Red Serpent
THE FALSIFIER

A Novel
by
Delson Armstrong

9ine, Inc.
New York, New York
For Mom, Dad, and Baby

Thanks for your support, your commitment and for being the way you guys are. I love you all very much!
Acknowledgements

This book would not have been made possible without the following people whom I’d like to acknowledge. First and foremost, I’d like to thank my editors, Kenneth Brosky and Daniel Kenyon for their advice, ruthlessness, and complete faith in this work.

If it were not for Sidhesh Sarda and Rudraksh M. Kulshreshtha, this book would have never been as it is now. They’ve been and remain my constant critics.

In India, they say that the most important person in your life, more than your parents, is the guru, the teacher. And I tend to follow that view because I have been blessed by such teachers while I was actually in the writing process. It was because of them that I was able to get a broader view on life which, at the time, I desperately needed. Those teachers are:

Sandeep Sehgal, for nourishing my mind with some great literature and practical wisdom.
Dr. CVL Srinivas, for helping me to advance spiritually and broadening my creative abilities.
Cmdr. D.N. Joshi and his family, for making me a part of their home.
Nishanth Nagavar, for his constant help and insights on life and for the fun times we had.
Pritha Mukherjee, for helping me with the historical and political basis of this book, without even knowing it!

I also want to acknowledge Luke Sequeira, for those crazy times in Bombay, the love and support of a true friend and just for being the way you are and helping me more than was ever required!

And of course, there are so many people out there who’ve touched my mind and heart in a way that’s helped to go on with the mental journey of completing a book that took a total of almost nine years. There are literally hundreds of people that I’ve met along the way who’ve shaped my views on life. I’d like to thank those nameless faces who’ve done so.
Table of Contents

The King’s Prologue
The General’s Prologue
Chapter One: Graduation
Chapter Two: Revelation
Chapter Three: Capture
Chapter Four: Changes
Chapter Five: Decisions
Chapter Six: Ultimatums
Chapter Seven: Elements
Chapter Eight: Preparations
Chapter Nine: Mission
Chapter Ten: Clash
Chapter Eleven: Aftermath
Darkness eclipsed all of Migra and its people as they waited. “This is a damn waste of time!” said the beefy man, as he looked up at the window of the highest tower of the castle.

His wife was three feet shorter than him but almost as plump. She looked at him, her eyes widened and glistening with relentless fear. “Don’t say such things, Kalev,” she scolded him.

“Good riddance to the wretch,” he said, continuing his steady gaze.

The surrounding crowd pushed and shoved, awaiting news. Some hoped for good, but most for bad. The ones who wanted him to die waited eagerly for the word. They looked up to the window, wondering when the hour of his death would arrive. Those who supported Anaxagoras XXIX wept, praying the king would escape from this fate.

A man nearby, skinny and fraught with a noble arrogance, said to Kalev, “You’re wrong, you know. Mind your tongue or I’ll report you to the commander.” His beady eyes pierced at Kalev.

“Will you now?” the large man said. His fuzzy mustached face reddened. “Do you know what he’s put us through? We’ve suffered four deaths in the family.” He boldly pointed to the castle, “He threw my son into the dungeons. It’s been thirty years since we last saw him! Not a day goes by that we don’t think of him.”

The scrawny man scrutinized Kalev’s wife and then turned his eyes back to Kalev. “What does it matter,” he scoffed, as people shoved harder to hear what news would arrive from outside the castle. The crowd almost pushed the man and those in front to the filthy edge of the moat. The man gesticulated, “Look around you. The majority here wants him alive and we’ll stand by him.” His vicious smile revealed dirty yellow teeth. Kalev said nothing and kept his eyes on the tower. His frightened wife stood closer to him and looked at this stranger, so loyal to the crown.

Suddenly the three of them turned their heads as the crowd made way, separating in two halves. Kalev and his wife walked to one side, while the noble ran across to the other.

A cloaked figure appeared on the middle path between the crowds, his face hidden within the shadow of his hood. He glided through the air towards the castle, where he demanded with a gesture of his hands to be let in.

The bridge dropped over the moat with a loud thud. On the other side, where the spectators stood, the large gates opened, making a deep and hollow moan. Hushed whispers and gasps erupted from the crowd. From inside the walls of the castle, came the sound of stamping feet. The marching amplified by the moment until shadowy figures could be seen. The shadows formed into men with spears and shields. Their armor shone silver and gold.

This small militia was led by a portly commander, bearded and bald except for a few oily black wisps of hair that sprung out on the back and sides. “What do you want?” the commander barked. The figure remained silent and the commander asked him again, this time more impatiently. Again, the figure remained silent. “I think,” said the frustrated commander, “I asked you a question. What is it you want?” Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks. The figure raised his right hand and snapped his fingers and the commander and spectators froze in time.

A moment passed and everyone snapped out of the trance. This time the commander spoke in a softer tone, “Let this man in; he wishes to see the king, and says the king orders it done. So be it!”

Inside the king’s room, the cold dark walls seemed to express death. A little light flickered around the room, from the dancing flames of torches, and yet darkness seeped through everything.

The king slept fitfully. As the hour of his demise drew near, he felt the haunting presence of his surroundings. He felt it in every ounce of his soul.

The large wooden door croaked open and the cloaked figure sashayed across the room. The king opened his eyes. He looked up at the intruder and frowned. “Don’t you know I want to be alone? Let me die in peace. Don’t tell me you are my blood for I have no one left–”

“You, my dear king, will soon be of my blood,” the figure said in a frosty tone. He faced the king, the darkness of his hood still hiding his face.

The king was sure that the intruder was the manifestation of death; this was the end.

“No,” the figure read his thoughts, “I am not your death, Anaxagoras. I am your life, eternal and everlasting. This is what I have come to offer.”


The figure said, “And what would happen if you died? There would be anarchy.”

“It’s already like that,” the king replied.
“But when you come back from the dead, they will praise you.”
“Have such powers already. What does it matter?” The king looked at the figure, his filmy eyes trying to uncover the face within the cloak.
“But the power I give you will make you a king of kings, the royal leader of all leaders of this universe.” The dark one hissed, “You will make this universe a part of our undying power, a part of a new and immortal race.”
“What do you mean?” The king coughed.
“I offer you that which Christ offered to his people one thousand years ago. I am giving you my blood. When you drink from the fountain of real life, you shall become part of me. You shall be like me. You will be immortal and invincible forever.”
“Truly I want this,” the king said, his eyes widening.
“But,” the figure said, holding out a long-nailed, pale finger, “I warn you. The road to immortality is difficult. You will come and live with me for some time and I will show you everything. When you come back from the dead you must bend the people to your will. They will be like you in all ways but one. They will die by silver, the one thing that they will abhor. So long as you are with your people, treading the same ground that they do, no harm and no death shall come upon them.
“They will acquire powers beyond anything imaginable but they must feed on blood. For it is written: the blood is the life. When you return, the blood will be yours and your people’s life. They will no longer produce kin to take over their welfare. But those they wish to inflict slavery upon they may do so by spilling blood from their victims and making them feed on the blood of our race.” The dark one paused, waiting for Anaxagoras’s reaction. The king was mesmerized. “So do you choose life or a death with no glory or honor?”
“I choose life!” the king said, struggling to sit up on his bed. His features remained obscured by the shadows of the curtains as he leaned on a silky pillow.
“Listen to me carefully,” the figure said. Just then, his right hand swirled around and a mist started to form above his palm. The smoke darkened and formed into the shape of a silver chalice, encrusted with rubies and emeralds. “Drink this and listen,” hissed the figure. The king did as he was told. “There will come a day when I am gone. You must conquer the Men of the Earth and you must resurrect me so that I can come and reign in peace. I will tell you more soon. For now, just drink.”
In the king’s hand the chalice became a link between himself and the life-giver. He felt a gentle but painful spark that lasted only a moment yet seemed eternal. As the last drop touched his lips his spirit tore away from his flesh and followed the dark being into the nether-realms and his limp body fell back on the bed.

The supporters mourned their king’s unfortunate death. No one knew what had occurred that day when the figure went to his room and no one ever spoke of it until the king came back.
The year was 3328 A.D and the vampiric race had almost succeeded in conquering the humans. The invaders expected an easy victory but the war lasted for almost fifteen years. They had underestimated the humans, presuming them to be weak and incompetent. On the contrary, they found them to be a formidable enemy.

General John Benjamin Howe III despised fear, which was the only emotion he felt now. However, he did not show this to his men who looked up to him. Externally he emanated courage and valiance. He had to. He knew in his heart they were going to lose this battle but he still wanted to fight it to the bitter end.

John surveyed his brave men, each one of them ready to fight, and sensed their fear. “Listen!” he said. Every single man of all the one hundred and fifty thousand units remained silent, eager to hear their general. “What do you hear?” he continued, cupping his right ear. He turned to the open battlefield with his back to the army. “Watch! Tell me what you see?” In their hearts, they already knew the answer. “Death!” He spat. “Do you all think that it’s death? If it were so, we would not be here now at the final battle, so close to victory. We are a tougher species than that!

“I’ll tell you what I hear,” boomed the General. “I hear the clamor of more than a hundred thousand vampiric blood-stained swords. I hear the battle cry of the human race, a cry that shall be written in the annals of history as the roar of a lion that vanquished its enemy. For I tell you, we will rise again out of the ashes. We will cry so loud that the entire universe will know that if they cross us they’ll perish!” The general waved his sword in the air. “Let me hear that cry now!”

The large army shouted in unison, clattered their swords against each other and stamped their feet. The ground trembled all the way to the vampiric army, two thousand meters away.

“And,” he went on in the same vein, “I’ll tell you what I see. I see the armies of Anaxagoras begging for mercy because they have been subjugated. For those who seek to conquer will be conquered. I see them crushed by our boots. I see them all destroyed by the sword and wrath of the human race!” Again, there was a loud outburst of enthusiasm. “Come, my brothers-in-arms: let’s show them what we’re made of!”

They marched on as death’s shadow towered over each one of them, ready to pounce and devour them.

“General,” said Nikolas to Varenkoff in the ancient vampiric language. “Is everything ready?” He stared into the eyes of the Rebel and sensed a great amount of apprehension in them. He wondered if his comrade’s eyes simply reflected his own emotions; for a moment he thought he saw fear personified as a cloaked and brooding figure in the crimson darkness.

“Yes,” Varenkoff said, “The scouts we sent are posted midway between here and the human army.” He whispered, “Once we reach the area, our units will be ready and we’ll catch them by surprise.” Nikolas noticed the fear and doubt in Varenkoff’s tone.

General Nikolas Gareng was a member of the Rebels, and he had been careful not to let the Imperial Regime know this. Ever since the beginning of the Great Rebellion, he played the part of the heroic and loyal subject of the king. He was useful to the Rebels because he showed them the vampires’ most secret of plans. Now, at the final battle, he would reveal his true allegiance.

At the start, John Howe didn’t trust him. He seemed too much of a loyalist to be a Rebel or to help the humans. But over the years the human general learned to trust him with his life and even became like a brother to him. There was a time when Nikolas disapproved of John and his ways. The human wanted to study the vampiric mythologies and ancient lore in order to learn their ways of energy manipulation. Nikolas felt that it was wrong for any human to even think of this. But as the years passed and the war magnified in scale, Nikolas knew he needed to be more forgiving and accepting. At his cousin’s behest he started to accept the humans and finally came to see what John really was: a loyal man to life itself and a man of honor. For that he respected him. Eventually, their friendship grew and was strengthened by their family ties.

“Where is he?” Nikolas asked as he thought of his cousin. “We don’t have much time. If the army senses we’re together, it will ruin the entire operation.”

“He should be here shortly.” Varenkoff said.

At that instant a fiery dashing warrior appeared, flying through the dark red sky. Above him the thick black clouds looked like they were about to burst. A blue light encapsulated him, giving him the appearance of an avenging angel returning from the heavens to report on the battle with Satan. He flew towards them and gently landed on the ground
“What are you doing here?” he asked Nikolas. “Weren’t we supposed to go directly to the king?”

“There seems to be a change of plans, Aidan. We will go to the king, but first I have to make contact with General Howe. He’s to tell me when to go. He commands that you go ahead first and wait for me and do as the king bids. Buy time. As much as you can. But if there’s going to be any kind of conflict, be quick with it and assassinate him.”

They could hear the Imperial army fast approaching. “Go now!” said Nikolas. They embraced each other, and Nikolas said to him, “Be careful, brother!”

Varenkoff shook Nikolas’s hand and flew high into the air. His body twisted rapidly and returned down to the earth where he dug deep into the ground between the two armies. Nikolas waited for Anaxagoras’s army, calculating his next move.

A few minutes later he could see them marching over the horizon, led by General Adiraan. When they reached Nikolas’s tent, they stopped at Adiraan’s command. Nikolas walked up to the general and embraced him. Adiraan smiled and said, “After all these years, we shall have victory.” His deep raspy voice rang in Nikolas’s ears. Every time he heard him speak, Nikolas felt a fear rise from his heart. He felt as if Adiraan knew too much, that he knew Nikolas’s true allegiance. But for now, he let it slide from his mind and returned Adiraan’s smile.

“Yes,” Nikolas said. “Come, let’s ready the men.” He put his arm over Adiraan’s shoulder and they approached the two hundred thousand soldiers. Nikolas ordered them to be at ease and inspected them with a general’s eye. They were the crème de la crème of the king’s battalions. Their armor and shields were embossed like the warriors of old in gold and white gold and depicted a cross with a serpent wound around it. Some carried swords, some bow and arrows, and some axes, all intricately designed. “Now!” shouted Nikolas in the modern tongue, “my men, is the time to show this scum race what and who we really are. We came here to conquer, and conquer we shall!” They burst out into shouts of fervor for war and blood. Nikolas turned around and saw John’s army reaching closer. He continued, “Look at the army you are about to face charging at us in a frenzy! But we are better than that; more civilized. Let us end this war once and for all!” He broke into a jog and they followed him, their pace increasing with every step.

As they rushed closer to the enemy, Nikolas’s heart heaved. Something was going on at the King’s Base. “General,” he said as they charged onwards. General Adiraan turned to his left as he sprinted along with his men. “Take charge of this legion!” Adiraan nodded and Nikolas flew off into the air.

Aidan monitored the large curved surface of the ship, black with the volcanic ash of Antarctica. The volcanoes that erupted here, as a result of nuclear global warming and four world wars, created a hellish environment of soot, ash, and lava. There was no vegetation and other than humans and vampires, there was no life. The fumes made it almost impossible for humans to breathe, so this area was the best possible place for the king to remain safe. Soon after the war it was known to all as the King’s Base.

He’s in there, Aidan thought. His target’s presence, deep within the thick walls of the ship, emanated a dark and deadly aura of hatred. He landed on the cliff, a few meters away from the base. His brow furrowed deep in concentration, as if looking through the ship.

The entrance to the base opened up and five guards, all dressed in black and maroon, flew towards Aidan and drew their swords. The leader of the guards addressed him, “You’ve been commanded to come with anyone. Especially your king!” Aidan spat into the guard’s face.

“If I didn’t consider your lineage,” the guard replied, “I would have killed you already.” He wiped the spit away. The other guards bound Aidan with handcuffs and tied chains around him. The chains were made of an alloy of silver and steel; there was just enough silver to keep him tortured but not enough to be fatal. Because of their rebellion, Aidan and those who followed him suffered to be unprotected by the king’s presence.

“Come along, scum!” The guard shouted. The others dragged him and hovered back to the base. As they neared their destination, Aidan scrutinized the ship with more attention. He noticed the black dust covering the once reflective silver ship. They landed near the entrance and walked on. It grew darker. The large edge of the ship towered over them like a massive cover. The ground beneath them felt rugged and almost rubbery. Vein-like crevices broke apart as they walked, and lava oozed out slowly. “Hurry up,” the leader of the guards said, frustrated as he pulled on the chains attached to Aidan’s cuffs. The silver door slid upwards. Light filled the spacious passageway as they entered the threshold.

The inside was very similar to the ancient pyramids of Egypt. Hieroglyphs written in Cuneiform, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Sanskrit were engraved in the walls. Aidan read some of them but their meanings seemed undecipherable. All he could fathom was something about a legend of the First Vampire of the Race. Other scriptures, the ancient relics of Migra, seemed to float and were encased in glass. Aidan remembered seeing one of
the texts somewhere, once a very long time ago.

It hit him. Of course! They were the prophecies of Ardemis, referring to the Falsifier. The same prophecies he had made thousands of years later. These scriptures remained unknown at the time of his prophetic utterances. Then one day an excavation in Antarctica revealed many ancient relics in this very cave the ship was lodged in. Amongst these finds were the vampiric scriptures, along with the apocrypha texts and the Ardemic Prophecies. There were many, and only a few had been translated into the modern dialect. Since not many knew the ancient dialects, Anaxagoras took it upon himself to study and unravel the truths of the vampires.

“Stop,” said the leader of the pack. “We’re to leave you here.” They stopped in front of the throne room. A large pure copper crucifix, green in color, with a red brass serpent wound around it, seemed to protect the massive platinum double-door.

The guards unchained Aidan but left on the handcuffs and took their leave. From the other side of the door, a snakelike voice hissed, “Enter.” The door opened and Aidan walked in.

The hall was large and dark. A dim light surrounded the throne where the king sat. Just as his predecessor had done, he dressed like the dark figure who had given him new life. His face was covered by a dark cloak, but the pale light revealed his pronounced mouth and bone-white skin. “Welcome, Aidan.” Anaxagoras lifted his hands and unbound him with his will. He motioned for the soldier to come and Aidan felt himself being pushed towards the king. As he came closer, the flames of the torches all around the room grew hotter and brighter. They revealed gray walls adorned with weapons and shields embossed with various noble family crests. Aidan saw another crest, more intricately designed and larger than all the others, behind the black marble throne. It was the majestic and ancient emblem of the king’s lineage and it was the same symbol of the serpent round the cross that was emblazoned on all the shields of the vampires.

“Take a seat, Aidan,” said the king, moving a chair towards his visitor using his mind. “I know why you have come here,” he continued once Aidan sat down.

Aidan sealed his mind so the king couldn’t read it. But what if he knew already?

“It is an assassination attempt...isn’t it?” the king asked. His wide mouth broke into a wicked smile, revealing large fangs.

Aidan swallowed his fear and said nothing.

Underneath the hood, the king chuckled softly. The deep demonic laugh echoed across the hall and rang in Aidan’s ears. “Well then, finish me off if you must, young Aidan,” the king said.

“It is not that,” the Rebel said, “I do want diplomatic relations to continue--”

“Useless! Your words are pathetic! Do you think peace can exist after all this? Do you think that the armies will surrender so easily?”

Aidan was taken aback. “Our army will not,” he said, gathering himself. “What we’re fighting for is freedom, for democracy--”

“Democracy!” the king shouted, “You really have no idea what you’re fighting for.”

