenue.

Thomson looked at his watch. "We have plenty of time before the meeting, let's go look at Red Square."

"Only a look!"

The onion-shaped domes of St Basil's Cathedral pierced the sky at the far end from where the two men entered Red Square. Crowds of tourists strolled in the gathering heat of the Muscovite late morning. Thomson and Baumann strolled past Lenin's Mausoleum and the Spasskaya Tower, then turned back.

"Okay let's leave a calling card," said Thomson as they headed toward the Metro station.

A sonic shock wave resonated through the square lifting people into the air and then letting them crash onto the cobbled ground. After a moment, with groaning spreading around, the area shook accompanied by a deep growling. Frightened people looked around the square. The clock spire of the Spasskaya Tower fell into the building which supported it. Screams filled the air, and people ran and hobbled in different directions.

Seated in the train heading back to New Arbat Avenue Bauman turned to Thomson. "Why'd you do that back there?"

Thomson turned toward him with blazing red eyes. "Wake them up and speed things along; an injection of a little fear never goes amiss!"

The police Sergeant opened the passenger door of the SVR vehicle. "Gentlemen, after a thorough

search of the river around the bridge, the underwater team have found nothing.”

“What!”

“Now, I can see the damage where you say the bus crashed through, but there's nothing in the water. I don't know on this one!”

His radio burst into life and he answered. After a brief discussion, he put the radio back into his pocket. “I will need to go, there has been an attack on Red Square!”

In the PEOC bunker a guard opened the door and showed Ron Scrimgeour into the Presidents office.

“Just to keep you up to date, sir,” said Scrimgeour as he sat on a chair in front of the Presidents desk. “There has been an attack... I hesitate to say attack, it's more of an event in Red Square Moscow. No casualties, but a lot of injuries and structural damage. Their secret service, the SVR, has asked us to identify this individual.

Scrimgeour showed the president a photograph of Thomson grinning up at a security camera on his smart phone.

“Why, it's that bastard!”

“Yes sir, Derek Thomson also known as Satan.”

The president pushed his chair back and rose, then walked to the rear of the small room and stared at the ceiling.

“So he walked into Red Square and did this right under their noses?”

“Well, yes. I think they meant it as a wake up call. Security was fairly lax.”

“So, what do we draw from this Ron?”

“We know Thomson is behind this swing to bolshevism, and he is trying to speed things up. So, I would say invasion of Russia and her neighbours is imminent!”

The president turned and looked at Scrimgeour. “The Dark Army will leave here and go over to Russia?”

“I wouldn't think so, but I don't know.” Scrimgeour said as he rose to leave.

The president walked round his desk. “There's one thing that bothers me about this Ron and it might be to our advantage.”

“Oh, what's that, sir?”

“Well, it was the Red Army that beat off Hitler's troops in the Second World War!”

“And the weather, and some bad strategies, but yes, I take your point. It's a whole new ball-game now though, sir.”

Chapter Sixty-Four

Matthew rose out of his bed and placed a hand on each hip then stretched his back. He then yawned as he walked toward the kettle.

“Good Morning,” said a voice.

Matthew spun round to find David sitting by the table in front of the window of their new room-gained due to an empty motel.

“You're back!”

“Yes.”

“How did it go?”

“Grondin will take Russia, by instigating a revolution.”

“And we've got to stop him... right?”

“Well, it's not that simple.”

Matthew sighed and flicked the kettle on while holding a mug toward David, who nodded.

“He pointed out our common enemy: the reptiles.”

“Great, so we're on the same side as the Dark Army, who are at this moment across the river threatening to wipe out humanity!”

“Well yeah, that's the situation.”

People from all over Russia descended on Moscow by any means possible-some walking. The Kremlin issued orders for the Army to seal off Red Square and the city centre. But, when the people approached; the soldiers lowered their guns.

“Come join us comrades,” the people shouted. “Let's claim our country back from these billionaires!”

The military joined in and marched to the Kremlin. At the head of the masses already in Red Square was a grinning Goran Veselov. “Let's take it!” he shouted as he watched the guards and police stand down. “Let's take the Kremlin!”

More people poured into Red Square as Veselov pushed open the gates and gazed at the Kremlin Grand Palace. Helicopters took off, one after another.

“They're running comrades!”

