

The Chosen

Rise Of The Darkness



C.A. Milson

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Dedication

For Anna, My Family, My Friends and Supporters.

Chapter One

As Alex parked his car, he rubbed his hands together and cupped them in front of his mouth. It was a bone-chilling Monday night, and he had a strange feeling something terrible was going to happen inside that conference center. For the past two days and two nights, he had been plagued with frightening visions and nightmares. The first time he experienced the series of visions, he had been driving home from the supermarket, and for that moment when all he could see before his eyes was the visions, he almost lost control of the car and crashed into a tree. The second had happened shortly before he went to bed last night, and the third vision an hour ago.

The visions were almost always the same. Each time, the sky was a swirling haze of yellow, gaseous clouds. The cold, steel-like ground was covered with blood that formed into a vast pool nearby. He always paused a moment to take in the strange and terrifying surroundings, expecting to see something new. But nothing ever was. In this place, there was a creature, which could only be described as half-human and half-dragon. On each side of its head, it had a face that represented the four corners of the world. Its arms were thick, and its claws were long and slender, sharp enough to pierce even the thickest of metals without effort. Strwn around this beast was a multitude of faceless bodies. Rotting flesh and sulfur thickened the air. Alex looked around, noting evidence that these victims had tried to flee from the beast and failed. This beast had destroyed everything. Standing among this horde of death was always a woman, alive, for reasons that he could not comprehend. He would gaze at her long, flowing hair that curled around her scantily clad body like asps. She carried a newborn that seemed to have been born prematurely. In her eyes, he could see

deception and great fear.

He turned his gaze from the woman to the beast, and for a moment, felt there was something familiar about this place. He moved closer, stepping over the mutilated bodies sprawled between him and that entity. The beast turned toward him, sneered, and then there was a flash of black light. The vision always ended at that point, and he always emerged from it covered in a cold sweat, his heart pounding.

Alex looked toward the building and then at his dashboard. This night—above all others—he had to go inside. Yet, he sat in his car, hesitating and rubbing his legs together against the cold. Finally, he got out of his black Pontiac Firebird Trans-Am, locked the door, and walked toward the conference center.

What the hell am I doing here? he asked himself. Yet, in the back of his mind, he already knew the answer. During the time he had been attending these seminars, he knew that most of what he heard from other researchers and witnesses were well-fabricated hoaxes. If *anything* was true of supernatural circumstances, it was his own life.

His life was a classic example of one supernatural incident after another. So many things had changed after the deaths of not only his fiancée, but also his parents. After the death of his fiancée, Alison, there were times when he would catch a glimpse of her spirit, drifting around either in his parents' home or by her gravesite. He had experienced many unusual things, like the time his mother's antique vase flew off the mantle and shattered against the opposite wall.

Alex entered the conference center. He went to Room 4, where the meetings normally took place, and chose his usual seat, four rows from the back. He sat alone, which was how he preferred it. He was no longer the social type, and quite

often crowds caused him to suffer panic attacks. Sometimes, they were mild and bearable, yet, other times, the feeling of anxiety was so overwhelming that he felt like shutting himself away in his apartment where he knew he would be safe. They were always the same—increased heart rate, cold sweats, jittering, nervous speech—but sitting where he was, he felt safe, even from his own anxieties.

There was a definite energy about this place tonight. He could feel a strange presence, and the longer he stayed, the stronger the feeling became. Yet, in this room with several dozen people, he seemed to be the only one who sensed it, and for a moment, he asked himself, “Why me?” He carefully observed the other people as they came in and then turned his focus to others in the room. Some professed to be sensitive to the spiritual. Judging by their expressions, they appeared to feel nothing. His inner senses told him that some of these people were here to find someone new to hook up with, nothing more. Some had no interest in the paranormal whatsoever.

He turned his attention to the three men on stage. A cold chill swept over him, and goosebumps covered his arms and legs. He shuddered and glanced around to see if anyone had noticed, but no one did. He breathed a sigh and then turned his attention back to the stage and the three men. He recognized one of them, the chairman of the society, but the other two men he didn't know. Of the three men on stage, the one who looked like a Native American drew Alex's attention more than the other two. Again, that same cold chill ran through him when he looked at the Native American. He flinched nervously and looked away. He began to feel weird sitting here, very uncomfortable. While he glanced around the room, the feeling of anxiety started to hit him, just as it did so many times before. The lights seemed to glow brighter and the room felt like it was spinning. He had left his meds at home, and without them, he felt too afraid to get up and leave just in case he happened to do something out of the ordinary and everyone there

noticed and ridiculed him behind his back.

I have to get outta here, he thought to himself, as he started to stand, but he did not. It was as though he could not. He was meant to stay. The anxiety was strong, oppressive, overpowering, and he was powerless against it.

No one noticed him in his own world of fear. Not one person noticed his panic burst, nor did anyone care. Like usual, he was being paranoid about nothing. He closed his eyes, breathed deeply, and focused on his special place of peace and refuge. In times of his fear, this sometimes helped, and he hoped that this would subside. He really hated these attacks. Soon, the anxiety subsided and he started to feel more secure about being there. He breathed a sigh of relief and opened his eyes. He scanned the room, and at first glance, it seemed no one had noticed his panic attack. And that was true to a point, but someone did notice.

He looked back at the stage, and as before his attention was drawn to the Native American. He did not feel anything peculiar except very weak. He closed his eyes and tried to focus on anything that would divert his attention from where he was.

* * * *

Usher stood near his associates, listening to the chairman talk about his glory days when he first founded the society chapter. Like Alex, he sensed the presence in the place, had felt the strong spiritual turbulence ever since he arrived. Usher was never one to take chances, so he prayed under his breath to his god, Apportioner, for wisdom and clarity.

He came from a long line of Cherokee. For five generations in his family, the men had been taught from an early age the ways and secrets of their heritage. Since the age of ten, Usher had had a special gift for the supernatural. He was proud of his birthright, and he was proud of who he was. But he was not haughty. He was wise beyond his years. His long black hair, streaked with gray, hid the scars on the back of his neck that he got years ago while investigating a haunting in Maine. Usher was spiritually powerful, and to some, handsome. Yet, even at the age of thirty-six, he had never cared for marriage or a family. He saw relationships as a hindrance to who and what he was. He had desires like any other red-blooded male, but he was strong when it came to self-discipline. If he ever desired to settle down, he was the type who would want someone of his own kind, to preserve the lineage of his forefathers. But he didn't.

* * * *

The third man was Drake Winters, the all-American boy. He had been the captain of his football team at a little-known high school in Northwest Ohio. In two years, he led his school to glorious victories over rivals in Michigan. He was a champion athlete, and a real show-off. His girlfriend Cassandra was captain of the cheerleading squad and, not surprisingly, one of the most popular girls in school. They had been the typical high school sweethearts. The two of them were the perfect couple. Drake had it all. He had the charisma to take him anywhere he wanted. Yet, as good as life was for him and Cassandra, he wanted more, and soon after his twenty-first birthday, he broke up with her and moved to Florida. In double-quick time, he married a rich woman he never really loved.

Twenty years later, Drake was still married to his wealthy wife, Jessica, despite people having said the relationship wouldn't last. He could have been anything he wanted. Instead of taking a comfy job at his wife's multinational tabloid

magazine company, he chose to be a paranormal researcher, and in that time, he had seen a lot of things that would make a billy goat puke. Some had been hoaxes, and some were so damn terrifying that they would make even skeptics believe. To some, Drake was a leader in his field.

Yes, he was good, but not the best.

By definition, only one held that right. For centuries, rumor had it that a forthcoming prophet of sorts would be born from a heritage of darkness, and after the anointed hour, he would have the power of ages to make even the most evil of supernatural forces feel real terror.

He would know the thoughts and secrets of anyone he wanted. He had power too incredible to imagine, but no one knew who this man would be because the One hadn't been anointed with power from On High yet. When that time had come, only an elect few would know who he was.

* * * *

The seminar started precisely at seven-thirty with Chairman Jake O'Hara giving the opening address. His speech was slow, and he paused at times, typical for a man of his advancing years. Jake had seen a lot of action in his thirty-four years of investigating the occult. To this day, he was no closer to the answers than when he started. Now, in his late fifties, all he had to show for his life was a self-published book, *No Ordinary Life*, about his adventures. And now, the hardship of his life was starting to catch up with him. It was evident to those closest to him that the years of hardship had taken its toll on this man.

"Just what answers lie beyond our natural realm?" Jake questioned. "Certainly,

there are many theories of what happens after we die. Christians believe that we pass to either Heaven or Hell, while other believers hold that the soul is reincarnated. Some people theorize that death is the end, but it is also evident that sometimes the soul will linger in the earthly realm for a time. Now, I'm sure that at one time or another, you have heard of ghost sightings, but are these true? Don't get me wrong. I'm not condoning such things, but I have seen many hoaxes. I have also investigated a lot of wonderful, yet tremendously shocking, instances. Recently, one of our members returned from an investigation that was fascinating, yet terrifying. You will hear more about this soon. This man had full contact with an entity. This being of power even tried to take his life. But thanks to Drake's skills and knowledge, he escaped that powerful force."

"Professor, I have heard some instances in which entities had become so violent they actually killed people," a young woman in the front row called out.

"That's right," Jake answered.

"Well, then, if that's the case, would it be possible to destroy that supernatural presence?" the woman said.

A moment of silence fell over the auditorium while Jake chewed his lip in thought. He searched his mind for an answer. In all his years, he had never destroyed anything supernatural. He had either exorcized daemons or sent some supernatural beings onto another plane of existence.

* * * *

That strange presence Alex felt earlier was stronger now. Alex could feel the overwhelming presence fill this room. Darting his eyes around the room and judging by people's reactions, he knew they were still oblivious to what was going on. Everyone except Usher. He watched Usher carefully and he had the uncanny

feeling that this man knew exactly what was happening.

He sighed and looked back at the speaker, who was starting to look very uncomfortable with the same question that the young woman had asked two or three times now.

Alex knew that there was no logical response to the question. The society tended to rule out logical thought and go with theories based on cult superstitions. Many people had left because they were unable to handle the fantastical stories they had heard from this so-called speaker. The real world was outside, and for most, that was all they had wanted. They didn't want or need to be told that they were being watched by lurking shadows, especially by a speaker who had been dubbed by some as a religious fanatic.

"I know in some films the hero manages to destroy the supernatural bad guy one way or another, but let me assure you, there have been no recorded instances of people destroying such phenomena," Jake answered.

"But is it possible?" the young woman asked with persistence.

Jake's lips moved, but no sound emerged. It was obvious he needed help.

Drake stepped up to the podium placed his hand over the microphone and whispered something to Jake.

Jake looked at the man, who gave him a reassuring nod and a pat on the shoulder as he passed and sat down by Usher while the crowd whispered under their breath.

* * * *

Usher leaned over to Jake and whispered, "Why didn't you answer her?"

"I'm sure you know why."

"Your brother?" Usher asked.

Jake never answered. He stared at no particular point in the sea of faces and folded his arms.

"I haven't known you long, but I know there was nothing you could have done."

"How do you know?" Jake snapped. "You weren't there to see how bad things got."

"I didn't have to be there. I knew all about it," Usher said.

Jake was silent for a moment. "Did Drake tell you? Did he tell you how my brother went insane in that house and murdered his wife and kids?"

"He didn't have to . . . I saw the whole thing in my visions."

Jake rolled his eyes. *Sure you did.*

Jake didn't believe him, but he didn't push the issue. Instead, he turned his attention to Drake.

Drake's response was pure fabrication, although he had thrown some truth in for good measure.

The young woman's curiosity was satisfied, and she continued to listen to the guest speaker, taking note all the while.

"As I gaze about this room, I am sure that there will be some among you who will no doubt come across paranormal instances in your lifetime. While it is believed that some events that take place can be put down to a hoax, there are also events you will come across that are as real as any horror folklore," Drake said truthfully.

"Since starting in this industry twenty years ago, I have investigated many strange occurrences all over the world. For years, I've known Jake and worked

with him. Let me say that his advice over the years has been invaluable to me, and if it wasn't for his friendship, I have no idea where I would be today. No doubt I would not be standing here addressing all of you.

“As Jake started to say before, I recently returned from investigating a haunting in the small town in Queensland known as Gympie. As most of you would know, Gympie was a thriving gold-mining colony before the turn of the century. Many people came from far and wide to seek their fortunes, but there was one man who sought after the souls of people.

“Records indicate this man was from Europe. He was part of a secretive cult, which was believed to be derived from an ancient Babylonian religion. His rituals involved sacrificing virgins and newborn babies. He slit the victims' throats and cut open their chests. This man, who called himself Jamiesonn, would rip out the victim's heart, drink his or her blood, and devour the heart while it was still beating. It was said that while he consumed the heart, the elders of his cult would feast on the flesh of the victim. Then the carcass was thrown into a cauldron and boiled. The bones were crushed into dust and used in Jamiesonn's evil spells. His rituals were so horrifying that he was also known as Belial, or Son of Baal. Some people called him The Beast, while others referred to him as Leviathan.

“In any case, it was evident that Jamiesonn had an insatiable lust for blood and sacrifice. No doubt, his desire for immortality drove him to a state of insanity. His barbaric sacrifices continued for many years, growing more horrific with time. Jamiesonn's need for immortality was his soul-driven passion, and he tried everything known to ancient mystic religions to possess it.

“In time, his hatred grew for those whom opposed his self-proclaimed godship. Jamiesonn was hell-bent on destruction and murder. One night, during one of his

rituals, a powerful force manifested within him. It is believed that he murdered not only all of his followers, but many of the townspeople as well. After that, the survivors of his killing frenzy wanted his life. To survive, Jamiesonn fled Europe and stowed away on a ship bound for Australia. He knew full-well that if he were to stay in his homeland, he would have been executed for his crimes.

“Several months passed before the ship arrived in Australia. It is rumored that when the ship docked, no one was seen to depart. For days the ship remained in the docks and when the local authorities did board the rumored “ghost ship”, they were shocked to find all the crewmen had been horrifically murdered. Some had been beheaded, while others had their flesh torn from their body, while others had been mutilated and obviously forced to eat their own liver. Only something inhuman could have done this. Jamiesonn soon arrived in Gympie, knowing that no one there knew his evil past. He kept his witchcraft in the cupboard, so to speak.

“He tried to live a normal life. Yet, living a normal life was something he could never do. Old habits die hard, and in a short time, his thirst for blood became a pain he could not control. He knew to satisfy his needs for flesh and blood he would have to start up his cult. To the people there, he claimed to be a missionary who could understand mysteries and visions. He also claimed that he had found the ancient scrolls of Abraham. Each month, on the day of the Moon Sabbath, he would deliver a sermon to the people, all to gain their trust and confidence.

“The sacrifices began again, only this time the sermons were far more evil in nature. One dark night, he persuaded several of the townspeople to attend his ‘midnight mass’ so he could ‘pray’ for the lost souls. The people were unsure of his intentions, but still curious. Most were totally intrigued by this man of

perdition, but not all of them.

“There was one man among those people who saw right through Jamiesonn. Despite his warnings, the people followed their spiritual leader to his ‘temple.’ Jamiesonn didn’t want his intentions revealed. He took the young man aside, bound and gagged him, then made him the sacrifice for his altar. But something totally unexpected happened in that temple.

“It was said that once Jamiesonn had completed his sacrifice of blood, the eyes of the witnesses were opened, and they saw his real nature they sought to execute him. Jamiesonn fled into the mountains, and despite a search for him, he was never found.

“The townspeople were relieved he was gone, but that feeling was short-lived. Jamiesonn returned to the town exactly one year after his disappearance. Before he could do anything, he was arrested. The records of the time state: *It became known unto us that the Wicked One had embarked on a journey forth to our shire to again cast his spell upon our kin. A group of us met by night and laid forth a trap to ensnare him. With the rise of the second moon, he came into our village to fill his hunger for blood. The kin of God ensnared the beast and by the light of night, he was to be hanged by the neck.*

“It goes on to say that the ropes which bound his arms and feet were loosed from his body, and the noose snapped. Seeing that he didn’t die, the townspeople bound him in chains and flogged him one hundred times, then shot him repeatedly. His body was marred to the point of being almost unrecognizable. Pieces of flesh hung from his body, but through it all, he still lived. Throughout this barbaric execution, it is reported that he showed no sign of pain or weakness of any kind.

“It goes on to say: We had him tortured to a point that no man could endure, and still he showed no remorse or sorrow. In our attempt to make this man pay for his crimes against God and our brethren, he laughed in our faces. He threatened to kill us all. The soldiers managed to contain his anger by locking him in the stocks, then cutting out his tongue. It seemed that no matter what we did, we could not contain his power. In minutes, he broke out of the stocks. No longer could we stand his ungodliness, so a trooper beheaded him. We all watched as his unholy soul manifested before us. He vanished and was never seen again. The remains of his mortal body were burned to ashes, and thrown into the wind, making it so that he shall never return again.”

Drake looked up from his notes at the audience. “As you can see, Jamiesonn’s priority was his own gratification. Even now, for reasons that I have not yet uncovered, his soul remains incarcerated within the domain of his shack. I investigated these spectra, and I have to admit I was lucky to escape alive. Others, though, haven’t been so fortunate. It is believed that if anyone dares to venture near his domain, they shall be destroyed. If, in the unlikely case you do manage to escape, you’ll never be the same again.

“During my investigation, I discovered Jamiesonn has a dire need to have a physical existence. If he manages to find the right host, he will manifest himself in this world, and the cult will be started once again.

“His cult will become the only religion and anyone opposing him shall perish by his power. It is said that if he is successful in his quest, he will become The Evil One that the Book of Revelation warns about.

“It is said that the souls of his victims and followers shall remain in limbo until his

spirit is destroyed. His powers are so great that he could possess anyone's mind, yet he waits for the One to come. The One is believed to be the holder of an ancient power. When he arises, he will have the ability to destroy anything that threatens this world.

“Now, when I think of it, I regret having ever gone to that place and confronting Jamiesonn. In all my years, I have never encountered such tremendous evil and power. Even with all my knowledge of exorcisms, I couldn't dispel him.”

* * * *

After glancing over at Usher, Drake looked back at the audience. He shifted from one foot to the other and licked his lips. He was nervous, that much was clear, but he wasn't aware of the evil presence. Alex could sense that the man hated speaking about Jamiesonn. In any case, it was evident to Alex that he had experienced something horrid and he knew he never wanted to face anything like that again. The investigation of Jamiesonn had stolen ten years of his life.

Hesitant to continue, Drake paused before telling the rest of his account. Most of the audience seemed to be intrigued by his presentation, but not Alex or Usher.

Alex focused his attention on the evil presence, which was growing stronger. He tried to define it, but couldn't. He was an amateur against something like this. If this evil were to appear, then he would die along with everyone else. The only thing he did sense was that man seated on stage could also sense this presence.

Drake concluded his speech a short while later, then asked for questions.

Silence.

Jake stepped up to the microphone and closed out the meeting. Jake spoke to Drake, and then they left the stage and entered the members' bar. The audience immediately started to disperse. Some left, while others also went to the bar. Alex remained in his seat for some time and thought about the presence he had sensed. That feeling chilled him to his marrow. In any case, he wanted to find out more about Jamiesonn. Alex was determined not to let anything get in his way.

Before making his way over to the bar, he stood in the doorway and glanced around the room. Usher was not there, but Drake and Jake were. To find out anything else about Jamiesonn, Alex knew that he'd have to speak with the other man. With that in mind, he went over and stood near Jake, enabling him to listen in to the conversation.

"And so, once I realized that Jamiesonn had the power to destroy anyone, I tried desperately to exorcise him, but my efforts fell short. Let me say this, when I was there, I certainly got my two cents worth." Drake bragged to those around him.

"So what do you intend to do now?" someone queried.

"Are you going back there to finish your investigation?" someone else asked.

Drake was silent a moment. "Well, to be honest with you, I don't relish the idea of going back there to face that thing again. But since I am the only one who knows what a destructive force Jamiesonn is, I'm afraid that it is my responsibility to send him into another plane of existence."

Spoken like a true hero, Alex thought. After all, why did this man care if some damn fool entity was hell-bent on destroying the world? It would never happen anyway, or so he hoped. Drake was excellent at making himself look good and, without fail, big-noted himself whenever he got the chance. The question was, did he have any intentions of returning to destroy Jamiesonn? Alex did not think

so. Underneath that cool smile and that tough talk, he was sure this man was nothing more than a showman.

Half an hour had passed before Alex noticed Drake standing by himself at the bar. Alex watched him carefully, studying Drake's expressions as he stared into his drink. Here was a classic case of someone being half-drunk, but something else ran deep in this man's heart, something painful, and it wasn't Jamiesonn. No, this looked like a man who had lost something close to him.

Drake stared into his glass of scotch and coke. He seemed to be lost in deep thought. There was a lot of pain and guilt in his life. Its signs were etched across his face. The stress had obviously taken its toll on this man, and for a very brief moment, Alex sympathized with him. For that one moment, he felt like being the voice of reason and listening to Drake's burdens, but he said nothing. He was in no position to offer advice when he had enough of his own problems to deal with. Alex guzzled the rest of his Coke, then went and sat next to Drake. They looked at each other, and said nothing. They just gave one another a nod.

Alex ordered another soda and took a big swig. "Impressive speech, Mr. . . ."
The man glanced at him then looked back at his half-full glass. "Winters. Drake Winters."

"So, is what you said true . . . about Jamiesonn, I mean?" Alex asked.

"Every damn part of it," Drake answered, staring into his drink.

Alex decided to get straight to the point. "Do you intend to go back?"

Drake looked at him, then back to his drink. "Maybe. It depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Depends if I feel like getting my ass kicked again." He said then drank some more.

"Well, if you don't mind, I would like to come along, if you decide to return."

Drake glanced at him then looked back at his reflection in the mirror behind the bar “What for?”

“I want to see for myself, first-hand, just what kind of thing this entity is,” Alex said with a touch of enthusiasm.

Drake looked him up and down and finished his drink. Alex didn't have to be a rocket scientist to see that Drake did not think he had a chance of coming to grips with what Jamiesonn could do.

“I don't think so.”

“Why not? I have the sense of insight.”

“You and everyone else in this place, kid,” Drake replied. He was silent for a moment. “Look, I've got nothing against you, don't get me wrong, but this thing I've investigated is like nothing anyone has ever encountered before. It would be far too dangerous for someone as inexperienced as you to tag along. After all, there's no telling what could happen.”

“I'll chance it,” Alex said, his voice firm.

Drake turned to him and said sternly. “Don't ever gamble with the possibility of death. One day, your luck will run out! There are no second chances. Now, if you will excuse me, there is somewhere else I have to be.” Drake got up off his stool, said his good-byes, and left.

Alex sat at the bar for a few moments, wishing he had gotten more information out of Drake, and now that the opportunity seemed to have gone, he regretted not being friendlier toward the American. He glanced about the bar, and was hesitant to leave, but he had to. He felt compelled to follow Drake.

He stood up, and before he could start to leave, the same old feelings of dread and anxiety struck him, but more powerfully than previously. His breathing quickened, and his palms and forehead broke out in a sweat. His heart started

pounding, and he felt nauseous.

There was something here all right. But what? Alex glanced around to see if anyone noticed his odd condition, but no one did. Everyone continued chitchatting and sticking to their own little groups. But as each second passed, that feeling of uneasiness intensified. The glass in his hand began to tremble uncontrollably and his face became clammy and pale.

What the hell is going on here?

He closed his eyes for a moment, and it felt as though the whole room was spinning. The taste of bile rose in his throat. Alex slowly opened his eyes to see a sea of faces staring wildly at him. He hated feeling like this. How he wished that he could just run outside into the cold night air. He wanted this to be nothing more than a dream. He closed his eyes again and wished it was just a dream.

But it wasn't.

Alex was under attack by an unknown power, and could do nothing about it. He questioned and wondered if anyone was noticing his actions. He opened his eyes to see people gathered around, laughing crazily at him. Some mimicked his trembling body, while others roughly stroked his extremities.

"What do you people want," he yelled, pushing some of them away.

"Why don't you just crawl in a hole and die!" a voice bellowed out.

Alex pushed his way desperately through the sea of people, wanting nothing more than to escape this madness. The harder he tried to get to the door, the more impossible it seemed. Thousands of people filled the room until he couldn't move at all. He heard the continued laughing and mockery. They pressed up

against him harshly, making it hard to breathe.