“As if not listening, the king rose from his throne and with a flick of the wrist, he materialized a sword out of thin air, long with a silver hilt and adorned with onyx and gold.

Aidan stood up and backed away, preparing himself and materializing his own weapon.

The king’s face darkened as he stepped down from the throne.

Aidan moved forward.

The two armies clashed into each other with a mighty force. The impact ruptured bodies and sprayed out blood, creating shockwaves in the ground as human and vampire pushed and shoved. The chaotic battle spread out for miles around.

Suddenly, Adiraan and his men were ambushed by a large number of Rebel battalions that hid beneath the ground. The first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth columns of the vampire army stopped abruptly. A group of fifty thousand Rebels sprang up as the ground cracked open. Vast amounts of lava spewed into the air. Led by Varenkoff, the Rebels flew up and protected the human army with a large energy bubble that deflected most of the enemy attacks. The Rebels that hid amongst their enemy attacked with full force, catching a quarter of the Imperials by surprise. But the enemy was still under the king’s protection, proving all attacks against them ineffective. Aidan had yet to fulfill his mission. The situation worsened when the Imperials resurrected the humans from the dead and turned them into their mindless warrior slaves.

General Howe half-expected this and ordered another full blown attack on the vampires. If they were able to corner them with the help of the Rebels, the enemy would surely surrender until backup arrived.

Varenkoff knew what Howe planned, and followed this strategy. Anaxagoras’s army was trapped but the king’s
general immediately called for reinforcements. As they waited, he used his will to control the forces of nature. The ground shook and cracked once more as copious amounts of red hot liquid spurted out. Smoke and steam rose out as lava quickly filled the cracks and burned everything in its path, including the human army.

“Varenkoff!” shouted General Howe. “Do something!” The Rebel general ordered a command to his army and the Rebels levitated the human army into the air and created another powerful protective aura. A translucent blue shield covered them. The Imperial warriors launched energy beams in an attempt to destroy the spherical shield. This is getting out of hand, thought John as he looked to Varenkoff.

Varenkoff knew what his comrade was thinking and said, “What would you have us do?”

“There must be some way to stop this!” John said.

The Imperial reinforcements arrived and renewed the attack. Thousands of them flew towards the battle, but before they could get close the Rebels blasted them away with massive energy balls.

Varenkoff flew across the mayhem and punched Adiraan in the chest, knocking him down into the lava. He fell in but flew back up, smiling as his energy shield protected him and radiated a shiny crimson light. The lava, still attached to the shield, dripped off slowly.

Irritated by Adiraan’s taunting smile, Varenkoff concentrated all his strength and energy into his weapon to create an effective blow. The energy around the sword formed slowly as sparks of light surrounded the weapon. The Rebel general dashed at Adiraan but bounced of the reddish energy shield and fell back. Adiraan laughed, his sharp white teeth shining. His long dark red hair blew across his face as the wind from the east moved with raging force. “Look upon your destruction, Varenkoff!” he said as he pointed at the ongoing battle below.

“You’re wrong!” Varenkoff said. “It’s time for Aidan to rule in a new order!” “Aidan is but a child compared to Lord Anaxagoras! No one can replace our king!” Varenkoff darted at Adiraan’s stomach and their haphazard battle continued.

Just beneath them, John Howe and his army were nearing defeat. The general decided to call for reinforcements. He knew of another battalion fighting out in the Gobi Desert, led by General Jarad Hameed. If they were still alive, he could call them to come and help. But would it be too late by then? If they even managed to arrive, would his battalion already be destroyed? That’ll be a risk we will have to take.

So he did what was necessary and radioed General Hameed.

The battle between Aidan and Anaxagoras grew fiercer. Their swords clashed with a fiery intensity that radiated sparks of hot light. The rapid clanging of metal upon metal resonated throughout the large hall.

Anaxagoras’s skills as a swordsman were the stuff of legend. His flawless reputation remained intact after numerous challenges from knights who were swiftly slain for their audacity. But Aidan too was a master swordsman. He had studied under the king and faced him in sparring matches. But all that was much earlier, before the war.

Once more, their swords collided, creating flashes of energy that blasted them to opposite sides of the room. The only thing on Aidan’s mind now was to destroy Anaxagoras. “You will pay for all the deaths you’ve caused, for all the pain you have brought upon the peoples of Migra and the Earth. I hate what you have done for us. It is a curse.” Aidan stopped and backed off when he was level with the king.

“How can you call this,” Anaxagoras charged up his right hand until energy formed around it, “a curse?” He threw the energy bolt at Aidan. The prophet backed away as the blast flew past his shoulder and hit the wall, which crumbled into pieces. Aidan soared towards the king, but Anaxagoras cast him aside into the debris. Aidan’s body was crushed as it hurtled into the rubble. His head started bleeding but he was still conscious. He glared at the king who landed softly on the ground and walked to him.

“Don’t forget this, oh wise king. I know your secret,” Aidan said. The king halted. “No one can destroy me!”

“You will surely die,” He said. “For he is coming. The Falsifier is born!”

“What did you say?” Anaxagoras’s voice faltered for a moment.

Aidan laughed at the sudden weakness he saw in the king. He saw the end coming but was no longer afraid to die. In his mind’s eye he saw the savior of the humans and the vampires alike. Now he was ready to accept his death.

With one swift move, the king slashed his chest open. “I will be ready.” The king turned around, leaving his enemy to die and disappeared into a mist.

“You will be sorry,” Aidan’s breath heaved. Blood surged out his mouth.

“Aidan!” Nikolas rushed into the throne room, having defeated the guards in order to get in. He embraced Aidan clutching his hand. “Where is he?”

Aidan spoke with a deep rasp, “I don’t know.”

“We’ve lost! It’s the end for us now.” Nikolas cried as blood flowed down his cheeks.
“No!” Aidan said, “It isn’t the end. It’s just the beginning.” He breathed out his last and smiled as he entered the eternal.
Chapter One
Graduation

Alex inspected himself in the mirror. The reflection showed a young man with wavy jet-black hair and a pale clean-shaven face. His eyes were dark brown and his nose was thin and majestic, which suited his long face. He had the air of an emperor about him like that of Bonaparte or Nero, two of his favorite leaders he studied about when he majored in Political Science at the Regnum University.

In his left ear he wore a tiny hearing aid, which despite being the latest technology did not make a massive difference. Four years ago he had been left practically deaf in his left ear after a sporting accident. Whilst scoring a touchdown for his college football team he had been crushed by the opposition. In the chaos someone had accidentally trampled on the side of his head, perforating his eardrum. The doctor had told him that his hearing would never fully return and it remained a cause of constant discomfort to him.

He stood six feet tall with an athletic body. Whether walking, sitting, or just plain standing, Alex possessed an authoritative physical presence. That might have been expected, perhaps, since he was the nephew of the most powerful man in all of Regnum, General John Howe the Head of the Council.

The Council of Regnum was an oligarchy that consisted of six leaders, each representing the six inhabited continents of the Earth as it was before the Third World War of 2112 AD. Above them was John Howe, the Executive Leader. Under the Council were three other governmental bodies: the Senate (consisting of one hundred and forty four people), the Judiciary or the Supreme Court (consisting of six Justices), and the Municipal Board (consisting of six Officials) which overlooked the day to day objectives, public safety, health and other aspects of the society of Regnum. Alex knew he would inherit the leadership of the Regnum, even though it wasn’t allowed legally. But his uncle always hoped he would be elected to the Leader’s Chair.

The twenty one year old fixed his silk tie and readjusted his black suit jacket. He turned around and sighed. He unbuttoned his coat and sat down on the chair nearby, nervous because it was his graduation day and he was the valedictorian. But there was something else that had been bothering him for a long time. Everyone’s parents were going to be there but his.

Of course everyone knew that as well. Alex had never met his father and knew nothing about him, and his mother had died during childbirth. Whatever memories he had of her had long since faded with his infancy. He thought of her now, hoping beyond belief that he might one day see her again. Maybe then he would discover all the truth his uncle seemed to be hiding.

Any time Alex asked about his father or the other side of his family, John’s face would darken and his brow would furrow even more than it did when he was deep in thought at the council. Whenever he asked these kinds of questions, Alex could see a hint of nostalgia in John’s glinting eyes. Alex imagined that his uncle thought of the glories won in the War for Existence. A bittersweet expression would dominate John’s face as he talked about the old days, before the War, when there was peace. Of course Alex already knew what his uncle spoke of during these wistful speeches. He had studied it in-depth as a thesis for his degree in Political Science, on the Comparative Studies of Wars and Their Corresponding Leaders. The content of his thesis spanned all the way from ancient prehistoric myths through the revolutions and to the Four Great World Wars. It also covered a detailed history of the recent war, its causes, the Rebellion, the Last Battle, and the aftermath.

What he and everybody else knew was that after the crushing defeat at the Battle of Antarctica, the humans were forced to retreat when General Jarad Hameed’s army arrived too late. By the time they got there, the vampires were on the offensive with a larger number of forces than ever. The Rebels, those vampires who were against the Imperial Regime, were too few to hold the enemy off. By the time the second-in-command of the Rebellion arrived, General Nikolas Gareng, most of the human and Rebel Armies had perished. King Anaxagoras had won the war and the humans were to be exiled forever. The Rebels were taken as prisoners of war and their fates were to be decided by the Monarchy.

Two weeks later, a meeting took place between John and Anaxagoras’s vizier, Erik III, a duke of the imperial nobility of the vampires. It was decided that a treaty should be signed in New York, where the long-forgotten UN headquarters once stood. The humans had no choice but to agree to the exile. They were to build a spherical space
station called the Regnum, the largest in history with a huge glass encasing and spanning a diameter of 5042 miles. It was to orbit the Earth and was to be at all times between the Earth and its natural moon. The vampires thought this would be the best way of containing the humans. They would be so close to home yet still unable to fight or reestablish another army. As the old saying went, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.”

During the peace meeting, General Howe spoke up for the Rebels in the great hall of the newly renovated building that stood in the place of the UN headquarters. Before the meeting, he spoke in private with Erik and suggested that the Rebels be allowed to live with the humans on the Regnum. After much consideration, Erik refused. He had other things in mind. John remained adamant and made a motion in the public gathering stating that the Rebels should be able to co-exist with the humans in the Regnum. Two of the seven council members agreed, while twenty percent of the Imperial Council agreed. But the rest of the Council Members, led by General Hameed, refused.

“Are you mad!” Hameed whispered to John while a break proceeded between the treaty sessions, “How can we allow that? And even if we did, do you think the others would feel comfortable with it?”

“We can’t just make them waste their efforts.” John said, “If it wasn’t for them, we would have never made it this far.”

“But they’re vampires!” Jarad protested. “They’re part of the species that tried to annihilate us! For all we know, they still want to!”

“I can’t believe what you’re saying, Jarad.” John shook his head and leaned back in his chair. “Remember Nikolas!” He pressed the intercom and connected to Nikolas’s table where the Rebels sat. “Nick, will you come over here for a minute?”

Nikolas got up from his conversation with the Rebels and left their section and spoke to his old friend. “Yes, John. What is it?”

John looked pleadingly at him, “Nick, don’t you want to join us on the Regnum?”

“Of course I would…” Nikolas said. “But, the other Rebels think it best that we don’t.”

“But you know what they’ll do to you,” John said. “You’ll be tortured and killed.”

“We don’t know that for sure,” he sighed, “Look, old friend, I can manage all this; somehow I have a feeling they won’t kill us.”

“Then what do you think they’ll do?” Jarad asked.

“I don’t know. But I get the feeling we are much more useful to them alive. They’ll do anything but kill us. Maybe the king has something in store for us.”

Anaxagoras had left the Earth after the end of the war and headed for Migra, the vampires’ home planet, with a vast portion of his army led by Adiraan and a select few commanding officers. This was in order to fulfill a verse of the prophecy; though the king gave no explanation, the general understanding amongst the vampires was that he wanted to gather more forces from Migra and its allies for the day of the Falsifier and the return of the Red Serpent.

After three days of intense negotiations and failed debates, John agreed to have the Rebels remain on the Earth and all was set. John and the others buried Aidan and, with him, their past.

Alex walked to the spacious window and stared outside to see people entering the university. All the students had one or more family members with them; mostly parents.

He slammed his fist on the table. A glass of water spilled over and fell onto the white marble floor where it broke.

A knock came from outside of the changing room. “Alex?” Uncle John’s voice called in. “Everything alright in there?” He opened the door. Alex’s face was buried in his hands.

The boy’s pent up agony and turmoil emitted from him like an unhealthy glow. Ever since his mother had died, the sad loneliness had never left him and it increased year by year, remaining dormant most of the time. Due to his tough heart, Alex didn’t often show his emotions. Today, however, was proving to be a little difficult and for good reason. “Alex,” John’s fingers combed through his nephew’s hair. “What’s wrong?”

“But look at me, Uncle John. I don’t want anyone to see me this way. I have to be strong!”

“Who told you that holding things in was being strong?” said John. “The dictators of history, the emperors long gone? They did what you’re doing and look what happened to them. They all died before their time. Look,” he sighed and took a chair to sit down in front of his nephew, “I’m not saying you should show your emotions in front of the public. But, if you hold on to these feelings of hatred, anger, jealousy, lust, or as in your case, grief, it’ll deteriorate you from the inside out. Let go of your emotions and the past. Learn to be stronger than that. Cry and mourn for those you loved, but then you must make the departed happy as well. What would your mother say?”

“I don’t know what she would say.” Alex said with iciness in his voice. “I never knew her.” He got up and walked to the sink where he splashed his face with water. He remained silent and watched John through the mirror. John returned a look of equanimity. Alex turned around and wiped his face and hands. “And what about my father?
Where was he?” Alex could see John’s eyes twinkle at the mention of his father.

“Your father was a great man.”

“You say that always. I want to know who he really was. What was his name? What did he do? How did he die? I’ve asked all these questions and more and every time you give me this generic answer. All you’ve told me was that he gathered the remnant forces of the Human Army. Then, why wasn’t his name mentioned anywhere? Even if it is classified, I got a right to know, don’t I?” Alex fished out his gown from the closet and put it on. “I’ve had enough. I want to know everything.”

“Maybe later,” John said. He stood up and brushed the creases from his nephew’s gown and placed the mortarboard on his head. “I promise we’ll talk about it later.”

“But—”

“I can hear the crowd outside. They’re growing impatient. I gave the commencement speech.” John held Alex at arm’s length. His eyes looked fiercely into his nephew’s. “Now it’s your turn to give the valediction. Hurry up. I said I promise, and I mean it.” He put his arm over Alex’s shoulder and led him out. “Let’s go.”

The University Auditorium was vast not only in space but also in history. It was here that the Revolution of 3333 occurred, when University students disagreed with the Council and tried to usurp the government. At the time, Alex was five.

The Constitution of the First Year of the Regnum was signed at the auditorium. After five years it was reinstated into a new constitution and ten years later it was redrafted and made final. This was one reason why the Revolution of 3333 happened. The Second Constitution stated a life-term of the Council Leadership and of all other posts but this was redrafted after ten years when revolutionaries demanded elections of shorter terms instead of appointments with life-terms. This was satisfied excepting the clause that the Council Leadership was still made a lifelong position, including the position of the Leader’s Chair. Because of this there was an unspoken feeling of wariness amongst Council members who feared assassination attempts or perhaps even a coup. There were rumors that the top people who potentially could have led an insurrection were Jarad Hameed and four other influential members of the Council.

Introduced by Dean Michaels, Alex entered the stage and stepped up to the podium. He felt his pulse rising. He’d often experienced stage fright but had also learned how to overcome it. He scanned the audience and saw Uncle John and Grandma Howe sitting in the front row. He saw all his friends beaming at him, with a tinge of jealousy. Then he saw her.

Angel, as Alex called her, gazed up at him, easing out everything else for him.

“My fellow collegians,” he started, “dear family and friends, respected members of the board of trustees, Dean Michaels, and whoever else I’ve missed out.” Those last words might have been an outrage but everyone knew Alex’s sense of humor. He continued, “I stand before you, here on this podium, as a graduate, a very nervous one, if I may add...” The lighthearted crowd laughed. “...but nevertheless a graduate. I am proud today to be among friends and to have the honor of being Valedictorian of the Regnum University.

“I don’t want to bore you with all the details of my years at college. It’s Political Science. How many people actually know what it is, let alone want to know what it is?” The crowd laughed again and Alex cleared his throat and continued. “So I’ll just highlight a few events at the University that have shaped my life so far. Interestingly enough, my first incident was on the first day but it doesn’t concern Political Science or any other subject for that matter. It concerns Angel, the first friend I made at college and one who has been my best friend ever since.” Angel smiled at him from the front row and the color rose to her cheeks. “Sparks flew the first time we met and we continued to see each other every day that followed. And now...well, I had promised to wait till the evening, but I have to say it. We want to get married.” There were many gasps and shouts of surprise amongst the crowd. Angel hid her face in her hands. Alex looked at her parents. They smiled at him and nodded their agreement. Alex’s grandmother beamed with happiness.

With the palms of his hands Alex motioned the crowd to silence. After a few moments he went on with his speech. He told the crowd about how he met his other friends, and all the funny incidents that had happened. He spoke of how important he felt his education was, and how great Regnum University was. The speech lasted for twenty minutes.

“In all this time,” he concluded, “I have learned many things from this highly respected institution. Let me end here by wishing all my colleagues a happy farewell and a very bright future. I hope one day we will walk in my father’s and uncle’s footsteps. My dream is that we will achieve the one goal we’ve all been striving for: existence on Earth. Let us pray that day will come soon. Thank you.” The crowd burst into thunderous applause as he bowed, left the stage and shook hands with the faculty.
After the graduation ceremony, a grand party was held in the University Gardens in the evening.

John and Jarad shared a drink together at the bar, just like old times. They refilled their glasses and clanked them together.

“So tell me,” Jarad said. His swarthy skin glistened with a light layer of sweat. He wore a stylish white goatee and a long scar ran down from the upper tip of his nose to under his right eye.

John knew where Jarad was heading, and just said, “I don’t know. You tell me.”

Jarad shrugged innocently, “What would I know? I just read what’s in the news.” His voice softened, “I hear there may be another fiasco like ’33.”

“Oh come on. Where’d you get the info?”

“Just rumors, here and there.”

John was surprised. Since when did Jarad Hameed pay heed to rumors? “I hear rumors too, you know. Like the others in the Council—”

“Richard,” Jarad blurted. “He’s not here, is he? What’d he say? Had some work, didn’t he?”

John raised an eyebrow, “Richard? He wouldn’t—” “He’s in on it.”

“People talk. Forget it.”

Jarad protested, “You’re holding Leader’s Chair. You have to put a stop to it.”

“If something did come up, I’d know. Believe me.” John emptied his drink and savored the strong taste of the whiskey. “Now, let’s forget all this. It’s my nephew’s graduation; let’s get drunk.” He let out a hearty laugh.

Jarad smiled.

John approached an idle bartender, “You there. Two more. Straight.”