Like a mass of ants the people scurried through the Kremlin grounds. Thomson's thugs smashed in the palace doors and the mob spewed in. Thomson looked around the splendour of the interior. “Yes, this will do nicely for my base,” he said to himself. He then ordered his thugs to round up the people and throw them out.

Thomas Baumann flew slowly through the Russian night. At a height of twenty metres he passed over Moscow. A pale cone of light emanated from him when he passed over cemeteries. As he moved toward the capital a mass of dark bodies followed. Ordinary people going about their business in the early hours ran and hid from the dark menace. Others drew their curtains as the demons passed.

He passed over the districts of Moscow gathering not only dark recruits, but demonic energy. He entered Manege Square as the city was coming to life. Then, followed by his army, Baumann entered the State Duma building-the Russian Parliament.

On the podium Baumann gazed around the Lower Assembly Hall with blazing red eyes. “Now we run the country!” he shouted.

Shrieks of laughter erupted from the dark hordes, some sitting in the curved delegates area, others standing in the aisles. All were dressed in dusty, disintegrating burial clothes; their faces were of sallow skin stretched over bone. Dead bodies possessed by evil spirits.

“There is someone who wants to meet you,” growled Baumann holding his arms up and gazing toward the ceiling.

Thomson descended onto the podium beside Baumann to ecstatic cheering from the now all

standing crowd.

Dressed in his familiar long black coat with shaven-head he held up his arms. His burning crimson eyes cut through the air to every entity, and the demonic energy rose to dizzying levels.

“Okay my friends,” said Thomson after the cheering died down. “I have summoned you into this dimension on this jewelled planet to help us defeat the Sin Gatherer and his cohorts.” He strode to the front of the podium while raising his arms up and down in front of his body raising the noise from the crowd. “Oh yeah, and some aliens,” he quipped returning to the microphone. He then turned and winked to Baumann, who laughed.

“Low key as ever!” Baumann shouted.

Thomson then flew over the mob and crashed through the doors into the vestibule.

Moscow had become a ghost city as citizens were warned on the television to stay indoors. Many left and stayed with friends and relatives in other parts of the country.

Russia was under martial control as the General Assembly reconvened in St Petersburg. Prime Minister Pyotr Teplov was for some nuclear action, but President Mikhail Petrukhin advised that a meeting between all sides would be better.

The armoured convoy drove through Red Square and pulled up in front of Lenin's Mausoleum. Then, after a moment, the three vehicles continued through the gates onto the Kremlin grounds.

Thomson and Baumann were standing at the front of the Grand Palace and watched the convoy drive along the road and pull up. Dark shadows occupied many of the windows.

Special forces soldiers in black gear carrying semi-automatic weapons jumped out of the first car and immediately froze.

“Please come out. There is no need for this. I told you over the phone that nothing will happen to you. You have my word on this,” said Thomson.

“Can we trust the word of someone who has invaded our country,” said a voice from the second vehicle.

“Well, you'll just have to trust me now-won't you? If you want to talk.”

“We're not going anywhere until you free our guards,” said Teplov.

Thomson looked at the statuesque soldiers and pursed his lips. “Oh, well!”

The opulent St Andrew Hall was brightly lit as the two Russian leaders filed in surrounded by their guards. Thomson and Baumann followed.

Shadows peeked into the room as the four sat at a large circular table.

“What about the others?” Petrukhin asked looking around.

“Oh, we're here,” said Mourak appearing with his assistant behind the two Russians making the guards react and point their weapons at the two reptiles.

“Stand down,” ordered Teplov

Thomson shook his head and laughed. “Okay, now we're all here, what is it you want to say?”

President Petrukhin cleared his throat. “Some compromise will have to be found. This is our country and we will die before giving it up.”

“That can be arranged,” quipped Baumann.

Teplov jumped out of his seat. “Now look here!”

“Yeah, what?” Baumann asked rising out of his seat.

“We still have control of the Red Army...”

“Gentlemen... please, sit down,” growled Thomson with arms held out and flickering red eyes. The situation is... we are about to take America, and the compromise for you is you can stand down and join us on this new Eden we are creating.”

“New Eden; considering who you are perhaps, my friend, New Hell would be a better name,” said Petrukhin.

Thomson cackled and then swung his head round to look at Mourak out of the sides of his eyes.

“And what of our reptilian friends?”

“You humans and sub-humans,” hissed Mourak looking at Thomson, “can play all the games you wish. We rule the Earth, and will continue to rule from the shadows!”