“No more!” he yelled. “Let me out of here!” He swung his fist, striking the three closest people. To his surprise, everyone stopped laughing and as though struck by the power of Death, they all started to fall lifelessly to the ground. It wasn’t long before the people were dead on the ground, just like in his visions.

There was a familiar stench in the air, but not of decaying flesh. No, the smell was definitely alcohol. Alex knew he was in danger. He looked toward the door, which was not far away, and without hesitation ran to his escape.

“Leaving so soon?” a voice snarled from behind him.

Alex froze, only inches from the door, and slowly turned around. Standing behind the bar, pouring a tall glass of scotch was a tall, dark-haired man. Immediately Alex wanted to leave, but knew he had to stay. He did not know exactly why.

“Who are you?”

The stranger downed the pint-sized glass of scotch in one long gulp. “You’ll find out when the time comes,” he replied, pouring his second glass. “But for now, you’ll have to be content with the fact that I know who you are”

Taking a step backward, Alex asked, “Why are you—”

“Doing this?” the stranger finished. “Because I like you. I think you’re damn cute,” he said and winked at him.

“Don’t even think about it,” Alex warned him.

“Come now, Alex. Don’t condemn me for my preference. I am what I am—no more, no less,” the entity stated.

“Cut the crap,” Alex yelled. “Just tell me who you are and why I’m here!”

“You’ll find out who I am when the time comes. As for you being here, how the hell should I know? If you want to leave, you can. I won’t stop you.”

“Somehow I find that difficult to believe,” Alex said.

“Don’t believe me. No one ever seems to believe what I say anyway.” The entity paused for a second then went on with a smirk, “People like you prefer to judge based on what your instinct tells you, and not ever knowing the complexities of the truth that is right in front of their eyes... Funny thing is that people are like horses. Just as bridled horses are directed in which way they need to go, they have no clear knowledge or understanding of what they are doing or where they are going. They are simply lead... Like these lifeless people around you now.”

Alex glanced at the mass of bloodied dead bodies around him then looked back at the entity, who guzzled the glass of scotch then poured another and gestured for Alex to drink

“Go on. Have one. . . . It won’t kill you.”

“No, thanks.” Alex said, as he turned and went to the door. Just as he got to it, he stopped suddenly, glanced over his shoulder, and watched as the entity continued to drink. Pushing open the door, he saw the conference room. He was about to walk in but stopped again.

He sensed a trap and turned to face the entity. “What’s going on here?”

The being smirked. “Whatever do you mean?” he asked, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

“I know that I cannot simply walk out of here without you trying something.”

“You’re right, I tricked you. Must admit, though, I had you going there for a minute, didn’t I?”

He jumped over the bar and walked toward Alex. Alex felt as if his heart would burst from his chest. He knew that he had to stay and fight or run for his life. Yet, he sensed that the odds of damaging this entity were slim, and he wished he had a brilliant plan, but he hadn’t. He was in deep shit, and there was nothing he could do about it.

“So long, kid,” the entity snarled as he pointed at him.

Alex closed his eyes and felt a sudden rush of icy cold wind around his body. He snapped back to reality with a gasp to find himself still sitting at the bar, holding a glass of beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He glanced around the room quickly to see that everything was as it was before. Noone was dead, and more importantly, no one had noticed his *'trip'*. He looked at the beer for a second then turned his gaze toward the barman.

"Hey, I don't remember ordering this," he said.

"Sure you did," the barman replied, then motioned with his head toward a young woman sitting at the other end of the bar. "You bought one for yourself and one for the lassy done there."

Alex glanced to his right and saw the woman, smiled at her then stood up and looked around the room. Most of the people he noticed earlier were still there. He saw the clock on the wall nearby and was surprised to see that only a few minutes had passed. The vision he had seen was nothing more than an illusion.

He stubbed the unlit cigarette in the ashtray then headed for the door. He had to catch Drake before he left.

Chapter Two

In the cemetery of Winmont, Jeff had a brilliant idea. The evening had started out like many others. Despite the chill in the air, a group of people, all in their early twenties, doing what they did on most nights—listening to loud music, drinking beer, and making their own fun. What else was there to do in a peaceful town so small it wasn't on any road map. They knew that no one would bother them here. Most of the townspeople were already in bed. They did this all just for thrills.

Jeff stood up and staggered over to the other side of the campfire. "I've got a fantastic idea."

"What would that be?" one of them asked.

"Let's perform a ritual!" Jeff said with a wide grin.

His suggestion was met with silence from some and laughter from others.

"Yeah." Agreed one of the drunken guys, "Lets conjure up another case of beer!"

"Yeah! Let's go!" someone yelled in agreement.

Another guy, Tom, stood up. "I don't think that's such a good idea. What if something really bad happens?"

"Nothing is going to happen, everything will be fine." Jeff said, and paused to watch everyone's reaction, but most were oblivious to his idea. He took a puff on his joint and piped up, "Let's put it to a vote. All those in favor of a sex ritual, raise your hands."

That got everyone's attention, or seemed to. It didn't take long for people to get on his bandwagon and start to gather their things. And why wouldn't they? As far as these revelers thought, Jeff was a cool guy.

As great as most everyone thought Jeff was, they had no idea that he knew much more about rituals than he cared to discuss. He was highly intelligent and very occult-smart. He had basically memorized every spell from the Book of Shadows. But he had not always so swayed to the black arts. There had been a time when he had been skeptical about such things, but all that changed a year ago when on one fatal night he had been abducted and blindfolded by some out-of-towners. That fatal night he witnessed firsthand just how sadistic a true ritual sacrifice was. That night changed him forever.

After that night he had become obsessed with the craft. Over a short period, Jeff's knowledge of the arcane grew until he was secretly ordained into the same cult that abducted him. By rights, he should have stayed clear of these heretics, but he didn't. He was too filled with lust for power.

Although he knew much of the darkness, he still was naïve when it came to the fullness of what the knowledge and power could do. He didn't care. Tonight was the night to perform his bloody deed and scare the others out of their minds. The one person he wanted to scare the most was Tom. Tom had stolen Karen, and this was Jeff's night for revenge.

Jeff had everything planned in his mind. While he performed the ritual of blessings, he would pass around the ritual drink, which would be spiked with Ecstasy, and during the climax of the ritual, he would pull out his handgun, point it at Tom, and give the son of a bitch right one hell of a scare he wouldn't soon forget by shooting him in the leg. The others would not know what had happened. They would be so damn high that they probably wouldn't give a shit anyway. To them, it would appear that the single gunshot was a hallucination. Jeff planned to take Karen away to somewhere remote, bind her, gag her, brainwash her and then have his way with her over and over again until he had

his fill.

Neither Tom nor Karen would ever know what hit them, and no one would ever suspect that Jeff wanted them both to suffer.

“So where are we going, Jeff?” Tom asked, as he got in the back seat of Jeff’s car.

“A special place. It’s somewhere I like to go to be alone and think,” replied Jeff, then started the car and drove off.

They drove down the highway some distance, until Jeff slowed down near a narrow dirt road that led deep into the forest. The forest was large, and although the area had some interesting scenery for passing tourists, the Clearing was a place that remained hidden from the outside world. It was a distance to walk, but by car, it would take no more than ten minutes to reach their final destination.

* * * *

As gullible as Tom seemed, he was not a fool. He knew that Jeff had had it in for him ever since he started dating Karen, and because of this, he watched what Jeff said and did around him. He knew Jeff was the type of person who lost his temper very easily and more often than not, his bursts of anger were more violent in nature than mere words. For a long time there had been rivalry between Jeff and Tom, and most of it was because of Karen. Both men loved and wanted her, and but only one could be with her. She knew that they both loved her, and sometimes she would use that to her advantage.

The rivalry began a few weeks after Tom and Karen had started dating. In one of Jeff’s bursts of anger he slashed the tires on Tom’s 56 Chevy. That car was Tom’s pride and joy. And why wouldn’t it be? He had spent 6 months of his life restoring the classic car to its former glory, and Jeff destroyed that in a moment of jealous rage. But Tom got his own back by beating Jeff to the point where he

put him in the hospital.

A short time later, the cars stopped at the entrance of a large clearing. As they got out of the car, Tom gazed around slowly, taking in the sight of this strange place. Around the edge of the clearing, torches were lit, and in the middle, there was a large stone slab, and various other stone relics were engraved in the dirt ground. This place resembled a temple of sorts of an ancient civilization.

Strange, Tom thought. *Almost Druidic in nature.*

The first thing Tom found peculiar was the torches. Why were they already lit? As strange as it seemed, the others weren't the least bit curious. The others got out and continued their revelry. Tom had lost his thirst for beer though. He just stood in front of the car and stared back down the long dark track that led them there.

Throughout the forest, the sounds of music and laughter filled the air. Tom watched as everyone partied like there was no tomorrow. He watched as his friends drank, smoked pot, and danced. Everyone was quite festive. Everyone except Jeff, who seemed very focused on preparing for his ritual.

* * * *

Jeff was oblivious to what everyone was doing. He was intent on making this scheme go off without any problems. He went over to the trunk of his car, and pulled out a black sports bag. It had the equipment he would need. Inside was his book of spells, small bottles of incense oils, herbs, charms, a chunk of charcoal, his ritual dagger, drugs, a chalice, and of course, his hand gun. With the charcoal, he marked the ritual symbols on the stone slab, and with a nearby branch, he marked other symbols on the ground.

A few minutes later, after he had prepared his bag of tricks, he was ready. He got everyone's attention and asked them to stand in the ritual circle. He watched as everyone came and stood in the circle, and some, more than others, swayed and looked like they were ready to pass out. . . . But still they drank.

He looked at each one of them, only for a moment, and noticed their faces well. He noticed how nervous Tom looked. He liked that. But he didn't like seeing Tom holding Karen's hand firmly.

Jeff began reciting the prayer of the dead, and then went into speaking in tongues. As he continued, he pointed at Tom. "Stand in the triangle symbol that points toward the east."

"Why?" Tom asked.

"The ritual won't work unless there is a positive force to counteract with the negative energy I am summoning," he answered.

"No!" Tom said, his voice firm.

Jeff flared his nostrils and clenched his jaw, yet hid his anger. "Come on, Tom, just trust me. Nothing will go wrong. You have my word."

It took some coaxing from Karen and the others, but hesitantly, Tom went over to the symbol and stood in its center. Jeff said nothing, but on the inside, he was laughing.

I've got you now, he thought. Jeff focused his attention back on the ritual book. As he continued to recite the verses, he handed the chalice of wine to one of the others, and one by one they drank until Karen drank from the chalice then passed it to Tom. He was the last to drink. He was hesitant, but drank anyway then tossed the chalice to the ground.

This was the moment Jeff had been waiting for, and he was overwhelmed with delight. Jeff wanted to finish Tom off. Just one damn shot and it would all be over. He was sure no one knew of his intentions or even suspected that he had a gun. It was well concealed in the velvet cloth, which was on the raised slab, right next to Jeff's right hand.

Jeff looked at his friends as he spoke, and he could see that the drug taking effect. Now the time was right to do Tom in, but he also felt compelled to finish reading the spell. As he read the last sentence of the incantation, he could feel his whole body begin to change. A blue and red aura surrounded his body, then his skin became deathly pale, and he felt his eyes darken. Jeff could see right into Tom's soul, and what he saw was fear.

Not wanting to stick around, Tom stumbled over to Karen, grabbed her by the hand and started to flee. The others started to stagger away, but their efforts were in vain. The drug had taken hold, and one by one they passed out until only Tom and Karen remained.

Just as Jeff had anticipated, neither Tom and Karen passed out as they had been the last ones to drink from the chalice, but what they did drink was enough for them to feel woozy.

"What the hell are you doing, Jeff!" Tom slurred.

"You know exactly what I am doing, you son of a bitch," Jeff yelled. With that, he took out the gun and stepped toward them.

* * * *

Tom's vision may have been nothing more than a blur, but he could make out the distinct shape of the gun Jeff was holding. With what strength he had, he tried to

run but he couldn't. All he could do was stagger aimlessly in circles.

Karen staggered over to Jeff and tried to fight for her man by yelling and hitting and trying to scratch Jeff's eyes out, but her efforts were in vain. With one swift move, Jeff punched her in her face, and she fell unconscious to the ground. He sneered at her and continued toward Tom.

"You're gonna kill me because of her?" Tom yelled, his voice cracking with fear.

"Killing me over a woman is not the answer!"

"Au contraire!" Jeff said. "I am not gonna kill you because of her. I am gonna kill you for what you did to me."

"What did I ever do to you?"

"You stole my life you bastard! You went behind my back and fucked my woman while I worked my ass off at the fucking mill."

"Jeff, we never meant for anything to happen," Tom said, trying to reason him.

"But it did," Jeff yelled. "And it's too late for apologies." He paused for a moment, his breathing coming hard and fast. "For fuck's sake, you were supposed to be my best fucking friend. And look what you did to me!"

Tom was silent. He knew that there was nothing he could do. He swallowed dryly and waited for Jeff to squeeze that trigger.

"Get it over with for fuck's sake," Tom muttered. "I am not afraid to die."

"You're not afraid to die!" He mocked with a sadistic smirk. "Take one last look at her, asshole. Tonight you sleep in hell." Pointing the gun at Tom's head, he added, "This is the way it has to be", he snarled. "Goodbye *old friend*."

Tom took one last look toward Karen, who was unconscious on the ground. If only he could tell her one last time that he loved her. But instead all he had time to think was, "I love—"

A single gunshot echoed throughout that place and Tom's lifeless body collapsed to the ground.

Jeff looked at Tom's dead body and looked at the smoldering gun in his hand.

"Oh fuck what have I done?" He cried out in panic, as he went and stood over Tom's body, and stared at his first kill. For someone who had planned this for weeks and as much delight as he thought he would get out of it, he felt anything but victorious.

"How the hell could I miss!" He argued with himself, "It was meant to scare him not damn well kill him!"

Oh fuck, he thought. He realized that he was now a murderer. What was he going to do? He sure as hell could not recite some spell and raise the son of a bitch from the dead. Nor could he simply sweep this under the carpet and hope to God that no one discovered his secret. He was in deep shit, and he knew it. Now, he wondered if anyone beyond the clearing had heard the gun shot.

He knew there was a campground nearby somewhere. Was anyone there this time of year? Shit, that was something he forgot to check. As perfect as his plan seemed, he was now realizing that there were things that he had overlooked.

And that was not all. Sooner or later, his friends—all seven of them—were bound to wake up. How would he explain what had happened? He could not just tell them that Tom went to take a leak and never returned. He knew that Karen and all her friends would tell the cops, and then a fucking search party would scour this place until he was found. Sure, he could bury his kill, but what if the dogs found the corpse? Oh shit, he was in deep.

He started to pace like a caged animal. He was desperate to find a way out of this shit he got himself into. Irrational ideas came to mind, and in his panic, all he could think was, *No witnesses*. Sure, he could kill the rest of them, but what the hell would he do with the bodies? What about Karen? Sure he had intended to kill her, but seeing what he had already done to Tom, he did not think that he could go through with the rest of his warped plan.

“No witnesses,” he finally muttered. He knew that if he allowed the others to live, one of them would turn him in, and he was adamant that he was not going to jail. Shit, he now wished that he hadn’t brought the gun.

It was only meant to scare him. He tried to reason within himself. *The prick provoked me, so he got what was coming to him*, another sinister part of his inner self retorted.

With the latter thought in mind, he began to execute the others. He did his deed swiftly and carefully. He planned to make it look like a gang execution. The only thing he had in his mind as he carried out his deed was the thought of Tom having sex with Karen. That alone drove him with enough rage to carry out his deed without question or remorse. Two he shot, and the others he stabbed in the chest and face with the ritual dagger. He did other things, too, to make it look like some kind of satanic killings. One person, he cut off his head and disemboweled him. To one of the girls, he tore off her clothes, shoved the dagger inside her vagina, and dissected her like a lab rat. The others he mutilated and cut into pieces, and what was left, he burned in the bonfire. The place was a fucking bloodbath. He had killed everyone except Karen and thought that he was in the clear.

She woke up screaming. He turned to see her standing before him and looking

around at the blood that now covered the ground.

“Jeffery?” she whimpered.

“Karen . . .”

“Why?” she cried.

Jeff shook his head. “Why what?”

He stared at her, and as much as he tried, he knew he could not hide that look of guilt in his eyes, nor could he hide the evidence of blood that covered his clothes.

“You bastard. You killed them! Why the fuck did you have to kill them?”

He had no answers to give her. But he knew that if he allowed her to walk away, she would tell the cops.

“I had to,” was the only thing he said as he started to walk slowly toward her. “I did it for us.”

“For us?” she screamed. “There is no us! There never was an us! I loved him, goddamn it!”

He stopped and glared at her. As much guilt as he felt for committing mass murder, there was something about Karen that he did not like. And that was the thought of her with another man. Especially Tom.

“You were meant to be with me!” he yelled, pointing at her.

“I never loved you, Jeff! And I never will!”

That cut him deeply. He swallowed dryly and forced back the tears from his eyes. He wanted to show his emotions but he didn't. Instead of crying like the heartbroken jealous coward he was, his anger rose up inside him and fueled his state of delusion all the more. With that, all he could do was pull out his gun and point it at her.

“If I can't have you, bitch, then no one will!” he yelled as he prepared to kill her.

She cowered from him and begged him not to kill her, but her words fell on deaf ears. He wanted a way out of this situation, and rather than stick to the original

plan, he decided to execute the bitch, to make it appear as though she had planned the whole thing while he fled that shithole of a town and started a new life in a place no one knew him.

He stepped over to her and hit her in the mouth with the butt of his pistol. She fell to the ground and looked up at him fearfully.

“As I told Tom before I killed his ass, tonight you sleep in hell,” he said as he took aim at her face.

Before he could fire, a bright green orb appeared and flew around them rapidly. Both of them watched the strange light as it slowed and hovered above them. Jeff’s only concern up until that point was the thought of being caught. It was obvious what Karen feared. She feared him, and she feared death even more. She knew death was something she was not prepared for. Her soul was far from ready. Jeff stepped away from her and watched the light with a mixture of fear and curiosity. It circled them a few times then shot off into the forest at the far side of the clearing, disappearing as it entered the trees.

Speechless, he looked at Karen for a few moments before he blurted out, “You see, even the paranormal bends to my will.”

“You’re delusional.”

He never heard her. He looked toward the forest then demanded, “Come back, I order you to come back!”

As if obedient to his command, the light rushed back to the clearing and stopped, hovering a few feet away from him. He could feel an energy emitting from it, and as if by some revelation, he knew what he had to do. He immediately went and grabbed Karen by the hair and dragged her over to the raised slab. She tried to

break free but she couldn't. He was too strong, but not by his own strength.

At once, the light buzzed around frantically, then drifted toward Karen. She screamed, quickly covering her face with her hands. It stopped just inches from her face and hovered there, as though it was measuring her up, or maybe trying to peer into her frantic soul. She removed her hands, and looked at the light. "See, bitch!" he said, his tone haughty and smug. "I control even the elements."

His statement could never have been more wrong. As soon as he spoke those words, the light drifted back a foot or two, hovered on the ground, and transformed into what it really was.

Jeff gasped at the sight of the creature. "What are you?" he asked, his voice cracking in fear.

The creature never spoke at first. It just stared at him with mild curiosity. "That which once was and what shall be again," the daemon answered. "I am Lutancix."

A smirk broke on Jeff's face and with a renewed self-delusional confidence he said, "I brought you forth, daemon, so obey my commands."

"You fool!" Lutancix laughed. "You have no fucking idea the forces you are dealing with. Your kind thinks that they have power over us because you can recite some little verse." It moved toward him. "You don't seem to understand that it is our kind that allows you to invoke us to begin with. And now, that which was started millennia ago shall be finished."

Jeff suddenly felt sick to his stomach and knew that he had to get out there. But he was too damn afraid to do anything, let alone flee.

Death was coming, and he was desperately trying to figure out a way to strike a bargain with the daemon to save his life. He wasn't ready for death. And he sure as hell didn't want to go to hell for what he had done. But what could he do?

* * * *

Lutancix lunged at him and knocked him to the ground swiftly and jumped on his chest. The daemon stood on his chest and glared into his eyes, then grabbed him harshly by the face. Lutancix glanced over at Karen, and seeing the terror in her eyes, he broke Jeff's neck in one swift move. Then, as though in a mad frenzy, he tore the heart out from Jeff's body and devoured it madly. Karen screamed in terror.

Lutancix knew what he was doing and why. Jeff would rise again to serve in his master's army. But he dreaded the One. He knew that one young man was a likely candidate, but there were others. What was important right now was that there was a young woman still alive.

"What are you going to do with me?" she cried out.

The daemon stepped toward her. She backed away, fear written across her face as she waited for the inevitable. Lutancix raised his clawlike hand and pointed it at her, ready to strike.

Just as he was about to kill her, a loud, powerful voice bellowed from all around them. "Leave her. She lives for now."

Lutancix knew this voice as his master and he obeyed immediately. "You live to see another day, girlie," he snarled.

Transforming back into a ball of light, he shot off into the forest, vanishing as fast as he had first appeared.

* * * *

Karen cried hysterically and staggered to her feet. She had to get out of there, and as distraught as she was. She ran as fast as she could in no certain direction, just anywhere but this clearing.

As she ran blindly through the forest, echoes of what sounded like an ancient lore came to her mind. *With three passings of the moon, these people shall rise, and they shall purge the land, until the time comes when that which once was, will rise once more.*

The torches flickered and went out until there was only silence in that clearing.

It had begun.

Chapter Three

Alex ran out into the parking lot and yelled, "Drake!"

Drake glanced behind him, but didn't stop walking toward his car, where Usher was already waiting. Opening his car door, he heard his name again. Slamming the door, he turned around and leaned against the car door. Alex ran up to him.

"You again? What do you want?" Drake asked, clearly annoyed.

Alex caught his breath. "I don't know why, but I found out about Jamieson!"

"You obviously have a death wish, kid, or you are just too darn persistent for your own good. Didn't you hear anything I said in there tonight?"

"I heard you, but I have a feeling that just won't rest until I come face to face with him."

Drake stared at him. His expression said it all. He thought Alex was out of his mind.

"If I can't go with you, then at least let me borrow your report, so I can investigate this for myself," Alex pleaded.

Drake was silent as he measured up the young man. He glanced toward some people in the distance then looked back at Alex and said, "Look, kid, I'm sure you have the best intentions in mind, or maybe your curiosity needs to be satisfied, but to be honest, if anything happened to you I don't want to be held accountable."

Alex sighed and felt that he was getting nowhere really fast, but still, he needed to know. He took a step back and began to open his mouth to speak, then

stopped when he saw Usher emerge from the passenger side of the car and walk around toward them.

“Kid, don’t you realize just how powerful Jamiesonn is?”

“From what I heard earlier I have a good idea,” Alex said. “But I still need to find out.”

Drake rubbed his chin and exchanged glances with Usher, who nodded at Drake.

“Okay, kid,” Drake said after a few moments. “I’ll give you what I have. But if you are smart like I think you are, you will heed my advice. If you decide to face Jamiesonn, then you’ll have to do it alone. There is no way in the world I’m going back there to face what terrors he has in store for anyone who takes it upon themselves to be fool hearty. Jamiesonn doesn’t know the meaning of mercy. The only thing he does is breed contempt for and in everything and anyone who comes near him. Bargaining, pleading or begging doesn’t work with this type of supernatural.”

“I don’t intend to bargain. Not my style,” said Alex.

Drake shook his head. “Don’t let the delusion of what you see in the movies cloud your intelligence kid. Style or not, Jamiesonn knows what you’re going to do before you do. He knows who his enemies are, and he will use anyone close to you to destroy you. This thing is far more powerful than you could ever imagine.”

“Then how does one fight this damn thing?”

“If I knew that kid we wouldn’t be here now discussing this. When I first came face to face with him, I thought that it would be an open-and-shut case, but I was wrong. This thing has a habit of toying with his victims, before going in for the kill. When I tried to eliminate him, it was only then that I discovered what supernatural power he had, and in my efforts to lay this thing to rest, Jamiesonn almost destroyed me.”

“What happened?” Alex asked. “If this thing is that powerful, why are you still breathing?”