The bartender nodded.

John turned to Jarad, “By the way, how’s Hassan?”

Jarad said, “Good. He sends his regards.”

John nodded, took the glasses from the bartender and handed one to Jarad. “Listen, I’ll see you in some time. Let me make sure Mom’s alright.”

“Yeah, sure.”

John left him and Jarad’s eyes followed him with suspicion.

Alex looked around the garden at everybody enjoying themselves and spotted Angel in one corner and approached her. “Hey,” he said and kissed her on her cheek. She smiled but Alex could see through her expression. Inside she hid a deep sadness. He looked at her for a moment, sipped his wine and waited for her to speak. He could tell from her eyes that something was urgent. “You okay?” he asked.

“Alex,” she said slowly, “we need to talk. Something has happened.”

“What?” he said, leaning forward to make sure that he could hear her properly.

She sighed and averted her gaze. “It’s difficult to say it,” she said. “Maybe now’s not the right time after all.” She cringed and bit her lip.

“You just said—” “Look, I know I have to say this but I’m sure you’ll go crazy if I do.”

He touched her hair, “Just tell me already.”

Alex saw from the corner of his eye Uncle John and his Grandma talking. From his uncle’s face, Alex could tell that he was nervous. His grandmother had her hands clasped together and was rocking them back and forth in a pleading motion. His uncle John was shaking his head. “Wait a minute, Angel. I’ll get back to you. Maybe we should talk later. Say the Flamingo, tomorrow? Lunch?” He started to walk away to see what they were talking about.

“But Alex—”

He had already left. Angel exhaled and rolled her eyes. She held back her tears and used a napkin to wipe her eyes. With her head down and her arms folded, she wandered away to be alone. She found an empty bench and sat down.

Alex went to meet his guardians. They did not notice him coming and so he overheard part of their conversation.

“But John, you have to tell him,” his grandmother said.

“Mom! He wouldn’t be able to handle it if he knew everything,” John protested.

Alex walked a little slower and eyed the two with interest. Uncle John suddenly turned his head and noticed him.

“Alex! Come here!” he said, affecting a cheerful tone. He went to shake his nephew’s hand and hugged him.

“Congratulations! You’ve made us all proud!”

His grandmother kissed him and said, “I’m so happy that you’ve accomplished this. We all are, and I know your parents would have been as well.”
Uncle John took a long meditative sip of his drink and nodded.
“Yes,” said Alex, turning once more to John, “I believe we have much to talk about tonight.”
It was about 2:00 AM when Alex, John and Grandma Howe reached the Estate. Apart from when John spoke occasionally to the driver of the limo, the ride home was a silent one. The limo pulled up into the garage where many other vehicles were parked. When they got out of the car, the silence discomforted Alex even more. He was eager to know everything and say something but, seeing his uncle’s solemn face, he remained quiet. His grandmother looked at Alex and placated him with her kind gray eyes.

Inside the manor, John sighed and sat down on the leather chair. “Okay Alex,” he said. Alex sat down on the sofa facing his uncle. Grandma wandered off into the kitchen to prepare some coffee. “What I’m going to tell you,” continued John, “is just the beginning of what you really need to know.”

Alex remained silent.

“Now, you do know that you were the last human to be born on the Earth. In fact you were born on the day of the last battle. Of course you were too young to remember anything.”

“Okay,” Alex said. “What are you getting at, Uncle John?”

John exhaled, “I’m not the one to tell you this story. Your mother is.”

Alex looked confused. “My mother?” He felt foolish even thinking it. “Is she still alive?” he heard himself ask.

Alex’s grandmother came in with three hot cups of coffee on a tray which she placed on the table. “Well, where have you gotten till?” She asked, sitting down on the sofa next to Alex.

“Uncle John mentioned my mother.”

“What have you told him?”

“I told him about the day of his birth and I was about to tell him its significance.” John turned to Alex. “Your mother wrote you a letter and it’s this letter that reveals the truth.” Uncle John stood up and walked over to the library in the hall. He began to root around the cluttered book shelves. His fingers finally rested on an old tome which he pulled out. Suddenly the library slid open, revealing a silver door. “The letter is in here,” he called out to Alex, gesturing toward the silver door.

Alex got up, more baffled then ever. “What the hell...”

Grandma Howe took Alex by the hand and led him to the library. “Come and see what your mother left for you,” she said.

Alex felt queasy as his palms sweated. He eyed his uncle with apprehension. “Look, I...I...” he stammered.

“We have time. You want this or not?” John’s sharp eyes stuck to Alex’s.

Alex nodded, silent for some time. Then, with more confidence, he said, “I want this.”

“What test?”

“Put your hand here on this knob,” John pointed.

Alex did as he was told and heard a whirring noise from inside the entrance. He felt a tiny shock and let go.

“The first part of the test was a fingerprint scan and a small nanopin pricked your hand to check your blood,” John said.

“Why would it need to check my blood?” Alex asked.

“You’ll see,” said his uncle, smiling. His eyes glimmered with the excitement of a little child.

The door slid open, leading to a long passageway. As he approached it, the ground lit up with a pure bright light, illuminating the walls.

“The door slid open, leading to a long passageway. As he approached it, the ground lit up with a pure bright light, illuminating the walls.

“Now you’ll have to go inside and see for yourself.” John said.

“You mean you’re not going to come with me?” Alex’s voice trembled.

“No,” said Grandma. “We promised your mother that you’d do this alone.”

Alex stared at his guardians, waiting for one of them to say something else.

Grandma Howe smiled. “Don’t worry. Everything will be fine. When you get to the end, you’ll know just what to do.”

“But how will I know where to go and what to do?”

John put his hand on Alex’s shoulder. “It’s a straight path. You can’t fail.” He gave a gentle push and Alex went
beyond the threshold. Instantly the door reappeared behind him, closing him inside. Now there really was no going back.

As he walked on and his eyes adjusted to the bright path, Alex wondered how this place was possible. Did the Council build this secret passage? Did they even know it existed? Maybe Uncle John was keeping secrets from the rest of them.

Fifteen minutes passed and Alex could see another silver door at the end. He quickened his pace, eager to find whatever it was that he was looking for. He checked his watch. 2:35 AM. He wondered whether his guardians were still awake, waiting for him.

He reached the second entrance and saw that it had no handle. Alex touched it to see if anything would happen. Nothing. He tutted in irritation and searched around to find a switch or key to open the door, but there was none. Then he heard the same whirring noise he had heard at the entrance. Out of nowhere, a robotic voice echoed in the corridor. “Please state your name,” it said.

“Alexander Howe III,” he replied.

“Access Denied!”

He tried his mother’s name, “Miriam Howe.”

The voice didn’t say anything. The whirring sound grew louder and faster. Finally, the voice said, “Access Denied! Three attempts left until total lockdown.” His guardians hadn’t told him anything about this. Surely they hadn’t forgotten? He tried his uncle’s name. That didn’t work either and nor did his grandmother’s name.

This was his last chance. He thought of going back to ask his relatives, but he suspected they would not hear him through the closed door. Again, he searched around for some clue. Just then, he noticed a small inscription in Cuneiform on the door. He touched it and immediately a thousand different inscriptions appeared, all in ancient languages. There was Hebrew, four different dialects of Aramaic, Sanskrit, Egyptian, Arabic, Urdu, and many others. Alex realized they all read one thing. A name. Aidan. He read it aloud and the robotic voice said, “Access Granted!” The door slid just like the first one, revealing a room. Once he entered, the door materialized again behind him.

The room was large with hundreds of books crammed on shelves all around. In the center was a small waterfall. Alex gasped. The flowing water was red. His cheeks tingled as he came to the realization that it was in fact blood. The blood flowed down from the fountainhead into a small pool.

His stomach churned. Fear crept up his skin. He turned around, paranoid that there might be some kind of monster behind him. A chill crawled up his spine. What if there were vampires here? He tiptoed cautiously over to the pool to take a closer look. But then he stopped, afraid that if he came any closer, something would jump out and kill him. He waited and looked around once again, keeping his right ear pricked for any sounds. The sound of the cascading blood echoing through the room was the only thing he could hear.

Alex wandered around the rest of the room. There were chairs and a Louis XVI style desk. There was also a coffee table, exquisitely decorated in gold and platinum, and four lounge chairs, a deep red sofa, and two recliners around the coffee table. He walked over to the bookshelf on his left. The literature ranged from science, history, political science, legends, classical, Greco-Roman literature, Shakespeare and ancient literature. There were scrolls from Alexandria, Taxila, Nalanda, Athens, Rome, and many other ancient centers of learning. Alex returned to the desk. On it there was an old book.

It was bound in leather and the cover showed a silver cross with a brass snake wound around it. In plain English, the long title read *The History of the Dynasty and a Plain Translation of the Verse of the Ardemic Prophecies*. Beneath this was the subtitle, *Included: Supplementary Material on the Secret Histories and on the Lineage of King Anaxagoras XXIX by John Benjamin Howe*. Alex opened the book to see strange writing in a language unknown to him. Next to these were the corresponding English translations. He browsed through and read the section on the Ardemic Prophecies, which had been bookmarked:

**XXIX.** There will come a time when the Earth’s moon shall darken. A large destructive force will strike down upon the armies of the King. Fear not for the Lord of All Bloods shall save them and destroy the impure ones that were cast out of the Earth. The False prophet known as the Falsifier is the Enemy of the King and yet he shall be called the Son of Men and Anisaei alike.

**XXX.** The Red Serpent, the One from whom all things came shall avenge the deaths of his servants. He shall resurrect them and make his Children immortal.

**XXXI.** And then I saw the One who is False and he said to me, “I have a power, unlike any other that no being has ever known nor ever shall. Only you, and soon the King shall know.” And he told me the secret, which none but the Holy King and I know. This king shall be known as the direct heir of the Red Serpent, and he shall be called Anaxagoras.
Fabian II. However, they had limited ships and space-fighters, which in the latter years of the Migritic Revolution Urwqene and Hildkür. The space force was commanded by Fabian who was then officially known as Admiral Migra. In addition to these famous turning points were other successful campaigns on the planets Jostna, Kolwar, were fought. These included the Battle of Drego Fort, the Battle of Kilas Plains and the Battle of the Foria Desert on command of the revolutionary armies and was successful in seventy-two of the one hundred and eight battles that the other planets and waged a full-fledged war against the Markian Empire. General Gregorious III centralized the system. Argos came to and fro constantly and word got back to the emperor. Markos sent spies to watch him. When Argos brought up the subject of the people’s unrest. Markos said nothing and tried to change the subject. When Argos persisted, the emperor became furious and yelled at him. He spoke about the people in a way that no leader should. Argos had enough and politely took his leave. In his heart, he had already turned against his brother. He would have to be careful from now on as suspicions were bound to arise about his true loyalties.

In the Markian Empire, relative peace prevailed. But as an Emperor, Markos wanted more power. He conquered other realms (planets) and in doing so, created a solar empire. Using the other planets’ resources and manpower, he made Migra the center of that system. He even changed the system’s name to the Migra System. After 750 years of rule, the people of the Migra System became distrustful of the Empire. They wanted a better ruler, someone who was democratic and yet strong at the same time. Eventually the “revolutionaries” found a man who fit that ideal. This was Argos, the twin brother of Markos. Argos was a diplomat and a very important member of the Board of Advisers. He never let the personal mix with the professional. He too was dissatisfied with the corrupt reign of Markos. The revolutionaries asked him to speak to Markos. One evening, while having dinner with his brother, he brought up the subject of the people’s unrest. Markos said nothing and tried to change the subject. When Argos persisted, the emperor became furious and yelled at him. He spoke about the people in a way that no leader should. Argos had enough and politely took his leave. In his heart, he had already turned against his brother. He would have to be careful from now on as suspicions were bound to arise about his true loyalties.

The next day, Argos met with a man named Fabian II who was the leader of the revolutionaries. The revolution officially began when Argos joined Fabian. Meetings were held on Jostna, an icy realm at the furthest reach of the system. Argos came to and fro constantly and word got back to the emperor. Markos sent spies to watch him. When he discovered what his brother was up to he had him arrested and taken prisoner for treason and terrorist plots. But this did not stop or even slow down the revolution. The people of Migra, appalled by the arrest of Argos, released him from prison gates. Bloodshed ensued and the Migrites succeeded in freeing Argos. Soon after, they joined forces with the other planets and waged a full-fledged war against the Markian Empire. General Gregorious III centralized the command of the revolutionary armies and was successful in seventy-two of the one hundred and eight battles that were fought. These included the Battle of Drego Fort, the Battle of Kilas Plains and the Battle of the Foria Desert on Migra. In addition to these famous turning points were other successful campaigns on the planets Jostna, Kolwar, Urwqene and Hildkür. The space force was commanded by Fabian who was then officially known as Admiral Fabian II. However, they had limited ships and space-fighters, which in the latter years of the Migritic Revolution
became a major liability. Fabian was finally defeated and killed in the Space Battle of Jostna. There was a major loss of ships and fighters. Admiral Johannes took over and miraculously managed to turn the entire fleet around. One after another, they won many battles, especially after 895 M.E. (Markian Empire) when Argos Nyrax created numerous foolproof strategies.

The final battle was at Drakim Castle, the main headquarters of the Empire on Migra. It was to be the battle which made Argos Nyrax I the hero of the Revolution. The Markian Armies were valiant and would not give up easily. However, equal bravery was to be found in the Nyrax Armies. Finally, the armies infiltrated the castle, and Argos led a small group of soldiers into the Throne Room, where the emperor awaited with his guards. A swordfight followed and Argos was able to get to the emperor. With one final slash, he cut off his twin brother’s head. He carried it to the highest tower in the Castle, and declared victory for himself and his armies. The Revolution was over and after three weeks of discussion, a Constitutional Monarchy was established with Argos as the King of all Migra and its system. The Nyrax Monarchy was established, with each king serving a reign of one thousand years. The coronation of Argos I took place in 1 N.D (Nyrax Dynasty). A thousand years of Golden Peace reigned. This further continued into an Age of Knowledge, Peace, Unity and Bliss that lasted for the next 150000 years. The latter years of this period were, however, besmirched by some war and ravage.

In about 10000 BC, the Migrites came to the Earth and passed on their knowledge to the Humans. It was at this time that signs of internal deterioration within the Kingdom were duly noted. They learned the secret of necromancy and were able to raise the dead. Politics took place inside the Courts and soon another war broke out, this one ending with Anaxagoras XXIX. It was known as the War of the Eight Kings and began in 142000 N.D, lasting about 7000 years. The war was ignited by a disagreement between father and son. It spread to future generations all the way to Anaxagoras, thus making it one of the longest wars ever fought in Migritic history. Finally, Anaxagoras XXIX won the battle in 149000 N.D, when he learned a secret way of defeating the other Seven Kings. He summoned a man named Jokesham, who was a powerful practitioner of the forbidden Black Arts. Jokesham told the King to go to the Earth along with the other kings to sign a secret peace treaty at Antarctica. When they arrived there, they entered a hidden cave. It was said that the magician cursed them and cast them into the Abyss where he presided over them as their gatekeeper. From then on, there was no king but Anaxagoras. His reign was more terrible than that of Markos I and not surprisingly, another Rebellion took place in 150000 but was garnered no measurable success. In 151000, Anaxagoras was to die, but the Red Serpent saved him.

This made no sense. How did Uncle John learn so much about the history of the vampire kings? He concluded that he must have had help from the Rebels.

Alexandros. That name rang through his head. Could it be that there may have been some connection between him and the vampires? Was he himself one of them? It certainly made sense but it shocked him to think so. His own name was Alexander III. So did that mean he was the continuation of that race? He wanted to know more. Was he really a vampire? If not he was sure that he had some part to play in all of this. He went through the book once more. Something fell out from behind the back cover and landed on the desk. A letter:

November 11th 3328

My Dear Son Alexander,

Today is your birthday, and as I am writing to you, I see your face. Your emotions are conflicting. On one hand your soul is at peace because you have been born into this universe and know your place in it. On the other hand something irks you. Today is the Last Battle, and we have lost. The reason I am writing this letter, which should have been given to you by your guardians at the right time, is to let you know the things you have always have wanted to know. I must tell you that after I finish this letter I shall die.

I am holding on to my last breath so that I may tell you this. You are my beloved son, and your father told me many things about you before you were born. His name was Aidan Nyrax, the son of Anaxagoras Nyrax XXIX. That’s right, you are a descendant of the Nyrax dynasty, but it isn’t mentioned in any of the books. Even your father’s name isn’t mentioned in any of the books. That’s because your grandfather believed he disgraced the dynasty. Because of this, he was cast out. Alongside his cousin Nikolas, your father started the Rebellion. And now, Anaxagoras has killed him.

Your father was no ordinary vampire. He was born after the conversion of your grandfather. Now, vampires cannot procreate, but they can turn other races, especially the human race, into their kind. Anaxagoras wanted a direct heir to the lineage of the Nyrax family, but this was not possible. Therefore, he created your father out of pure energy. He used the energy of the stars and quanta and molded it into your father’s form. So he was born as a grown
man, having had no childhood. At first his only thoughts were an extension of Anaxagoras’s. It was after some time that your father became independent and started to think on his own. He learned all the great secrets from Anaxagoras. After the Rebellion, he taught them to Nikolas and John and later used them against his father.

But you, my son, are quite different. Your father prophesied earlier for Anaxagoras, and later he spoke of the Prophecies of Ardemis. He had visions about you and foresaw your coming. You are the one who will be known as the Falsifier or the Equivocator. You are both human and vampire. You may wonder how that’s possible. Your father did as your grandfather and created you out of energy. You were made the same way Christ was made. Your father never touched me. So he put pure energy into my womb, with a single cell of his blood and you were conceived. You were born to avenge us. Your grandfather is afraid of you, I know that. And your father still has many things to tell you. He left some discs for you, which I gave to your uncle. There is a code for all of them. Ask him and you will know everything else you need to know.

I know you will not fail in anything you have to do. You are destined for victory. Your father could not foresee what will happen after you go to battle with Anaxagoras, but he knew that you are the salvation for all races.

I shall forever be with you in spirit and I will watch over you. I remain your loving mother eternally, and I address you by your true name: Alexandros yus-Aidan Nyrax III.

So he was the Falsifier and a vampire. A half vampire at any rate. He whispered the word to himself. Suddenly, he felt it in his blood and his heart. Somehow, he had always known. Was that why he had achieved so much? Because he had such powers and came from such a noble lineage? I am a vampire prince, he thought.

He returned to the shelf to look at the other books in the library. Next to the shelf was a full-body mirror. He walked over to it and glared at himself. Even his reflection seemed different now. It disturbed him. The more he scrutinized himself the more his reflection distorted until he saw himself as a monster. He jumped with fright.