“That sounds like fighting talk where I come from,” said Baumann looking at Thomson.

“Yeah well, you'll really like this!” Mourak yelled as he pulled a weapon and held it at Baumann's head.

The Russian guards aimed their guns at the Reptiles, and shadows flowed into the room. Uproar gripped the room, and the Reptiles disappeared. The guards pulled the two diplomats out into the vestibule then out of the building. Then, placing them into the second car, the soldiers entered the first and third, and the convoy left the Kremlin grounds.

The sun rose over Washington DC and announced another fine autumn day. The seething mass that was the Dark Army stretched into the distance and roared at their leaders.

“Let's wipe these fuckers out!” Growled an undead.

“We must wait, the Lord has told us to wait,” said Ritchie.

“Fuck him, let's attack,” the demon roared back.

The demon grasped its neck with both hands and seemed to gasp for breath, which was strange because the body was dead. He rose into the air and flipped over 180 degrees. A hole opened in the ground next to where he hung, and Thomson rose out.

“Now, what were you wanting to do to me?” He asked in a hissing groan.

The undead shook and then shattered into a million pieces with a yell.

“Anyone else feeling they want to go against my orders!” Thomson shouted with blazing eyes.

The army remained silent.

Thomson strode over to the banks of the Potomac and surveyed the city. “Right, the Dark Army has swollen past all comprehension, let's do it,” he said turning to Ritchie. “Let's attack them!”

Ritchie nodded to the officers standing behind them, who let out piercing screams, and a wave of alertness spread through the dark mass into the distance.

“Something's happening... did you hear that?” Matthew asked as he rose from a seat by the table.

“Mm,” said David reading a magazine. “They're going to attack.”

Matthew spun around toward David, who was lying on his bed reading a magazine. “What!”

“Most of them are demons... they won't hang around forever. I'm surprised Grondin and his side-kicks have held them back this long.”

“Shouldn't we do something?”

“Mm, wait till I've finished this article on growing begonias.”

Chapter Sixty-Five

The command of the US Army watched as a dark cloud blotted out the sun. The cloud became bigger as they realised something was coming toward them.

Massed artillery along the bank of the river opened a barrage. The shells and bullets passed straight through the cloud.

Shouts and screams erupted as the pestilence engulfed the part of the army close to the Potomac. Soldiers ran from their posts and weaponry swatting the air. As they were busy with the plague a deadlier swarm crept out of the water and destroyed guns and tanks. The dark pests then slithered toward the city.

Any soldiers left were too busy to notice the large crafts cross the river and discharge their dark payloads. And so the demonic mobs spread through Washington killing and absorbing all in their path. Any citizens left had the choice of running or being taken. Many joined the Dark Army.

Soon the remnants of the US Army had pulled back and surrounded the White House. The demonic hordes then surrounded the US Army outnumbering them 10:1.

The American commanders along with Ron Scrimgeour were sitting in a make-shift command centre discussing the situation when a lieutenant burst in and saluted.

“What's the meaning of this?” General John Brodie asked.

“Sir, begging your pardon, you must come and see this.”

Outside, between the rings of the two armies metal sheets were erecting themselves on no-man's-land.

“Who or what's doing this?” Brodie demanded.

“I am,” said David approaching the group.

“Ah yes, now Mr de Longford,” said Ron Scrimgeour.

A soldier ran up to the lieutenant with a salute.

“Sirs,” said the lieutenant as the soldier left. “We have reports coming in of fighting around the fringes of the enemy ring.”

“Who's ordered that?” Brodie asked.

“Sir,” said the lieutenant, “it does not involve our troops.”

“Then, who is it?”

“It's the Reptiles,” said David as the last shield slammed into place forming a ring of steel.

David looked from officer to officer. “I agreed to protect you and the White House, while the Reptiles attacked the Dark Army.”

General Gerry Matthews stared at David. “And how do you think this plan will go?”

“Ultimately, the Dark Army will be too strong for the Aliens. The best we can hope for is that the Reptiles will lead the dark mob away from this area.”

“Where is your side-kick, Mr Wilson?” Ron Scrimgeour asked.

“Oh he has his hands full with a similar problem across the Atlantic!”

Demons danced on the re-enforced glass roof of the underground shopping mall in Manege Square in central Moscow as Baumann strode through stationary traffic. Troop and mob movement had brought most thoroughfares to a standstill. Frightened people peered at him through their windscreens.