“I don’t know, kid. Maybe he thought it wasn’t necessary to kill me. Perhaps he wanted me to warn others of his power. I don’t know,” Drake answered. He was silent again for a moment. “When I was on the floor of that shack, he stood over me and could have killed me right then, but he didn’t. He just walked away and ordered me to leave and never return. For that brief instant, I sensed something about him. It was as though with all the contempt and hatred he has, there is still something human about him.”

“Unbelievable,” Alex said.

Drake gave a smug laugh. “It was then that he used his power on me, and I was thrown a good thirty feet out of his domain. After that, I immediately left, and I haven’t been back. That was a week ago. Before I left Gympie, I found out a bit more history on Jamiesonn from a local mystic. Anyway, I won’t go on, as whatever you need to know is in the report. Also, there are some old newspaper reports that you will find interesting.” He opened the car door, grabbed a folder from the dashboard, and handed it to Alex. “Remember that you will only have one chance to lay this beast to rest, and if you truly decide to go through with this, I won’t have any part of it. Just one last word of advice, if things get out of hand, get away from that place, as fast as you can! Not that it would do you much good.”

“Why not?”

“As I just said kid, Jamiesonn knows who his enemies are. He knows who seeks him. Hell, he probably knows that we’re talking about him right now,” Drake replied.

Alex felt his throat tighten. “That’s good to know.”

Drake smiled, patted Alex’s shoulder, and wished him luck. Alex thanked him, then stepped back as Drake and Usher got into the car.

“See ya around, kid,” Drake said. “Remember I want that report back, so my cell number is inside the folder.” With that, they pulled away.

Alex got into his car a few minutes later and drove back to his apartment, which was situated on the south side of Brisbane City. The apartment was nothing too elaborate, but at least it was a roof over his head. He had lived in the apartment on the ninth floor ever since the death of his parents. They were an upper-middle class family, and with the inheritance he received, he knew that he could start a new life. This, he felt, was the only way to do it. So much grief and pain had happened in his life already. He poured a glass of juice and lay down on his leather couch, staring up at the white-glossed ceiling. Tracing streak patterns in the paint with his eyes, he let his mind wander and reflected on the events of that night. After some time, he got up and grabbed the report from the kitchen. He went into his study and examined the newspaper clippings one by one, then turned to the report.

As much as he wanted to know about Jamiesonn, another part of him really didn't. In a way, he already knew the outcome for this entity, but he didn't know how or why. Changes in his life had happened so rapidly over the last couple of months. It seemed he was developing a strong sense of knowledge and insight. This scared him at times. Now more than ever he felt sure about the future, mostly about his own.

But still as certain as he felt about his future, the visions remained. In some, he saw images of a man-beast, which ravaged the world and made nations crumble under a fist of bronze. But what scared Alex most were his visions of himself in the midst of the future war. Each time he had that vision he could see clearly that it was himself standing in the midst of the conflict of nations. To his left were the souls of humanity, while on the right stood the great oppressor. Alex had always

felt that he was destined to do something great with his life, but didn't know for sure what that calling was, apart from those visions.

While he read the report, one passage caught his eye. Jamiesonn was far more powerful than Drake had first realized.

Long before I set out on this investigation, Jamiesonn knew my intentions of destroying him. The night before I started his investigations, Jamiesonn's spirit visited me, warning me not to venture to his domain. If I continued this course of action, I was told that I would not live to see the morning. At first, I thought the visitation was nothing more than a dream, but my assumptions were terribly wrong. When I arrived at his shack, Jamiesonn manifested before me, and unleashed his attack. It was a force I had never encountered before. Parts of my body felt as though they were being eaten by worms. I found myself helpless against this extreme might. My knowledge was no use against Jamiesonn. I could not understand why this creature had not killed me. He ordered me to leave, telling me to warn The One that he was coming, and before I could get up, I was thrown like a rag doll. . . . With all of his power, even Jamiesonn has to have some weakness. . . . But who is The One he told me to warn? Was he referring to the Jewish Messiah or Dalai Lama or someone else? And why did he tell me and not someone else? What connection do I have to this . . . One?

The report went on to say that Drake could never go through something as traumatic as that experience again. He knew that if he were to ever go near that place again, he would not make it out alive. Drake knew that Jamiesonn had to

be destroyed. The report went on to say that if Jamiesonn were to possess the One, he would be brought into this world. Drake sensed strongly that things would soon come to a point, in which, the One would arise and strike down Jamiesonn.

Alex sat back in his chair and closed the folder. There was something strange about this moment, much like déjà vu. He had seen this moment in a dream. He was about to open the folder again when he had the sudden feeling of being watched. The night was humid, but he felt bitterly cold. He jumped out of his chair and looked around the room. To the natural senses there was nothing out of the ordinary, but something was there.

He walked out of his study, into the lounge room, and sat down. No sooner had he sat down when a mist started to form. He froze, his muscles seizing his bones like iron bands. He was afraid, really afraid. He felt a coldness come over him and his blood seemed to drain from his face. He was pale, almost had a deathly appearance about him. He sat, watched captivated, as the mist floated around the room slowly, and then stopped near the glass sliding door which lead out to the balcony. Not a few seconds later, the apparition formed into a man and glared at Alex. Alex stood slowly and started to back toward the wall. He wanted to run and get as far away as he could. As terrified as he was, he found that he was unable to do anything but stand there with his back to the wall.

The eyes of his intruder burned with black coals of hate, and he never spoke. Yet, words were not needed. The man's hatred for Alex was obvious. He glared at Alex for some moments then stepped toward Alex, walked through the coffee table, and measured him up.

Alex could do nothing but stand there frozen. *Free!* he thought. *Get outta here*

before the shit hits the fan! He couldn't. He had nowhere to go.

In the blink of an eye, the intruder's appearance changed, and now, standing before him was a beast with the torso and legs of a lion and two grotesque serpent heads.

The serpent looked at Alex, then looked away and began to spit fire all around the room. Rooted to the spot, Alex watched as the room was set ablaze.

"Nooo!" Alex screamed as his apartment erupted into flames. Fire raged out of control all around him, but he remained unscathed. Not even a hair on his head had been singed. Yet, he could certainly feel the intense heat.

He fell to his knees, covered his eyes, and wept. He wept for the loss of his belongings, for his own life. His safety did not last because, within seconds, the flames engulfed his body and he was set ablaze. For some seconds, the flames burned and tortured every part of his body. He fell back on his knees and screamed in agony . . . and then it was over. . . .

Silence. A deadly silence.

* * * *

Breathing. The sound of his own breathing is the next thing Alex heard, and he slowly lowered his trembling hands and gazed up at his intruder who had transformed back into a man.

Shocked, he slowly looked around the room. Everything was as it was before. Nothing had been burned. The whole thing was a damn illusion.

He found a moment to sigh with relief, but that was short-lived as immediately the intruder walked over to him and lifted him clear off the ground in one swoop.

"If you enter my domain, thou shalt certainly face the death I have shown thee."

"Why?" Alex whispered.

Jamiesonn leaned in close to him and again warned, "If thou come, then thou shalt die!"

Alex never spoke. Overcome by the stench of rotting flesh that emanated from this man's mouth, he was too scared to say anything else. The intruder released his grip and let Alex fall on his knees. He took a step back and stood there for a moment, then turned around and vanished.

Trembling Alex sat on the floor and ran his fingers through his hair. Staring around the room, he had no idea what to make of his encounter. He was too much in shock to do anything sensible.

He sat there for some time, trying to come to terms with his experience. When he finally came to some form of sensibility, he staggered to his feet, went to the kitchen cabinet, and pulled out one of the bottles of chardonnay. After opening the bottle, he took a long pause. He knew he shouldn't drink again, but he had to. The experience was too much for him to settle for a glass of water or Pepsi. He sniffed the contents of the bottle and closed his eyes and savored that smell. *It's been a long time old friend*, he thought then took a long drink.

He knew that this was wrong, but the logical had no place in his mind right now. Normally he saved the wine for cooking and for when he had a date over for dinner, but not tonight. Tonight was the night for drinking.

As he tasted the sweetness of the wine, a glimmer out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. Before he took another drink, he lowered the bottle and

looked back toward the lounge. There was something in there, and all he could think was, *Not again*.

He sat the bottle down on the bench and crept slowly back toward the lounge. He glanced around the corner of the hall into the lounge and saw nothing. He fully expected to see his intruder but didn't. There was nothing there. He sighed with real relief and leaned back against the wall. He wiped the remnants of sweat from his face, then went into his study, and sat at his desk. For some time he sat there staring at the folder that Drake had given him, and while he sat, there it occurred to him who his intruder was.

"Jamiesonn," he muttered as he leaned forward, opened the folder, and began shifting through the notes he read earlier about Drake's own experience. Again he read what Drake had written about his own encounter and what he recounted was almost the same as the experience Alex went through.

"He knows just as Drake warned me."

As he read more, he thought about what Jamiesonn had said and he knew very well that Jamiesonn's power seemed to know no bounds. He also sensed strongly that some people had to sacrifice and risk their lives in this . . . crusade.

He was faced with a choice—heeding Jamiesonn's warning and steering clear like a coward, of quitting this investigation before he began or facing whatever else may be thrown at him.

It didn't take long for him to come to a decision, and that was to see this through to the end. He knew he needed advice on what he should do, so he picked up the phone and called Drake's cell phone.

Alex wasted no time with filling him in with the details on what happened.

"Are you sure about this, Alex? Are you sure this happened?" Drake asked.

"Of course I am. I wouldn't make this up," Alex retorted.

“Okay, if what you say is true, then this thing knows your intentions. From now on, he will be watching you. If he warned you not to go near his domain, don’t,” Drake said.

“What? Are you crazy?” Alex exclaimed. “There is more to Jamiesonn than what meets the eye, and I need to find out what that is.”

“Then it’s your funeral, kid,” Drake answered. “From the way I see it, you have one of two choices. The first thing you could do is probe more into this entity and perhaps die from your efforts. Second, you could forget about the whole thing and find something else to occupy your time.”

“So you’re saying I should just give up?”

“I’m only giving you my opinion,” refuted Drake. “But if you’re adamant ongoing, then I suggest you take someone along when you go there.”

“Who should that be?”

“He’s a member of our society, and from what I hear, he has had similar investigations.”

“So, has this person faced something with the destructive power of Jamiesonn?”

“That is something you’ll have to find out for yourself, as I don’t know much about him. What I do know is that he is good at what he does.”

Alex sighed wearily then asked for the man’s number. Drake left the phone for a moment, and returned with the number.

“His name is Wang Dwuing.”

What kind of name is Wang Dwuing? Alex felt like saying but didn’t. He tried to end the conversation. “I’ll give him a call.”

“If you decide to go to Jamiesonn’s domain, remember that he is no ordinary daemon. He will use your fear as his weapon, and overcome you. If you feel that fear will overwhelm you, the best thing to do is run—run for your life. Losing concentration for only a second will give him a chance to launch a full-out attack on you. This means you will end up just like the others he has killed,” Drake

warned.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Alex said and then hung up.

Alex stared at the phone number. He felt hesitant to call, but it had to be done. There were many questions to be answered and little time. After a few minutes, he picked up the phone. He had only dialed the first three numbers, when there was a loud, high-pitched wail from the receiver. Alex dropped the phone and covered his ears with his hands. Steadily, the wailing turned into a shriek. Alex could feel his eardrums pounding, on the verge of bursting.

He could feel warm liquid trickling between his fingers and dripped onto the floor.

He looked at his hands and then at the floor. *Blood!*

“For the love of shit!” he yelled.

His nerves were being shredded, and tendrils of pain tore through his guts. It was unbearable, and he tried everything to unplug the phone.

The shrieking got louder, and again, he covered his ears and stumbled back from the phone.

Everything fell silent once again.

Alex’s chest heaved, and he could still hear a ringing in his ears. He pulled his hands from his ears and examined them again. No blood, no pain. Just another illusion.

“I must be going out of my fucking mind,” he said to himself as he regained his composure and then picked up the phone and started to dial the number again. As he dialed the number a black mist drifted into the room from behind him and manifested into a hideous daemon.

Sensing he was being watched, he stopped dialing and turned slowly to see a short, almost florescent green daemon standing near him, staring at him in almost curiosity.

“Here we go again,” Alex whispered to himself as he swallowed dryly. He had really had enough of today and wished for nothing more than to be out of this place.

“As you wish, mortal,” the daemon spoke, knowing his thoughts.

Instantly, Alex was thrown out into the hall with great force. He slowly rose to his feet and felt a lump rising on the back of his head. Staring down the hall, he saw nothing and could only hear his heart beating and his deep breathing. He had no idea who this entity was, but he had had enough of the games he was being put through. Summoning what courage he had, he went back toward the study.

Every fiber of his being was on total alert and fully expected this entity to take him by surprise, but that wasn't the case. When Alex entered the room, he found the daemon had vanished. But the phone was destroyed. Fed up with all this, he wondered if there was going to be any more surprises in store for him. He certainly hoped not. He was not sure, but he had the feeling that the entity that had done this was not Jamiesonn. That begged the question—what creature would do this, and why? This part of his life he couldn't ignore, and he had to find out what was behind all this destruction.

Hoping this was all over, he decided to go out. When he grabbed the doorknob, it was incredibly hot. Pain rocketed through him. He bolted to the sink and ran cold water over his hand. It gave him some relief, but not enough, and it was some time before the throbbing ceased. Alex then went to the medicine cabinet and doctored his hand.

Time passed slowly, and all was silent. Alex sat staring at the blank television and cradling his injured hand in his lap. Boredom set in. He wanted to leave but decided his best bet was to turn on the television. He picked up the remote, pressed the power button, and watched in disbelief as the television exploded.

Alex stared at the television, disbelieving what he was seeing.

He couldn't believe how bad this day had turned out. All he could do was sit there, remote in hand, and look at what was left of his television smolder and smoke.

He coughed and shook his head in disbelief. "This has gone far enough."

"I haven't even started yet, mortal," echoed a voice through his apartment.

Alex jumped to his feet and spun about, scanning the room. There were no signs of his visitors, but he knew it was there, watching and waiting. Cautiously, he walked to the window and suddenly broke out in a cold sweat. He trembled with anxiety, knowing that something bad was upon him. A sinister laugh echoed down the corridor. He looked down the darkened hall and began to walk slowly forward. Suddenly, an unseen force struck him from behind. Alex flew through the window. Bad as his reflexes were, he managed to grab the windowsill. Pain rippled through his injured hand. He let go and dangled by the other for a moment, then finally hoisted himself through the window.

Just as he flopped onto the floor, that same hideous daemon appeared. Alex crawled away, trembling from head to foot as his throat tightened with fear, leaving him speechless. It stared at Alex, a look of pure evil on its distorted face. "Just what the hell are you?" Alex asked, his voice hoarse.

"That which once was and what shall be again," the daemon hissed.

“What?” Alex managed to mutter.

“Don’t concern yourself with things which hold no relevance to your purpose, boy. In time, you will come to realize that the one who sent me is your true master, not the other who came to you earlier this night.”

“Piss off!” Alex threatened, finally finding his voice.

The daemon stared at him and seemed surprised at his tone, but that was brief. A moment later, it leaped over to him, harshly grabbing his face. “Don’t test Lutancix, mortal, or the master will cast you into the place of eternal torment.”

Lutancix sneered at him, and smirked before it let go of him and leaped through the broken window. Alex got to his feet, looked outside, and saw that it had vanished without a trace.

It had been a long night, and all Alex wanted was to sleep, or hide. In his condition, though, this was not to be. He went back to the kitchen, grabbed the bottle of wine, and sat on the kitchen floor. He sat on the floor and stared at that bottle of wine, and he knew that there was no going back.

The vow he made, the pledge he gave, seemed to almost haunt him as he sat there. He felt the urge to drink more, just this one bottle, but he felt guilty of what he wanted to do. But with everything that had happened he felt that this drink, this one bottle, would give him the release he desperately needed right now.

“Just one,” he muttered. “Just this one and everything will be okay.” He put the bottle up to his mouth and closed his eyes.

He smelled that all too familiar smell of chardonnay, and it had a pleasant aroma. He sighed with pleasure as he took another sip, then mouthfuls. Now, he started to feel a little more relaxed, and there was no more guilt. He had taken that step

back into the land of booze.

He drank slowly and reflected on the events of the night. Once he finished that bottle, he wanted another, but he couldn't be bothered drinking anymore. He was too pissed off to drink. Frustrated, he took a shower then crawled into bed. He was willing to bet this whole thing had happened because he had gotten the report from Drake. He had a good idea of what Jamiesonn was about, but the other daemon left him clueless.

What had Lutancix meant by the one who sent him was his true master? As much as Alex didn't want to think about it, he couldn't help himself as it plagued him. Many questions ran through his mind, and he probed their depths for a logical explanation. But, there was none.

Alex knew he needed to find out more about Jamiesonn before he went to his domain. He wanted to know what Lutancix was after, but not tonight. He would think about that in the morning when his head was clear.

Alex turned on his side, closed his eyes, and eventually fell asleep.

Chapter Four

The dream Alex had that night was unsettling.

In his dream, he was standing ten yards from a set of steps, leading to an old dilapidated shack. He remembered looking up at the moon, admiring its elegance and splendor. Then he looked toward a nearby valley, some distance away and noticed how the moonlight shined down on the town there.

As he stood taking in the beauty around him, he noticed that no light shone on the shack. Alex felt the presence of something sinister all around him. He started to back away, wanting to get as far from this place as he could. As much as he wanted to leave, his gut told him he had to stay.

Suddenly, he heard a voice behind him. He spun around but saw no one. The voice again came from behind him, but he knew that if he turned, there would be nothing there. It was soft, indistinguishable, and sounded muffled. He felt drawn toward the door, and so he made his way to the shack. Alex had to know what lay beyond that door.

As he reached the first of the four rotting steps, a grotesque disfigured imp of an entity appeared in front of him. He jumped back into the surrounding dead grass. "You are not him for whom I have come." Alex stated. "Make way!"

The entity snarled.

Alex set his shoulders straight and stepped forward. "I said, make way!"

"Or else?" the entity mocked.

"Don't try my patience. If you do, you'll find yourself in the place where there is

weeping and gnashing of teeth,” Alex shot back.

The entity snarled and crouched down slightly. Alex knew what was about to happen, and he stepped up on the narrow veranda, determined to show no fear.

He could see the entity prepare to strike, but then its attention was drawn to something else. Alex felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand straight up. Something was manifesting behind him, and with that, the entity in front of him vanished. Alex didn't turn around; he didn't have to. He knew who was standing behind him.

“I see you met my guardian.” He heard Jamiesonn say from behind him.

“I thought you'd never show your cowardly face,” Alex said, without turning around.

“And I told you not to come here. You must have a hard time remembering things,” Jamiesonn replied.

“You knew that I had to come,” Alex said, still facing away from him. Yet, he turned his head ever so slightly, so he could watch Jamiesonn out of the corner of his eye.

Jamiesonn smirked evilly, placed his hands behind his back, and walked around in front of Alex. For a moment, Alex surmised that his adversary looked like a distinguished gentleman. In silence, they stood there facing each other with only a couple feet between them. Alex gazed into those cold, dark eyes, and both men took measure of the other.

“I knew you would come, Alex, but now I must kill you for your defiance.”

“Don't think for a minute that will be as easy as you think.”

“That a fact?” Jamiesonn said, his tone mocking.

Alex nodded.

“We shall see about that,” Jamiesonn said with a smirk, turned and walked inside

the shack.

Alex knew he had to go in, and he didn't hesitate. Never before had he seen this place, but there was something very familiar to him. He shook off that feeling as he entered. It was pitch black, He'd be lucky to see his hand in front of his face. He knew his chances of survival were slim, but this had to be done.

Bam! The door slammed shut behind him. Silence filled the room and darkness enveloped him. He looked around slowly hoping his eyes would adjust to the darkness. A sudden chill howled through the air. Alex froze. His natural sight was unable to pierce the darkness, but he knew the enemy was there, watching, waiting.

Jamiesonn let out a vile hideous laugh. Alex was unable to tell what direction it came from. He felt like the laughter was all around him, closing in. He heaved a sigh of frustration and walked blindly ahead. He felt lost and empty and wondered why he was here to begin with.

Suddenly, there was a bright flash of light, which blinded him momentarily and before he knew what happened, he felt a powerful force drag him inside the light.

He opened his eyes and saw that he was drifting in a cloudlike void, and for a while, all he could see was the bright red light. In seconds, it was gone, and Alex knew exactly where he was. Jamiesonn's kingdom. In the distance, he could see a halo of white light. He perceived this was the doorway to the next life. Alex looked back, trying to see where he had entered, but saw nothing. The one thing that Alex could see was Jamiesonn, who was soaring toward him. He reached Alex and grabbed his neck, choking the life from him.

"I told you, that you would die if you came here!" Jamiesonn said.

“Let go of me,” Alex demanded, gasping for breath as he tried to break Jamiesonn’s grip.

With a mighty heave, Jamiesonn hurled Alex through the air. He was moving at what seemed to be an incredible speed. Try as he might, he was unable to alter his direction. He was headed toward the white light and could do nothing to stop it. He closed his eyes and screamed in agony as his skin started to burn from the intense heat of the light.

His body started to burst into flames and the last thing he heard was the sound of Jamiesonn’s laughter.

* * * *

Alex awoke suddenly and sat bolt upright in bed. He turned to the mirror. His face was pale, and his body soaked in sweat, and blood was trickling from his nose. He wiped the blood from his nose with a trembling hand, and for several seconds, he thought he was still in that awful place. It took a few minutes to get his breathing under control and to accept that he was safe and sound. He was grateful it had only been a dream. Glancing at his clock, he saw it was a little after four.

He knew that he had to go see the investigator, Wang that Drake had told him about, but there was someone else he needed to see first. His old friend Phillip, who was a priest at a small church not far from his apartment. He was hardly concerned about the time of the morning as Phillip was not one who slept through the night.

He motivated himself to get up and go see Phillip. Alex had a hard time getting

out of bed. All he could think of were the events of the previous night, and what that dream might have symbolized.

As much as he tried to figure it out, the more confusing it became, which annoyed him. Not only was this whole situation plaguing his mind, but he now had two entities to also deal with—Lutancix and Jamiesonn.

First, he took a shower, then got dressed, and had a cup of coffee then set off to go see Phillip.

* * * *

As Phillip sat at the table preparing his sermon, he was suddenly distracted by a noise coming from his bedroom. At first he ignored it, thinking it was just the wind, but this sound was different than the normal creaking he would hear in the early hours of the morning, in his old cottage.

He stopped what he was doing long enough to glance over towards the bedroom, then ignoring that noise, he focused his attention back to the sermon on Romans 10.

Again a strange creaking noise emanated from the bedroom, louder this time. He stopped writing his notes about the Apostle Paul and glanced back at the bedroom again.

“Is someone there?” He called out.

No verbal answer came. Just the repeated sound of creaking.

Phillip put the pen down and stood up and turned towards the bedroom. As he stared towards the bedroom he felt his pulse quickening and his heart begin to beat faster. He was afraid. Afraid of who was in there. He glanced around

quickly, and the only thing he had close by to defend himself was a wooden cross that was hung on the wall behind him.

Phillip quietly pulled the cross down from the wall and walked as silently as he could towards the bedroom.

Again that sound of strange creaking emanated from that room.

“Hail Mary full of grace.” He whispered as he approached the doorway and peered inside the dark bedroom. At first glance he didn’t see anything out the ordinary, but there was something there.

Breathing. He could hear shallow breathing from his bedroom.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph.” He whispered as he closed his eyes tight and clutched his cross. He turned and stood in the doorway and stared towards the window.

There. In the light of the window, he could see a silhouette of someone. Phillip fumbled for the light switch on the wall.

CLICK! Nothing. The light failed to work. He switched it again. Nothing.

“Who are you?” He asked, fear evident in his tone. “Don’t you know this is a house of God!”

The intruder never spoke. Just stood there and breathed shallowly.

Phillip couldn’t see the eyes of his intruder, but he knew that it was staring right at him. He could feel those eyes glaring, penetrating him. There was something about this intruder. Something evil.

“Get out of here or I’ll call the police!” Phillip ordered as he turned to make a dash for the phone.

SCREECHING! A loud ear-piercing screech filled his cottage and before he could do anything, he was thrown against the wall with force.