“I can’t be a vampire!” he cried out, suddenly horrified by the notion. He felt now that he could trust no one. It hurt him that Uncle John and Grandma had not told him before. He went to sit on the sofa and looked into the pool of blood and the waterfall. His senses electrified seeing it once again. He got up and touched the pool, swirling his fingers in it and lightly skimming the blood. He tasted his finger. It tasted...good! It was so different, unlike anything he had ever tasted before. It was sweet, but not like sugar. This must be the taste of Ambrosia, the food of the Gods, he thought.

As Alex drank more of the blood, he felt more at peace. There was a soothing humming sound in his head. It was the sound of the universe and it pleased him. His face was a picture of serenity like one who had attained nirvana. “This is the missing piece in my life,” he whispered.

Suddenly he felt something pop in his left ear. He took out his hearing aid and whistled. It was incredible! Sound had entered his left ear! It was just like before the football accident; in fact it was even better.

He was immediately addicted to the red liquid. With a splash, he thrust his whole head into the pool. Suddenly, he could feel his gums expand as his canine teeth grew. He felt them with his tongue and laughed. He felt more powerful than he had ever felt before. He found himself speaking in a very strange language. Fire seemed to glaze over his pupils and two red energy beams shot out of his hands.

He yelled at the top of his lungs and collapsed.
Chapter Three
Capture

Alex had fallen into a dreamless sleep. When he woke up, he felt as though he had been hibernating for a thousand years. He stretched his arms and yawned. A huge smile spread across his face. He opened his eyes and blinked. He was on the living room sofa. As his eyes adjusted to the light, he saw the figure of Uncle John.

John smiled at him as he sipped some black coffee. “Good morning,” he said. He came closer to Alex and placed his hand on his nephew’s forehead. “Well, the fever’s left you and you seem better now. You gave us quite a scare last night.” He spoke matter-of-factly, as if nothing had happened last night. Alex tried to remember last night, but his head ached as if he just swallowed an ice cold drink.

Suddenly he saw a vision of an emerald cross, and a serpent, red as blood, crawling towards it. He saw a rift between him and the cross and in that rift was a white light. The previous night came back to him. “Anaxagoras!” he shouted. He paused, catching his breath, and said much softer, “I didn’t have a fever last night.”

“You did. Right after you fell unconscious.”

His grandmother hurried out from the kitchen, sat down in a chair next to him and said, “Alex, you’re okay. We were so worried about you last night.” She gently wrapped her fingers around his hair.

“If you hadn’t drunk the blood, everything would have been fine,” his uncle added.

“So am I one of them?” he said weakly.

John took his time before saying anything. “Well you’re half vampire, half human.”

“Okay,” Alex said, trying to make sense of it slowly. “So I wasn’t dreaming after all. So, what does all of it mean? Am I some sort of messiah?”

“You are the Falsifier. According to the prophecies, you are a vampire in every way but you do not share their curse. Ultimately you are the enemy of the Anisaei.”

“Anisaei?” Alex asked.

“Vampires, in the ancient tongue of the Red Serpent,” John said.

“Please tell me this is all a joke, you guys.” He looked at John, then at Grandma, searching for the slightest hint that they were pulling his leg.

“Think about it, Alex,” said John, raising his right eyebrow. “All this time you had a feeling.”

“What? That I was a vampire?” Alex thought about it and realized that in his heart of hearts, it was true. “So what’s my true name? Alexandros yus-Aidan Nyrax?”

“That’s right; you are a royal prince. Your name means Alexander son of Aidan Nyrax. Like in the Hebraic traditions.”

Then it hit him. “Wait a minute! So then Anaxagoras is my grandfather! He killed my father, didn’t he?”

John looked at him solemnly, but said nothing.

“So now I’m supposed to kill my grandfather?” he said, as he got up wide eyed, from the sofa.

“Alex,” said John. “I think we should go back to the Inner Chamber, where you were last night.”

“Are they ready?” Lord Julius asked the President of the Vampire Confederation.

“My lord, they will be shortly.” Daniel bowed slightly. He had never liked the Twelve. They were a Council of Elders that Anaxagoras had established before he left. They outranked Daniel and came between him and his chance for ultimate power over the Earth.

“That is all?” asked Lord Julius. He was part of the Twelve. Although the majority of vampires on the earth wanted a democracy, Anaxagoras had always preferred a dictatorship. Nevertheless, he listened to the people, and a Confederation was established. They were responsible for making important decisions to do with the rule of the king, the keeping of the Ancient Covenant, and of course top-secret war plans. The Covenant, made to the Red Serpent by Anaxagoras on behalf of the vampires, was something that was hidden under the ancient inscriptions in Anaxagoras’s diary. The only thing the vampires knew was that they were supposed to keep the humans alive, though they were the enemies. Many speculations arose from this controversy including that they were to be made vampires later when the Red Serpent came, that they were to be placed under the rule of the Red Serpent and made slaves for the vampires, or that they were food for the Red Serpent. However, no one understood why the Treaty of
New York was approved by Anaxagoras, and why the humans were to live so freely with only the necessary restrictions. These, including Anaxagoras’s sudden departure, were only the beginning of the numerous speculations the vampires conceived.

Nobody knew what the Twelve looked like as they always wore dark cloaks and hoods over their heads. Rumors had it that they symbolized the Twelve Elders of Migritic Mythology. No one knew their real names for they were lost when Anaxagoras hypnotized the entire race and bestowed upon them new names. These names came from the great emperors of Rome. Anaxagoras had a passion for this history, and so he named them after the Twelve Caesars.

“No, my lord,” said Daniel with a reluctant tremor, “I wanted to ask you about the project.”

“You mean Hydra?” Lord Julius asked.

“Yes,” Daniel said, “I was curious as to when we would start it. Is—”

“No, my lord,” said Lord Tiberius. “We must wait till this mission is successful. Have the Rebels ready. If all goes well, we will start with Phase Three of the Silver-moon Project. Once Phase Three starts, we will simultaneously work on Hydra.”

Daniel looked unsatisfied with Tiberius’s answer, but he knew better than to mention it.

“Does something displease you about what I said?” asked Lord Tiberius who had read Daniel’s mind.

Daniel changed his thoughts and said, “No, my lord. I was just intrigued, that is all. I am a little anxious about the war.”

“Why so? Plan everything, make sure everything is foolproof and start. These were Lord Anaxagoras’s orders. Do not forget that.” said Lord Caligula.

“Of course, my lord.” He bowed and left the darkened room facing the Twelve. The heavy iron double-doors slammed shut.

Daniel walked out of the hallway and into the courtyard where he looked up at the sun. We conquered you a long time ago, and now we have even conquered silver, he meditated. Who can stop us now? He smiled and ran his fingers through his long black hair.

His secretary, Mikhail IV, approached him, interrupting his thoughts, and said, “They are ready, sir.”

*****

Alex and his family entered the Inner Chamber. “Let’s see,” his uncle said thoughtfully as he looked for a particular book. “It was here somewhere.”

“Uncle John?” Alex said, looking at him.

“Yes?” John said, as he continued to browse through the collection of books.

“Was last night all set up?” Alex asked.

“I thought you would have figured that out by now,” John said. “But to clear your doubts: yes, it was set up after we inhabited this space station. I had this chamber built secretly so that you might learn about your vampiric heritage. Ah, here it is!” John pulled a book off the shelf. Compared to John’s history book, it was a slim volume.

“What is it?” Alex asked.

“Gareng! Isn’t he... I mean... wasn’t he part of the Rebellion?” Alex asked.

“Daniel is Nikolas’s son. But he deserted the cause thousands of years ago. After the failed Rebellion in 151000 N.D., he joined forces with Anaxagoras. That’s when the Great Conversion took place and the Vampiric Race was born.”

“So General Gareng helped you to write the book?” said Alex, looking at the book’s title. The Annals of the Kings of the Nyrax Dynasty was engraved on a small rectangle sheet of silver.

“Well there was help from both Gareng and your father. Gareng, Nikolas Gareng, is your father’s cousin.”

“So he’s my...” Alex said, trying to link it all together.

“Well, technically, he’s your second cousin first removed,” John chuckled. “But Nikolas always joked about the vast age difference between Aidan and himself. He would say that if Aidan were to have a son, he would be more like a guiding uncle to him. Now the last copy is in the secret chambers of Antarctica. It’s said that that’s where the Red Serpent lies, in the Mausoleum of the Anu-Sa-Rihm, located in the Great Cave.”

“What?” Alex looked at John, his brow furrowed.

“Anu-Sa-Rihm. It means the Blood Gods. You really need to learn the Mitgritic dialect of the ancient vampiric language. And you need be trained in combat,” John said, walking over to the fireplace. “You will learn how to use a sword, how to fight hand-to-hand, and how to develop your vampiric powers.”
“You’re going to teach me how to what?” Alex said.

“Not me,” said John, leaning against the wall next to the fireplace, “your father.”

“How can I learn how to fight from a letter?”

“The discs.” John smiled.

Soon after the Treaty of New York and the Great Exile, there were many tasks that lay ahead for the Anisaei on the Earth. First, in accordance with Anaxagoras’s orders, the Rebels were to be held captive until Phase One of the Silver-moon project was foolproof. It took about four years to perfect. During this time some of the captives were experimented on. Then the second phase began, in which the silver immunity serum was injected into the remaining Rebels including General Gareng. It took two years for this immunity to peak. Training procedures took place for another sixteen years.

At the same time, the infrastructure for the entire Earth was planned and remodeled. Most of the devastation caused by the war was cleaned up and the debris was launched towards the sun.

The cities of the Earth were populated and developed with new buildings, roadways and airports. The water in the oceans was recycled and used for hydroelectric power in the cities and in the Central Command Centers. These CCCs were large mega stations that bridged the oceans and connected all the continents. There was one connecting Europe and Africa to North and South America and another from Asia to Australia and the Pacific side of North and South America. Two smaller CCCs also interconnected with the islands (or what was left of them) such as Greenland, Iceland, and Japan. From the sky, these command centers looked like giant metal octopi that attached themselves to the coasts of the Earth. Only Antarctica remained isolated. For the vampires, Antarctica was their Holy Land and the place where the Great Cave stood. It was strictly prohibited to go there until the Return of the Dark Lord.

Daniel traveled to CCC 1 via helicopter from London. “What’s happening so far?” he asked Mikhail in the copter.

“Well, the situation is under control,” said Mikhail, clearing his throat as he looked through a file.

“What do you mean?” Daniel asked, his fierce gaze trying to penetrate Mikhail. “I thought you said they were ready.”

“Your father was some problem for us; he tried escaping the lab and with his newly acquired power, he killed four scientists and some guards.”

“Well, how did you get it under control?” Daniel asked. “Does the Council know about this?”

“No, sir,” Mikhail said, trying to meet his gaze with confidence.

“In that case,” Daniel sighed, “there’s no need to tell them anything. How did you stop him?”

“We put a restrainer on his neck, which he was unaware of. After the attack, one of the scientists turned it on, giving him a mild electric shock. The silver on his body acted as a conductor and paralyzed him.”

“And how is he now?” Daniel asked.

“Fine,” Mikhail smiled slightly, “but resting.”

“Resting?” Daniel asked, raising his voice, “I want him ready for this mission.”

“He will be, sir, by the time we get there.”

“I surely hope so. When this mission is completed, we’ll have everything we need ready.”

From the chopper, they saw the massive tentacle-like structures. The bridges that led to the huge saucer-shaped base stretched from coast to coast, hiding most of the Atlantic Ocean. A row of helipads that branched out from the main base awaited the Presidential chopper. It landed on helipad eight and Daniel could see Erik, the vizier, waiting for them near the elevator doors that led inside the Command Center. Beside him stood two Imperial guards. The President and secretary stepped out and waved to the vizier.

“Oh no,” Daniel said under his breath, “Not him now!”

“Well, good to see you too Daniel!” said Erik as he walked up to them with his arms outstretched. “You had better learn to control your tongue and mind, especially around those you don’t like.” He gave a baleful smile.

“Why are you here?” Daniel wasted no time.

“Fine,” Mikhail smiled slightly, “but resting.”

“Resting?” Daniel said, “I want him ready for this mission.”

“He will be, sir, by the time we get there.”

“I sure hope so. When this mission is completed, we’ll have everything we need ready.”

The elevator took them down to level 32. They exited into the hallway where many scientists in white coats and with clipboards scurried about. Instantly, Mikhail could smell a hint of silver nitrate.

“Oh no,” Daniel said under his breath, “Not him now!”

“Well, good to see you too Daniel!” said Erik as he walked up to them with his arms outstretched. “You had better learn to control your tongue and mind, especially around those you don’t like.” He gave a baleful smile.

“Why are you here?” Daniel wasted no time.

“Just came for some work the Council wanted me to do.”

“And what’s that?”

“To keep an eye on you. So shall we?” Erik gestured towards the elevator.

The elevator took them down to level 32. They exited into the hallway where many scientists in white coats and with clipboards scurried about. Instantly, Mikhail could smell a hint of silver nitrate.

“Isn’t this a little dangerous for us?” he asked, sniffing the air.

“No, of course not.” said Erik, “These gases have been tested upon and are absolutely harmless, as long as you don’t overdose.”

“But why is it here, sir?” asked Mikhail.
“Well, the scientists here are testing it on the soldiers, our Rebels, to see if they are immune to it. Inside,” he pointed towards the door, which had a radiation warning sign on it, “the dosage is lethal for us; that’s why we’ll have to wear these.” He pointed to three reflective hazmat suits that were by the entrance.

Once suited they strolled inside where they saw a small group of soldiers, glazed in bright silver and restrained to operation tables. Some of the scientists recorded data, while others put braces around the soldiers’ wrists. They took blood samples to check the level of silver in their systems. So far, there was no sign of danger for the Rebels. Daniel searched the room for his father and spotted another room. He entered it to find Nikolas encased inside a bulletproof glass container. There were many of these side rooms where wounded soldiers recuperated. There were tubes that had been injected into Nikolas’s body: two in the chest, two at the shoulders, four in the legs, and three in each arm. Through these tubes, Migra was being injected.

Migra, the name of the planet of the vampires, was also their name for iron. The vampires needed blood for iron. Because of a low hemoglobin count, vampires needed the iron for regeneration. They used vast amounts of energy in order to fight and use psychic powers. This energy transmuted from the iron in the hemoglobin. Therefore, it was necessary for them to have blood. But then they realized they could make artificial blood by extracting iron from the Earth and mixing it with other minerals and vitamins found in rocks. This is how they created the concoction known as Migra.

The tubes popped out of Nikolas’s body and retracted into a black metallic hive. The Rebel opened his filmy eyes slowly. Then a crimson color crept slowly back into the pupils. Daniel looked at him defiantly, and said, “Well, top o’ th’ mornin’ to you...father. Did you have a nice slumber?”

Nikolas got up and moved swiftly towards the glass. Suddenly his whole body turned to bright silver. With a supernatural strength he ripped apart the glass wall. All gasped and backed away except Daniel. “Everyone, stay calm!” The President shouted before anyone could call for backup. Nikolas hovered in the air like a silver angel as he approached Daniel.

“So, my son,” he said, “This is what you have done to me.” He pointed and Daniel backed away. “Oh, don’t worry. Though you may have thoughts of patricide, I nonetheless love you, as I always have and I always will.” He hovered back down to the ground. The silver layering of his body dissolved, revealing his pale muscular body and face. Nikolas smiled.

“Oh, my dear father,” Daniel said, “how much you try in vain to persuade me to join you. But look now who is the victor and who is the fallen. I have finally squashed your Rebellion, and now you will work for me!”

“Or rather for your king? Is it not so?” Nikolas looked at Erik with disgust. “I should have killed you when I had the chance. Perhaps things would have been different.”

“Do you really think the humans would have let you all stay inside the Regnum?” Erik scoffed.

“Never mind that!” Nikolas’s voice reverberated through the room, “I know for sure what General Howe would have wanted and what he still wants.”

“General Howe is nothing but a rogue human who couldn’t even control his own battalion!” Erik laughed in Nikolas’s face, his sour breath hitting Nikolas’s nose like a punch.

“You cannot judge him,” said Nikolas, “because of that one battle.”

“Why must you always talk of the past, both of you?” Daniel said. “Mikhail,” he turned to his secretary and snapped his fingers. “Are the ships ready?”

“Another four minutes and twenty seconds, sir.” He said, checking his watch.

“Alright, get these soldiers ready,” Daniel said loudly to the scientists. He addressed his secretary once more, “And I want you to get the others ready and send a report to the council.”

“Right away, sir.” Mikhail bowed and hurried to do his superior’s bidding.

“You know this will mean war,” said Nikolas.

“Precisely father,” said Daniel, “Your mission will be to get the Falsifier. After that, there will be war, but with the Falsifier on our side, we will have destroyed everything even before Anaxagoras comes.”

“Lord Anaxagoras,” Erik corrected him.

“Yes, Lord Anaxagoras.” Daniel said, glaring at the vizier coldly in the eyes.

Nikolas laughed, “You have no idea who the Falsifier is, do you? You think it’s some mutation in the genetic code of the vampiric DNA. Well, it isn’t. The Falsifier is vampiric and he’s something else as well.”

“What? Human?” Daniel laughed back, “It’s impossible to have a Vampiric Human.”

“All things were possible with Aidan,” Nikolas said, his eyes glazing in the light.

“What do you mean by that?” Erik said, almost baring his teeth.

“Oh, you shall see. You want this mission completed, so be it. But you’ll soon discover that all this time you were wrong. Imagine, a vampire in the Regnum,” Nikolas spat.

“Well, it’s possible. Everyone knows the Falsifier will come from the humans but behave like a vampire. Besides,
we have found a vampire in the Regnum.”

Nikolas’s eyes widened. “What?”

“Yes,” Erik said. “Our ships were near the spatial border a few hours ago. They were taking thermal imagery of the Regnum, when they spotted a life-form. The being they saw didn’t have normal human heat. Its temperature fluctuated due to an innate part of its structure. It’s the Falsifier.”

“You may be right. You may not,” Nikolas said. “But you still don’t know the whole truth.”

“Just imagine.” Daniel said. “When we find the Falsifier, we will be able to be like him. We can splice his DNA with ours and become truly immortal.”

Mikhail hurried in and reported, “Sir, all the soldiers have been transported into the ship. We are ready to launch at your command.”

“Good. Go outside and wait for me,” Daniel said, turning to the vizier, “And Erik.”

Erik turned to face Daniel.

“Please leave with Mikhail.” Daniel gestured. “I have something to tell my father.”

Erik responded, “Whatever you tell him can be said in front of me.”

“Erik,” Daniel said looking into his eyes, “I’m requesting you. That’s not something I usually do.”

“Are you flattering me? Do you think I need that? I’m the vizier of the King! You can’t talk to me like that.”

Nikolas interrupted, “This can wait. I have a mission to go on. I am sure there will be time for this when I get back.”