All of a sudden the glass gave way, and the mob plunged into the interior. Screams erupted as shocked shoppers ran from the falling then advancing dark.

Baumann laughed. “I hope they find what they're looking for in the sales.”

Two of his close guards erupted and fell to the ground as shots pinged around him. “Snipers!” He shouted diving behind a car.

After a moment the upper windows of an apartment building shattered and three soldiers with rifles plunged to their deaths. Baumann then appeared from behind the car as the three bodies

twitched and then stood. After a moment they marched toward the AntiChrist and bowed. “What

would you have us do?" One of the dead soldiers asked.

"Join the Dark Army," ordered Baumann. "I have a special mission for you!"

Reptilian fighters appeared and picked off the outer soldiers of the Dark Army ring around the US Army. The advantage was surprise; the problem was, as the US Army found, you cannot kill someone who is already dead. When a human Dark Army soldier was killed, he became one of the undead.

Frustration was setting in as the edge of surprise was negated. Mourak called a meeting with the other reptilian leaders.

"What are we to do?" Touron, a tall warrior, hissed. "They cannot be killed. I chopped off the arms of one I killed before engaging others, and the next thing I knew the mutilated one was back fighting-fully formed!"

Mourak stared at him, then the others. "Yes, we are fighting the supernatural."

"It appears to be hopeless. We have lost many warriors, and they have lost none," said another of the leaders.

"There is one among the humans who is part demon. I must talk with him," said Mourak nodding his head in conclusion.

Chapter Sixty-Six

The presidential convoy of three armoured vehicles sped through the streets of Moscow. Many roads were closed, and the pavements had to suffice. The president and prime minister were on the way to meet the commanders of the Red Army.

“What do we tell them Mikhail?” Teplov asked as they swung from side to side in the second vehicle.

“Look Pyotr, we need to sound confident. We want them: the great Red Army, to defeat this enemy.”

“Okay, I know, but what's the plan?”

“The plan my friend is to have our escape helicopter on standby to fly to the bunker.”

“Ah yes. Well constructed away from Moscow.”

Petruhkin shrugged. “They built it for a nuclear attack!”

Suddenly a bomb exploded under the first vehicle forcing it to fly side-ways into an apartment building. Cars rolled out in front which brought the other two vehicles to a halt, and a bomb exploded under the third car which flew over on to its roof.

Three soldiers ran up to the car which contained the leaders. The driver looked from side to side, but there was no escape.

Small explosives dealt with the locks, and the doors swung open. They shot the driver dead and pointed their guns at the president and prime minister.

“Outside, now! If you want to live. There is someone who wants a word with you,” said one of the former Red Army snipers.

They were taken to Manege Square and asked to take front row seats in the Lower Assembly Hall of the State Duma Building.

Baumann strode along the central aisle “Gentlemen,” he said waving away the soldiers who were watching them.

“Why are we being held prisoner?” Petrov asked.

“Held prisoner! No,” said Baumann standing in front of the two seated men. “You are of course free to leave, but I have a suggestion on how we can rid ourselves of a mutual enemy. We will then hand back your country.”

“How do we know we can trust you?” Petruhkin asked shaking his head.

“Do you have much choice? The joint forces of the Dark Army and the Reptiles will destroy the Red Army!”

“Okay... what's your plan?” Petruhkin asked raising his arms.

Mourak appeared in David's motel room. “Apologies for the intrusion, but I need to talk to you.”

“Okay,” said David leaning back against the sink unit.

“First, why do you live here, do they not attack you?”

“No, you forget, I am one of them; only far older and more powerful.”

“Ah, yes,” said Mourak gazing past David out of the window.

“You have a problem?”

“Yes, the problem is with the Dark Army: we cannot kill them as they are already dead and...”

“The ones you do kill become undead,” interrupted David.

Mourak refocused on David. “Well yes, that's it! What can be done to destroy them?”

“What indeed?” David said looking at his set of keys. “Look Mourak, I told you this war would not be easy. The best you can do is lead them away from the White House, then you and the Americans can formulate a plan possibly involving nuclear weapons.”

“My understanding was that the humans did not want to use nuclear weapons on their land. I was hoping you had some less... devastating solution.”

“Oh I have a solution,” said David again looking at his keys. “But, less devastating? No. It would

mean releasing old and terrible, dark powers upon the Earth.”