Phillip lay on the floor and looked up to see a man standing before him. His eyes were dark, black and his face was pale.

“In the name of the Lord!” Was all he could shout before the intruder pointed at him and instantly Phillip was lifted in the air and thrust against the wall.

“What do you want?”

The intruder looked at him, glared, and said nothing. It was as though he was measuring up this priest.

“Soul.” The intruder finally spoke in a dark tone.

Phillip closed his eyes and began to silently pray. He didn't manage to pray for long as his intruder glided over to him and grabbed him with force by the throat.

“A man has come this hour to ask you for help.” The intruder warned, “If you help him you shall die, and no God will save you...priest.”

With that the intruder let him go and drifted back away as Phillip fell on his knees and coughed hard, struggling for breath.

“I'm a man of the cloth. I do the Lord's will.” He retorted.

The intruder snarled and glared down at him, “You shall surely die, God-boy!”

Phillip turned and fell back against the wall and watched as the intruder started to approach, then it stopped and vanished.

Phillip remained sat there for some moments, regaining his senses from what happened, then he slowly stood up and walked into the bathroom to wash his face. He didn't know what to make of what happened but the ordeal left him questioning himself if he was being put to the test by God.

As he washed his face and reflected on his intruder, he heard a car pull up outside. He went into the bedroom and flicked on the light-switch. It worked.

Phillip walked over to the window and peered outside into the dark street. Only the streetlight outside of the adjacent church could make anything visible in this part of the street, and he watched as a young man got out of a car and walked towards the church.

“Oh Lord.” He whispered, “Alex.”

* * * *

It was about five by time he arrived at the church, and it was still dark out. Alex stood before the old church and stared up at the front doors. It had been a long time since he visited this church but still the old building gave him the creeps. He wasn't sure if it was the aura of the place or just the way it looked. In either case, he felt uneasy being there.

“Alex!” He heard Phillip call from a nearby window.

Alex turned his attention to the cottage that was next to the church and saw Phillip standing in the window.

“What in the Lord's name brings you here so early?”

“Father I need to talk. I need answers.” Alex replied

Phillip knew that tone and that look. He looked at Alex for a moment then nodded, “I'll be right out.”

* * * *

Phillip left the room and went to enter the church door through the back room, but was met by his intruder. Phillip froze in the hallway and gasped in fright.

“What do you want?” He questioned

“Die.” Was the only thing the intruder said in that dark tone.

Phillip stood and stared at the intruder who remained stood in the darkness then faded back through the door. Phillip tried to remain calm. He couldn't allow this haunting to get in the way of what he was called to do. He hurried through the door and into the church and went towards the front door.

“Die.” He heard that intruder say again, this time from right behind him.

Phillip turned quickly to see the intruder's dark presence standing right in front of him. He went to scream but his voice was silenced. In an instant, the intruder lifted him off the ground and tossed him to the foot of the large wooden cross that graced the alter.

Phillip looked up to see the foot of the cross dangling above his head.

“I am the way.” It mocked as it lunged at him with a screech.

* * * *

Alex had no clue why exactly he was there. But, if someone could give him insight, he hoped that this man of the cloth would know. He hoped anyway.

Five minutes later he heard the sound of the church door being unlocked and that familiar sound of the door creaking as Phillip opened it.

“Oh boy.” Alex muttered. He was hesitant, and for good reason.

“Well, you gonna come in or are you waiting for Blessed Mary to invite ya!” Phillip said, with that thick English accent he was well known for.

Alex said nothing. He nodded and walked inside. Even for this time of the morning, the church was well lit, with a few lights on in the back and dozens of prayer candles lit on the later near the podium. Although the outside looked old

and gothic in nature, the inside always had that clean look about it. Everything was always in its place, from the stack of leaflets that were neatly stacked on the desk by the front door, to the hymn books neatly arranged in the holders in the pews.

“I must say Alex it has been some time since you have dropped by.” Phillip said as he closed the door behind them. He turned to him and continued, “Not like you at all. In fact, the last time you dropped by was – “

“I know. But Father that was a long time ago.” Alex interrupted.

“Ah, being formal I see.” Phillip said, as he cupped his hands behind his tunic and started to walk with Alex down the aisle towards the podium. “Only time you call me Father is when something is wrong, or you have done something.”

“There is something amiss Father. Something that I need your help – “

Phillip grabbed him by the shoulder and said, “Son, maybe you want to do this in confession?”

Alex shook his head.

“Sit then and tell me what’s on your mind.” Phillip said and motioned for Alex to sit on the pew.

They sat down and Alex glanced around the room. There was a scent of incense in the air, and he could hear orchestral music playing softly in the background.

Peaceful. He thought. As much as he thought that, his body spoke otherwise.

“So what’s seems to be the trouble my son.”

Alex looked at him and didn’t know where to begin. He opened his mouth to speak, but couldn’t say a word. His mind was blank.

Phillip frowned and looked concerned.

“I have no idea where to begin Father.” Alex finally spoke.

“Alex, you know that whatever you say to me is held in strict confidence.”

Alex looked away and stared at the large wooden cross that hung gracefully at the altar. “For some time now I have been going to these meetings.” He started. “The AA I take it.”

“No. There is this group that investigates the paranormal. Well, not exactly a group, but these people who investigate alleged hauntings.”

“Go on.”

“And somewhere Father, I think I may have stirred something I shouldn’t have.” Alex said his fear evident in his tone.

“Stirred what?” Phillip asked, “What did you get yourself involved in?”

Alex wasn’t thinking clearly. Maybe it was the wine from last night, or the aura of this place. In any case, his words were not coming out as he wanted them to, and he knew it. But still, he needed to get someone else’s insight into all this. “Last night,” He said, “I was visited by a demonic spirit.”

“Alex are you sure?”

Alex looked at him and said firmly, “Oh yeah. The thing destroyed half of my apartment.”

“Before you go on, you already know the standing of the church on demonic activity.”

“So I remember you saying.” Alex said, and sighed. “Sorry, I shouldn’t have bothered you with this.” He went on as he got up.

“Alex, wait.” Phillip said, “There is more isn’t there.”

Alex nodded.

“Then sit and tell me everything.”

Alex looked around and hesitated before he finally sat down and started to tell

Phillip everything about what had happened the night before. He told Phillip about the visitation from the demonic imp and from Jamiesonn. He told him about the nightmare, and he told him about the drinking. Telling him about the drinking was the hardest thing to explain. After all, he had made a vow and now that pledge was broken.

* * * *

When Alex had explained everything, Phillip looked at him in silence. He knew that everything he had heard sounded like it was derived from some horror movie, but he knew Alex a lot better to know that it was fantasy.

“You know that I am bound from getting involved in these matters Alex.” He said. “I know.” Alex said, as he stood up and shuffled past him to leave. “For what it’s worth Phillip, it was good to see you again.”

“It was good to see you Alex.” Phillip said as he stood and walked with him towards the door. “I can’t promise you anything, but I will look into a few things for you and call you if I hear anything.” He said as he opened the door.

Alex stood in the doorway and looked outside. It was now close to six, the dawn had just broken and it was raining.

“You take care of yourself Phillip.” He said without looking back at him, and he started to walk down the stairs.

* * * *

Phillip never answered. He watched Alex walk over to his car then closed and locked the door and turned and stared at the large wooden cross and smirked wickedly.

“You won nothing.” He said with hatred in his tone, and in an instant he changed his appearance to who he really was... Jamiesonn.

Jamiesonn walked over to the podium and looked at the dead body of Phillip which lay bloodied and mutilated on the floor behind the pulpit. He knelt down by the body and dipped two fingers in the pool of warm blood that had formed by Phillips head, and then licked the blood from his fingers.

“Hmmm, a good year.” He remarked, savoring the taste of the priests’ rich blood. “Truly there is life in the blood.” He stood up and again turned to the cross. “This one’s mine!” He snarled, and then vanished in the twinkling of an eye.

* * * *

Alex entered his apartment and looked at the mess from last night. From first glance it looked like he had an out of control party, but if only it was that easy. He tossed his keys on the table and went into the lounge and slumped down on the sofa. He knew that he needed to get in touch with Wang, and no sooner had he planned to call Wang then his cell phone rang.

“Alex. It’s Drake,” the voice on the other end of the phone said.

“Yeah,” Alex answered, his mind distracted by the events from the night before.

“You okay? You don’t sound yourself.”

“Huh? Oh, I’m fine,” he said. “Just dealing with a mess at the moment.”

“I hear you there,” Drake said. “I tried to call your landline before and I kept getting a busy signal so I called Jake and he gave me your cell number. Anyway, to get to the point, I spoke to Wang half an hour ago and he is flying up to Gympie. So if you want to meet the guy you best hightail it to the Smithfield Airfield, as he’ll be leaving in an hour.”

“I’ll find it. Thanks.” Alex replied.

“There’s something else I need to tell you.” Drake said, “Do you have your TV on?”

“Ah . . . no I don’t. It’s broken,” Alex said almost weirdly amused.

“That’s some shit. Anyway, to cut a long story short, there was a news report on this morning about a cult like slaying in a place called Winmont. I’ve talked to Wang about it so he can fill you in.”

“Okay sure,” Alex said then hung up. He took another look at the disaster otherwise known as his lounge room, shook his head. He really didn’t feel like going out again, as he had not long got home, and all he wanted to do was rest. But he had to leave.

He had an idea where the airfield was, as he had driven past the turnoff on occasion, and if his memory was correct—which was unlikely—he could make it there in thirty, maybe forty-five minutes if he drove fast enough.

Alex got his keys and left his apartment and got into his car and drove off.

* * * *

His instinct in finding the airfield was right. He arrived in just under forty minutes and as he pulled up, Alex spotted a Chinese man nearby that could only be Wang. He was short, clean-shaven, and had short black hair. His appearance gave the illusion that he was a high rolling executive in the business world, dressed in what seemed to be an Armani suit, polished black shoes, and designer sunglasses. But he wasn’t a high roller. But appearance was everything to a guy like Wang.

He got out of the car and called out, “Are you Wang?”

The man stopped short of boarding the Cessna and turned to him. “Who are you?”

“Drake Winters sent me.”

“Ah, yes. You must be Manning.”

Alex approached and extended his hand to him. "That I am."

"Yeah, I'm Wang, and it's about time you showed up. I was starting to think you wouldn't come," he said, shaking his hand firmly.

Alex glanced around and then decided to get right to the point. "So what's this I hear about a cult murder in Winmont?"

"Keep it down!" Wang snapped, looking around. "I don't want the whole world to know about this, okay? Let's go for a walk."

Alex looked around and seeing the mechanic nearby, he walked with Wang.

"So, what do you want to know?"

"What the hell happened down there?" Alex asked before lighting a cigarette.

Wang adjusted his tie. "Not sure on all the details, but I got a call about seven this morning from Drake, who said there had been a mass murder down there and that I should check it out."

"How many were killed?"

"About six or seven people, but that's not why you're here, Alex."

"You know about Jamiesonn?"

"Yes! If I were you, I'd stay away. That thing is bad news, period."

"So I've been told by several others," Alex said.

"Then you'll quit while you're ahead?"

Alex looked into the distance and then back at Wang. "No. Why should I?"

"Because I don't think you're ready!" Wang said, his voice stern. "I know about you from O'Hara. He tends to check out people's backgrounds when they join the society, but don't be put off, man, my past has been looked at as well."

Alex decided to change the subject. "So, what happened down south?"

"Apparently a group of people were partying in a place that was going to be a bomb shelter back in the early fifties. From what I understand, the contractors pulled out because the people who were funding the project disappeared without a trace. So, since then it's been a graveyard. The locals call it the 'Canyons,' and

nothing grows there in the Clearing. It is truly a place of death!" Wang said.

"What about the people in the cult murders?"

Wang grew silent and stared at the passing traffic on the distant road. "A group of teenagers went there last night for a party, and things got out of hand. From what Drake said, he talked to the cops down there and apparently there were remains of six people and one of the vics had his face torn off. I suspect there's more to this than what the police have gotten."

"Like what?"

"Well, Drake thinks that what happened down there last night is somehow tied to your investigation of Jamiesonn."

"Really."

"I feel something big is coming," Wang said, almost as if staring off into some distant future that would probably never happen.

"Oh yeah? Like what?"

Wang took a deep breath and said with enthusiasm, "He is among us now. The One. I tell you, when he makes himself known, everything will tremble at his ancient name."

"The Christ you mean?"

"In a way, yes."

"If you're referring to the Book of Revelation—"

"Not quite," Wang interrupted, "What I'm referring is much older than religion."

"Explain."

"From what I heard, archaeologists found a previously undiscovered tomb in one of the Mayan temples, and among the artifacts, they discovered an ancient scroll, which is believed to date back to before the writings of Moses."

"Sounds exciting," Alex said.

"Yeah it is, and get this," Wang continued with even more enthusiasm. "The scroll

is believed to give the most accurate prophecy of the destruction of the great civilizations in history. The fall of Babel, Persia, Grecian and Roman Empires were all written on these scrolls, according to experts. It is said that the scroll contains the name of the One. He will come to put an end to the most powerful daemon, which lurks in another dimension. When such a time arises, it is said that this man will possess pure power, but only if he survives the ancient Tests of the Powers from the Elders, whoever they are.”

“Sounds heavy,” Alex said.

“It gets better. The One is believed to be able to physically enter realms and dimensions far beyond our own. The downside to all this glory is, this man is killed before his mission is complete. After a period of three decades, life will be breathed into his body once again, when he will set out to conquer The Evil One. When he destroys The Evil One of Perdition, all is said to be finished. That’s all I know.”

“Finished, meaning the end of the world?” Alex wondered.

“I’m not sure.”

“So who has this scroll?” Alex asked.

Wang shook his head and replied, “That in itself is a mystery. According to other experts the scrolls were lost before it could be revealed to the masses.”

“So how do you know all this then?”

“I read a lot. And legends live on, despite the rumors,” Wang commented.

“Besides, the scroll will be found again. It was found once, so it will be found again.”

Alex shrugged. “Well whoever this One is, it sure sounds like a real shithouse of a life for him.”

Wang nodded and kept talking, but Alex’s mind was somewhere else. He stared directly in front of him, and instead of a runway, he saw a sea of blood as thick and as deep as the oceans. Smoke and death filled the air, and on both sides of

him were steep rocky cliffs.

This is the place of all those whom have died at the hands of The Evil One! A powerful voice said in Alex's mind. Your purpose is for another time. Soon all your former ways will give way to the new ways. . . . For this reason solely have I revealed this place of death unto you.

Alex looked back at the unending sea of blood. Seconds later, he snapped back to reality. He felt drained of his strength. Kneeling, he moaned softly in pain, hoping he would regain his strength, but to no avail.

"Alex, what's wrong?" Wang asked, concerned.

"I-I don't know. One moment I saw this place of blood, the next I'm like this," Alex said weakly.

Wang stepped back, his eyes filled with amazement.

Alex watched him. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You have the visions too, huh?"

"What are you talking about, Wang?"

"I see visions, too," Wang said. "Although not as graphic as that."

Alex glanced at him and his expression said it all. Wang had the look of "Welcome to the geeky-visionary club," and for a second, he could almost feel some kind of idiot group hug about to happen.

Wang didn't hug him, which relieved Alex. Instead, Wang helped him up to his feet, and they headed to the hanger. All Alex could think of, was what the outcome of his encounter with Jamiesonn would be.

The future. Such uncertainties it holds for those who don't understand the perplexity of what lays beyond that which they can merely see. Those people perish for their lack of vision, a voice whispered in Alex's mind. Alex tried to ignore that thought as, for the moment, he was focused on the cult killings. With

all the recent events in his life, everything seemed so chaotic and unclear. Perhaps in time, he could sort it all out.

They arrived back at the hanger, and Alex watched as Wang gave the plane one final inspection, before climbing into the pilot's seat. Alex stood there, staring blankly at nowhere in particular before Wang looked back at him and yelled out, "You coming?"

Alex jumped into the plane, Wang revved the engine, and the plane picked up speed. Racing down the runway, it soon left the ground and headed south.

Chapter Five

Jamiesonn's plans had not gone as he had anticipated. He fully expected Alex to show up rather than hightail it to some remote town in the middle of nowhere.

What he got though was two teens looking for a secluded place to have sex turned up instead. He knew why they were there. His sanctuary was to be defiled by their raging hormones. But for now, he lurked in the shadows and watched them, waiting for the opportune time to strike.

The young couples were no older than seventeen. While Cathy had long flowing red hair and big supple breasts, her boyfriend, Thomas, was average built and average looking. He was hardly the popular teen in school, but Cathy was his first girlfriend, which he was thankful for.

Thomas had waited for this moment for a long time. Today, finally, he would experience sex for the first time. In his anticipation he hoped that he wouldn't cum so fast.

The young couple found a room that had little light and they began to kiss and undress one another. Thomas' manhood ached as Cathy grabbed it in her soft hand. He moaned with pleasure. He had imagined how she would feel. The scent of her body drove him wild.

He kissed her neck and started to kiss down to her breasts as she gently stroked his hard cock.

Thomas positioned himself on top on her and prepared to slide his aching manhood inside her waiting vagina.

Finally. This is it. He thought. He was trembling in anticipation. All of his adolescent years had been building to this point. To this moment. All those years of jacking off to pretty girls in lingerie catalogues and fantasizing how good it felt was finally about to happen. Today, now, he would become a man. He looked into her eyes and fumbled to enter her, but he couldn't. He was nervous, awkward. Cathy reached down and held his throbbing cock. The tip was oozing pre-cum and she was sure that he would not last long.

"Go slow." She whispered softly in his ear as she guided him to her wet entrance

Jamiesonn wasn't going to let them get away with defiling his sanctuary. This sight of their wanton passion infuriated him. But, he bided his time, waiting for the right moment to destroy their momentary pleasure.

He could remember a time when he once had that oneness with a woman. He vaguely remembered the feeling of holding a woman in his arms, and the feeling of being one with someone. But, those things were gone. Faded, like as his mortality ended, so did his compassion. With that faded memory well behind him, he opened his eyes and glared at them. Rage coursed through him and he loathed this abomination in his kingdom!

Before Thomas had the chance to enter Cathy, an invisible force pulled him off her and threw him against the wall. Cathy sat upright and watched in terror as imprints of fists began to beat Thomas repeatedly in the stomach, chest and face.

Thomas begged for the being to stop, but it didn't. It continued its violent attack. Cathy tried to flee, but she couldn't. Before she had a chance to even stand she

was sent flying back against the opposite wall and bound by an unseen power and forced to watch the brutal attack.

“Please stop! Stop!” Cathy cried and pleaded over and over.

Jamiesonn took no heed to her pleas. He ignored her and continued to beat Thomas violently, punching him hard in the stomach and in the face.

Cathy cried and watched helplessly as the blows become more brutal.

Thomas was thrown effortlessly against the far wall, and then thrown face first into the other wall. The sound of bones breaking echoed in the room, and blood could be seen spurting from his mouth.

Jamiesonn turned Thomas around and threw his back against the wall.

SNAP!

Thomas’s ribs were broken. But Jamiesonn didn’t stop. He continued his horrific attack, punching Thomas repeatedly in the face. With one swift blow, Thomas’ jaw was smashed and his jawbone was exposed through his flesh.

Jamiesonn paused for just a second to look at his work, and seeing the exposed bone, he grabbed it and with a one quick jerk he ripped Thomas’ broken jaw off his face.

Blood! Blood spurted and flowed everywhere. Jamiesonn stopped for a moment and looked back at Cathy who was crying frantically, terrified.

Jamiesonn smirked then looked back at Thomas.

“What do you want” Cathy managed to choke out

Jamiesonn released Thomas who slumped on the floor, bloodied, beaten and mutilated. He was alive, barely

“It seems that no one will heed my warnings,” Jamiesonn finally said as he manifested in front of her.

“Who are you?” She managed to squeeze out through her tears.

“The one who will feast on your soul,” Jamiesonn replied.

Jamiesonn sneered as he stood in front of her and looked at her naked body. He relished the thought in the pleasure he would take in raping and torturing her soul.

Movement!

He could hear Thomas move ever so slightly from behind him, and he knew exactly what this boy was attempting to do.

His sneer became a gloating laugh. “Such gallantry!” he snarled and looked back at him. In an instant Thomas was slammed hard against the wall and hung high up on the wall, bound by Jamiesonn’s power.

Jamiesonn knew his thoughts. He knew both of their thoughts. He could see into the depths of their mind without effort, and all of their deepest secrets were revealed in a second. Jamiesonn did this to all his victims. People’s secrets, their private lives, their secret shames... Nothing was kept a secret from this dark man.

Jamiesonn glanced at the young man then looked at Cathy. His lust for her started to ache, but it wasn’t her he wanted, but her blood. Through her fear and sweat, he could smell her young fresh blood. Hers was rich and appetizing. Her blood could satisfy his hunger for flesh.

“Please let me go.” She begged, whimpering.

Jamiesonn crouched in front of her and stared at her in silence. He was peering

into her soul, seeing her thoughts, her secrets. He saw how much of a true slut she was. He saw much she enjoyed being fucked by the half a dozen guys at the gangbang party she went to last week along with her sister. She saw how much she loved sex and how strong her drive for it was.

“Such the nymph.” He scoffed as he rose to his feet and looked back at Thomas through the corner of his eye. “Not to worry though bitch. While you were getting it all ways from your posse, Tommy-boy was jacking off to your slutty sis.”

Cathy could say nothing. She was afraid to do anything, let alone say anything. She watched as Jamiesonn grabbed Thomas by the neck and dragged him across the floor.

In an instant, a section of the floor below him disappeared and all that could be seen was a dark hole, which seemed to have no end. But heat, there was fervent heat emanating from that vast darkness, and crying. The sounds of tortured souls rang clear and loud.

Cathy screamed in terror.

Jamiesonn held his young victim above the dark vortex and gave him a long hard look. “Tonight, young one, you shall know the true meaning of pain as your flesh is torn apart by my will. Tonight, you will know what suffering really is.”

With that, Jamiesonn released his grip and dropped Thomas into the dark vortex. Thomas screamed, but the sound of his terror was quickly drowned out by the wailing of the multitude of other tortured souls in that realm.

“Did you hear that?” Jamiesonn said as he turned and faced her.

“You’re a bastard!” she choked out between sobs.

“Hmmm. Virgin blood. So fresh.” He quipped as he licked Thomas’ blood from his fingers. He looked over at Cathy and shook his head in disgust. “Cathy. Sweet,

sweet, Cathy, I had to do that. It was for our own good.”

“What do you mean?” She sobbed.

Jamiesonn walked toward her, the pit closing behind him. “Come to me.” At once, the power that bound her lifted, but she was hesitant to move. “Come now, don’t be shy,” he said in a soft voice, his hand reaching out for hers.

Raised to her feet, and not by her own will, she moved toward him.

“What do you intend to do with me?”

“I want to fuck you like the slut you are,” Jamiesonn said.

Her face blanked. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Jamiesonn again brought up more secrets from her past, further humiliating her. After ridiculing her, he grinned. “I’ve wasted enough time, so why don’t you just go ahead and bend over?”

“No, please don’t! You can’t,” she begged, tears glistening on her cheeks.

“How are you going to stop me? Remember, I’m just a spirit, a daemon. No one can see me unless I want them to. What would you tell the authorities? That a ghost raped you? They will just laugh in your face. So, on the ground you go!”

With his power, he forced her to lie on her back and her legs spread. Her entire body shook with fear, and she cried, wanting this terrible nightmare to be over. But her nightmare was to only begin.

Jamiesonn stood over her, and he could have raped her if that had been his intention, but it wasn’t. She would suffer her lot in his realm.

“You love sex so much. That will be your lot in the next life.” He scoffed.

Rumbling! There was rumbling from beneath her and she feared what it was.

Immediately that dark vortex opened beneath her and she fell into the vast darkness of that pit, screaming in terror. Her fate was sealed and she was doomed to be brutally raped by Jamiesonn's hellhounds for eternity.

"A good time was had by all," he mused to himself. Jamiesonn was satisfied with his latest murders. He would have been ecstatic had Alex shown up. That would have made his day.