Nikolas walked to the elevator with Daniel, Erik and the twelve Rebels that had survived the tests, their neck restraints turned on just in case anyone tried to escape. The elevator descended a hundred and fifty feet below helipad eight to helipad six. They took an air-transport to the hangar, where the ship awaited them. The hangar, located nearest to the volatile ocean, stretched half the width of the command center. Inside there were thousands of fighters and transport tankers. Some of them were being replaced or repaired by mechanics and aviation technicians. As Nikolas walked to his ship, Daniel stopped him and whispered in his ears, “Remember. If you try to contact John Howe or do anything to compromise the mission, our three hundred soldiers are on guard.” Nikolas flashed a quick smile and left him.

John observed the fireplace, as if inspecting it—

“What is the Red Serpent?” Alex asked.

John turned around and looked at his mother, who sat on a nearby recliner observing the two of them. “Now Mom, this will be a first for you as well, I suppose.”

“Yes, it will be,” Helen paused, “well, you do know who it is, right?”

“You mean no one has any idea what or who this Serpent is?” Alex was intrigued.

“In fact,” said John, “Not even any of the vampires know, except for Anaxagoras.”

“Okay, so we don’t even know what we’re fighting?” Alex said, walking around, trying to digest everything. “I’m guessing he’s the originator of the vampire race, right?”

“You could say that, yes,” said John. “I don’t know his true identity, but I’ve been researching it and I found stories of him amongst the ancient Sumerian scriptures and even from Genesis. He could be the serpent from Genesis.”

“You’re saying it’s the Devil?” Alex smiled. “That’s a little too esoteric for me.”

“Alex, please be serious. I said I’m still researching. What I can tell you is that after the War of the Eight Kings, Anaxagoras was stronger than ever. But he had no heir and wanted to die. But a man came, whom your grandfather called the Red Serpent, and gave him new life through his own blood.”

“I know he killed my father, but...” Alex sighed. “This sounds like something from Shakespeare or a Greek play. I hardly knew my father, and I don’t understand why I have to kill my grandfather. For revenge?”

“Because the prophecy...”

“...because the prophecy says so,” Alex finished. “But if he is my grandfather, there must be another way.” He felt an anger rising up within him. “And why am I being used as propaganda for my father’s rebellious beliefs? Why am I made this ‘god’ who’s supposed to avenge everybody?”

Grandma Howe and John said nothing. They knew he was right. But what could be done about it? This was only the beginning.

John breathed in and smiled with a teary twinkle in his eyes. “Alex,” he said, moving closer to his nephew, “You once told me that you would do anything to see the real Earth, to one day regain what we lost. That,” he grabbed him by the arms, “is not nor ever was your destiny. Your destiny was written by your father and has been told to you by your mother. Nick told me that your father died in peace with a blissful smile on his face because he knew you would be the one to defeat Anaxagoras and save us all. Perhaps that’s why his body never combusted. My theory is...
that the curse of the vampires never touched him. I truly believe that.” He stretched out his arms and gestured
towards the library. “You think you don’t have any reason to kill your grandfather but, when you read these books,
you will change your mind. And you may not know your father, but you will now.” With a magnifying glass John
deciphered what was written on the right side corner of the back cover of his book. Then he scribbled the number
11113328 on a piece of paper.
“What’s this?” Alex asked as John handed it to him.
“Guess!” his uncle smiled at him, “you should know this number.”
After examining it carefully, Alex realized what it was, “My birthday!” On the note, he placed two dots:
11.11.3328.
“Right.” John smiled. “But this is just the code for that.” He pointed at a gargoyle, which was on top of the
fireplace. Alex still couldn’t figure it out. “Mom, do you want to stay here?”
“I think I’ll head back to the hall.” When Grandma got up, she said, “Angel called. She said she had to meet you
at the café near the Monolith for lunch.”
He checked his watch. It was already 1:30. “Damn, I forgot.”
“Angel had something she wanted to tell me at the party last night and I totally forgot about it after seeing you
guys.”
“I hope everything’s alright.” said Grandma.
“I hope so too. Uncle John, I need to go to her.”
John nodded. “But make sure you talk somewhere private.”
“And in any case,” said Alex, “I really need to go to the Monolith and just let it all out.”
“Sure,” John nodded and gave a comforting smile.

The Monolith of Faith was a nine hundred foot stone column that stood in the center of the mega city. It was a
tribute to all the different religions, spiritual teachings, and mythologies of the ancient and modern world. People
were free to worship in any way they pleased, as long as they were silent in the large inner courtyard. The structure
of the complex was intricate: as the worshipper entered the main courtyard, a large door would open and lead him
into a large hall. Here was the Great Library, where scrolls from Alexandria, Nalanda, Taxila, and various other
ancient centers were preserved. The spiritual teachings of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam and
their various respective branches of philosophies, sects and denomination would be available in books and on
holodics.

After walking through the one thousand yard library, one entered the Worship Room where people of different
religions practiced their faiths as they saw fit. Here the great monolith stood, engraved with the thousands of names
for God taken from ancient and modern scripts. It was carved mainly out of silver and radiated magically in the
night. It truly looked like an object brought down from heaven. This was one of the many places Alex loved to visit.
Here, he could pray to his mother or to God and feel at peace. Sometimes he thought he felt his mother’s presence
and the divine spirit swirling in the room during his meditations.

Alex’s grandmother had told him to meet Angel at the Café Flamingo. It was one of those regular places where
Angel and Alex would go together as a couple to enjoy coffee and cake. Alex loved the espresso the café made and
the Dutch Truffle chocolate cake, while Angel would usually order for a Mocha Cappuccino and a Hazelnut
Brownie with chocolate ice cream and syrup.

Alex checked his watch as the limo driver stopped near the café. “Thanks, Bill.” He said and hastily got out of the
car. It was 2:15 and he was really late. Angel sat outside in the garden area with an impatient look on her face. Alex
kissed her on the cheek and then pecked her on the lips. “Sorry I’m late. I didn’t get your message until 1:30. I was a
little tied up and I guess Grandma forgot about it.”
“It’s alright,” she smiled one of those smiles that made Alex’s heart melt. “I already ordered some food for us
when I saw your limo coming by.”
“What did you order?” He sat down.
“Ah, your favorite: Chicken Parmesan,” she said, smiling and looking deep into his dark eyes.
“Great, what are you having?”
“A steak sandwich and an iced tea.”
Alex looked at her skeptically. “Really? You never eat steak.”
“Well I’m feeling very hungry today,” she said with a wink.
“Okay,” said Alex. “So, what’s been happening?”
She looked apprehensive and sighed. “I really don’t know how to say this to you.”
“Just say it, Angel.” Alex said. “I asked you last night as well and you didn’t tell me anything.”
“You walked away from me,” she said.
“You weren’t saying anything! You know you were like this a while back too.”
“When?”
“Two weeks before the graduation. You had to say something about our life together while I was busy working on my speech.”
“See! It’s always about you. You never ask how I am or what’s wrong with me.”
“I’m asking you right now.” Alex protested.
“You ask it as if you don’t care.”
“Oh! Should I say it like this?” He patronized her, “Oh, honey, what’s the matter?” He scoffed, “I mean, really! You can at least tell me so I can help you out. But, no! Alexander Howe isn’t the right type of guy for you, is he?”
He raised his voice. The waiter who had just arrived at the table with their food turned a little pink.
“Alex, keep your voice down. People are looking at us,” said Angel, feeling the spectators’ funny looks on her.
“Don’t care, Angel. I really don’t care.”
“What do you mean you don’t care? Is this whole relationship just a joke for you?”
“Now you’re talking like your parents. I hope you remember that I did publicly announce, almost in front of the entire population and on live television, that I want to get married to you. Wait...” Alex felt something click. “Is that what it is? You don’t want to get married, do you?”
“I didn’t say that.”
“So then?” He dug his fork into the gooey cheese and shoved some into his mouth. “Eat your sandwich,” he eyed her plate, “It’s getting cold.”

She took a fairly large bite out it, surprising him.
“You know,” he said, “you really aren’t yourself today.”
“Oh,” Angel muttered with her mouth full. “And what exactly is myself?”
“I really don’t know anymore,” he sighed, “You know, even I had something to tell you. But I don’t know how to say it.”
“So then we’re in the same predicament, aren’t we? What is all this, Alex? I mean I don’t know why we’ve been fighting so much.”
“Me neither,” Alex said, sipping his iced tea. “Maybe your parents are right.”
“No, they’re not.”
“Okay, look.” He faced her eye-to-eye. “Just tell me what is it that you have to tell me.”
“I’m pregnant.”

For a second he thought he’d misheard. But then he saw how serious she was and realized she was speaking the truth. For a moment the world stopped. He should have been happy but his face didn’t show it. He had no idea what to do and felt the heavy burden of sacrifice. “Well,” he started slowly, forcing a smile, “this is wonderful!” His eyes welled up with tears and he held Angel’s hand in his. “I’m really happy, darling.”
“It doesn’t look like it,” she said.

“Are you kidding? This news is just what I needed. The last two days have really been something else but nothing compares to this.” He laughed and let go of his fears. Now his mind and heart floated in the happiness of this news.
He took Angel into his arms and hugged her. Any sense of negativity vanished in that one embrace. He saw surprise in her face.
“I haven’t seen you like this in a long time, Alex! And I...I like it!” She kissed him. After they finished their food, Alex left money for the bill and a large tip. They walked hand-in-hand together towards the Monolith. The waiter, who had served the two lovers for years, watched them walk away and smiled. He hadn’t seen the couple so happy together since the beginning of their relationship.

“Angel, you really don’t know how happy you’ve made me today. I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to understand you before. Now I know nothing can separate us.” I’m going to be a father! But what would Uncle John say? What about the people? He shook his head and smiled. What did he care what the people thought?

“Alex,” she looked into his eyes, “I love you and could never even think of being with anybody else. I think now you can put this whole thing into perspective. My parents aren’t against us being together. They’re just a little upset because I’m pregnant before the marriage. They thought you knew and so after your speech they were surprised at the way you behaved. But don’t worry, I spoke to them last night and explained everything to them. They’re still happy for the both of us.”
“Well, I’m glad about—”

A large chunk of glass came crashing down on top of him. Angel screamed in shock. People turned to see what had happened. Three men came running over and tried to help him up. “Hey pal,” one of them said. “You alright? Hello?” He snapped his fingers to get Alex’s attention.
The others gazed up to see what had caused the destruction. High above, a large rocket had smashed through the glass casing of the Regnum.

Suddenly, the computers that handled the Regnum’s climate conditions, solar and lunar cycles and seasons went haywire. For a second there was pitch-black all around. Frightened shouts of horror echoed throughout the station.

The lights turned back on and the computers were back on track. John, accompanied by security, appeared at the scene and ran towards Alex and Angel.

Alex’s head felt heavy. A pulsating pain pounded continuously in his skull and everything seemed to swirl around him. In echoes, he heard his uncle say, “Are you alright, Alex?”

“Uh...” his head spinning, he said to John, “I think so.” He touched the back of his head and felt liquid slowly trickle down from the wound. Blood. He smiled and fell flat on his face.

He heard a faint voice say, “Call an ambulance!” Everything turned black.

The reinforcements John had called for prior to his arrival hurried into their attack positions. The rocket flew towards them. As it got close and slowed to a halt just above the ground John could see Nikolas, accompanied by Imperial guards and Rebel comrades. “Hold your fire!” John commanded, recognizing his old friend.

Jarad ran to John and said, “John, what the hell is going on here?”

“But—”

“Listen, Jarad, just get ready to fight if it comes to it.”

John lifted Alex up and supported him on his shoulder. The boy was completely unconscious.

Nikolas and the vampires touched down on the ground. He walked towards John. “Give him to me,” he said. John did as he was told. Nikolas laid Alex on the ground. He put his hands on Alex’s head and closed his eyes. A blue flash of light flickered in his palm and it radiated outward, centering on Alex’s forehead. All around them, the blue light shone brightly encompassing everything. Everyone around, vampire and human, looked at the healing in awe.

With tears in her eyes, Angel asked John, “Mr. Howe, what’s he doing?”

John smiled, “It looks like Alex hasn’t told you yet.”

“What? What did he have to tell me?”

“I think it would be better if he told you himself,” Alex moaned slightly. He opened his eyes and saw Nikolas. He bolted up. “What?”

“Easy...easy, Alexandros,” said Nikolas.

“General Gareng?”

“That’s right. I am General...well I was a general once. But I am still Nikolas, your father’s old friend and cousin.”

“How’d you know it was me?”

“I can sense his blood in you.”

“What are you doing here?” Alex asked, getting slowly onto his feet.

“That’s what I want to know, Nick.” said John. He gave Alex a hand.

“I thought you’d know. I knew this day would come,” Nikolas bared his fangs, “didn’t you?”

“You mean...”

“Exactly. They’ve used us for this purpose.”

Jarad gestured to his men, “Kill them!”

“No!” yelled John, but it was too late. The vampires opened fire on civilians. The human reinforcements returned their blasts with lasers and rocket launchers.

“What’s the matter with you?” John yelled, running to the Egyptian councilman.

“Obviously they want a battle, don’t they?” Jarad said.

“I wanted you to order an evacuation, goddamnit. I’ll handle the rest.” John held Angel by the shoulders. “Angel, you better go home. Don’t worry about anything.”

“But, Mr. Howe—”

“Just go!”

“Uncle John!” yelled Alex, “what’s going on?”

Nikolas said, “Alex, you’ll be safe, don’t worry.” He grabbed Alex tightly around his right arm.

“What are you doing?” Alex pulled away.

John commanded his driver, “Get my sword!” The driver tossed it to him. John caught it and, in a flash, pointed it at Nikolas. “Listen Nick, you can’t take Alex with you.”

“It’s the Council’s orders, John. Listen to me.”

“I can’t believe what you’re doing! You’ve joined them!” With one quick move John grabbed Alex and pulled him towards his side. He moved the sword up to Nikolas’s neck.
“You’re misunderstanding me.” Nikolas said and backed away.
“I understand you completely!” John slashed at Nikolas but the vampire dodged the blade.
Alex dashed to the limo. His only thought now was to contact Angel. He pressed a button on the side of his watch and the chain around his neck broke apart and morphed into a headset that attached itself to his ear. He pressed the earpiece that served as a nanophone. There was no clear reception.
John and Nikolas fought like never before. They felt invigorated even though they were fighting each other. Nikolas flew upwards. “Come down here, Nick, and face me!” John shouted.
“Listen to me old friend!” Nikolas said.
“Don’t call me that! You were supposed to keep your promise, Nick! And now you break it?”
“I need him!” Nikolas said.
“For what?”
“I can’t tell you yet but I want you to take this.” He threw a silver canister towards John.
John caught it but threw his sword at Nikolas. Suddenly a silvery substance engulfed Nikolas’s body like mercury, transforming him. The sword simply bounced off his hard metallic body. It fell to the ground, tip first, and stuck there.
Meanwhile the two armies continued to fight it out. Lasers and silver nitrate bullets flew everywhere, damaging stores, restaurants and cracking glass. One of the Imperial soldiers levitated a piece of concrete with his will and flung it at some civilians, crushing them. Nikolas threw a large red energy ball towards the debris, disintegrating it.
“What’s wrong with you?” he yelled at the soldier, “This was supposed to be a simple mission.”
The soldier smiled bitterly, activating the restraining choker and Nikolas fell to the ground with a thud. John hurried to the limo where Alex was sitting. He got in beside his nephew and opened the container. He took a scroll out of the canister, unrolled it and scanned it quickly.
“What’s happening?” Alex asked, ogling the scroll.
“Nikolas is here to kidnap you,” said John. Alex was about to speak, but John gestured to let him finish. “It says here that Nikolas’s plan was to take you. And my guess now is that after seeing us with weapons, the vampire government is going to take action. They will see it as an act of aggression and try to attack us. By the time they do, we will have prepared our ultimatums and hopefully be able to avoid war by diplomatic negotiation. But before that can even happen, we will come to rescue you. Nikolas will take good care of you and he will tell you more than I know about the vampire history. So don’t worry.”
Alex said, “I’m going to be a prisoner of war for the vampires?”
“For the time being, yes. Trust me, Alex. I would never let this happen if I didn’t think Nikolas had the situation under control. I am also very confident that we can rescue you later.”
John waited for a reaction, but Alex gave none. His eyes were closed as he tried to ready himself. Finally he sighed and said. “Alright. I’m ready.”
Outside, Nikolas returned from silver to flesh. He glared at the soldier who attacked him. He ran to the limo and yelled his orders to the soldiers. “Hold your fire!”
John got out with Alex, commanding his own troops to do likewise. Alex embraced John and turned to the Rebel. Nikolas gave him a comforting look. Then he took a pair of handcuffs and bound his wrists. “Come, Alex. Don’t worry about anything. You won’t be harmed.”
“I know,” He said and added, “Uncle Nick.”
Jarad chased after them and as Nick and Alex both went to the rocket, he yelled, “After them!”
“No! Wait!” John said, clutching Jarad’s left shoulder. “Hold your fire, boys!”
Jarad eyed John with suspicion. “What are you up to?”
“You’ll see.” He smiled.
The human soldiers stood still as they watched their enemies retreating to the ship. It flew out of the Regnum and set a course for Earth.
John opened a bottle of pills and shook out two into his hand. He popped them both into his mouth and swallowed them without sipping anything. In the ten years since he’d been diagnosed with stomach ulcers, he’d had a lot of practice swallowing pills like this.

He eyed the container Nikolas had given him. It was beautifully decorated. The silver was exquisitely carved with various designs. One image which caught his eyes was the Emblem of the Red Serpent, the imperial insignia of King Anaxagoras XXIX. The cross glittered in the light, engraved in onyx and the serpent in a bright ruby color.

Jarad interrupted John’s appreciation of the jeweled container, bombarding him with curses. “What the hell have you done? You just handed your nephew over to the vampires! You know what this will mean? It will mean war!”

John looked at him calmly. “You just answered your own question.”

Jarad turned a slight shade of red in anger and embarrassment. The soldiers regrouped and reported to the two generals.

John glanced at them, fifty in all. “Go back, boys,” he said, “This is but a taste of what the vampires are. Prepare yourselves for the real thing. We may be in a full-scale war soon enough.” The soldiers saluted the generals and dispersed.

Jarad opened his mouth to talk but John interrupted him, “I did say may be.”

John had ordered Angel to go somewhere safe, but she didn’t want to. She wanted to be with Alex, to comfort him and to support him. Her fear during the battle was nothing compared to the fear she felt for him now. Nevertheless, she did as Mr. Howe told her and went home to her parents.

“Angel!” her mother yelled from the kitchen window the moment she saw her daughter walking towards home. She put down the dishes she was cleaning and ran out to hug her daughter. “What’s happening over there?” she asked, her face drenched in tears. “Come inside.”

“Is Alex alright?” asked Mr. Stone as his daughter entered the house. He got up and embraced her. “We saw the news. Alex was taken by the vampires!” Ken turned on the holoTV. With a press of a button from the remote, a floating screen emerged seemingly out of nowhere. The TV switched to channel 610, RNN, the Regnum News Network.

“What!” Angel gasped. “I thought he would be fine.”