“I see. Well, I will instruct my kindred to lead the enemy away from the human's capital.”

The hit-and-run tactics used by the Reptiles did the job: Dark Army soldiers peeled off from the ring around the Americans. The demons were led out into the country away from areas of dense population. Out into the fields and woods of rural Pennsylvania.

Once most of the Dark Army had chased the Aliens the US Army flexed its muscle by forcing, not killing, the rest of the enemy out of the DC area and north into Pennsylvania toward their friends.

Then, with the Dark Army in a centered position looking for reptiles and US troops, the air of western Pennsylvania burned. A curtain of fire swept over the land reducing everything in its path to ash. The nuclear blast was seen and felt around most of the northern states.

“Oh, so they took my advice, said David to himself with regret.

Thomson rose into the air above the empty CIA Headquarters in Langley and gazed in horror at the massive mushroom cloud. “So they want to fuck around with atomic bombs do they... I'll give them a fucking nuclear war!” He screamed as he disappeared.

Chapter Sixty-Seven

Mikhail Petruhkin sat in the conservatory of his Dacha a few miles from the western outskirts of Moscow. He had sent his wife along with their daughter and her family away to the holiday home by the Black Sea.

The president gazed up past the branches of the over-hanging trees at a white, hazy sky. The reports of a nuclear explosion on mainland USA had shaken him. What was the plan Baumann had for Russia?

Suddenly, some mist from the sky funnelled down into the conservatory through an open hopper window. Petruhkin wanted to get up and close the window then head into the living-room, but he couldn't move. His body wouldn't react to the instructions from his brain. He sat staring.

"Mikhail... Mikhail," whispered the mist, rising and falling in volume as it swirled around him. "The time has come and you know it!"

Petruhkin forced his mouth open, but no words came.

"The Americans are behind this," continued the whispering, "they are stirring up your people to revolt and then they will infiltrate."

More mist entered the conservatory. "Mikhail... Mikhail, you know what they unleashed on their country. Do you think they would hesitate to use nuclear weapons to destroy you!"

Again Petruhkin tried to utter.

"At the moment they are planning a first strike attack on your weapon sites."

A hiss turned into a whisper. "This has been their plan all along: total world domination. Their form of revelation. Not the New Jerusalem, but the New Washington DC with the US flag flying over the world."

The President's eyes burned with anger as he found he could move with the mist escaping the way it had entered.

Petruhkin strode into the kitchen, grabbed his mobile phone and put in a call to Teplov.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

Matthew, who had followed the Dark Army in Moscow, watched from underneath as the reinforced glass roof of the underground shopping mall gave way. A woman screamed for her two young children playing on a roundabout under the glass.

His powers kicked in, and he moved at high speed and rescued the kids placing them beside their mother outside a shop. She hugged them, then pulled them inside the shop as she watched the demons rise up after falling with the glass onto the hard floor.

“Get out of here!” Matthew shouted across the mall at the stunned shoppers.

Security guards raced through the crowds, who were running for the exits.

“Back... get back,” one shouted at the people still in the area. Another was talking into his radio.

David disappeared into the crowd as anti-terrorist police arrived with semi-automatic weapons aimed at the dark mob.

The police formed a barrier right across the width of the mall as they stood focused on the demons advancing over the broken glass, which created a crunching sound.

When the demons got to 10 metres from the line the Sergeant behind, looked from the enemy to his men and shouted: “Right! Fire!”

The deafening noise of gun fire filled the atmosphere, but when the police stopped shooting; the Dark Army had disappeared!

Chapter Sixty-Nine

David Longfellow entered the President's Office.

"Dave!" said the president as he spun round on his chair.

"Sir," replied the national security advisor as he took a seat.

"Tell me it's now safe to leave this bunker?"

Longfellow gazed at his leader with sorrowful eyes "Well, it is and it isn't."

"What kind of answer is that?"

"The scientists say the air is safe to breathe; radiation higher than normal but okay. The public in the areas well away from the blast site are carrying on as normal..."

"I sense a but coming," interrupted Cavendish.

"Well sir, it's the Russians. There are reports coming in they are planning some type of nuclear action.

The president rose and paced the room. "And these reports... they're accurate?"

"Supplied to the NSC by the CIA. The Kremlin hierarchy have gone into the bunker outside Moscow."

"Could be like we did: to avoid the battle with the Dark Army."