As powerful as he was, Jamiesonn was feeling strangely anxious about confronting Alex. He sensed that both Drake and Alex posed a threat to his plans and for that reason he wanted them both dead, but he could do nothing until the Hour of Reckoning. He knew he had to bide his time until they came to him. But still, although he had to wait for them, it still didn't stop him from messing with their minds in the meantime. He sensed a problem also arising with Lutancix and his master, Tanzac. Lutancix had been sent to pave the way for his master, and that posed a serious threat to Jamiesonn.

Jamiesonn knew that Lutancix lusted for the event to take place. It would mean his master's evil reign could start once again, as it had when he ruled the ancient world for some time after he was cast from heaven.

Jamiesonn was determined not to let anyone stand in his way of returning to this world. Not even the One.

In an instant Jamiesonn vanished and returned to his realm to watch the continued suffering of the thousands of souls who were incarcerated in his world.

* * * *

For many years, Usher had watched the spiritual world and could see something catastrophic approaching. He knew that a powerful force was preparing to enter this world. He professed being scared of nothing, but in this case, he did have some fears and concerns. Usher knew that soon the One would arise, and he felt that it was someone he already knew. But as gifted as he was, even he had no idea who the One would be.

Usher arrived back at Brisbane Airport in the afternoon, and Drake was there to greet him. "So what happened? Did you find out what the problem was?"

"Nothing," Usher replied, as they walked out of the airport. "I'm afraid my search was nothing more than a waste of time" Drake threw back his head and laughed, which annoyed Usher. "What's so funny?"

"You! You're the super-spiritual guy who got his wires crossed."

Usher felt like punching Drake in the face, but after a minute or so, he found the humor in it. He patted his friend on the back while he continued to laugh then they got in their rental car and drove off.

Drake drove toward the city. "Usher, I've been feeling so strongly about meeting up with Jamiesonn again, and I don't like it."

"That's not good, and what makes it worse, Jamiesonn is now in his full element, and he's not alone."

Drake pulled the car over to the side of the road and stopped the car. He turned to Usher, a look of total shock on his face. "What do you mean he's not alone?"

"Keep driving."

"No, you need to tell me what you know," Drake said adamantly.

Usher took a deep breath before answering. "There is another force at work which has made its presence known, and this force has come to make a path for

another entity, one that I sense is just as powerful as Jamiesonn.”

“Tell me you’re joking.”

“I only wish I were, my friend, but it doesn’t stop there,” Usher replied.

“What else can there be? We have Jamiesonn in one corner, another entity in the opposite corner. What more could there be?”

“He is among us.” Usher said.

“He who?”

“The One,” Usher replied.

“The One is here? Where? Who is he?”

“I don’t know who he is. But I sense he is here with us. Drake, it is quite possible we both know who he is and it is possible that whoever he is, he may not even know he is the One. But in any case, we should be preparing ourselves for his coming.”

“This is a lot bigger than I anticipated, and I think I see why Jamiesonn is lashing out at everyone who even thinks about going near his domain,” Drake said. “If you sense that the One is here, alive on his planet now, then you can bet that Jamiesonn senses this also, and to stop anything from interfering with his plans he is attacking everyone who may be seen as a threat to him.”

“Good theory and that may well be correct.” Usher concurred. “But getting back to other things . . .”

“Yes, what were you able to find out down in Winmont?” Drake said, as he started the car and drove off.

Usher told Drake of the cult killings and also warned that the victims would rise again. He had seen Lutancix in his visions many times and knew that the only reason this entity was here, was to make sure its master would come forth. He shared this with Drake.

“Who’s this master?” Drake asked.

“An entity of pure evil, more powerful than you could ever imagine.”

Drake swallowed hard. "But why now?"

"I told you, the One has come. His job is to destroy that which wants to destroy, that which wants to tear apart the very essence of humanity. Soon, the people who have been killed by this entity shall rise and follow him. That is, if the One fails."

"We must make sure the One doesn't fail then!"

Usher shook his head. "Yes, but at the Hour of Reckoning, we are forbidden to interfere."

"Why?"

"It is said in ancient prophecy that in the Hour of Reckoning, the One will undergo such trials that no mortal would face, less they be destroyed for their folly. I believe that Jamiesonn is a major part of this forthcoming."

"I know. As much as I hate this situation, I must go back and face him. I was ill-equipped to face the horrors he unleashed last time. I intended to stay away from him. But things are different now."

Drake and Usher discussed the fact that Drake had given his report to Alex. Now, based on Usher's latest vision, they knew that Alex had gone south with Wang to investigate this entity. They realized that he would be in trouble and need their help. Without it, he might pay with his life.

"We must join him. You do know this entity's location?" Drake asked.

Usher nodded. "Naturally."

Drake went into his hotel room, gathered some things, and then they drove to the airport. Usher closed his eyes, determined to sleep the day away, but sleep eluded him as within no time they arrived at the airport.

"Well, I hope you are ready for another flight."

Usher was frustrated at the prospect of getting on another plane. He hated flying at the best of times, and now after having been on a long flight and dealing with customs officials, he now faced the unpleasant prospect of getting on another damn flight. Uncomfortable seats, screaming kids, and airline food was not his idea of a swell time.

The prospect of going through this forthcoming apocalypse hardly filled him with excitement. Too much had happened in the last month and the stress of his hectic life was becoming too overwhelming for him to deal with. Whenever he was in his hometown, there were times when every man and his dog seemed to experience “supernatural disturbances,” which, in most circumstances, were nothing more than media-induced paranoia, and they would call on him to solve their problem. Then there were the times when tourists would ask him idiotic questions about tribal rituals. Damn, how he loathed idiot tourists.

He realized that life had many setbacks but for him it seemed to be a never-ending ordeal. On top of the stress, he had to try and interpret the frequent visions he had. In one of his visions, an unfamiliar voice had told him, “Some will depart from the path, so that you may go forth unhindered.” Until now, he hadn’t understood what that meant. But he soon realized that what that voice meant was that some people would have to leave him, so that he could help the One.

They boarded the plane for Melbourne just after five that evening. Usher got comfortable in the chair and closed his eyes.

Drake grabbed a book out of his bag. It was the one he had helped Jake O’Hara write not so long ago. Drake had read it at least a dozen times and he found it just as intriguing now as when he worked on it. This book was about the most

valuable possession he had, mainly because it recounted his first experience with the supernatural.

“Reminiscing about the past again, old friend?” Usher said, noticing Drake held the book in both hands tightly.

Drake turned his attention from outside the window and replied, “Um, oh yeah. Was just about to.”

“That was your first experience as I remember.”

“Yeah it was . . . eleven years ago in fact,” Drake said, “but that was a different time for us both. The days of simple disturbances seem to be long gone, if you’ve noticed.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed.” Usher said with his attention on the stewardess pushing the drink trolley down the aisle. “I have seen the turbulence become more severe over the years.”

“Drink, sirs?” the stewardess asked them.

Drake smiled at her and ordered whiskey for them both. After the stewardess served them their whiskeys, he went on, “How easy it was back in the day when the disturbances were centralized to a few rooms of a house. So nice and simple compared to now.”

“I know what you mean,” Usher answered.

“Even back then at that old Victorian house it took so much out of me.”

“Yeah, but remember back then you were a lot younger and more stupid,” Usher jested.

Drake looked at him and could only say “Hmm.” He drank his whiskey in one go and then said, “Be that as it may, even the last encounter with our latest friend took more out of me than I could handle, and realistically I don’t think I can go through with it again. You may not have noticed but I’m not getting any younger

here, and I am getting too old to go around chasing phantoms in the night.”

“You and me both, old friend.” Usher said, “I agree with you completely. We are both getting too old for this, and I feel that I need to take time away for myself.”

“I agree there. After this, I am headed to Miami Beach and take a long vacation. Booze and broads for me. Spring break time.” Drake smiled. “You can bet there’ll be lotsa young and dumb college girls.”

Usher shook his head. “I bet your wife will have other ideas about that.”

“Yeah, you’re right there,” Drake said, staring out the window. “Back to reality for me, I guess, and I’ll take that job at her magazine company she’s been hounding me for years to do.” He sighed heavily and dreaded that thought. It was bad enough when he had to return home to face her, but for reasons he couldn’t comprehend he stayed married to her. Maybe it was the security he had or maybe it was her money that financed his adventures.

“Better get some sleep,” Usher said, “We have a lot of work to do.”

Drake agreed and put his book back in his bag and closed his eyes. Soon they both fell asleep.

* * * *

While Usher slept peacefully, Drake did anything but. He was plagued by the dreams of his past. In particular, his dream was haunted by his first encounter.

In his dream, he sat in the den, reading a magazine, when suddenly there was a loud rumbling throughout the house. He leaned forward and looked around slowly. At first, he thought it might have been the pipes, but that wasn’t the source of the noise. He stood, walked silently out of the room into the corridor, and looked down the hall. He saw nothing out of the ordinary, but there was a definite cold chill in the hallway. He walked over to the bottom of the stairs and

looked up toward the first floor. Nothing. Silently, he went back into the room and went over to the monitors. There was no sign of any supernatural activity on the monitors, but there was something there. He had a feeling that he was being watched. He shrugged off the feeling and went to turn around . . . then he saw it.

A dark mist filled the doorway, making any way of escape impossible.

He panicked and stood, frozen in fear as the mist hovered for a moment. Then, as though provoked, it shrieked and rushed toward him.

He woke up at that point, startled. He always woke up at that point in the dream.

“Damn,” he muttered as he closed his eyes and tried to go back to sleep

Chapter Six

Alex and Wang arrived on the murder scene. The bodies had long since been removed, and all that remained was blood everywhere. Alex couldn't help thinking that Wang was right. This truly was a place of death. Standing in the center of the clearing, he scanned the area and saw that the trees and grass came up to the edge, but no further. It was a barren, desolate patch of earth.

Alex introduced himself and Wang to the two officers on the scene, Shaun Wilcox and Roy Arnetto, as private investigators. Not being the type to check their credentials, Shaun gave them a briefing about what they found, then after telling the investigators their version of what they think happened, the officers stood well back and watched as the investigators went to work. It did not take long for Wang to spot the pentagram marked in the dirt. Upon closer examination, he backed away quickly, staring at Alex.

"What's up?" Alex asked.

Wang looked at him, his eyes full of fear, and could not answer.

"What is it?" he asked again.

Wang pointed to the center of the pentagram, where strange symbols had been etched. Alex ignored the symbols and looked at what had Wang so scared. The word "Die" was etched next to the symbols. He glanced at Wang and then back at the pentagon. Walking over to the words, he shuffled them away with his foot.

"Don't get jittery Wang. This is obviously someone's idea of a sick joke," Alex said, ignoring what he had seen. He couldn't quite explain it, but somehow he

knew that those words were not meant for them but for the others who had already suffered their fate.

He stared at the trees surrounding the clearing. Then, as if called by an unheard voice, he focused his total attention toward the distant mountains. An extreme power source emanated from them, penetrating his being.

Alex could feel this strange power fill every part of him. It was as though spiritual knowledge and wisdom had filled his senses, and in those moments, he felt his body surge with power. His focus was broken somewhat suddenly when he heard the footsteps of the two cops approaching, and he turned to face them. Alex could see the Deception clouded their eyes.

“Found anything?” Detective Wilcox asked.

“Nothing you two haven’t already seen,” Alex answered. “So, what exactly happened here?”

Both cops were silent as they exchanged glances.

“To tell you the truth, we’re not real sure,” Wilcox replied.

“You must have some idea of what happened. It’s not hard to see that it has something to do with the occult,” Alex snarled.

Wilcox sighed, glanced at his partner, and then looked back at Alex. “This morning, we got a phone call from a farmer who lives near here. He told us that the killings had started again.”

“This has happened before?” Alex asked.

Wilcox was silent. The corner of his mouth twitched. He knew something—that was clear—but for some reason, he didn’t want to disclose it. Well, whether he liked it or not, Alex was not going to be put off. “What killings?” he asked.

Arnetto told Wilcox it was time these investigators knew the truth. Arnetto looked at Wilcox, pleading with his eyes, then sighed, and turned to face Alex. "Back in the fifties, there was an . . . incident similar to this one. But it . . . well, from what I heard, a young man came into town. Ted, as he was known, was a high priest of some pagan religion. He came here to recruit young people into his sect. It didn't take long to recruit many teenagers. The kids never knew what they were dabbling in until the night of the initiation."

"What happened?" Wang asked.

"Human sacrifice," Arnetto said, almost in a whisper.

Wang gasped. "How many were killed?"

"Maybe thirty, but nobody knows for sure. It was a blood bath, and it's believed Ted conjured the most evil and hideous daemon one could imagine. Before that night ended, all the kids were viciously murdered. He set some on fire, tore the skin from their bodies. Others were said to have had their flesh devoured by him and the daemon."

Alex looked at Arnetto, recounting the story had made him visibly ill. "What happened to the Cultist?"

"Nobody knows for sure. After that night, he vanished. Some believe he fled the country, others think he committed suicide, and others think he is still alive."

"Ted committing suicide is highly unlikely," Alex said.

"Why's suicide unlikely?" Wang asked.

"This Satanist wouldn't take his own life after being responsible for all those murders. It would defeat his purpose," Alex answered.

"Then what do you think happened to him?" Wang questioned him.

"Probably skipped town to avoid prosecution. He might have gone into the outback to lay low and wait to start the whole process again. Only this time, he would be careful, disposing of the bodies."

"Let's forget about Ted running off to some ghost town and concentrate on what happened last night," Wang said.

Alex nodded. "You're right."

Wilcox rejoined them. "When we got here, we found the charred remains of five dead bodies in a bonfire. From the initial autopsy, it was apparent three of them were shot at point-blank range with a forty-five. The others, we're not sure. They were too badly mutilated. There was another body, and he had his skin torn off, literally. I've seen many murders in my time, but nothing like this. Normally, I'm not one to believe in cult activities, but after what I saw, I'm not sure what to believe anymore."

Alex tried to keep eye contact with him, but Wilcox kept dropping his gaze.

"Have you been able to identify any of the vics?" Wang asked.

Wilcox shrugged. "One, Jeffrey Dunn, the victim who had his skin torn off."

Suddenly, a chilly breeze blew through the clearing, and darkness started to fill the sky. Only Alex noticed this. He could feel something here, its presence made more evident with every passing moment. A sensation came over his body, unlike any other he had experienced. He became unusually cold, and he began to shiver. Then, just as fast, he felt like he was on fire. He spun around and looked behind him. Something or someone was there. He couldn't see whatever or whomever it was, but he could definitely feel the presence!

In an instant, everything around him changed.

Alex stood in the midst of a vast mist filled valley surrounded by tombstones. His heart pounded, and sweat trickled down his forehead. He felt an energy in the air, but it was not positive. This energy was evil, and his instincts told him he needed to get away. Alex started to walk at a quick pace, which turned into a full out sprint. His mind was filled with the moans and screams from the dead around him. As he ran, violent tremors rocked the ground, and he was thrown to the

grass by an unseen force. He got to his knees quickly and gazed around. Suddenly, his mind grew silent, and for a brief moment, all he heard was his heartbeat. He knew he should go, but he also knew he couldn't.

Everything was strangely silent.

There was a torch flickering in the distance and Alex stared at it, transfixed. The sound of the earth shifting filled his ears. He ignored it. Suddenly, the torch went out, and the stench of rotting flesh assaulted his senses. His eyes burned. He gagged and shook his head in a vain attempt at purging the foul odor from his nose. Then he saw them, the corpses that were rising behind him. They climbed from their earthly confinement and turned their glares toward him. He saw them approaching and for a moment he was paralyzed with fear. He tried to run, but couldn't. Alex shook his head again. "This can't be . . ."

"Real!" a powerful voice spoke from behind him. Alex tried to turn around, but he still couldn't move. A dwarflike daemon walked around and stood before him.

Alex knew who this entity was, where he came from, and why he was here.

Lutancix stared at Alex. "I have waited a very long time for this moment."

Alex puffed out his chest and summoned all the courage he could. "Is that so?"

"You know it! Even as you know who my master is, you know you must die."

"We all die sometime, right?"

Lutancix snarled, glanced at his army of darkness and then back at Alex. "You think you can defeat my master's army?"

"Do you think that I will lie down and die, so that can destroy humanity?" Alex asked, sarcasm in voice. "If so, you are a bigger fool than I thought."

Lutancix said nothing.

Alex muttered, speaking in words not even Lutancix knew, and within seconds the power which bound him, loosened. "If you want me, Lutancix, come and get me."

Lutancix didn't need much prompting. "Kill him!"

The corpses started to stalk toward Alex, but he remained steadfast and continued to glare at Lutancix. "No, Lutancix, you do your own work. That is, if you are able," Alex said, mocking the dwarf.

Instead of attacking himself, Lutancix stepped back and watched as his immortal army closed in on Alex.

Disgusted, Alex looked at the creature, then turned and ran. Then the realization of his situation came to him. There was no place to run. He stopped, and a deep ravine appeared before him. Looking over the cliff, he saw nothing to break his fall but rocks and boulders. Alex began to swear and then turned around to see the oncoming army. He had only two choices: go down fighting, like a hero, or jump to his death, like a coward. Either way, he was dead.

Taking another glance into the ravine, he looked back at the foul-smelling corpses and made his decision. He would jump. It seemed the cowardly thing to do, but it's what he had to do.

So, he did. He jumped as hard as he could and fell rapidly into the ravine. He could feel the wind rush past his body as he tumbled faster and faster down towards the rocky bottom below.

Death was inevitable.

* * * *

Alex was brought back to reality by a shooting pain in his chest. He opened his eyes to see Wang kneeling over him. Alex looked around wildly.

"You okay, man? You're as white as a sheet!"

Alex shook his head and rubbed his eyes. He was still dazed, and barely heard Wang speaking. His mind still hadn't registered what was going on.

"Where are you? Where's your mind been?" Wang asked, with concern in his voice.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Mate, you've been standing talking in tongues, you damn space cadet," Wang said. "You feeling okay?"

Alex looked away. He was unwilling to share what he'd glimpsed in this other realm, mainly because he didn't know how to describe what he had seen.

"Alex?" Wang said, stepping over to him and looking him in the face. "What's going on?"

Alex shook his head. "Nothing." He glanced around then looked past Wang and went on. "Let's just continue on with what we're doing here."

Wang shrugged his shoulders and commented under his breathe, "Fair enough, moron."

Alex sensed Wang's thoughts, and even though it angered him, he didn't say anything.

"Well, while you were off daydreaming, I found out more about our case here. It's possible there may be a survivor of last night's massacre. So, come on, where have you been?" Wang's voice seem to trail off.

This latest vision obviously had some effect on him as now he could sense the thoughts of those around him. He was terrified of what was happening to him. Even if he didn't want to, he sensed what these people thought. He closed his eyes and tried to shut out the voices that plagued his mind, but he couldn't. He opened his eyes and looked toward Wang. He could clearly detect contempt from Wang, which he didn't like. Alex was going through a psychological, as well as a physical change. That power filled his mind and soul, and there was nothing he could do about it. Oh, how he would love to run and hide somewhere, but he

couldn't.

"You two okay?" Arnetto called out.

"We're fine here, thanks," Wang answered, and then said to Alex. "Look, sort your shit out, man. We have a job to do here. If you are going to stand around wasting time, then you should just leave."

Alex didn't speak. He only stared at Wang and tried to look calm, even though inside him a battle raged violently to shut out the thoughts bombarding his mind.

Arnetto walked to the car with Wilcox then turned. "You two coming?"

"Yes," Wang said as he pushed past Alex. "Freaking psycho". Alex heard Wang think.

I gotta get out of this fucking nightmare. Was the only logical thought that came to Alex's mind.

He watched as the officers and Wang got in the car.

Arnetto leaned out the passenger side window. "Hey, come on, junior! Let's go!"

Alex stared for a moment, not saying a word.

Great Caesar's ghost, why the hell is he just standing there? Alex sensed Arnetto thought, and at the same time he heard Wilcox think, *Darn loony. What the hell is that boy doing?*

Wang looked at Alex and yelled, "Hey! Let's go already!" But at the same time Wang thought, *Why the fuck Drake recommended this idiot I don't know. Look at him. He's standing there like a drugged up retard!*

Alex didn't like what they were thinking at all. He closed his eyes firmly, then opened them again and muttered under his breath, "Okay, here we go."

He had to wonder why he had been plagued with this ability, to be able to sense the thoughts of everyone around him. He sure as hell didn't ask for this, and he sure didn't want it.

* * * *

Alex got into the car and they started back to town, not knowing Lutancix was observing them. He watched the car disappear into the night and went and stood in the center of the pentagram. He looked toward the spot where Alex had been standing, and he cringed. There were remnants of supernatural power there and immediately he began to suspect that the One has finally come.

He stood there for sometime before returning to the spirit realm, where he would tell his master, Tanzac, of what he had witnessed.

Chapter Seven

The squad car pulled up outside the morgue. Wang and Alex were escorted inside by the detectives. As soon as they entered, they were met with the sickening stench of death. Not even the gel they put under their noses could mask it. The rotten stench filled the room. However, it wasn't coming from the bodies they had come to look at. No, this putrid odor emanated from the other bodies that were there. The smell was thick, and for a few moments, they stood in the hall while Wilcox went to see if he could figure out why it was so intense.

Although Alex felt overcome by the smell, and still bombarded by the thoughts of those around him, he did notice how fidgety Arnetto had become all of a sudden. Alex watched him carefully, taking note of his trembling nervousness as he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his pale, clammy face. Alex looked at Wang, but saw no sign of unease. Wang may have gotten used to this during previous investigations. Alex looked at Arnetto again, and noticed his left leg was trembling. Obviously a way of releasing that nervous energy, Alex wanted to think to himself but he couldn't. Now, thoughts—the thoughts of these two with him—were a jumbled mess in his own mind.

He hated being here, and again closed his eyes and tried to drown out those thoughts with something, anything, a song maybe.

Shit. He did manage to think. I would give anything for this to end.

Moments later, just as suddenly as those thoughts started, his mind was filled

with silence. He could only hear one voice in his head, and it was his own. He looked around and couldn't help but smile and sigh with relief.

"You okay there?" Wang asked him.

He smiled at him and replied, "Sure."

When Wilcox returned, he had a puzzled look on his face.

"Find out why the stench is so thick?" Arnetto asked. His tone betrayed just how uneasy he was.

"No. But, I think either old man Winston shut everything down last night, or some kids broke in," he replied. "Speaking of Winston, I haven't seen him around today."

"He may be at the bar," Arnetto said.

Wilcox went to call Winston while Arnetto showed Alex and Wang the bodies.

At that moment, Alex's mind filled again with that overwhelming surge of power. He also felt that strange calling. He glanced down the hall, half expecting to see something but didn't. Turning back to the others, he glanced at them briefly, then walked past them and into the death filled room. Wang followed, but Arnetto was a little more hesitant.

The three of them stood in silence. None of them wanted to be the first to look at the bodies. Alex knew how Arnetto felt about this situation, but Wang's change in appearance surprised him. He had grown pale, had broken out in a sweat, and looked as though he might vomit at any moment.

Alex waited for either of them to pass out. Arnetto came back to his senses and shook off that uneasy feeling he had, then opened the vault that held one of the bodies. Alex pulled the sheet back from the exam table and looked at what was left of this man.

"This is one of the vics," Arnetto told them. "As you can see the body is so mutilated that the only way we could identify the vic was to run a DNA test from the blood samples we were fortunate enough to get." He paused and took a deep breath.

"Fortunate enough to get?" Wang asked.

Arnetto glanced at the two men then back at the body, "The vic may be covered in blood but most of it was not his own. We ran a few tests at the city lab and found traces of other DNA that was clearly not human. Quite frankly, we are unsure what the DNA came from. The guys at the lab have never seen anything like this before." He paused then went on, "Off the record, we suspect this was more than a ritual slaying. There was some other evidence in one of the cars we had towed back to town."

"Why do you think it was a ritual?" Wang asked.

"Just a hunch. If you ask me, revenge was the motive, but I'll be damned if I know who did it."

"Do you think there were any other motives?" Wang asked.

"None that we know of. The only thing I can think of is that Jeffrey here pissed off the wrong person and that person waited until now to kill him and the others."

"Do you know of anyone that had it in for him?" Alex asked.

Arnetto shook his head. "Nope. But then again, there weren't many people in this town that he didn't piss off at one time or another."

"Why do you say that?" Wang said.