“I’m so sorry, dear.” Her mother said, wiping away her tears. They sat on the sofa, watching for any more news about Alex.

“What do you know about it?” Angel asked, tears swelling up in her eyes.

“He chose to go, Angel,” Ken said. “He went without a fight.”

“And Mr. Howe?” Angel asked, seeing him on the screen, moving into his limo, followed by a pack of reporters.

“John did nothing. In fact he ordered his troops to hold their fire.” Ken’s eyes darted to the screen, watching John’s face with irritation. Angel watched her father’s expressions, afraid to say anything more. She wondered whether her father’s anger was just about John or whether there was something else bothering him. “We don’t know what’s next,” Ken continued. “It’s all over the news. People are cross with John’s decision and for good reason.”

Angel remained silent and continued to look blankly at the screen. Martha went into the kitchen to prepare some tea.

A reporter at the scene of the battle started to speak as the camera panned to see civilians being treated and carried away on stretchers by medical personnel. The reporter said, “And Leader Howe has refused to comment on the fact that his nephew has taken off with the enemy.” The reporter scurried to get an interview with Jarad, who was walking towards his car. “Oh wait. It seems Mr. Hameed is available for some comments.” The reporter rushed to get a closer view of Hameed fighting his way through other reporters and floating robotic cameras. Finally, he managed to ask the Council Member a question, “Mr. Ha-meed. How are you presently dealing with the situation and what are your comments on Leader Howe’s actions?”

However, I am strictly against it. Council Leader John Howe’s actions have been questioned long enough and it seems fair to say that he must step down!” At this, several reporters started mumbling amongst themselves. “In fact I think both he and his nephew, if he is to be rescued, must be ostracized from the world of politics!”

“What the hell?” Mr. Stone yelled. “So this is it? That’s all he wants!” He slammed his fist on the armrest of his chair.

Another reporter quickly and loudly asked, “Are you accusing John Howe of treason?”

“The truth is, citizens of Regnum, John Howe is a threat to the very existence of the human race. He has had contact with the vampires till now! He has been in power for too long. If we are to have a man like John Howe who sides with the enemy stay in power, it will spell doom for all of us.”

Ken looked at Angel. “This is insane,” he said. “It’s obvious now that these reporters are probably on his payroll.”

“...and,” continued Jarad on the television, “If we must, we will arrest Howe and charge him with treason and acts against humanity, since he must have been aware of this whole operation. We, the Council as a whole, think it better if John Howe were to be exiled from the Regnum. He should not be allowed to stay with us in our society.”

Another reporter interrupted him, “But do you have any actual proof, Mr. Hameed? Is this not a matter for the Supreme Court and also for the people?”

“Yes—”

“And,” the reporter added, “what about the nephew? Shouldn’t he be rescued before these procedures?”

“Such an act will definitely provoke war with the vampires, and I’m sure Regnum would never want that. As I was saying, the...”

Angel paid no attention to the holoTV and went to her room, silently praying in her heart for Alex’s safety. The realization that he had been kidnapped was now fully sinking in. She sobbed into her pillow.

When John came home his mother was waiting for him in the hall. “What’s this I see,” she asked him. “Why did you let him go?”

“Mom,” John said, sitting on the sofa in the living room, “just hear me out, will you?”

“Did you hear what Jarad said?” Helen asked. “He wants to impeach you!”

“What?” His back straightened.

“HoloTv on,” Helen commanded the computers of the house.

In front of John, the holographic screen popped up.

Jarad continued with his speech, “The Council and I have proposed a new Constitution. We can promise a better, safer way of dealing with elections, all the way from the Leader’s Chair to the Municipal hierarchies. We have decided to depart from John Howe’s old ways and follow a new plan of action. If John Howe wants to go and rescue his nephew, so be it! But the moment he leaves he will not be welcome back!” Some people clapped at this statement while others jeered.

John shook his head and sighed, “I expected this to happen. But I’ve got other plans.”

Helen muted the TV while Jarad elaborated on his plans of action. “So you have a way to save Alex?”

“All I can say is everything’s going to be fine.” He took the container out from his leather bag and opened it. Helen’s eye glittered at the sight of the beautiful specimen. John unrolled the scroll and read it out loud:

“My dear friend John,

Long gone are the days of old when we fought side-by-side against the tyranny of Anaxagoras. I have never forgotten you all throughout these long years. Right now, I want you to know what I am planning. It has taken me some time to plan and realize how to go about doing what we had originally envisioned. For that, we must be patient. On Earth, the Imperial Vampires want to kidnap Alex. We, as his family, know that Alex is the Falsifier, the Equivocator. Nevertheless, these vampires have no idea of who Alex really is. They think by kidnapping the Falsifier they can study his DNA and be able to create a super-vampire. But that is also being done on us Rebels. We have been tested on and they want us to be the pioneers of this new super-race. They are foolish to do this because when we join the humans, we will be very dangerous enemies for them. This time we will be unbeatable. I am taking Alexandros with me and I promise you I will keep him safe. No harm will come to him, and no one will know who he really is until the right time comes. So I need you to trust me on this, my brother. You will have to embark on a rescue mission. I will get the Rebels ready once you enter the Earth’s
atmosphere and we will start the fight before you come to collect us. When we get to know what the enemy’s real plan is, we will be more than ready; we will use their own weapons against them!

It is up to you now to start the mission. Until you get here, I will try to tell young Alexander everything he wants to know about his vampiric lineage. Good luck, old friend.

Nikolas yus-Faviane Gareng.”

It was clear by her eyes that John’s mother was deep in thought, calculating the next move. “Jarad’s made it hard for you to rescue Alex,” she said.

“I doubt it. I know that the entire Council, except for Richard, is against me. I knew it from the very beginning, ever since the people elected me Council Leader. Jarad’s just jealous and I know he won’t get too far with his plans.”

His mother glanced at the TV and suddenly cried out. “Oh my God!” There were replays of Jarad giving his fiery speech and then getting shot three times in his shoulders and chest.

“Turn on the volume!” John said.

The same reporter that Angel’s parents had been watching appeared after the replays. He yelled, “Could it be that John Howe has sent a message to Jarad Hameed for his candid and shocking statements about the Howe family? This is surely a devastating blow to what we knew as democracy.”

“What the hell is going on here?” John yelled, standing up. “There’s no way I planned that.”

Suddenly the window smashed open and a green can projected into the room, letting out tear gas. John grabbed his mother by the arm and led her out. He opened the door and they ran outside. A dozen people crowded the large iron gates of the Estate, shouting hateful remarks against the Howe family. Numerous reporters wrested to get past each other and get a good story. Security guards tried to hold the crowd back. John realized soon enough they must have been paid by Jarad to do this. They protested, holding up signs and slogans of hatred.

“Enough of this,” John said to his mother. “I’m going out there to face them.” John walked outside of the gates.

“People of Regnum!” he said as loud as possible. He repeated his words four times more until the shouting ceased to total silence. “People of Earth! I understand what must be going through your minds right now. You may think of me as scandalous. You may think of my family as scandalous. You want to think that what Jarad says is true.” He was careful not to say outright that Jarad bought them. “Go ahead then. But let me say this. I believe in democracy. True democracy as he does, if not more. But I want to remind you of one thing. I have fought with pride and honor in the line of fire! Do not forget those who died on that fateful day of the last battle. I tried my best and I am proud to say that I fought side-by-side with my fellow Anisaei, my fellow Vampire Rebels and gave my best to win back our rightful place on the Earth.

“And for the last twenty one years there hasn’t been a day that has gone by in which I haven’t tried to fight the Imperial Regime of Anaxagoras. I want us to achieve what we fought for long ago. But we won’t achieve anything with all this bickering. We must join together as one army and fight for our rights! We must fight to regain what we have lost and what is rightfully ours!” At this point the people bowed their heads in silence. They realized that John was right. Even the reporters stopped bickering and just let the silence continue, as the floating cameras panned from John to the audience. The silence became almost unbearable for John. The fear that his speech might not have persuaded them surged like electricity under his skin. He waited.

The crowd suddenly started shouting and cheering for John. Their leader.

John’s face widened into a smile. “So what do you say? Are we going to get the Earth back or not?”

The people cried out, “Yes!”

Alex glanced around the area of the ship anxiously, careful not to make eye contact with any of the crew members. He felt them glaring at him suspiciously. To relieve his mind, he thought of his family and Angel. He smiled at the thought of becoming a father. Nikolas observed Alex and said, “You have your mother’s smile.”

“You knew my parents, didn’t you?” Alex asked in a hushed tone.

“Alex, you don’t have to be frightened of anything. Everyone here is a Rebel. And these punks,” he added, referring to the Imperial soldiers. “They don’t really talk much or listen to anything.” He glared at the one who had turned on his restraining choker and the other Imperials. They returned the aggressive look and ignored Nikolas and his comrades. Every now and then, they would watch Alex’s movements.

“So, what were they like?” Alex asked a little louder.

“All I can say is that they were wonderful human beings.”

Alex opened his mouth, surprised by Nick’s statement, but the Rebel covered his mouth before he could say anything. “Some things are better left for later.” He motioned with his eyes to signify that it was dangerous to talk on such a subject. “Let me introduce you to the Rebels,” he said.
The Rebels now consisted of only twelve members. The rest, Nikolas explained, died in the war. There had been about 125000 alive before the war. The last battle had claimed 12000 Rebel casualties. The rest had been used for tests for the Silver-moon project. After the first phase, 3000 had died. Once the first phase had been completed, only 850 were left. During the second phase, only twelve made it. One by one, Nick introduced them.

The first Rebel he introduced was Varenkoff. “I’ve read lots about you, General Varenkoff,” Alex said, smiling. Varenkoff smiled back and shook Alex’s hand, “Please, call me Dante.” His black hair was tied in a ponytail and he donned a thin mustache. His eyes were the darkest Alex had ever seen, with a slight tinge of crimson. Alex could not help but look at his scar which ran down the length of his cheek from his left eye to his upper lip. Dante noticed this and laughed, pointing to it with his right finger, “This, my dear boy, was a gift from Adiraan.”

“Oh,” said Alex, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I keep it as a memento; a precious memory of our days in the Rebellion.” Varenkoff’s eyes looked beyond Alex, vacant and dreaming, in the same way that John’s did when he spoke of the war.

“I thought vampires could regenerate,” Alex said.

“If they choose to, yes,” Varenkoff replied.

Nikolas went on to introduce the others:

Efarius seemed to be the oldest of them all. He was lean and tall and his skin was tanned from hard work in the sun. He had worked in the farms as a serf for Anaxagoras. He smiled and shook hands with Alex. Efarius’s hand felt hard and leathery.

Joqetu, a youngish looking Rebel with red hair bowed to Alex and shook hands with him. “Finally,” he said, “after all these years.”

“And this is Davik,” said Nikolas, introducing a tall Rebel with pleasant features. Davik’s fair face smiled at the mention of his name and he shook Alex’s hand. His grip was gentle.

The next Rebel, Gavin, stood with his arms crossed and his back straight. His muscular frame was tight and stiff. He smiled solemnly at Alex.

Noel was introduced next. He had been watching Alex constantly and was filled with awe and respect. His eyes widened as he took Alex’s hand in his own.

Liam bowed slightly and shook Alex’s hand. He had wild ragged hair that fell loose about his face. When he smiled, Alex saw his bright white fangs. “It’s an honor,” said Liam.

Yagnik shook Alex’s hand next and brought him closer to embrace him. He watched Alex with interest. His light blonde hair was cut short and his eyes were the color of blue seas.

Orwen welcomed his leader’s son, bowing and shaking his hand. He looked slightly nervous and his pale face seemed even paler when he looked at Alex with his large golden brown eyes. Moving his chestnut brown hair away from his face, he said, “I never thought I’d see the day, Alex, but I’m glad I have.”

Hektor, a six and a half foot tall vampire, grabbed Alex by the arms, hugged him and laughed loudly. “I’m so happy at last to see you, young Alexandros.” His face was covered under a huge messy beard that flowed down to his chest. The hair on his head flowed all the way down his back.

Finally, Quentin smiled at him and bowed, “Good to see you,” he said. He was thinner than the others and moved quickly when introduced. Quentin was from a noble lineage and indeed had a regal air about him. The others came from humbler backgrounds and some were part of the military of Migra. Quentin was related to Nikolas, on his mother’s brother’s wife’s side, being her third cousin.

Alex noticed that all the Rebels were shirtless and just wore military pants. “Why aren’t you guys armored?”

“Watch.” The Rebels transformed their bodies into silver, like Nikolas had during the battle in the Regnum. Their whole bodies looked like shiny sculptures. Their muscles gleamed as the silver reflected the light. They looked like mechanical, robotic vampires.

“Wow!” Alex said, “This is amazing!”

They levitated in the air, surrounding Alex in a circle like magnificent angels protecting him. They took their right arms and placed their hands a foot above Alex’s head. From each arm came white beams of light, which shot into Alex’s head. The converged light radiated a powerful aura, traveling down his spine and back, finally spinning clockwise around his vertebral column. The radiant light scattered throughout his nervous system and into his bloodstream, finally reaching his brain. It spread around and circled his brain like a bright halo. A thin white light emanated from the center of his spinal cord. It slowly rose from the base and through the cerebral cortex. His eyes shone like fire and he opened his loose mouth slightly. Suddenly he began to levitate alongside the others. The Imperial Vampires watched in awe, waiting for a command to do something, but no such command was given. Even Jacque, the Imperial commander of the mission, stared on in complete shock, watching the amazing spectacle of
light and magic.

Alex spoke an ancient magical incantation in ancient Migritic. And at once, the pure white light flooded the entirety of the ship. A faint sound, like the one Alex had heard when he first drank the blood from the fountain, hummed incessantly. After four minutes, the light died out and the Rebels collapsed back down but Alex continued to hover in the air, cross-legged in a lotus position. The light still surrounded him.

The Imperial soldiers snapped out of their trance and the commander ordered the soldiers to bring Migra for those who had collapsed. Plastic packets of Migra, much like stored-up blood, were injected into them and little by little they recovered. Jacque asked Nick, “What was all that about?”

“Nothing. Just something between us. Don’t worry about him. He’s taken our energy. When it wears off, he’ll be fine.” Nikolas said.

“Taken your energy?” Jacque asked.

“In fact, he’s taken everyone’s here on the ship.” Nikolas said.

“I thought only powerful Ancients could do that. And even they needed to have permission first.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s strange,” Nick said.

“So how long will he be like that?” Jacque looked at the hovering figure.

“Depending how much he took from us, I’d say he’ll be fine by the time we land.”

“I hope so.”

Nick left to join the other Rebels. He said under his breath, “I hope so too.”

John was sweating. He didn’t understand anything that was going on, especially Jarad’s statements and the actions after that. What about the assassination? Who was responsible for that? He decided that, politically, the best thing to do would be to go to the Central Hospital. It was only a five minute walk from Regnum Central Headquarters. He needed to show the people that it was not he who had planned the attack. He was painfully aware that other people might see it that way.

As he got out of his limo, the entire press community launched itself at him, bombarding him with questions about his affiliations with the Vampire Regime and rumors of his nephew joining the vampires. They asked him about his family history and his rule of power. He tried to ignore them as calmly as he could but his grim face betrayed the stress that he was under. He placed his hand over his burning throat, as he regurgitated a little stomach acid. Stress always set his ulcer off, although sometimes he wondered if might be the opposite way round. Perhaps it was the ulcer that made him so irritable. His guards did the best they could to protect him.

Once they reached the entrance of the hospital, John felt a sense of relief. The other members of the Council acknowledged him with silence, but he felt their subtle suspicion. At least it wasn’t the lynching he’d feared. “So what’s the situation?” No one spoke. An unnatural silence widened the disparity between him and his fellow members. If he reacted in a negative way, they would surely win. “Would,” he continued in an innocent voice, “someone please tell me what’s happening? How is Jarad?”

At the mention of Jarad, the whole Council looked him directly in the eyes. It was like the stand off at the last battle all over again. He was not going to fall back or jump at the accusations.

Just then, Richard Bacon, another Council member stepped out of an elevator and joined them. He had overheard the question. “He’s expecting you, John. I thought you’d know that,” said Richard.

Richard was tall, taller than John even, and he was lean. His face was aged, as if it had seen too much work. His eyes were perpetually squinted, yet gleaming with wonder. His nose was big and round and his lips were almost entirely covered with a furry mustache which entwined with his beard. He pulled back his dark, red-brown hair and regarded John.

John knew Richard very well. He had taken control as General in the Mediterranean during the Great War with the vampires. He was also John’s right hand man in everything they did. They were great pals in high school and Richard was also the best man at his wedding. Sadly, Caryn died only two years after their marriage and fifteen years before the War broke out. John trusted Richard with his life and he knew his old buddy would never stab him in the back.

“Right, I’m going in to see him. Richard, I want you to come in with me.”

Richard nodded and followed John. The others stared daggers at them.

“Tell me,” John said as they stepped inside the elevator.

“I have to be blunt with you. They want you out. Dead or alive.”

John nodded. A sour smirk appeared on his face.

“But as far as Jarad is concerned,” Richard continued, “I just don’t know. He seems two-faced.”

“Yeah, that’s Jarad for you. I knew he would be against me from the very beginning. I knew he wanted the Leader’s Chair. He wants me dead and now he’s gotten a clear cut chance to show himself without any fear of being
discharged. He thinks that under the situation we’re in he’ll be able to take power.” John sighed and shook his head.
“Personally I don’t care right now. I just want Alex back.”

The elevator stopped. They stepped out and Richard led the way to Jarad’s room. Once they reached his room, 11203, Bacon opened the door and John entered inside. Jarad lay there in a semi-comatose state with various tubes coming out of him. There was an intravenous drip in his arm that administered medication and a blinking machine by his bedside. His eyes opened slightly, but at the sight of his rival, he closed them again, ignoring the two. John and Richard sat down on the metallic chairs next to his bed, one on either side. Jarad turned his head to John and smiled in a patronizing manner. John controlled himself.

“John,” Jarad’s mouth formed the name without a sound.

“Jarad,” John replied quietly, “What the hell are you up to?”

Jarad said with slow, heavy breathing, “I don’t know what to say.” He licked his dry lips. “I only wanted—”

“What did you want? Power! I thought you were better than this. You should have waited until after I died! And you don’t think I know you planned that bloody assassination? Of course I do! And I think I even know who did it.”

“It’s not like that at all,” Jarad said.

“Because of today’s incident, you are temporarily discharged. I will make sure personally that you don’t interfere with the affairs of Regnum or of my family. Now,” John stood up, “hope you feel better. Take care and please, please, don’t ever think of coming to speak to me.”

Richard and John walked out.

“That was a bit harsh, don’t you think?” Richard said after they left the room.

John shook his head and smiled, “Richard, this is between you and me; I never meant to publicly denounce him. Once he knows that I’m doing it, he won’t do anything to meddle with Regnum politics. And I’ll deal with the rest in the same manner.”