"Could be sir, but the CIA have told us to be ready for a strike. They monitored a phone call between the president and the prime minister."

"Okay in that case, let's strike first... let's hit their weapon sites!"

David screamed as a force raised and pinned him to the ceiling. He watched as an entity swirled around the room.

"You must release them," it hissed. "The humans are about to destroy the Material. This cannot happen. You must open the Dark Realm... now!"

David listened then broke free and floated to the floor. Other voices screamed in his head. He dressed and vanished.

As he dived into the Quantum World David flashed into the firing communication equipment of each president and blocked the transmissions. He then visited Matthew in Moscow.

"The Key Matthew... I need the Key."

Matthew stared at him in disbelief. "The Key! David... what for?" He had asked the question, but he knew the answer.

"The two super-powers will attack one another and destroy the planet."

"But won't you destroy everything by releasing what ever is behind these gates?"

"Not the Earth."

"What about humans?"

"I have to save the Material!"

The two friends glowered at each other. "Matthew... the Key!" David growled.

Matthew looked around. They were standing, or more correctly hovering in a desolate environment, which was familiar to him. The sky was black and a keen wind swept the grey landscape. He looked back at David staring at him with red eyes, who said, "this is the void. It's where Jonas, my father, hid from dark forces. I don't know why we're here: to answer the question you're about to ask!"

"Okay man, the Key's in the basement of Arbroath Library. Just... let's get out of here!"

Chapter Seventy

Matthew composed himself and entered the ornate red sandstone building that was Arbroath Library.

“Long time no see,” said Kelly standing behind the main desk.

“Kelly, I haven't got much time I'm afraid. The last time I was here I left something in the basement. Is it okay if I nip down and get it?”

“Sure, on you go.”

He grabbed the key from behind the desk and headed downstairs.

The basement corridor was empty; the only noise came from the many service pipes which ran along the ceiling. He unlocked the book store and retrieved the box which contained the Key. Then, after tucking the box in his rucksack, he switched off the light and locked the door.

“So, you're back,” a voice said.

Matthew spun round to find Brian his boss blocking his escape along the passageway.

“I'm in a hurry at the moment Brian. Can we discuss the work another time?”

“What do you have in your bag?”

“Just something I left here. Look, I need to go!”

“Let me see it. I need to check things stored down here.”

“Get out of my way Brian!”

“You're not going anywhere,” said Brian, his eyes flickering red.

“Brian, what's happened to you? Let me past, the future of the world depends on this,” said Matthew as he patted his rucksack and moved forward.

“Does it really,” said Thomson.

Matthew stopped and stepped back in shock. “Look you... you need to get out of my way!”

Thomson shook his head. “Who will make me... you boy?”

“No, I will,” said a shadow peeling off the wall behind him.

“de Longford!” Thomson said spinning around and grinning. “Well, well this feels like a family reunion. Just the three of us... why, it's like old times.”

“Yeah, well, don't get too mushy cause you're getting out of his way!”

Shadows peeled off the same wall and grabbed David. “Not if I can help it,” growled Thomson, who turned toward Matthew, but then found he couldn't move.

Matthew looked from David to Thomson as shadows rose from the floor behind him.

“Go Mattie! You can do it,” shouted David as he struggled with the shadow demons.

Matthew shook himself then ran at high speed past Thomson and then David. Instead of climbing the stairs he ran through them and disappeared.

Matthew was in one place, he was in many places. He watched as the president of the United States stared at a screen with a mobile phone clasped to the side of his head. He watched as the president of Russia looked gravely at Teplov the prime minister. Matthew ran past Joshua Collins, who moved very slowly and shouted in a slow deep voice: “Do it Matthew!”

Matthew stood amid the desolate waste of the Void. He took the box out of his rucksack and looked at it. The wind rushed about him. He gazed up into the blackness of eternity and then he turned.

“Jonas!”

“Don't hesitate son. You must do this,” said David's father who no longer looked to Matthew like a lost soul.

“But, I don't want to destroy the human race!”

“You won't, the goodness in people will always survive.” He laid a hand on Matthew's shoulder. “Stop this madness.”

Matthew took the Key from the box, shrugged his shoulders and read the inscription on the barrel

from right to left. In a flash he was in a poppy-filled meadow as an inky darkness flooded over the blue sky and a low groaning filled the air.

He looked on as the blackness seeped into the PEOC, and President Cavendish yelled as his mobile phone and the control unit crumbled to dust.