"Put it this way, Jeff wasn't exactly a role model. He was often in trouble in one way or another. About a year or so ago, he was arrested up in Ballarat for possession of coke."

Wang studied Jeff's remains. "Sounds like the story is unfolding."

A minute later, he asked if he could examine the evidence they found in the car.

Arnetto nodded and said it would be all right. Alex's attention was drawn to him.

Alex sensed that Jeff's past had nothing to do with these murders.

"How much do you know about ritual sacrifice, Detective?" Alex asked.

"Only what I've seen on television and videos," he said, but it was an obvious lie.

Alex nodded. "I see. So, you're sure you don't know anything else? I get the feeling you may have spent some time in a cult, am I right?"

Arnetto's nostrils flared, but he didn't immediately deny it. That was all Alex needed.

Alex stepped toward Arnetto and asked, "You spent time in a cult yourself. So what do you know about this?"

Arnetto looked away and stood by his word, and divulged nothing. It was evident that Alex intimidated him.

Alex felt compelled to find out the truth. He had to learn more, he knew it would be helpful to this investigation.

Alex's mind was troubled. His senses told him Arnetto was involved with the cult, but his conscience had doubts. Alex found himself wrestling with those burdening thoughts. He shook his head, let out a frustrated sigh, and turned away from Arnetto.

Wang never had the opportunity to examine what the cops had found in Jeff's car. His only interest now was the way his partner was reacting to this situation.

"What's your problem?"

"Never mind! I'll deal with it, alone," Alex said.

"Fine, but don't let it interfere with our investigation."

"I won't," Alex said, but he knew his tone was not reassuring.

Wang probed and examined the body at some length, taking detailed notes on everything he found. Stepping back from the table, he had a look of steely

determination. "Where are the others?"

"Over here."

Arnetto went into another room, and Alex and Wang followed. The remains of the others were on separate tables. Wang looked at the bodies one at a time and examined one victim more closely, noticing the bullet hole in the middle of the victim's skull.

Wilcox walked in. "Found anything that will help?"

Alex turned to him. "Perhaps."

"What we have here is some kind of ritual homicide," Wang said.

"We already figured that part out. Tell us something we don't know," Wilcox sneered.

Wang stepped forward. "I found trace residue of gunpowder on Jeffrey's right hand, which would place him as the murderer. But, as to who killed him, I don't know. I have never seen wounds of this nature before." He paused and took a deep breath. "From my preliminary examination I can only surmise that whoever did this had knowledge of ritual sacrifices, and if that's true, then this is not the last we are going to see of these kinds of killings. Our killer is out there and more than likely he or she will strike again."

"What makes you think it was a ritual slaying?" Arnetto asked.

"Back in college I studied pre-Mesopotamian rituals, and these scars on the vics ribs are relatively close to what has been described in ancient texts."

"So this is a religious thing?" Arnetto asked

"Maybe," Alex said

"If you are trying to intimidate us with some religious message, we're not buying," Arnetto said.

"You can choose to listen or not. I'm telling you my theory," Wang said.

"For years, there have been many who believe that there will come a time when certain forces shall arise to bring an end to this world, and now it looks like this

town could be the start of things to come.”

Arnetto gave a derisive huff. “Somehow, I find this very hard to believe. Not to discredit your reputation, but I don’t think that these slayings have shit to do with the end of the world.”

As Wang stood there and explained his theories of ancient rituals to Roy, a series of visions, which exposed the truth about Roy, flashed in Alex’s mind. Alex looked at Roy.

“Roy, I get the feeling that you’re not telling us everything you know about this cult.”

“We told you everything we know, sunshine.”

“Really?” Alex said, “Then I guess that the name Joel doesn’t mean anything to you.”

Roy stared at him for a second then looked away. “You have no idea...”

“No,” Alex interrupted. “Your father, Joel, was known as Ted, wasn’t he?”

Arnetto didn’t answer. He was surprised that Alex knew who his father was.

If he knows my father, maybe he knows more. Alex sensed Roy think

Roy started to feel worried, but he didn’t show it. He wasn’t about to let his guard down.

“Boy, you’re speaking shit, and if you keep it up, you’ll be spending the rest of the night in jail!”

Alex looked at the other two men then back at Roy. He knew he was right. His vision showed him the truth of this. He stood there, looked Roy square in the eye and said with boldness, “I know all about your father, Roy. How he used to mistreat you and your mother. How he told you about his Bad Room.”

“Alex, what the hell are you doing?” Wang piped up finally.

“Boy, you have no idea what you’re talking about,” Wilcox added.

Roy was clearly nervous, trembling. Without a second thought, he whipped out his gun and pointed it at Alex. “Okay that is enough!”

Keeping a sharp eye on him, Alex stepped back a pace and then stood still.

“That’s right. Joel was my father,” Roy confessed. His voice grew deeper as he continued. “When I was young, I found a secret room in the house, which had keepsakes from each of the vics he murdered.”

“Roy?” Wilcox whispered. He walked toward his partner. “What the hell is going on?”

But it was too late. Alex could sense an unknown force had already possessed Roy. He gestured to Wang, and they backed up toward the wall.

Roy pushed his partner to the floor. “It’s all part of my father’s plan, you idiot! I have to do it for him!”

“Surely you can’t be serious!” Wang yelled.

“Silence! I’ve got news for you. You’re gonna die just like all the rest.”

Alex remained silent as he stared down the barrel of Roy’s pistol. He knew that because Roy was possessed, he could pull the trigger. Alex called on all his self-control to give no outward sign of the fear that boiled within him. He wasn’t sure how successful he was, as he could feel his heart pounding. “Don’t do it, Roy. It’s not worth it.”

Roy walked over to Wilcox and pulled him to his feet. “Not worth it? Oh, yes it is.” He shoved Wilcox back to where Alex and Wang stood. “Now hand me your gun.”

Wilcox did as he was told. “What do you plan on doing with us?”

* * * *

Roy watched the others carefully as he knelt down and picked it up. “Nothing,

absolutely nothing. Actually, I thought I'd let you rot with the rest of these bodies.”

He backed out of the room, then closed and bolted the steel door behind him. Roy hurried out of the morgue and drove off in his car toward the clearing. In his mind, he could already see the powers of darkness being unleashed upon the people of this small town, and the people of the world.

* * * *

“Guys, there is something you should all know about our friend.” Alex said, as Wang and Wilcox had started to search for a way out of there. At first they took no notice of Alex, then he piped up, “Guys!”

What? Can't you see we're busy here,” Wang almost yelled.

“There is something you both need to know about Roy, which will shed some light on why some of these things have been happening.”

“Oh do tell, oh wise one,” Wang said sarcastically.

“Wang, let him speak. I'm interested in hearing this . . . theory,” Wilcox said.

Wang didn't give a response at first. He just stood there with his arms folded staring at Alex.

Alex looked at them both, and he sensed that neither of them were about to believe him, but he needed to tell them what he knew.

“Roy is not the person you think he is,” he started.

“That is nothing new,” Wilcox said.

“Listen, “Alex replied, “You remember earlier you told me about the massacres that Ted did, then supposedly he vanished?”

“Yeah, so? What does that have to do with Roy?” Wilcox asked.

“Your buddy, Roy, was exposed to the occult at a young age, and for many years he lived a double life. For the most part, you, Shaun, and many others saw him

as a real stand-up citizen and clean-cut cop.”

“That’s what I thought,” Wilcox said

“That’s what you were led to believe, but you and everyone else were deceived. What you did not see was the person who would drive the lonely highways, looking for his next victim. There were many times when Roy used his authority to manipulate others. Do you remember a few years ago the slayings that the press called the Midsummer Massacres?”

“Yeah I remember.” Wilcox replied, “That was something that you don’t forget easily, know what I mean?”

Wang nodded in agreement.

“Hang on a minute . . .” Wilcox added, shaking his finger at Alex. “You’re not saying—”

“Roy is the one who massacred all those women. On many occasions, he forced his way into the homes of single women, and he would bind and gag them then take them to his workshop where he would then rape and murder them.”

“Hang on a sec, Alex,” Wang said. “What you said may be true about our new friend who locked us in here, but what exactly does that have to do with our predicament now?”

“Roy’s father, Joel, was in fact Ted.”

“Hang on a minute,” Wilcox said, “I knew Joel and his family for twenty years and Joel was no more a Satanist than my grandmother.”

“Appearances can deceive, detective,” Alex answered. “And so did Joel. Ted went into hiding for some years then returned as the person you knew him as. Sure he kept up appearances to deceive everyone, but in secret, he was the one who slaughtered all those kids many years ago.”

“How do you know any of this?” Wilcox demanded.

Alex looked at them, and although he wanted to tell them what he had seen in his vision, he knew he couldn’t as they would have branded him psychotic.

“Come on, how do you know all this shit?” Wang said.

“I can’t explain how I know exactly, but trust me on this. I know.”

Wang and Wilcox were silent. Wang looked ready to dismiss this account. Wilcox looked at Alex and all he could say was, “We better get out of here and find that son of a bitch.”

Alex, Wang, and Wilcox tried to break through the door, but to no avail. It was at least four inches thick and bolted tight. They searched for another way out, but there was none. It appeared they were to remain in this foul-smelling room until someone found them. An idea came of getting into the air ducts in the ceiling and following them out of the room, but alas, no one was small enough to fit inside them.

Soon, the strange presence of power returned to Alex, forcing him to stand back and look at the door. That voice was powerful in his mind and almost instantly he knew what to do.

He turned and looked at the others and only said, “Let’s get going.”

From their expressions, it was clear they thought he was out of his mind

“Mate, if you don’t know already, we seem to be trapped in here.” Wang said sarcastically.

Alex ignored them and turned to the door, closed his eyes to concentrate, and felt his mind fill with supernatural power. Moments later, he opened his eyes and stared at the door. He caught a glimpse of his reflection in the glass cabinet next to the door, and he saw his eyes glowing red with the surge of supernatural power, and just as he noticed, so did the other two.

“Alex, what the hell is going on?” Wang asked.

Alex could sense their fear but said nothing. He just raised his hands toward the door exit and focused. Immediately, the steel door began to creak and buckle, and within seconds, it exploded off its hinges and smashed through the opposite wall.

“Fuck, now that’s what I call an exit,” Wilcox quipped.

As glad as they were to be free, both Wilcox and Wang had questions. Questions as to what the hell had just happened. They wanted to know what manner of trickery or force he had tapped into, and if nothing else, why was it showing now? Alex sensed their thoughts and he would love nothing better than to tell them, but the fact was, he had no tangible explanation to give them.

What mattered was they were free, but for how long? Alex knew that Roy or Lutancix would be after them and the only way to bide time for now was to flee.

Alex and Wang checked into the only motel in town, while Wilcox went and started to search for Roy. He may not have wanted to confront Roy, but as long as he was the law in this town, he had to do the right thing and uphold the law.

* * * *

Alex sat in the lounge room of their hotel room and stared out the window while Wang took a shower. There was so much he could not comprehend of his new found powers, but if anything, he did find a new confidence he had somewhat lacked before.

It wasn't long before Wang was dressed and then they were out the door. Alex was about to get in the car when he noticed a Cadillac driving slowly through the parking lot.

He stood by the car and looked at the individuals in the Cadillac. He knew that driving that car was the investigator he had met yesterday, Drake Winters, and his partner, Usher. As Alex looked into Usher's eyes, he felt a strong spiritual connection with him.

The car slowed to a stop a few yards away from them. Alex watched as the two Americans got out. At first, nothing was said. They just stood there and waited for Alex to approach them. He didn't.

Drake stepped forward. "Alex, good to see you."

"Likewise, but what are you two doing here?"

"We had to come," Drake said. "After all, we couldn't let you two rookies investigate this by yourselves," he added, smiling.

Usher said nothing. He just stood nearby, staring intently at Alex and occasionally glancing over at Wang who now stood near Alex.

"Wang. I see you look none the wiser after all this time," Drake quipped.

"And you're still a shithead," Wang replied, shaking his hand. "So how goes it?"

"Not bad. Have seen better days."

"Tell me about it." Wang said, "We just had a run in with one of the cops in this town."

"Anything out of the ordinary?" Drake asked

"You could say that," Wang answered. "Your boy here seemed to have opened a Pandora's box with one of the cops who may be tied in to what we're checking out."

"If you're referring to the one called Roy, he is far gone from here," Usher said.

"Yeah, that's exactly who I was referring to. How'd you know?" Wang asked,

puzzled.

“I saw him in my visions,” Usher said. “I have foreseen the events of this place, and what is behind the slayings. Roy is just another pawn used to pave the way for the Master.”

“The Master?” Alex asked. “Who is that?”

“That is something I cannot see,” Usher said. “But I do sense that when The Master arises, the One will also make his presence known.”

“The One? The Master?” Wang asked. “Usher, you’re getting into deep thought there, buddy.”

“Well, you know him. Always deep,” Drake said.

Alex was silent. Everything he heard may have sounded like gibberish, but a part of him understood.

Usher glanced at Drake and Wang then looked directly at Alex and said, “It may be deep, but I will tell you this, whoever the One is, he sure has a lot of responsibility on his shoulders.”

“What kind of responsibilities?”

Usher looked at Wang and replied, “Many, some of which would be far too complex to explain. What I can tell you though, is that the One, when the time comes, will have the power to destroy the mind, the body or the spirit. He will have the ability to look into places, times, eras, and realms beyond what we know.”

“What signs will reveal his identity?” Wang asked.

“Maybe there are signs pointing to whom the One is, but no one will really know until the time of his anointment,” Usher answered.

Wang hesitated a moment before he told them the events of the night. Wang told them everything up to the point of Roy going nuts. Upon hearing the details, Drake and Usher exchanged looks and shook their heads.

"It seems time is short, my friend," Usher said to Drake.

"Appears that way," he replied.

"Time is short?" Wang asked. "Care to explain?"

Drake turned to him. "No. But you wanna tell us where you guys were headed?"

"Out to where the murders took place," Alex replied.

"I don't think that's a good idea." Usher warned.

"Why?" Wang asked. His tone sounded more like a protest than a question.

"I sense death is out there waiting for you both," Usher answered.

"Then why are we here?" Wang responded. "Aren't we here to check these things out?"

"Yeah you are," Drake said, "But it also pays to use caution. You should know that by now, Wang."

Wang stared at them, then looked at Alex, sighed, and walked off toward the car.

"Always the hothead," Drake said. "One of these days, his foolhardiness will land him in deep trouble."

Alex looked toward Wang and watched him get in the car. Then looking back at Usher and Drake, he said, "Guess that means we should get going."

Usher glanced at his partner, then looked back at Alex, and said, "Be mindful out there."

Usher had no sooner spoken than Alex's eyes started to glow red again, just as before, and like before he was filled once again with a surge of supernatural power.

Drake immediately backed away slowly, but Usher never moved, only stared at Alex.

* * * *

If this is a sign of the One, it's out of the ordinary, Usher thought.

Alex turned his stare directly to Usher, but said nothing. Usher heard thoughts in his mind, and he knew what he heard in his mind wasn't Alex's thoughts, but those of an ancient power.

Soon this shall become him who has been chosen to deliver creation from the four that will arise during the last hours of reckoning. This shall be the end of the sixth millennium of Man. You are the blood of the ancients who gave prophesy unto you of all men. Safeguard the One. After a time, when he has heard his call, he will forsake that which he has, and in a day of seven he will journey forth to the ancient place, and recover that which was held sacred. Only until these times shall you guard him.

The glow in Alex's eyes faded, and they returned to normal. The experience left Usher charged with spiritual power.

Alex shook his head, then looked at Usher and then Drake. "Happened again?"

"This has happened before?" Drake exclaimed. "I think Wang forgot to tell us of this minor detail."

"Seems that he did," Usher agreed. "Convenient." He looked toward Wang, who was sat in the car waiting for Alex. Somehow, he sensed a lot of conflicting thoughts in that man.

"Let's not tarry," Usher went on to say. "For now, let's get some work done." Drake never questioned anything more of what just happened. He figured that Usher knew his partner figured Usher knew what was going on and for now he would let the matter drop.

"We must go out there in the woods," Usher said.

Drake's eyebrows shot up. "Are you kidding?"

"No, we must go, now!" Usher replied, and started to get back in the car.

Drake could see Usher's enthusiasm, and was not about to argue. If Usher felt the need to go out there, that's exactly what they intended on doing. One by one, they got into Drake's car. He put it in reverse, backed out, and then headed out to Lutancix's domain. Doing this felt very good, and when Usher had feelings like this, he was rarely wrong.

Chapter Eight

Wilcox made his way into the morgue. Something about this night sent fear through him, which left him trembling. Once he entered the back room, his greatest fears were confirmed. He knew it meant the corpses had risen and he wanted to get out of town as fast as possible, but he couldn't. He had an obligation to the people here to protect them, no matter what. As much as he hated the thought of staying, he knew he had to see this thing through to the end, but first thing was first. He knew that he had to warn Alex and Wang of what he had seen. Hurrying out to his car, he knew where to find Alex and Wang. He drove as fast as he could out to the clearing, parked beside another car, and got out. He could faintly hear some voices, and he recognized one as Wang's. It took a few minutes for his eyes to adjust to the moonlight, but then he was able to make out the silhouettes, and it seemed that Alex and Wang were not alone.

He raced over to them. "You guys have to come quick."

"Why? What's going on?" Wang asked.

"I was just at the morgue and the stiff's, they're gone!" he replied, his voice cracking in fear.

"What do you mean they're gone?" Drake asked.

"Whoa. Who are you two?"

Drake formally introduced he and Usher to Wilcox.

"So what are you talking about? Whose gone?" Wang asked.

"The vics. It's the darnest thing. I went back to the morgue and discovered that the vics are gone . . . vanished."

"I suspected this would happen," Usher said. "I have felt a spiritual disturbance.

Now my suspicions are confirmed. This Master has called forth his army, and Lutancix is gathering the soldiers. This means we haven't much time. If we don't find a way to stop this, the entire town will be transformed into part of that which cannot be conquered."

Wilcox bit his lip. "So, you're saying, if we cannot stop this, this town will be in a stranglehold?"

"Not only this town. If Lutancix manages to conquer this place and us, then his master's kingdom will spread until the entire world is consumed," Alex said.

Usher looked at Alex, sensing the supernatural power rising in him. Usher suspected that Lutancix wasn't powerful enough to overcome Alex, but that could just be wishful thinking.

"Just where'd these stiffs take off to?" Drake asked stupidly.

Silence. No one knew.

Drake turned to Wilcox. "Can you take Usher back to the morgue?"

"What for?"

"My friend here may be able to track them," Drake replied.

Wilcox looked at Usher and sighed heavily. It was clear that he didn't want to go back into town. Not with those forces on the loose.

"Come on then. Let's get this over with," he said, reluctance coloring his voice.

Usher put his hand on Alex's shoulder, but remained silent.

"Don't worry, I'll be fine," Alex said.

Usher felt Alex would be, but his mind still held doubt. He didn't know why, but he knew that soon there would be physical warfare, along with a spiritual battle. For decades, there had been a powerful evil stranglehold upon this town, but the time would come to break such daemonic forces. Fighting it was not going to be easy.

There were many powers and principles bound throughout this small, once peaceful town, along with having to deal with Jamiesonn. That evil son of a bitch wanted a piece of the action, and he didn't plan on letting anyone else get in his way, including any other evil entity.

* * * *

Alex watched Usher and Wilcox walk away, and something about the situation didn't feel right. Alex was suddenly hit with a cold, frightening feeling, which made him turn and look toward the woods. There was something there. He could feel its presence ever so strongly. Something was watching, waiting, but for what? Maybe to attack? He didn't know.

He turned toward Drake, who was staring down at the ground, then looked over at Wang. Neither of them knew or felt this presence, and how could they? They had not experienced the things he had, probably ever. Alex was developing a supernatural power that could be recognized as that of the likes of the apostles of Christ. But for now, those things didn't occur in his mind, but there was something else, that presence. It was so evil, that it started to make him feel cold and depressed.

Suddenly, a dazzling blue light flashed between Alex and Drake. Alex watched, astonished, as it hovered near them for a few seconds. Before they could get a good look at it, the light rocketed toward the squad car. Drake screamed for Usher to get out, but he obviously didn't hear him. Wilcox started the engine. A moment later, the light came to a stop, hovering in front of the car.

* * * *

Usher noticed it and grabbed Wilcox's arm. "Don't do anything!"

Wilcox noticed that orb and muttered, "Oh, shit, what is it?"

"It is a form of the enemy. Whatever you do, don't move," Usher replied.

Wilcox tried to follow Usher's advice as he tried to remain as calm as he could.

Yet, he was too scared to remain calm.

"What's it doing?" Wilcox whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

"I think it's observing us, we should be okay," Usher said, his voice calmer.

* * * *

Drake and Wang stood where they were, looking at the light. It seemed as though they were in a trance, but Alex was not. Alex walked closer, somehow knowing exactly who and what it was. Alex could see Usher clearly, and with his eyes, he practically screamed, "Stay back," but he remained silent and watched as the light began to pulsate.

Alex was more intrigued than he was afraid. He threw his cigarette to the ground, walked up to the light, and held his hands toward it, as though he was going to grasp it. In some way, he was being drawn into this supernatural power. Usher and the others could only watch.

The light began to pulsate faster and stronger, letting out a burst of energy that sent Alex flying back on the ground. He slowly stood up, looked at Usher, and then back at the light.

Usher must have known what was about to happen because he grabbed Wilcox's arm and shouted, "Get out of the car!"

The light glided back some feet then rocketed into the car, causing it to explode.

While everyone else wasted no time seeking safety, Alex got to his feet and stood rooted to the ground, examining the damage it'd caused. He wanted to have it out with this entity, but a part of him told him to let it go. So, that's what he did.

Alex went to Usher and helped him up. Then they both checked Wilcox to make sure he was okay.

"Lucky break, huh?" Wilcox said, dusting himself off.

"Perhaps, but I suspect that if it had wanted to kill us, it could have," Alex said.

"Then what was it after?" Wilcox asked.

Usher looked at the car. "A warning. This being is playing with us, testing us. It wants to see how much we can take. Once it's had its fun, it will kill us."

Alex nodded. "This entity is playing mind games with us, trying to send us all into a state of paranoia. The second any of us start to lose it, that's when it'll strike, and it will strike with everything that it's got."

"That in itself is frightening!" Wilcox said.

"Yes it is," Usher agreed.

"But we're not going to let that happen, are we?" Alex said firmly. "If it's mind games this thing wants, then that's what it'll get."

"What are you thinking of doing?" Drake asked.

Alex looked at Wang, and then at Usher. "Among us is a traitor," Alex said, making it clear he was referring to Wang. Everyone stared at each other in amazement. "As hard as it is to believe, this problem will be solved, because this person is being used by the evil entity that just attacked us."

"Well, it's not me!" Drake said.

"I already know who it is, so the rest of you, don't worry," Alex said.

"Well, who is it then?" Wilcox asked.

Alex was silent for a moment. "Roy was to be used for our downfall, but his true nature was exposed before the proper time. So, the buck has been passed to another, but he doesn't know it yet. When the time arises, we will see his true colors, and not before."

Drake rolled his eyes. "A lot of good that did!"

Yet, they were all prepared to believe Alex, so they dropped it.

"So, what do you have in mind for this supernatural force?" Drake asked.

"One hell of a surprise! Something it'll never forget. Remember we can play mind games, too," Alex said, full of determination.

"Okay. So, what do we do now?" Drake questioned.

"Usher and I will go back to the morgue, and check things out," Alex said. "The three of you will check the area for any signs of supernatural activity."

"Thrilling," Drake remarked. His tone betrayed his lack of enthusiasm.

Wilcox shook his head. "Hey, I'd like to help you guys, but this isn't my line of work. I'm paid to keep law and order, not look for supernatural excrement and mucus!"

Alex looked at him. "Fine, we'll drop you off at home. Just give us some guns and we'll handle the rest. How does that sound?"

"I can't do that," Wilcox replied. "Regardless of what is going on here I can't give you weapons so you can go shoot up the place like a couple of cowboys."

"We're not going to shoot everything. It's just a safety precaution," Alex replied.

Wilcox stared at him for a few moments then finally said, "Look, as much as I would like to, I just can't. Sorry."

With that, he motioned for Alex and Usher to get in the other car.

Drake stepped over to the passenger window. "The two of you be on your guard!"