“Well played, old friend!” Richard smiled. They entered the elevator.

John remained quiet, calculating his next move.

The ship started its descent, picking up speed in the atmosphere of the Earth. Inside, Nikolas constantly stared at Alex. He’d always known that the boy was special but the spectacle he had just witnessed had blown his mind. As an aristocrat with a royal bloodline Nikolas had seen a lot of dark magic, sorcery and some very unholy things. Perhaps, here in the boy, was something different. Something holy and good. Alex’s eyes had been closed for some time now and he remained completely still. “Alright!” the commander yelled out, “Move along to your positions! The ship’s coming in for a landing. Secure yourselves and...” he didn’t know what to say about the boy and just left it at that.

A moment later, the interior of the ship turned crimson red. Everything whirled. The sensation picked up momentum until it turned into a hyper speed carousel. In the center of all this, Alex stirred from his trance and opened his eyes, completely white. “It’s happening!” he shouted.

“What?” Nikolas tried to get a hold of himself as he and the others were thrown around in the forceful twister.

“He’s here! I can feel him!” Alex’s eyes flickered.

The shaking wavered and died down until everyone on the ship was jolted back by the sudden stop. They recovered from the fall and got up slowly as the light faded and pitch darkness consumed them all.

John and Richard, ignoring the other Council members, left for the Headquarters of Central Square, half a mile north of the Monolith. “John,” Richard said as they walked halfway towards the Headquarters, “Tell me something.”

“Yeah?” John asked.

“You said that you would do this to everyone. So, I’m just wondering. Do we have enough time?”

“I don’t think now would be the appropriate time,” he said as if he had an epiphany, “Let’s scrap that!”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I think with Jarad out of the way temporarily, the other members won’t have the guts to do anything against me or to try and take over. They’re weak, Richard. All of them. Besides, before they even think to do that, we’ll do it!”

“You mean you’re going to arrange a coup?” Richard whispered as if he said something forbidden.

“Just wait and watch.”

They arrived and entered the Central Headquarters. They were in a huge lobby, the size of a football field. In all directions, there were spiral staircases leading towards various government offices. John walked up to the lobby secretary and told him to call the other Council Members to arrange a meeting in one hour’s time. The secretary got on it right away.

“So where are we going?” Richard asked.
“To the Senate,” John said, still in his calculative mood.

The darkness left their eyes and they saw the remnants of the old planet, the realm of Migra. Migra seemed desolate, barren, full of death. All around dark shadowy mountains surrounded them. The ground was reddish brown, like the clay of the Earth and it looked parched. Clearly, it had not been nourished by water for a long time. Was this how Migra really was during the reign of the Nyrax Dynasty?

Alex was mesmerized to have seen this scorched land after being so used to the perfect “Eden” that was the Regnum. “You human scum,” Jacque shouted. “What’ve you done?”

“Quiet!” said Alex, his tone indifferent to the offense.

Nick looked nervously at the boy, “Alex, don’t say anything you might regret.”

“Silence, son of Faviane.”

“How...how did you know my–”

Alex laughed, “Do you really think that it is he who is speaking? Think again, nephew.”

“Anaxagoras!”

“Is that how you speak to your king?” Alex’s voice boomed. The Imperial soldiers knelt in respect.

“What are we doing over here?” Nikolas asked, unmoved.

“You have come,” said Anaxagoras through Alex, “because I am going to show you and Alexander alone what happened that fateful day when the Red Serpent made me immortal.”

“Where are you going, my lord?” asked Jacque.

“It is not for you to know.”

The three entities vanished into the air.

“Is that really what Migra is like now?” Nikolas asked, looking all around him to see nothing but darkness. A sudden flash of light appeared and he felt the same spinning sensation from the vortex they entered moments earlier.

“No. This is only the mind, Nikolas.”

“I don’t understand. What are you doing? If you are here for me, why don’t you just kill me?”

“Because I want you to know the truth. I want you to know who I am and where I came from. You are my enemy, but only in the drama of revolution that my son created. Otherwise, I am no different from you and you are my offspring. I know the truth, Nikolas and the truth is something that will shock everyone. I know Alex is my kin, my blood and my grandson, the heir to the throne.”

“But–”

“I know he is the Prophesied One, the One Aidan spoke of and I know that he will be the one to challenge me. But there is something that he doesn’t know and neither do you. Only Aidan, Ardemis and I are party to this secret.”

“What do you mean?” Nikolas asked. He felt sick and dizzy from the constant spinning and his face turned green.

“Why should I speak thus?” He sighed and paused. “Come, we are here.”

The vortex stopped and they reached their destination.

In front of them stood a great cavernous threshold, three hundred feet high and decorated with gold and silver. The entrance arched across in four directions. The ceilings were painted with scenes from the history and legends of Migra. Nikolas realized that this place was more than just a rich and palatial resort. It was the holiest of holies. The Mausoleum of the Anu-Sa-Rimh! This palace was a vacation home for the king on his sojourns to the sacred place.

Once they reached the gates, Anaxagoras left Alex’s body and Nick could see a shadowy mist. A dark cloak without a body formed. Then a black hand, gloved and armored with metal ringlets around the fingers appeared and motioned to come forward. Alex fell to the ground. “What the hell?”

“Don’t worry.” Nikolas rushed to his aid. “Everything’s alright.”

“What’s happening? Is that, is that–”

Anaxagoras said. “Welcome, Alexandros.”

“What!” Alex said, getting to his feet.

“Alex, don’t worry.” Nikolas kept his right hand on his left shoulder. “It’s going to be alright.”

“Follow me.” The cloaked figure glided to the gate, which was bound in iron and chained in titanium. There was a large lock with a complex key-hole to confuse even the best of locksmiths. Nikolas and Alex walked forward with caution.

Alex whispered, “How the hell did we get here? And where’s everyone else?”

“They’re waiting. He brought us here alone. He wants us to see something.”

Anaxagoras turned around. “You don’t realize your importance yet, Alexandros.”

Alex felt a chill in his spine as the king spoke. But he gathered himself and said, “If you are real, why don’t you strike me down? Why do you hesitate? Is it out of weakness?”
Anaxagoras cackled. “Don’t challenge me with these petty taunts. If you really want me to prove it then, so be it.” He brought his hand closer to his chest. A black mist formed around his hand which extended in a straight line and formed a thick mass that slowly turned into a sword which he pointed at Alex.

Alex backed away.

Nick materialized his own sword just like Anaxagoras had done. “Alex, stay back.”

Anaxagoras glided swiftly towards Nick and threw him aside.

“Come with me, Alex. The king’s shadow covered him. “Come and I will show you your destiny!”

Alex stood his ground. “No!”

“You must!” The king’s voice hissed. “Isn’t that what the prophecy says?”

Nikolas jumped high into the air in an attempt to drive his sword into the king’s back but before he could, he was suspended by Anaxagoras’s will. The Dark King turned around and circled him.

“Tell me!” Alex shouted. “Why did you really bring us here?”

Nikolas took another stab at Anaxagoras and this time succeeded, driving his weapon deep into the king’s back. The king fell forward as if slain but then shot back up. He knocked Nikolas over and choked him without even touching him before throwing him towards Alex. The sword in Anaxagoras’s spine disappeared like vapor and his wound healed instantly.

“Enough of this!” Anaxagoras yelled. “I did not bring you here for this.”

“It’s a trick, Alex,” Nikolas said, coming in between the two Nyraxes. “Don’t listen to him.”

“I know, Uncle Nick,” Alex said patiently. He sidestepped to the left and faced Anaxagoras. “Alright then. If what you say is true, then show us.”

“No!” Nick said. “We will not go with you!”

“But—”

“He can’t be trusted!”

“This has gone on for far too long,” said Anaxagoras, flinging his sword towards Nikolas. Alex yelled something in ancient Migritic and jumped to block Nick. Everything turned white and the light blazed once again, creating a rift between the Dark One and the two Rebels. Anaxagoras was pushed away by the light and suddenly, in a flash, everyone was back on the ship.

“What in the hell?” shouted Jacque.

“What just happened?” asked Varenkoff. “Is everyone alright?”

The entire group on-board gave a curt nod.

“Uncle Nick, what just happened?” Alex said, hyperventilating.

“It was a thought, that’s all,” Nikolas assured him. “Calm down.” He touched Alex’s forehead and Alex slowed his breathing drastically.

“What do you mean it was a thought?” Alex asked.

“Anaxagoras had access to you, through your mind. He knows the truth, everything about you. I don’t know how though. I can’t see why he wouldn’t but…”

“What? Just explain it, please.”

“I suppose Anaxagoras tracked us through the transference. It could be that he was waiting for such an opportunity.”

“Why would he do that?”

“For one thing, you’ve been initiated into a brotherhood that hasn’t existed since the Great Revolution against the Markian Empire. This is a secret way of sending forth pure energy to the initiate, so that he will be recharged to ‘fight the good fight.’ It was started first by Fabian II who was the harbinger of the Revolution. It was later continued and handed down to various commanders by King Argos I. This brotherhood is called the Knights of the Elders.”

“Who?”

“The Elders were the Twelve Councilmen who created the entire planet of Migra. I mean,” Nikolas smiled, “literally created Migra, and possibly all the other planets of that system.”

“You mean they were like gods.”

“Well, in one respect, you could say so. They came to create a perfect society. We were their lab-rats. They had this desire to create us and just went away. The very first people of our race were known as the Elemnauri. It is said that they were in tune with the elements of the universe and harnessed immense powers of both creation and destruction. They were even able to create their own mini-universes. They were in contact with the Elders and their race for three and a half trillion years until finally relations collapsed and war broke out. Eventually, according to the ancient tablets called the Stones of Revelations, the Elder Race was cast away, never to return. By that time, our distant ancestors had learned much and became very advanced until eight hundred billion years later their DNA was...
polluted by the curse of the Red Serpent.”

Alex, dazed by this knowledge, tried to make sense of what Nikolas told him. How old was his heritage? As far as he knew, his human ancestry could have stretched out for some ten million years. But the ancestors on this other side of his family went back trillions of years! “Okay,” he said, “so that still doesn’t explain how we got there and what happened.”

“The story’s going to have to wait,” said Jacque. “We’re ready to land.”

“This is one for the history books,” John said to Richard, outside the Great Hall where the Senate met.

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” asked Richard. “It will be the very thing you’d be fighting against them.”

“I’m doing it for Alex. I’ve got to. Besides, I am not doing it permanently.”

“But it’s treason to declare yourself all-powerful and create a dictatorship. It’s going to turn into anarchy sooner or later. You know this.”

“And that’s what I plan for,” John smiled.

“What?” Richard asked, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his handkerchief.

John winced as another wave of stomach acid burnt his throat. The corner of Richard’s mouth went up, “The old ulcer still bothering you?”

John sighed, “Just when there’s pressure.”

“So that’s most of the time,” said Richard.

John forced a weak chuckle. He changed the subject, “You are going to see great things happen in the coming months.” He banged on the great doors with all his might. A man from inside the Hall opened the doors.

“What is the meaning of all this noise...oh! Leader Howe, it’s you, is it? Sir, what is it that you want? We are in the middle of a very important decision.”

“Senator Gars, I’m sorry to interrupt, but I have a very important issue to bring up.”

“And what might that be?” asked the Senator, raising his brow.

“Excuse me, will you?” John said as if he were in the middle of a conversation at a dinner party. He took Bacon aside and said, “Go and bring every damn reporter you know. If Jarad wants a fight, he can have it! We are doing exactly what we shouldn’t.” Richard did as he was told and John turned back to Senator Gars. Senator Gars was a short old man with a little white hair around the sides and the back of his head but none on top. He had an extravagant mustache and its tips almost touched the base of his ears. He wore small spectacles for his even smaller eyes. “Senator, this pressing issue is of the utmost importance. If I may, I wish to speak immediately.”

Senator Gars examined John up and down in a peculiar manner. He looked back at the Senators, who were listening or rather pretending to listen to a tall, slender old man named Senator Greenfield. Greenfield was a great orator and was at that point discussing the issue of the security of Regnum. Without further ado, John pushed past Gars, letting himself inside.

With a loud booming voice he said, “Senators of the Great Hall! Senators! My dear Senators.” There was a great amount of commotion, shouting and whispering. “Please, Senators of Regnum!” His voice was also drowned out by the constant hammering of the gavel by the General Speaker, retired Lieutenant Kenneth Lylock. At the podium Greenfield was still trying to discuss his plans on what he called the State Security Bill. But by now no one was paying any attention.

“Order!” John yelled. He smiled a toothy grin. “Order is my command, Senators, and that is what we shall have!” Slowly, as the voices died down, he walked up the stairs towards Senator Greenfield and said, “Excuse me, but would you please allow me to speak?” He completely ignored Lylock who continued to bang his gavel. In some ways, John blamed the Lieutenant for the loss of the War. He had failed the Vatican Mission. He was reluctant to have Lylock as a Senator but democracy had been the order of the day. Not anymore, however.

From the podium, John looked out at the entire hall. It stretched out like a large auditorium, with all one hundred and forty one senators sitting down, looking suspiciously at John. “Senators, ladies and gentlemen, I have an important announcement to make. Very soon, the one who tried to assassinate the good Council member General Jarad Hameed will walk into this room and try to attack me in the name of freedom and democracy and he will say he is doing it for the good of Regnum. The truth of the matter, my dear people, is this person will be an ally of Hameed. He and Jarad are planning a coup and they are going to declare themselves the de facto government and out of that Jarad will declare himself Dictator of Regnum. In an instant, democracy, our one ideal since the Dawn of Man, will fall forever. If a dictator were to rise to power today, then it would spell the end of the human race.

“Let me add something here: I am implying one thing and one thing only. If Jarad Hameed takes over, he will be ruthless. He wants power and that’s it. He doesn’t care whether Regnum is safe or not. You have heard the rumors about the other Council Members and what you hear is true. They all want me out. But I will not go out without a fight.
“They will all be coming soon, and the truth will be out. I am not here for any personal gain. Except of course the personal safety and rescue of my nephew, Alexander.”

At this, Lylock said, “But General Howe. Is it not true that you allowed him to be captured? Now there is talk of your secret alliance with the vampires.”

“That’s not true. I am a friend to all except the Vampiric Regime. I spoke to Nikolas and that was all. He ensured the safety of my nephew...for some time. Until then, we must act. This is an ultimatum! Don’t you see it? The vamps want war! They want to eradicate us.”

“Then why didn’t they do it before the signing of the Treaty?” asked Senator Julia D’Luca, a close associate of Jarad during the time of the de facto government constructed in the first days of the Regnum.

“Because they have what they want!” John said.

“What do you mean?” asked Senator Gars. The other senators started speaking in hushed whispers amongst themselves.

John paused for some time. He didn’t know what to say or rather how to say it. If he told everyone the truth, how would they react? Would they allow him emergency powers and permit another war to take place? It was inevitable but no one seemed to be bothered.

“Please, let me explain...” he gestured for silence and slowly the voices lowered and died down. “There is something that has been hidden from everyone. No one knows about this. Both vampires and humans alike have speculated on the war that is to come. Am I not right?” He was trying to buy time, so that the secret of his nephew’s true heritage would not come out before the media or the opposition stormed in.

“How can you talk about a coming war, when there have been no rumors of it?” asked another senator, from far off. His face was hidden by the wave of senators ahead of him.

“It is obvious,” responded John. “No political analyst or government official needs to tell the people. It’s in the air and it will come whether we want it or not, whether we prepare for it or not.”

“So what are you proposing?” Gars asked. “And you still have not told us about this thing the vampires have?”

“It’s my nephew. They wanted my nephew. What I am proposing—”

The media stormed in. Damn it! If they only came a little earlier.

“Settle down!” yelled Lylock, once again taking the lead. Along with the media were Richard and the other Council members. “Please settle down! Who gave you permission to come in here?”

Suddenly, vast numbers of people charged inside repeatedly chanting, “We want John!”

“This has gone far enough!” Gars yelled. The other senators, who had already stood up when the media burst in, tried to leave the room. They wanted nothing to do with a political controversy that could potentially damage their own image.

John took control of the situation by gesturing for silence. “People of the Earth,” at this many of them yelled gleefully, “please cooperate with me and the others here.” Now was the chance. He only had to wait for the culprit who had attacked Jarad. He knew he would come and even though he took a big risk it was still a calculated one. The people calmed down and waited for John to speak. “You have been deceived. That is the truth. I have some things I want to share with you as well. Firstly, I was not behind the attack on Councilman Hameed. It may sound strange but the truth is that it was preplanned by Jarad himself and these people here.” He pointed at the other Council members. All heads turned to see who the culprits were. They looked at each other in surprise as if they didn’t know what was going on.

“He’s wrong,” burst out Scott, a portly man with a large double chin that stretched down to his chest. He looked ferociously at John and shook with anger, his large fleshy facial skin flapping about. “We have no connection with this so-called coup! We have no affiliations with Jarad. We only want what he wants...”

“And that’s power!” John yelled out. “That’s the truth. By the way,” he smirked, “I never mentioned anything about a coup when you were here. Somebody else is in on this.” He stayed silent, while all eyes were on the Councilmen.

Someone from the crowd yelled out, “Down with Jarad and the Council! Elect John as the Supreme Leader of the Regnum!” Everyone in the crowd agreed and kept yelling out remarks like, “Kill them!” “Make them suffer!” “Get Jarad and hang him for his treason!” Some of the crowd began to attack the Council Members, pulling them by the collar and trying to strangle them.

But John said, ‘Don’t! Please, don’t.” At once his order was obeyed. “If we attack them, we will be no better! We must have a peaceful transition if we are to succeed.”

“Peaceful transition?” asked Senator Blake, a very influential man not only in the government but also in the business world as one of the richest stockholders in the market. “What kind of transition are you talking about?”

“First of all...” John paused and gesture for Richard. He whispered, “Get the guards. We will need them soon.”
Richard nodded and ran outside the Great Hall. “Of course, we must do what is best for all of us, Senator Blake. We must have action. We must have responsiveness, urgency, and above all, total control of our ideals! I am doing this for democracy, for the people and ultimately for our existence.”

Blake laughed. “Existence? We are alive—”

“Not for long,” John said, “if the vampires have their way. They will be coming to get us soon. Before that happens we must prepare for the inevitable: War. Are you with me?” he asked the crowd. They roared affirmations. John looked each Senator in the eye. He knew he would win and they knew it too. “Now, I will ask the Senate to give me emergency executive powers to deal with the situation we are about to be in. I ask them to hereby close the session by electing me Supreme Leader of all Regnum, in total control of all aspects of the Regnum, including the Senate, the Judiciary, and the other sub-aspects of the political body of the State. Is that agreed?” Shouts erupted from the crowd, but none from the Senate.

Lylock spoke, “John, you are asking for exactly what you are speaking against!”

“Don’t say anything to me, Lylock, you traitor!”

“What’s the meaning of this?” Lylock shouted.