He looked on as the inky black issued into the Russian bunker and turned the controls and phones to atoms. The guns of the guards crumbled and fell through their fingers like sand.

The weapon sites of every atomic nation were reduced to dust as the entire world was engulfed in black. David joined Matthew as they watched the black shapes form and wipe out soldiers and screaming people. Some were taken; some were not. The remaining souls gazed in terror as the black forms moved away.

The black wave moved across the Earth leaving a waste land in its wake. Buildings were left whole, but void of any technology. People howled and hugged one another, some knelt and prayed offering thanks to God for their salvation.

The Dark Army fled from Washington DC as the black engulfed the city, flowing through tanks and around artillery, which crumbled to dust. A growl erupted as the black sucked up the fleeing soldiers, both demon and human.

The president and his staff shuffled through the hollow shell of the PEOC bunker.

“What in hell was that?” Bob Laverty asked.

Cavendish stared at him. “Exactly that Bob: Hell gave us a visit and corrected our stupidity.”

“I don't understand. Why have some been taken and others left?” Matthew asked as he and David looked on from the Void.

“The meek shall inherit the Earth; that's what we're seeing. The Dark Realm thrives on dark energy from black hearts, so they have taken anyone with any darkness in them. This is true throughout the Cosmos on the multitude of other inhabited planets in the many universes.

“What of us, David? Why have we been saved?”

“Truthful answer: I don't know.”

“It's because you saved the world before by tricking the demons into the Dark Realm at Arbroath,” said Jonas.

“Father!” said David with tears in his eyes.

“It's good to see you too, son.”

Jonas looked at Matthew. “As the Bible says: there is some good in all. For the Dark Realm to take someone the balance has to be tipped toward the dark.

“How do we get rid of them once they have cleansed the Earth?” Matthew asked.

“They will move on after they have scoured the lands. They do not wish to be here as much as we do not want them here. As for the portal being locked, there is no need, they will not come back.”

Chapter Seventy-One

The reptiles disappeared at the first sign of black in the skies-they knew what was coming. The human race had been pushed back several hundred years. There was no transport, and the whole economic structure was non-existent. People had to search for food. Supplies which were not electrically preserved sustained families.

Houses were shells, but provided shelter. Safety was not an issue because they had taken evil-doers from the Earth. The resourceful, good people of the planet rejoiced in the situation.

Slowly, communities came together, and the Earth healed from the trauma of recent and ancient events.

As the sun rose over Washington David and Matthew stood on the west bank of the Potomac with masses of people. A cry erupted as vast walls descended from the sky and surrounded the empty city. An earth vibrating thump reverberated through the surrounding area as the walls embedded themselves.

“New Jerusalem!” shouted a man in the crowd.

“Hallelujah!” shouted others

A dazzling figure upon the nearby bridge pointed to an open gate in the wall close to the end of the bridge.

“I think we're being invited in, Mattie,” said David nodding in the direction of the gate.

“Come on people; God awaits,” said a woman behind Matthew.

David and Matthew led the people over the bridge past the smiling angel and through the open gates of gold. A trickle of people soon became an excited crowd.

Inside the city, golden sunlight reflected off the transformed buildings, and gleaming pathways led to a central square where a figure stood on a raised platform.

“It's Joshua,” said Matthew as the crowd gathered

“My children, I am Michael, known as Jesus to some. The divisions have been washed away. God has wiped your tears away.”

More people poured into the square. Joshua, dressed in a white robe looked up to the sky and then re-focused on the crowd. “There will be no more death. You are now free. All countries are one; all peoples are one!”

A murmuring spread around the crowd which erupted into loud cheering as Michael ascended into the sky.

Well what do you reckon Mattie?” David asked as the two men walked away from the square.

“I reckon it's time to head home. I've had enough of this stuff. I'm going to have a couple of pints and ask Kelly from the library out on a date.”

David stopped walking and burst out laughing. “Not quite in with the spirit of what's just happened, but yeah, it sounds good.”

“That's if she's still there!”

“Oh, she's still there.”

Epilogue

A wind whipped around the desolation below the inky darkness. The barren hills in the background reached for the starless eternity. Footsteps broke the thick silence as a figure walked along the desert-like terrain.

“Just what I was looking for,” said Thomson crouching and picking up the Key.

He laughed before walking back the way he came, but after a few steps he found he couldn't move... in any direction.