Usher nodded. "Same to you old friend."

As they left, Alex could feel the intensity of evil that was present throughout the clearing. From the expression on Usher's face, he felt it too.

The first thing they did when they arrived in town was proceed to the local gun store. Breaking in as quietly as they could, they grabbed some weapons before headed over to the morgue.

Chapter Nine

Standing in the doorway, they stared into the cold, completely dark building. Alex was the first to walk in, followed by Usher. There was a definite air of evil in the place, but neither of them seemed too concerned. It didn't take long to discover that the fuse box had been demolished.

This made Usher's job of tracking the undead much more difficult. He was still able to manage. Taking careful note of everything around him, Usher examined each room, then made his way outside, Alex right behind him.

Usher looked to the north and then the south. He stood there briefly, trying to sense where the corpses had gone, and then turned in the direction of the cemetery. It was then that the realization of what was going on here hit him. This sent a spine-tingling chill up his back, and he grew fearful. It shocked him. This wasn't something he normally felt. "This can't be right."

"What can't be?" Alex asked.

Usher turned to him. "This whole investigation. Something feels not right with this whole thing." He paused then went on. "Take a look around. Alex. What do you see?"

Alex looked around and saw nothing peculiar.

"Do you see what I mean?" Usher said, "This place is far too quiet. Listen, there is no sound anywhere. Not the sound of cars, dogs, owls. . . . Nothing."

"What the hell is going on here?" Alex asked.

"It's the town, Alex. There is an evil presence over it, unlike any I've felt before.

This scares me.”

“A man with your experience and knowledge cannot be scared.”

“But I am. When I was younger, I may have been able to handle something like this. But I’m getting older, and I fear my knowledge is futile against this evil force,” Usher replied. His tone belied his depression.

“Don’t think like that, Usher! That’s the thinking of the enemy. He wants you to believe that you’re insignificant against his power, but let me tell you now, that’s a lie.”

Usher smiled. “I know what you say is true, Alex, but you have to realize that I’m not as young as I once was. Time has caught up with me, and I know that soon I shall pass on from this life and join my ancestors.”

“You’re going to live for a long time. Death is only a state of being. Entities like the one we are fighting are able to destroy the body, but never the soul. That is the one thing about a person that always endures.”

“It’s good to believe in such things, Alex, but my beliefs of life and death are entirely different from yours.”

“Then maybe your ancient beliefs are outdated, and it’s high time you realize what reality is.”

“You call this reality?” Usher said with a smirk. “Do you think investigating such phenomena and disposing of them is reality? Listen, I don’t like this place!”

“What is the real problem, Usher?”

“I feel that if we continue on our present path, we’ll be dragged into a far more violent realm, and if we manage to survive, our concept of this world will mean nothing.”

“What do your instincts tell you now?”

Usher didn’t have to think about the answer to that question. “To carry on, even though I don’t want to!”

Alex slapped him on the back. "Are we going then?"

Usher decided to listen to Alex and his own instincts, so he continued tracking the corpses.

* * * *

Alex followed in the car, remaining some distance behind him and keeping a constant eye out for any signs of the enemy. Usher knew the enemy was close, but not how close. They were out there, somewhere.

Usher followed the resurrected dead along the main road. He stopped suddenly and stared toward the small town hospital.

Alex stopped the car, got out, and rushed over to him. "What's wrong?"

Staring at the hospital, Usher remained silent. Before long, he had a gut feeling that he couldn't shake off.

"Usher, what is it?" Alex asked.

Usher was starting to get jittery about this entire scenario. "Strange, the trail seems to split up here. From what I can make out, several of the group continued up the road, while the others went down the drive of that hospital."

"Do you think they're in there?"

"Don't know, but that's the way the trail goes," Usher replied. They could see the reception desk and an overweight nurse sitting there. Everything seemed normal.

"Sure looks quiet enough," Alex said.

"That's what scares me. It looks peaceful, but my gut tells me some of those living dead are in there."

"I don't like that thought!"

"The rest are headed to the cemetery," Usher said, certain he was right.

"What makes you so sure?"

"I've known all along. I had a premonition of this same event," Usher answered.

"The ones who were resurrected are out there, and from what I can understand they're waiting for the others to rise from the grave."

"Then what?" Alex asked.

"Think about it. This entity is preparing the way for his master. The only way he can do the deed properly is by using the bodies of the dead to influence the weak minded and the skeptics," Usher replied with confidence.

"So, once this thing has gained control of people's minds, his master will have no opposition in his domination of the world," Alex said.

"And mankind will be reduced to spending eternity in the midst of total fear."

"Well then, we have to do something about the situation, and fast."

Usher pointed toward the hospital. "This way!"

Alex led the way along the side of the building, with Usher close behind. They stopped at the courtyard behind the hospital, stood in the shadows of the trees, and looked toward the side entrance. The door was hanging by a hinge, and it was evident that something or someone with incredible strength had forced the back door open. When Alex turned to Usher, he knew expression said everything exposed his fear.

They looked at the door, then in the windows, one by one. No one was at any of the windows. They did notice that the light above the door was on, as if someone was expecting a visitor. Alex mentioned this to Usher, but he took no notice. He was focused on the open doorway.

There was no denying that he feared what waited inside. He felt the blood drain

from his face as he broke into a cold sweat, and a painful cramp settled in his gut. Usher tried to push away this feeling, but could not. It was there to stay, and remained ever constant. Soon, an acidic taste filled his mouth, which made him feel worse.

The longer Usher stood there in the shadows, the more uncomfortable he became about the situation. Despite his rising anxiety, he could hear a clear, distinct voice yelling at him, "Hey, fucker! Something bad is about to happen!"

Usher turned his mind away from the voice and its warnings. He tried to focus his attention to perceiving what the situation was. But he found this very hard. Every time he tried to focus, that voice rang through his mind. He knew it was not his spiritual guide, nor anyone else he knew. The voice came back, chanting a tune of death.

Usher trembled again then turned to Alex and stared at him for what seemed like forever. "Alex, we have to get out of here," he muttered.

Alex glanced at him. "I don't know what's bugging you, and frankly I don't care. What I do care about is doing what is necessary, so you better get your act together and your mind focused."

Usher understood but he sure didn't like it. "I'm not saying this to get out of the job."

"I know that."

Alex looked toward the open door. Usher frowned. He knew Alex had a small amount of power within him, but he also knew that Alex could never understand why he was so scared. Usher wanted to tell Alex what that evil voice had said, but before he could, Alex made his way to the door.

"Alex, wait!"

Alex stopped and turned around.

“Not that way, go through the basement.”

Alex looked at the basement doors. “Going that way, the enemy could ambush me.” He propped the shotgun on his shoulder, then turned around and went inside.

Usher watched, chewing his lip as Alex disappeared. All he could think of was whether Alex would be safe or not.

“Of course he’ll be safe, you idiot, it’s a hospital, what could possibly go wrong?” the voice screamed in his head, making its presence known again.

“Plenty,” Usher murmured to himself. Normally, he would be a lot stronger than to allow some force to play mind games with him, but this was different. He was mentally exhausted and had allowed too many personal things to get to him. To say he hated being like this was an understatement. He knew he had to gain full control of all aspects of his life if he was to be the watcher of the One. This seemed too much of a task, perhaps even impossible, as much turmoil that had transpired in his life. Usher thought about it every day, and every day he made the same choice, to stick it out.

“It can’t continue on for much longer,” he thought aloud.

“Oh yeah, we’ve only just begun,” the voice echoed in his mind.

He wished that this all would stop, but he knew it wouldn’t.

* * * *

Alex proceeded cautiously down the main corridor, and noticed a patient buzzing for a nurse, but no one came to him. He was sure that something had happened to the staff, and he was determined to find out what. He also noticed that every other bed he passed was empty, but looked slept in. Hearing footsteps

approaching from one of the hallways, he ducked into a nearby room and peered out to see who was coming. He thought it could be one of the corpses, but that changed when he saw the plump nurse. Suddenly she vanished, and a moment later, the sound of her footsteps stopped.

Alex poked his head out, trying to see if anyone else was around, but there wasn't. Stepping into the corridor, he looked over his shoulder to make sure no one was there.

As he continued down the corridor, it became clear that he was not alone. It was not the presence of the nurse or the buzzing patient he felt; it was something else. The thing that watched him was supernatural, but every time he glanced around, there was no one. Although the entity made him nervous, it never deterred him from his mission. He had the shotgun down by his side, and he dispelled all feelings of being watched. He focused on what lay in front of him.

We're going to get you! A familiar voice chanted a deathly tune from somewhere behind him.

Alex turned quickly, but saw no one. He stopped and stood there, waiting for something to happen.

There was a sudden rush of footsteps behind him. Alex turned, and was shocked by the sight of Jamiesonn walking toward him. Alex lowered the gun and could only stare. Jamiesonn was not here just to warn Alex. He had found out who he was and wanted his share of the action. Alex could see this in Jamiesonn's eyes, so he raised the gun quickly, and without thinking, he fired.

"Oh fuck," he muttered as the blasts passed through Jamiesonn.

Jamiesonn ran at Alex, kicked the gun out of his hand, then grabbed him by the

neck and hoisted him off the ground in one swift action.

“Why now?” Alex asked, gasping for breath.

“Time to die, fucker!” he bellowed. He threw Alex against the wall, and he fell to the ground. Before Alex could even attempt to get up, Jamiesonn picked him up and threw him down the hall, where he landed hard up against a metal trolley. The impact knocked Alex senseless for some moments, and then he stumbled awkwardly to his feet. His vision was blurred, but he could still make out the gun nearby.

Jamiesonn knew exactly what Alex was thinking, so he rushed over to the gun and kicked it away. “I’ve been waiting for this moment for an eternity!”

He kicked Alex hard in the gut. Alex let out a loud moan in agony, and then rolled over onto his back. Jamiesonn stared at him with hatred burning in his eyes, intent on finishing him off. Raising his arm to throw the final blow, he heard a woman’s voice yell. “Leave him alone!” He froze.

Jamiesonn turned and glared at the nurse and said nothing. Instead, he squinted his eyes and instantly she was thrown back in the air and flew rapidly to the end of the corridor. The force drove her head-first into the wall, and she dropped dead on the floor.

Jamiesonn looked down at Alex. “Now where was I? Oh yes. Time for you to French kiss death.”

Alex held still, but he knew he had to get out of there. He tried to stand, but Jamiesonn grabbed him by the neck and slowly started to squeeze the life out of him.

Frantic, Alex tried to escape, as it was becoming harder and harder for him to

breathe. He was starting to blackout. Then Jamiesonn eased his grip a bit, and Alex managed to suck in a little air. He could see what was going on. Jamiesonn took great pride in killing, and he wanted Alex to suffer. He not only wanted to kill Alex, but tear his mind and soul apart in the process.

You're dead for sure!

Faintly, Alex heard that voice echo. He was too beaten to comprehend anything. He had given up struggling, knowing it was pointless. He could do nothing, and with each second, he felt his life slipping away. The thought of death had started to overshadow his mind, body and soul. He was ready to give up.

Alex wasn't sure what happened next. One moment Jamiesonn was on the verge of killing him, the next second Jamiesonn's grip was released, followed by a loud boom that echoed throughout the building. He saw nothing at first, but he could hear several voices yelling nearby in languages he didn't know. He opened his eyes and tried to focus. To the left, he could see a mass of white light approaching, and out of the corner of his eye to the right, he could just make out the shadowy figure of Jamiesonn. His heartbeat rose, and his nerves danced as the light approached. Thankfully, it passed over him and pursued Jamiesonn. Alex wept as he heard the two entities fighting. Within seconds, it was over and Jamiesonn fled, but before he did, Alex heard him yell, "Watch your back, kid. I will find you!"

* * * *

Usher heard the commotion and rushed inside, but by the time he found Alex unconscious and slumped against desk, the commotion was over. Alex needed immediate medical attention, and seeing that the nurse was dead, Usher knew

he had to resort to his own healing abilities. He grabbed his medicine sachet out of his pocket and began to speak in tongues.

“Stand aside,” a powerful voice bellowed out.

Usher stopped in the middle of his healing, and stared down the corridor toward an approaching angelic Elder. He was speechless. Slowly, he stood up and started to back away. The Elder glided toward them, stopping in front Alex and looked at him.

“What are you?” Usher whispered softly

The Elder looked at him and remained silent for several moments. “We are the Elders of the Ancient Ones. Why did you let the One come alone?”

Usher started to tremble. “What?” Then he thought with undeniable fear, Alex is the One?

“You suspected he was even when you first met him. Instead of watching over your charge you were only thinking of yourself,” the Elder interrupted.

“But I cannot—”

“You doubt far too much, Usher. Believe in yourself. Only then will you come full circle. The Hour of Reckoning is at hand, and there is not much time before he will go through the rites of passage to become that which he shall be. You have been appointed to keep watch over him until that time.”

Usher felt like asking how, but he didn't. He kept his mouth shut and watched as the Elder knelt beside Alex, placed his hands on Alex's head, and spoke softly to him. Usher tried to listen, but the words were incomprehensible.

When the Elder was done, he stood and turned back to Usher. “Alex will be fine. He'll remember nothing of what happened here, and it needs to stay that way.”

“I won’t tell him,” Usher promised.

“It is up to you to watch over him, Usher. Don’t fail us.”

Usher understood, but didn’t reply. He didn’t have to. The Elder already knew his thoughts. Usher stared at the Elder, and then it vanished.

He turned his attention to Alex, and knelt beside him. When he gently shook him, Alex didn’t react. He looked dead. Usher shook him once more, and this time he responded.

* * * *

Alex opened his eyes, glanced at Usher, and then slowly turned and looked down the corridor. His vision was perfect, and he could clearly make out a pool of blood at the end of the hall. He tried to recollect what had happened but couldn’t. He remembered entering the hospital, as well as the buzzing patient, and the nurse, but that’s where his memory ended. “What happened?”

Usher scratched his chin. It seemed he had to think of what to say. “You were attacked.”

“By who?”

Usher’s expression made it clear that he hadn’t meant to say that and was hesitant to give out any other information.

Alex grabbed him by the arm. “By who?” he demanded.

“By one of those things.”

“What things?”

“One of the dead,” Usher said.

Alex could tell Usher was lying, but he remained silent. He stood up and grabbed his gun. Facing Usher, he knew he must resemble a gangster of the 1920’s as he

stood with one hand in his pocket, and propped the shotgun on his shoulder.

“You know something you’re not telling me, and I don’t like it!”

“All I know is what I told you, and that’s it.”

“Yeah, well what’s with that stupid smirk?”

Usher glanced around, leaned toward Alex, and whispered, “Nothing.”

“Don’t feed me that shit,” Alex yelled.

“Listen, I’ve never been good at lying. My father taught me there was nothing worse in this world than a liar. The truth is, what happened is not for you to know.”

Alex remained silent and stared down the corridor. In his mind, he was still questioning what happened and why Usher wouldn’t tell him.

Then that evil voice came into his mind, causing him to shudder. *Just how can you expect to get even with a force that can destroy you so rapidly?*

“How am I supposed to know?” Alex wondered.

What you are doing is a lost cause, unless you think you’re Superman! Face the facts. You don’t have what it takes to defeat the army of darkness. So, if you value your insignificant life, leave!

Alex didn’t answer, knowing that even though the tone of the voice sounded evil, he sensed fear in it.

Who are you? Alex demanded.

I’m the one who can make your life a living hell!

Alex again demanded to know to whom the voice belonged.

Don’t push it, Alex. I like you, but if you mess with me, I’ll fuck you bad. I’ll destroy you, those you care about, and everything else that you are!

Jamiesonn, he thought.

Your instinct seems to be sharper than a brass tack, kid. Very good. Be warned, I am watching and I can take your life at any time I want. . . . Just as I did Alison.

Ali. Tears immediately filled his eyes.

That's right, kiddo. Do you remember how she died? I sure do, and I loved every second of tearing her soul apart!

The only thing that filled Alex's mind was the memory of his fiancée, Alison. She had died just over four years ago, and despite his feeble attempts to let her go, he found he just couldn't. Or, more to the point, he didn't want to. He still loved her, and when he reminisced about what they had together, the wounds seemed fresh. He would usually break down weeping, and blame himself for her death.

* * * *

He met Alison three months before graduating high school. From the first time they met, they knew that they were meant to be together. Their meeting was not by chance. During that final year of high school, he used to sit in front of her in history class, but it wasn't until they were partnered together for a history assignment that they really knew the other existed. That moment changed their lives. From then on, they were almost inseparable.

After prom night, he took her away to a five-star resort on the Gold Coast for the weekend and asked her to marry him. A year after they got engaged, their son Matthew was born.

His life was perfect. Until that fatal winter night.

Alison was driving home from her parents' house after picking up their son, who had stayed with them for the holidays. The road was icy, and for a split second, she got distracted. In that one moment, everything changed. She never saw the dark presence standing in the middle of the road until it was too late. She

swerved to avoid him, but there wasn't time. She had veered off the road and smashed into the trees. She, Matthew, and the unborn child she was carrying died instantly. Even though Alex was at home that night, at the moment the accident happened, he felt his heart break.

There was so much he remembered. He missed her and Matthew so much.

* * * *

Alex snapped out of his thoughts about Alison and looked at Usher.

"Painful, isn't it?" Usher said, stern and serious.

"What are you talking about?"

"Memories of the past."

Alex locked eyes with Usher. It was clear he knew exactly what memories had just flown through Alex's mind.

Usher was silent for some time, and then he looked Alex in the eyes. "I'm sorry for you, Alex. I'm sorry for her death. I understand how you felt when you lost her, your son and your unborn child."

For a moment, Alex questioned his own thoughts, and tried to reason how Usher could have known about the unborn child. He didn't know what hurt more. The fact of losing his only son, his fiancée, or his unborn child. Each carried a great amount of heartache and grief. "How can you understand, Usher? You were not there."

"Perhaps not in the physical sense, but in my visions I see a lot of things."

"Everything?"

Usher nodded. "I saw how they died, and I saw your demise that followed. But I

also saw you rise above those things, and now you will receive what was lost.”

Alex didn't find comfort in Usher's words. Instead, he looked away and focused his attention on where he was.

A strange sense of fear swept over him. It was the most fear he had felt in his life. Evil was there, in that hospital, and for a split second, he could have sworn he saw a multitude of hideous beasts flying toward him. He shook his head and rubbed his eyes. “What is going on here?”

“What?” Usher asked.

“I could have sworn that I just saw . . .”

My legion! They heard Lutancix's voice roared in both of their minds.

Alex could see that Usher had heard the voice that time; his reaction made that clear. “Do you think it's . . .”

“We must tell the others.”

They started to make their way outside, when that voice bellowed, “Heed my warnings. If you stay, you are dead!”

Alex and Usher stopped and looked around behind them. They heard and understood. This event seemed too big for them to handle. Yet, they knew that they must go through with it, no matter what the obstacle.

The two of them headed back to the car. Getting into it, Alex sat in silence and stared blankly into the night.

“Alex, what are you waiting for? Let's go!”

Alex looked at him and for a moment. His mind didn't register what Usher had said.

“Let's go, Alex,” Usher said softly.

Alex snapped back to reality. Without saying a word, he started the car and drove along the highway, heading back to the clearing to pick up Drake and Wang.

Chapter Ten

Alex stopped at the entrance to the clearing. Alex and Usher went over to Drake, and Usher was instantly bombarded with questions. At first, Usher could say nothing; it was all too hard to explain. Wang walked up and asked what was going on. Usher knew he must tell them, so he recapped the entire evening. When he was finished, they all looked drained of life.

“This town is headed for a catastrophe. It will be unlike anything that anyone has ever seen before,” Alex said after a long silence.

“Jamiesonn is here. And so is the Master! If he has any part in this, I’m not sure how we can defeat this army of darkness,” Usher said.

“The war we will be fighting will shake the foundations of both the physical and spiritual worlds,” Alex said.

Usher knew that if anyone else was in this situation they would have called it quits at this point, and as he stood there for a moment he felt like that they were like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, but they weren’t. Still, he knew now that each was willing to die for humanity. . . .Well, except for one.

Drake slowly nodded. “I’ve heard of this. When I was young, I went to this church, and all the pastor talked about was the end of the world. He said in the last days, powers would arise and reap havoc, just as it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Wang shook his head. “But this isn’t Sodom and Gomorrah! Every religion has its own theory about the apocalypse, and what we’re witnessing is not an aligning of

satanic powers, but only limbo spirits—”

“Causing destruction everywhere,” Alex said. “There is definitely something about to manifest itself in this town, and when it does, it could bring about the destruction of all of mankind.”

“Unless we do something?” Wang asked.

Usher looked at him. “I don’t know if we can. After all, once the legions of darkness come forth, only the One will stand a chance.”

“And I doubt that even he can come through,” Alex said.

Usher said, “Why do you say that?” But what Alex heard in his thoughts was, “There’s no way you’re going to quit on us.”

Suddenly, a powerful voice screamed, “Be it known now, if any one of you men of false power dare to defy me, you shall all die by the hand that betrays you.”

Usher, Drake, Alex, and Wang all looked at one another but could say nothing. Each knew the voice that surrounded them, and as Usher looked around, he could see that the others feared this presence, and not just him.

“Just who the hell are you?” Drake asked.

“I am the one who has—”

“Dominion over this world, yeah I know,” Alex finished, his tone mocking. “If you’re such a damn hot-shot as you claim, then manifest yourself now, if you dare. I defy you!”

Again, silence.

“I think you may have over stepped your bounds, Alex,” Drake whispered.

Alex gave a huff. “Why are you whispering, Drake? I’m sure that this piece of shit can hear us, but he’s too damn gutless to appear.”

Usher looked confused. Clearly he didn't know why Alex had become so full of fury, but it was obvious it had pissed off the spirit. They watched and listened as the wind suddenly howled all around them. It uprooted several trees and swept them into the air. At the sudden daemonic cry, they all turned around, watching in awe as something began to manifest itself in human form before them. While Drake, Usher, and Wang stood well back, Alex remained. He stared at it, and then started toward it.

"Alex, no!" Drake yelled.

Alex didn't pay attention. He had a fair idea that this manifestation was not the Master at all, and he was going to prove it. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Drake start after him, but Usher pulled him back. He nodded, and Usher led Drake and Wang to the edge of the clearing. Alex sensed that Usher knew trouble was brewing and that it was best for them to be well away when the shit hit the fan.

"You're not the Master," Alex said, as he stood some feet before it.

"That comes as no surprise," Lutancix said.

"What?"

"Your perception."

"Not perception, common sense. I knew he wouldn't manifest when he could get you, his high general, to do it. Isn't that right, Lutancix?" Alex asked.

"After all we've put you through, do you think it wise to try and fight us?"

"Meaning?"

"Take a look around, Alex. Everything that could go wrong in your life has. It was not Jamiesonn's doing that took the life of your family, but ours. We will make you suffer, just like before."

"You didn't take her life. Jamiesonn did. Besides, if you wanted me back then you would have done it instead of now." Alex said.

Lutancix stood back a few feet and snarled at Alex.

Alex stepped forward. He felt that wave of supernatural power fill him once again. "If you were so powerful, you wouldn't take orders from the Master. But like the sap you are, you bend over every time your Master tells you to." He paused and glanced away, as though a vision had just flashed in his mind, then he looked back at Lutancix and went on, "Just as you did in Babylon."

"The Ancient Ones begged for death kid!"

"I don't believe you," Alex shot back.

"You forget, we control the kingdoms of this world, and we can take your life anytime we choose!"

"Don't threaten me," Alex yelled, with fire in his voice. He knew that Lutancix was fully prepared and able to destroy him right now. His actions, or more to the point, his mouth, had landed him in a bad situation, and he felt there was no way out. Alex started to back away slowly as Lutancix crouched and prepared to strike Alex down.

Lutancix never had the chance to kill Alex, as there was a sudden flash of light and a split second later, one of the Elders appeared, standing between Alex and Lutancix. At once Lutancix backed away and stared at the Elder with pure hatred.

"You," Lutancix snarled

"You know the Hour has not come, Lutancix," the Elder said, speaking in a language that only spiritual beings were to know.

Lutancix was silent for a moment. "Our time is whenever we choose, old one."

"We will not allow you to take him before the Hour of Reckoning."

"I will take him whenever I feel like it."

"If he dies before the Hour, your Kingdom will face the destruction, or need I remind you of what you were told before the Foundation when your kind was kicked out of the Kingdom. He told you then that He would cast you into the Fire that burns with Sulfur."

"It doesn't matter. We already know of that prophecy," Lutancix retorted. "Now

make way!”

Run, Alex! the Elder said into Alex’s mind.

You don’t have to tell me twice! Alex thought back, and immediately ran for cover, near his companions.

He got to safety and watched as the Elder faced off against his ancient adversary. Lutancix crouched and attacked the Elder swiftly. The elder stood his ground and with ease fought off Lutancix.

With one blow, the Elder struck Lutancix, and he was sent hurdling to the other end of the clearing. Alex and his companions watched as the Elder started toward Lutancix, but before anything else could happen, an unseen force filled the clearing and struck the Elder down. Alex and his companions watched as a mass of darkness appeared near the Elder and took form into a goliath of a beast, which stood a good fifteen feet tall. Wang and Drake didn’t stick around any longer and quickly left, leaving Alex and Usher behind. Alex was taken aback as the beast looked the same from the visions he had seen some days ago. “The Master. Tanzac,” Usher muttered.

Alex glanced at Usher, then looked back at beast. He couldn’t hear what was being said between Tanzac and the fallen Elder, but he could guess that it was anything but pleasant. He watched, as the Elder rose to his feet and moments later vanished. Tanzac looked toward Alex and Usher and just stared.

“Now would be a good time to leave,” Usher whispered. He was afraid. He had seen what happened to the Elder and now, he feared that this entity was far more powerful than the Elders, which made him start to question the whole Chosen One theory.

“I agree. Let’s get outta here.”

Alex and his companions felt the ground quake, and they weren't going to stay to find out what was going on. The only thing they wanted to do was get out of there.

* * * *

Tanzac watched as they ran off into the night, and instantly he vanished into the darkness from which he came. At that moment the ground in the clearing began to shake and from out of the ground, in the center of the clearing, a bronze statue of Tanzac rose up out of the earth.

* * * *

"There isn't much time," Usher said. Alex looked at him and opened his mouth to say something, but Usher read his mind. "No, not that."

"Then what?" Alex asked, slightly puzzled.

"Until the legions of darkness unleash disaster and destruction upon this town."

"The Darkness has arisen." Alex muttered.

Drake looked at him for a moment, taking in everything said, then slowly turned around, scanning the area. Even though they appeared to be safe, his nervous twitch made it clear that he felt they were being watched.

Each man feared this investigation for different reasons. Wang feared both the powers of darkness, as well as Alex's powers. Drake's fear was death, and leaving his wife with feelings of guilt for letting him go on this journey. As for Usher, he mainly feared Tanzac, because he finally knew what the Goliath was capable of. Alex, on the other hand, feared everything. He feared Lutancix and

his followers, the Elders, Tanzac, and Jamiesonn. Despite his fear about this whole thing, he knew there were powers far greater than that of the darkness that now overshadowed this town. After all, he had heard preachers preach about it so often when he was younger, that somehow, he felt as if God had a hand on his life. He felt guided by that hand, and it would either make him or break him. Alex wasn't a Christian or a religious fanatic, but he had sat through enough Sunday Masses when he was younger to know that God had some purpose for his life.

Alex had nothing against religion. He just felt he didn't belong to that lifestyle. He could still recount the preacher saying over and over, "Sometimes God will allow a person to experience times of turmoil and persecution, so that they will come before Him to ask Him into their hearts and lives."

Alex wished he could call upon the services of Phillip, but he couldn't. Phillip and no other priest in his right mind would believe what was going on here. He had to depend on the other three investigators. He accepted this.

"Sure it is, kid, you got nothing to lose," the voice of his father said in his mind.

Alex became frightened. *What's going on here?*

Nothing's going on. You should know better than to misjudge people. The voice of his father replied.

"But you cannot be my father. It's not possible." Alex walked away from the others and went to sit alone.

Why would you say such a thing? Didn't I always tell you to look beyond that of what we know, so that we may see the inner person? the voice responded.

"Yes, but still I refuse to believe that you're my father!"

I know you do, son, but I ask you to trust me. I have never steered you wrong in your life, and dying so suddenly, was just one of those things that happen.

The voice started to talk about things in Alex's life that he knew his father was never aware of. He looked over at Usher. His eyes were full of confusion and concern. Immediately Usher started to walk toward him, to see what was troubling him. Before he had gotten too close, he was struck by a powerful and unseen force, which sent him flying a considerable distance.

Alex shot up to his feet and dashed over to make sure Usher was okay. When he got near, an invisible force lashed out at him, and sent him flying into a tree. Alex slumped face first to the ground, feeling as though his spine had broken. His main priority was getting up so he could check on Usher. For the first time in his life his own safety did not matter, but another's whose life might be at stake.

All he could do was endure the pain that pulsed through his entire body, as he forced himself to stand up. It took what seemed like forever, to stand and get moving.

He hobbled over to Usher, who was still lying on the ground and not moving. There was no sign of Drake or Wang. Alex's first thought was they had taken off, just as they had before, but a few moments later, he found that they too had been attacked. They were lying unconscious in the scrubs. Alex checked Usher over and tried to bring him around, with no success. Usher seemed to be in a coma-like state, and nothing worked.

Alex limped over to Drake and Wang, but they were in the same condition. He had enough of this, and he hobbled back toward the clearing, feeling foolishly ready to face the dangers, but driven mostly by the anger swelling underneath his skin. He was ready to have it out with Lutancix and Tanzac. In the back of his mind, he knew this was a foolish decision, but he really didn't give a shit.

I know what you're thinking, boy. He heard Jamiesonn speak out with power. Alex stopped and looked around slowly, but could not see him anywhere. "Show yourself!"

Silence.

Jamiesonn manifested and stood near Usher. He looked at the fallen warrior then looked back at Alex. "You should know better, Alex, then to test such powers. You might just get yourself killed."

Alex looked at Jamiesonn and said, "Why have you come?"

"Guess," Jamiesonn replied.

"To kill me, right?" Alex snapped. "Well, take a number and wait your turn."

Jamiesonn never answered.

Alex measured him up and said, "What are you doing here?"

Jamiesonn stepped toward him a few feet and stopped when he heard Usher groan in pain. He turned around and watched Usher stand. After looking back at Alex, he vanished without so much as a word or an attack.

"What happened?" Usher asked, still in a daze from the encounter.

"Never mind, you didn't miss anything worth seeing," Alex replied.

Usher frowned. It was obvious that he knew Alex was lying, but he was not going to push the issue.

"How do you feel?" Alex asked.

"My head feels like it's been run over by a truck! Never mind, I'll ignore the pain. It's you who needs help. I can sense what the problem is."

He walked up and placed his hand on Alex's spine.

"What are you doing?" Alex asked.

"Don't worry. You'll feel a bit of heat in a moment or two. Just relax."

Alex did, and within minutes, he felt a tingling drift up his spine followed by the warmth Usher mentioned. The heat felt as if it were taking over the pain. He felt a disk slide back into place and fuse with his spine. Alex was amazed that Usher had healing powers, but then again, he was not overly surprised. He had figured that there was more to this Native American than met the eye.

"It is done," he said softly and removed his hand from Alex's spine. Usher rushed to Drake, Alex trailing behind. Kneeling down beside Drake, Usher checked him over in different places before placing a palm on his forehead.

"Is he all right?" Alex wondered with concern.

Usher didn't respond, which led Alex to believe something was wrong.

Questions regarding Drake's condition flooded Alex's mind. No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to come up with an answer. It didn't look as though he was breathing. As soon as that thought came into mind, it was gone.

Suddenly he heard Jamiesonn's familiar voice in his mind. *Dead as they come.*

Not again. Alex thought

Just consider me the thorn in your side, Jamiesonn said in his mind.

"How is he, Usher?" Alex asked, trying anything to direct his thoughts away from that voice.

Usher heaved a heavy sigh. "It's not good, Alex."

Jamiesonn's haunting voice echoed in Alex's mind. *Here it comes.*

"Drake has suffered a degree of damage to his brain and he's in a coma."

"Can't you do anything?" Alex pleaded.

"I cannot bring him out of the coma."

"Why not?"

"My friend, I may have powers that some would consider unnatural, but raising

someone out of a coma or from the dead is not one of the things I can do," Usher replied.

"Then we need to get him to a hospital."

"There's one in the next town."

Alex nodded toward Wang. "What about him?"

Usher glanced at him and shook his head.

"Dead?" Alex choked out.

"He's alive," Usher replied softly.

Alex noted the weird look on Usher's face, which he didn't like at all. "Well then, what's with that look?"

"He's alive, but . . ."

Alex knelt beside Wang, looked him over, and then glanced at Usher. "But what? What's wrong with him?"

"He has no affliction, but soon he'll be dead," Usher replied, his tone sullen.

Alex stared at him, trying to understand what Usher could see, and then looked away. "Do what you can for Drake; I have to go check on something."

Usher stood. He clearly didn't like the tone of Alex's voice. "I sense a bad idea, Alex, which could end with you dead. I can't allow you to go through with whatever you've got in mind!"

"I'm going," Alex said adamantly. "You just get Drake to the hospital."

He walked off toward the forest. He didn't have to look back to know that Usher was watching with concern. As Alex reached the woods, he looked back and saw Usher kneel down and start to use whatever power he had left to heal Drake.

Walking slowly through the thick forest, Alex could hear Usher chanting. These sounds grew fainter, and all at once, he could only hear the rustling leaves at his feet. Numerous thoughts flitted through his mind, but he knew he had to get his

mind in order. He had to figure out why these powers were doing these things.

In a way, it seemed to only be mind games, all to test him. But he knew it was more than mind games; these powers meant business. He couldn't understand the meaning of the voices in his head. Most important was to know how many powers and principalities were in the legion of darkness that Tanzac had mentioned. Alex didn't expect an answer, knowing there were probably thousands in those spiritual legions.

In all of this, he basically stood alone. Sure Usher could help to some degree, perhaps Wang also, but things didn't look good for Drake. Alex couldn't understand why Jamiesonn had vanished the way he had. Jamiesonn could have manifested in front of them and gone on the offensive, but he hadn't. Had he done it just to show that he was still a threat? Who cares? he thought, as all of this ran through his mind. He couldn't understand why he had been brought to this place to begin with.

As always, there were no real answers to his thoughts, but this was not something Alex was willing to accept. He had become so frustrated over this whole thing that he demanded to know what was going on. He stood there and looked around, suspecting that he was being watched, but there was nothing there.

"If I'm this foretold man of power, then why does it seem as though I'm being dragged down?" he called out into the forest around him.

Silence. He sighed wearily, then started to walk off.

"Alex," a voice spoke from behind him.

He froze, unable to turn around, and glanced out of the corner of his eye, but could see nothing.

“Alex.”

He hesitated, then turned around and was shocked to see an angelic being standing a few feet in front of him. “What?” he blurted out, staring in awe at the white glowing being.

“You have been heard, and we understand your confusion about your situation. Let not these things confuse you, nor cause you to fret.” The Elder’s tone was soothing. “You will know what to do when the time comes, Alex. Until then let things run their course, for they know of you now before they should have. At the Hour, your mind will be filled with great knowledge. This will not all come easily, for nothing great ever does.”

Alex felt as though he understood, to some extent.

“Go back to the others, but do not tell them of what you have heard. Although they want to understand, they cannot. It is not for them.”

Alex remained there and let everything sink in. He knew that it all made sense, but he couldn’t understand the power he was supposed to receive. Alex didn’t hurry back, having no reason to, or he didn’t think he did. After he had walked some distance, Drake’s condition came back to him, and he immediately ran back to where he left the others.

By the time he got there, he was relieved to see Wang up on his feet, but that jubilation was short-lived once he saw Usher was still there and Drake lying on the ground. Usher still knelt over him, trying to use his powers to revive him. Alex couldn’t see Usher’s face, but he could tell by Wang’s expression that things had gotten worse.

“Usher, I thought I told you to get him to the hospital?” Alex yelled as he ran over

to them.

Usher looked up at Alex. "I failed," he said, barely above a whisper.

"I told you to get him to the hospital, damn it," he repeated. "So what happened?"

Usher took a deep breath, and held it before exhaling. Failure was written across his face, along with weakness and misery. He was almost in tears. "I don't understand what went wrong! I tried to heal Drake as best I could, but my efforts fell short."

"How?"

Usher sighed. "I thought I could heal him, and I used my powers, but something went wrong. Now he is dying." Usher began to tremble. "I'm sorry, Alex."

"Don't be sorry to me, Usher. Be sorry for him!" he snapped. "I left you with instructions and I expected you to do that!"

Alex stared at him, then looked up at the sky. He knew Usher was terrified of this power, but Alex knew he couldn't leave. He looked at Usher and sighed in disbelief. He couldn't believe that Usher had stayed there, knowing full well that Drake's life was critical.

Alex grabbed the keys from his pocket. "Let's get out of this hell hole!"

Usher carried Drake to the car, while Wang trailed behind him.

In minutes, they were in the car, and Alex didn't wait before driving off. As the motel was on the way, Wang insisted on being dropped off as he claimed hospitals freaked him out. Alex said nothing nor thought anything of it. Usher told Wang they would phone if there were any delays. Alex was thinking that of course there were going to be delays. There were always delays at a hospital. He turned up the stereo to block these thoughts. Alex looked into the rearview mirror and saw the same fear in Usher's eyes that he had seen so many times since this all began.

By the time they arrived at the hospital about an hour later, Usher couldn't believe they had made it in one piece. His nerves were on edge, and he could have used a stiff drink. His main concern was getting Drake medical attention. Usher stood near the front of the car watching the medics come out and lift Drake onto a stretcher before rushing him into the emergency room. Alex started to follow but noticed that Usher remained by the car. He tried to coax Usher into coming, but he wouldn't budge.

* * * *

Alex went inside while Usher went and sat on a park bench across the street. Usher's urge to drink again was strong. All he knew was his best friend was on the brink of death and there was nothing he could do to save him.

From his point of view, nothing seemed to be going right. He felt depression crushing in on him and thought about succumbing to the darkness of drink. Round one hadn't even started, and this man was ready to throw in the towel. He needed help. He was lacking vision, and it seemed his spirit guide had deserted him. Usher felt totally alone, helpless and confused. Instead of trying to overcome these difficulties, he sat there and wallowed in his own self-pity until he stood up and went to find an all night liquor store.

* * * *

Alex sat in the waiting room and watched the morning news. Things were bad, especially for Drake. Yet, he knew how it would all end. He waited impatiently for someone to come and tell him the inevitable. He was concerned for Usher and Drake's safety as well as the outcome of his own life.

Everything happened for a reason. The reason for this event was simple enough. The powers of evil were against Alex because soon he would have the ability to make their existence miserable. Deceit was the name of the game, and the only thing up for grabs was the countless lives that roamed the world. Of all of this, Alex could only wonder if Jamiesonn was aligned with those powers.

What if Jamiesonn is one of them? Surely with all those forces combined they'd have no trouble getting what they want. So, why do they hold back? Alex wondered.

"Mr. Manning?" he heard someone say, but it was faint, and he took no notice.

"Mr. Manning," the voice came again. He looked to his left and saw a beautiful young woman standing next to him. "Are you Alex Manning?"

Alex stood. "I am." He could tell by her voice that things were not good. "How is he?"

She sighed. "This is not a good place to talk about your friend's condition. Follow me and we'll talk in my office."

She turned and walked toward an open door down the corridor. He followed, admiring her physique, and entered her office. She sat at her desk. Alex stood in the doorway for a few seconds, before he entered and sat opposite her. Glancing around, he saw the awards and diplomas that graced her walls.

"I'm Dr. Cathy Morgan."

Alex leaned forward. "How bad is he?"

"He's in surgery, but his chances of survival are slim. I have to ask, what happened out there?"

Alex leaned back in the chair and stared blankly at no particular point on the

desk. He was unresponsive. Again, she asked him. He glanced up at her for a second then looked away. "Hunting accident," he replied, barely above a whisper.

"Hunting accident, huh? In all my years of being a doctor, I have never seen injuries such as these from a, hunting accident."

Alex didn't know what to say at first. He knew he couldn't tell her the truth. After all, what would he say? *Hey, we were out at Winmont investigating some paranormal shit, when a supernatural force opened a big can of whoop-ass on us and left our friend here like this.* Sure he could say that, but for the truth, he would be committed.

Doing the only thing that seemed logical to do, he leaned forward, stared intently at her and focused on her thoughts, or at least, he tried to.

"Would you mind not staring at me like that." She said.

"Sorry." He apologized, glancing away for a second and thought *What the hell?*

"You want to tell me what really went on or do I need to call security." She said, already reaching for the phone.

He glanced at the phone then stared back at her. He knew that this was breaking point. He couldn't allow her to call the rent-a-cops. That would only make his situation worse, and sure, he could tie her up and gag her, but that wouldn't help his predicament.

He frowned and again stared intently into her eyes, trying to see into the depths of her mind.

"You need not call security. My friend was in a hunting accident. That is all you need to know." He spoke in a dark tone.

She stared at him, almost with a blank look in her eyes, and he knew that his power was working. He had power over her mind – finally.

“Those are unfortunate circumstances.” She finally replied, “Your friend has lost a lot of blood, and to be honest it will be a miracle if he lives.”

“You will do everything you can to ensure he lives.” He spoke with power

“We will do everything we can to ensure he lives.” She replied, almost repeating him word for word.

Alex reclined back in the seat, satisfied with his handy-work.

“Is there anything we can do?” he asked

“When we examined Mr. Winters, the police were notified. So, it would be in your best interest to stay away as they will have questions.”

Alex nodded and stood up and went to leave. He took one last look at her and again used his power on her mind, “Go about your work.” He said, “I was never here.”

She nodded and focused her attention back to the medical report, then looked up at him.

“I’m sorry, can I help you?” She asked.

He smiled and shook his head, “No. I have the wrong room. Sorry.”

He exited her office, feeling proud of himself for being able to control the mind of someone else, and for a moment he felt superior.

Don't feel too haughty boy! Your life is fixed.

For a moment he stopped and glanced around. He sensed security guards nearby and although he was able to control the mind of the doctor, he suddenly didn't have the same confidence in controlling the minds of a mass of people at the same time.

He rushed down the corridor, raced out the front entrance, dashed to his car and looked around for Usher.

Usher sat on a park bench, clearly in a drunken stupor.

“Where the hell have you been?” Usher asked in anger.

Alex sat beside him and started to explain about the doctor, but Usher cut him off. "Distracted by that blonde bitch?"

"Not exactly," Alex said.

"I had a vision this morning, and I know she is only trouble."

"Trouble is right. C'mon, we need to get out of here before the cops show up."

"My power is all we need," Usher slurred. "Bring 'em on and I'll show 'em."

Alex grabbed Usher by the arm and tried to get him to stand.

Usher stood and seized Alex by the neck with one hand. "This is your fault!"

Alex struggled free of the powerful grip and stepped away from him. "I'm warning you, don't start!"

Usher sneered and threw a punch at Alex. He reacted quickly, blocking the swing and then kned Usher hard in the stomach. He doubled over, and before he had a chance to lash out, Alex kicked him in the face.

Usher fell flat on his back, holding the side of his face. "I always had the idea you could defend yourself, but I hadn't expected this."

Alex stood near him and, judging by how tight Usher's fists were clenched, he was waiting for Alex to finish him off. He didn't. Calmness had replaced his rage.

"I told you not to go too far. We have too much to deal with, then being at each other's throats."

Usher said nothing. His expression made it clear that he knew he was out of line and had gotten what he deserved. Alex could tell that Usher hated that he'd been taken down by a guy half his size. In most cases, this was due to an adrenaline rush, but not here. It was Alex's ever-growing power. He offered Usher his hand and helped him to his feet. They sat on the bench and remained silent for a moment.

"Did you get to see Drake? How did he look?"

"He was in surgery, I couldn't see him."

Usher sighed heavily. "How long is he supposed to live?"

"The doctor didn't say."

"I wish I would have foreseen this." Usher buried his face into his hands. He began to weep softly.

Alex comforted him with a gentle pat on the back. "Don't worry, Usher, he'll live."

Usher didn't seem to take any notice of what Alex had said. "Jessica told me specifically, before I left, to keep Drake away from investigating anything. She had a strong feeling that if I didn't, he would be shipped home in a coffin. Now, it looks as though she was right."

Alex shook his head. "We'll see." He paused and took a deep breath. "After all, when I become this prophesized One—"

"When?" Usher snapped. "Alex, it's not when, but if!"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"First, you have to . . ."

"Have to what?" Alex demanded to know.

Usher sighed and looked away. He knew that he could not tell him, but it seemed now he had no real choice in the matter.

"Usher," he said, grabbing his arm, "if you know something you need to tell me."

"When you hear the calling you will then know," Usher replied. "I'm sorry but that is all I can say."

Alex nodded. "Well, I will say this. The enemies are certainly doing their darnest to split us apart." He paused then added, "Drake is down. You've been acting like a pree-doo-rock . . . Just a good thing they haven't got to Wang yet."

"You're right," Usher said. "I have been acting like an idiot."

Alex sat there and looked at Usher. He knew from his own experiences just how easy it was to turn to alcohol for comfort. But as much as he sympathized he

sure did not feel sorry for him.

Alex sighed, exhausted. He wanted to believe that he would have the power to change things, but he doubted this ability. When his time came, only those full of truth would know who he was. What of those who would be witness to his abilities? Would they believe in him, or think him a faith healer or miracle worker? They would not see him for what he truly was, a man ordained by the spirit with great powers.

Time slipped by, and aware that the police would arrive any minute, Alex motioned for them to leave, rather than stay in the park in open view of everyone. Usher nodded, and they got in the car and drove away to no place in particular.

For the next hour, they drove, discussing things that held no real significance. Talking about anything was better than the harsh reality of what was going on around them. Alex decided to go back to town, but Usher insisted on going back to the hospital.

Something in Usher's tone made Alex uncomfortable, but he ignored it. After he dropped him off, he went on his way.

* * * *

Usher felt really bad, but he held onto a glimmer of hope. He had lost so many, and he didn't want Drake to be another. They had been friends for many years, and if he died, Usher would never forgive himself.

Everything that happens, happens for a reason, a voice said in his head. It reminded him of his father. Usher tried to laugh, but couldn't. He felt more like crying, but didn't. The emotions he had been carrying around for so long had

become a burden on his mind and heart. As much as he wanted to set that weight free, it seemed things just kept getting worse.

Just how much can a man take before he snaps? the voice asked.

Usher didn't answer. He wanted out of this sinister game, but he couldn't walk away. As if he were in a game of chess, he was a pawn in the game of life. As much as he wanted to escape, it was something he could never get away from. Like so many others in the world, he was trapped, with no end in sight. He knew there had to be an end because his father had preached about it so many times. It just often felt as if there was none. Usher did not dwell on this fact; he was worried about being next on that entity's hit list.

"My friend, the only thing you have to fear, is fear itself," the voice called out.

Usher only sneered. He was not interested in what that voice had to say. The only thing that held any significance was that Alex fulfill his destiny. Usher wondered when the legion of darkness would come. Its arrival was something no one knew, not even the Elders. The answer would be presented, but not today.

* * * *

Alex arrived back in Winmont in the late afternoon. He had driven around for hours, then stopped at a gas station for cigarettes and gas before driving to the motel. As he pulled into the parking lot, he noticed that there was something different about this place. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something had changed. Alex went to his room without checking on Wang. He locked the door and collapsed on the bed.

He tried sleeping, but all he could think of was Taznac, Lutancix, Jamiesonn, and

the Elders. The one thing he hadn't seen in some time was the dead that had risen. There hadn't been any sign of them the previous night, and he wondered if they existed.

As Alex tried to doze off, his mind filled with visions of Lutancix and the clearing. He paid particular attention to the inscriptions that covered the ground. He memorized them well, as he felt they held some significance to his situation. The other issue haunting him was Drake. There was something almost familiar about his hospitalization, but he didn't quite know what. Alex didn't even try to figure that one out. Instead, he rolled over, closed his eyes, and fell asleep. As he slept, dreams of the undead flashed through his mind. He could see them, waiting on the outskirts of town. In his dreams, he could see that their bloodlust for flesh was strong, but they did not do anything. They were anticipating something, but what? His dream did not reveal that answer.