“I know you’re the one who’s been letting the Council in on what’s happening. Isn’t it so?”

“How can you be so sure?” asked Senator Donaldson, sitting in the front row and looking at John with his forest green eyes. His face showed a deep seriousness, but not out of dislike for John. Instead he looked curious and supportive. “What makes you think you can be a good leader?”

“You are going too far with this and you are going to kill us all!” Senator Blythe said, sitting right next to Donaldson. Her face cringed in anger and repulse. “Jarad was right!”

The crowd became agitated and moved closer and closer towards the Senate.

“Wait!” John yelled. Again the noise died down, this time at once. “You don’t believe me, right?” He directed the question to the Senate. “Then, search him!” A group of thirty officer guards arrived. “Guards, search Senator Lylock for any communication devices!” Two guards ran up the stairs and followed John’s command. They found an earpiece and a wireless microphone on the old senator’s watch. “There you go. Is there any other proof you need?” The senators remained silent and looked at Lylock with disgust and shock. “Take him away and arrest him and those four,” he pointed to the Councilmen, “for treason.” Six more guards broke ranks from their formation and arrested the others. John looked at the senators. “Is there anything else that you need before you pass this bill?”

Someone from the throng of people yelled out in pain. A masked man jumped in with a plasma handgun, running and pushing his way through the crowd. He quickly aimed at John and fired. The General instinctively ducked and the bullet missed him by a few inches and blew a hole in the wall behind him. Immediately, the people disarmed the man and attacked him. They unmasked him. “Behold!” yelled John. “The man who attempted to assassinate Jarad. Hassan Hameed, his own son! Guards take him away.” Three more guards ran to arrest Hassan but the crowd didn’t allow it and started beating the man senselessly. John ordered them to stop but they continued to vent their suppressed anger and confusion on the assassin. John yelled out, “Citizens, there is no need to make him suffer! He has been through enough, like you all! Let the guards take him and let true justice take its course.” Finally the crowd obeyed him. The guards took Hassan and arrested him, escorting him outside to join the Council Members and Lylock.

“So now you know,” John said to the Senators. “I have not lied. I give you one hour to decide the fate of the Regnum. I assure you I don’t say this out of arrogance. You have no choice but to realize what I am saying is true and that what I am going to do for everyone will ensure our survival against the vampires and our return to Earth.” Total silence ensued and John walked out with Richard. The crowd followed him to his limo. The car drove off to the Howe Estate, leaving behind the people who were filled with rage, pride, courage and a new energy to fight.

Now, John knew, it was all up to the Senate to vote and decide.
Chapter Five
Decisions

It had been a long time since Alex had last seen the Earth. He sighed, anxious and nostalgic. He thought of the people back in the Regnum. He thought of Angel and the baby once again and basked in the light of the truth that he was to be a father. A shaky and cold chill crept up his spine when he remembered the encounter with Anaxagoras. In his heart, he knew it was to be the first of many.

The ship slowed down as it left the titanic stratocumuli and approached CCC 1, ready to land in the main hangar. An air-transporter awaited their return and Alex, still bound by the wrists, felt afraid and alone. This hangar represented the potential for war, filled with thousands of battle planes, space fighters, tanks and cruisers. Vampire personnel moved about busily as Nikolas held Alex by his right arm and they walked inside the air-transport. The transport was like a bus from the Regnum but older and less comfortable. There were rows of seats all along the length of the transport and poles to hold on to for those that stood. Nikolas stood near Alex, with his hand on his left shoulder, reassuring him everything would be fine.

Awaiting Nikolas, Alex and the rest of the Rebels and soldiers, were Daniel and Erik. Nikolas kept Alex by his side as they walked out of the transport on the outdoor platform of CCC 1. He whispered into Alex’s ear, “Don’t say anything unless spoken to and don’t say anything unnecessary; keep your answers short and curt.” Alex nodded.

“Father!” Daniel walked towards them. He gave a small smile, almost unnoticeable and shook Nick’s hand. “So,” he scrutinized Alex, “this is him, is it?” Alex looked back at Daniel without any malice.

“Yes,” Nikolas said, “This is the Falsifier.”

Daniel extended his hand. “Welcome.”

Alex shook his hand with a firm grip. Erik sighed, flippantly blowing out a large puff of smoke from his cigarette. Nikolas knew he would be rough towards Alex, but only because Daniel had acted so formally. “Can we get this over with and get the guy inside?” Erik said.

“If you are in such a hurry, why don’t you kill him yourself?” asked Daniel. “Oh wait!” he said, “You’re not in charge, are you?”

Alex, amused by the two vampires, hid his smile, afraid to trigger any conflict. As they bickered, he scanned the area around him to get a better look. From the platform, he noticed the raging blue sea reflecting the light of the sun. A violent wind blew in their faces and hair. He breathed in, thankful to savor the breeze and oxygen of the Earth. It felt good and he smiled, closing his eyes. The sea was something he had never seen and it seemed to him like a mythical entity. No wonder the first travelers were so mystified by it and told stories about its majesty.

Daniel broke Alex’s reflection, “By the way, don’t be fooled by all of this, please. Erik is always upset about something or other. Come.” He walked past Erik, their shoulders brushing. “I’ll show you to your room.”

*****

John was surprised by his own behavior in the Senate. What had made him speak and act like that? It was pure luck; at least half of it was. There was a lot of calculation on his part, but that too was based on chance. He had had the feeling that Hassan had been behind the assassination attempt, ever since he had been in the elevator with Richard. The thought had struck him, when the previous coups were mentioned. He thought that perhaps there was someone outside the political system helping out Jarad, and he figured it would have to be Hassan as he was trained in the Army and was a Lieutenant. There was no crime as such in Regnum as there was a very strict weapons control. The only access to guns would have to have been provided to someone from the army and that’s how he made the connection. The entire idea of a coup wasn’t planned in detail but John always thought of eradicating the disloyal Councilors. Lylock was a nobody. John thought of him as an informer, a man looking for power just like everyone else. The main reason John hated him was because of the Vatican Mission. It cost many lives in the end and was one of the most, if not the most, major turning points of the entire war.

John was in his study while Richard kept Mrs. Howe company in the living room over a cup of tea. He took another gander at both the scroll and the canister. There was something Nick was trying to say by all this, but what was it? In the old days, Nick, Aidan, John, Jarad, and a few others invented their own secret language and became fluent in it. It was a sort of club of a chosen few who knew the secret code. It was a great way to give away vampiric
secrets and the like. But there was no distinguishable sign or code, except for the emblem. As his eyes hovered over the cross, he saw it shining in the light. He circled it with his index finger.

Nothing happened for a few moments until finally a small crack appeared on the cross. Out of the crack a white light shone in his face like a flashlight and vertically projected an image. It was a video hologram of Nikolas. “John, my dear friend,” he said, “it has been a long time. I am sure you must have read my letter. As you can see, this video is actually from a long time ago. It was filmed during the mission at Washington. Remember?” he smiled warmly. That really was a long time ago. It took place about ten years prior to the Last Battle. It was a mission in which they were fighting for the West Coast of North America. After three weeks of fighting in California, they had won the battle and continued up towards Washington, working their way through British Columbia. From there, another group had gone further north and reached Alaska. Finally three legions were sent into Russia to attack the vampiric front from the East.

“I know you may be wondering how I was able to foresee this,” Nikolas continued. “It may be that I have some of the same gifts as Aidan, yet still less developed. What I do know is that Alexander, your nephew, will be the Falsifier. I knew this because Aidan told me a hundred years before this battle. Whatever else is to happen, will happen according to the Ardemic Prophecies. The time for your own initiation will be close, once Alex is initiated. Sorry to be so vague, but if information gets into the wrong hands it may be advantageous to Anaxagoras.

“This message is just to let you know that your initiation is at hand. When we meet again, the first thing we will do is the initiation. Then, you will learn the secrets of the Knighthood and vampiric history. That is all I wanted to tell you. I suppose it will fire up your anticipation.” Nikolas smiled and bowed and the hologram shut down. The light faded and dissolved into the crack in the cross.

This was special for John. Once they had been together at a secret camp in the Himalaya Mountains, thirty kilometers north of Uttarkashi, in the Uttarkhand state of India. They had been getting ready for the next day’s attack and were trying to push the vampiric bases up north to the frigid regions, like the source of the Ganges River, Gomukh. Aidan had told John many things that night. The prophet Aidan had been very popular amongst the Rebels, not only for his bravery and candid remarks against the king, but also for his good nature. Whenever they camped out he would regale the group with stories and myths. That particular night John had spoken to Aidan:

“Well, it’s been a hard day,” John said.

“Yes.” Aidan offered John a hot cup of coffee as they sat near the fire, “Here, take this. I can feel your chill. Don’t worry.”

John hadn’t known whether he meant the real cold or the fear that was in him. “What are you talking about?”

“You know what I mean.” Aidan said, “Tell me how you’re feeling. I know something’s troubling you. Do you want me to teach you how to hide your mind?”

“Is it possible for a human?” John asked, sipping and savoring the hot coffee. Aidan chuckled, “It doesn’t matter whether you’re human, vampire, or whatever it is. It all has to do with this,” he had pointed to his head; “this,” to his heart, “and that,” he had pointed to the sky, signifying the universe.

“It’s really that simple?”

Nikolas, Varenkoff, Richard, and Liam had joined them, all holding their cups of coffee. Nick said, “What’s all this talk, Aidan? Trying to teach John something spiritual, huh?”

Aidan laughed, “No. I think it might be time, that’s all.”

Nick and the other two Rebels were shocked by this, “What!”

Liam added, “Do you know what you’re doing?”

“Are you really sure about this?” Varenkoff asked. “It could be dangerous.”

John’s nerves tensed. “What exactly are you talking about?”

Aidan said, “Well, I’m sure you know about the Knights of the Elders. You’re still writing the book?”

“Of course.” John said.

“What book is this?” Nikolas asked.

“It’s just a history of the Vampiric Race. Aidan suggested that I start it.”

“So, what have you written so far?” Aidan asked.

“Just about the Ardemic Prophecies. I was making some detailed commentaries.”

“Well, that would help.” Aidan turned to the other four. “Looks like everyone’s waiting for a story,” he smiled, “So let me start.” He paused for dramatic effect, then began, “Long ago, before the reign of Argos, before the Markian Empire, even before the Republic that lasted for hundreds of thousands of years before that, the very first society was nomadic. There were many tribes on Migra, about a hundred and forty four thousand.”

“Interesting; this sounds like something from the Bible,” said John.

“Yes, I know. It was the same on Earth, I guess, but the first incidence was on Migra. Now, during this time there
was war amongst the divided tribes. The warring factions had divided from the original twelve tribes. That was trillions of years before. At that time, according to legend, a group of twelve beings came to Migra and created us. Like you, we are humanoids. They created our DNA and what we once were. Three and a half trillion years later, the Twelve Tribes went to war with their creators. This is all recorded in the Stones of Revelation.”

“The what?” John asked.

“The Stones of Revelation. They were recorded in a very archaic language, possibly in the language of the Twelve Beings.”

“Have you seen these Stones?”

“A long time ago, yes. When I was once in my father’s study room, I saw them. They were recorded on a hundred and forty four stone tablets. They contained the Legends of the Twelve, the Creation Process, the wisdom and knowledge of the Twelve, their secrets, and of course the War that occurred. After that, the Twelve Tribes were ruled by twelve leaders.”

John was amazed by how much Aidan’s story and the Biblical stories of the Twelve Tribes and the Judges had in common. He wondered if Aidan was just borrowing stories from the Bible.

Aidan laughed, “I told you, old friend, you need to learn to veil your mind. Don’t worry about the reliability of my story. It’s true. Ask any other vampire, and they will tell you the same. Should I continue?”

“Sure,” John said. “This is definitely going to spice things up for my book.”

“John, you don’t need to add this in your book. The second part of my story that I’m going to tell you, is what you need to know, not anyone else who will read your book.”

“But the book’s going to be a secret, Aidan; you told me that.”

“For now. But there’ll be a time when people will need to know about it.”

“What?”

Aidan shook his head. “No more of this talk; let me tell you what you need to know now.” John remained quiet.

“You have been with us since the beginning. We were against Anaxagoras for many millennia. You joined us only recently. But, you have proved loyal to our cause, all of you," he said, referring to the human race, "and of course you are fighting for your own reasons as well. That’s why we want you, especially you, John, to be initiated into the Knights of the Elders.”

“We?” Varenkoff, Nikolas and Liam said at once.

Nikolas said, “Aidan, what are you talking about? You know only vampires can be a part of the Knighthood.”

“You really don’t know, do you?” Aidan said.

“Wait a minute. How did the brotherhood originate?”

“Well, it was introduced first by my ancestor, Argos I. He learned about the Stones only after he joined the Rebellion against Markos. Fabian told him about them. They were excavated in some caves in a wild desert on Migra. After learning about the History, he decided to pay homage to his ancestors by creating the brotherhood based on the Twelve Creators, and hence those who were firm in the Rebellion were initiated into it. Now, I have reintroduced it. With this initiation comes the knowledge of prophecy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and many other abilities. So I think it’s time.”

John said, “I’m honored. But are you sure?”

“Of course.”

“But we need twelve members to do it,” Liam said.

“John will need some time, don’t you think?” Dante asked, “I mean his body will not be able to take all that energy.”

“Yes, you’re right, Dante.” Aidan said. “Liam, we already have more than twelve members and this camp is filled with potential initiates.”

“But, will they agree to it?” Nikolas asked.

“That’s something we have to wait for,” Aidan said.

“So then, will I be initiated?”

“Can I be a part of it?” Richard asked reluctantly.

“Yes, you can,” Aidan said, smiling.

“This is madness,” Nikolas said, “You really think they can go for this?”

“Yes, but only if the rest agree.”

So the reason that John and Richard were not initiated was that the Rebels didn’t agree to it. It was not out of hostility, but because they thought they weren’t ready. When the right time came, they would do it.

That right time was now.

“Unbelievable!” said Alex.
“Well, you better believe it.” Nikolas stood across from him.

They were in Alex’s designated room, where he was monitored by security and cameras. Nikolas had just explained to Alex the story of the Twelve Elders, and the twelve tribes splitting into one hundred and forty four. He told him about the initiation, the story Aidan had told John and about the coming of the humans’ initiations. Nikolas was allowed free entry in and out of the Central Command Center, as he was now trusted, or rather Daniel had given him that trust. Daniel was up to something, Nick knew, because he had never seen his son so uneasy.

The story was told an hour after they landed and refreshed themselves. By the time it finished, the sun was setting.

“Now I need to know more. What happened out–?”

“Wait, Alex. Not now. I’ll explain everything to you when we are alone...completely alone. For now, get some rest. I’ll see you in the morning.” He patted him on the shoulder and left.

Nikolas walked to the end of the corridor. There were twenty guards posted outside, ten against each wall three meters apart, to make sure every part of the corridor was protected. He left the corridor and entered a small hall where he waited for the elevator. They were five kilometers under the Earth’s crust. The elevator beamed down and opened. It was desolate or at least that’s how Nick felt when he left the place. He thought about this day and what had happened. Hopefully, by now, John had gotten the message encrypted in the canister. It was precious because this was one way they could defeat Anaxagoras’s army. After the Last Battle and the Treaty of New York, everything the Rebels owned was to be destroyed. The only way Nikolas could ensure the safety of the canister was to keep it where no vampire could ever find it and the only place he could think of was Antarctica. He kept it with Aidan, whose body was buried there. How he managed to get it out was another story, and a very dangerous one at that.

The elevator stopped. He was now on the surface level of the Command Center. He was to meet with Daniel for something very important. Everything was done so quickly and efficiently that Nikolas was as free as could be. The other Rebels faced the same restrictions, but they rested for some time before their next set of lab tests.

Nikolas knew that there was some ulterior reason Daniel had made sure it was this way. There was something he wanted out of it. He remembered before he left, his son had wanted to talk to him but Erik had refused. Now he would hear him out.

The surface was extremely busy. Scientists were scattered all over the place, discussing projects that had been commissioned by the Council of Twelve. This level was circular in shape with elevators at four points. Ten meters from the elevators were doorways, which led to the offices of the administrators who were responsible for the welfare of the vampires in their designated areas (in this case North and South America, Africa and Europe). There were the offices of Erik and Daniel and the Conference Hall. Then there was a smaller Boardroom, where the more important decisions and ideas were brought forth by senior officials.

He turned to his left and walked on, following his son’s instructions. He entered the small hallway, lit by bright florescent lights. There was a glass door, which was locked by a numeric code. Nikolas typed the code Daniel told him into a keypad on the right side of the entrance. 35842. The door opened and Nikolas walked into what seemed like a small foyer. There were two doors there, one to Daniel’s office, and the other to Erik’s. At one side was Mikhail’s desk, and at the other was Sirach’s desk, the latter being Erik’s secretary. Both secretaries smiled at him, and Nikolas smiled back. “Mikhail,” he said, “I was to see Daniel at 6:30.”

“Yes,” Mikhail said, “That’s right; you may go in.”

Nikolas opened the door and saw Daniel sitting in his chair, deep in thought. He hadn’t even notice his father when he came in and sat down. Nikolas kept silent, observing his son, wondering what he was thinking. He was tempted to psychically scan his mind but he knew better than that. Nick cleared his throat. Daniel jumped. “Are you alright, Daniel?” asked Nick.

“Father.” He kept silent for about ten seconds, trying to recollect his thoughts and what he wanted to say to his father. “How is he?” he asked.

“Fine,” Nikolas said, “Although I can sense fear in him.”

“Yes, so can I,” Daniel sighed. “Okay, let’s just get down to it.” He rearranged himself in the chair and said, “I want to know more about the Falsifier. There’s clearly something no one knows about him except you. Who is he really?”

“You think,” Nikolas smiled, “I would tell you that? How do I know you aren’t asking me so that you can tell the Council? How can I trust you?”

“I’m your son,” Daniel said, a tinge of anger rising from his throat.

“But you are also President of the Vampiric Regime. Your allegiance is to the king, and mine is to Aidan.”

“You know you’re not allowed to speak his name.”

“It’s not the first time, is it?”

“Ah,” Daniel smiled wickedly, “That’s something I will never understand, father. Why did you go to Antarctica?
Why did you really go?"

"You know I had to see my comrade, I had to receive his blessings before the mission. That’s what I told the Council, and they agreed, as long as I was accompanied—"

"But you weren’t, were you?"

"Yes I was."

Daniel laughed, “You don’t expect me to believe that, do you? That the four soldiers died there? It’s obvious you killed them.”

“Even if I did,” Nikolas smiled, baring his fangs, “what difference does it make?”

“Unless there was something that happened there, something you wanted hidden, you wouldn’t have killed them.”

“Look,” Nikolas’s eyes pierced through Daniel’s as he spoke, “I have a proposal for you. You want me, you need me. You know that. And I’m willing to work for you, willing to tell you everything if you allow me this: let me talk to the boy privately, and I’ll get all I can from him; let him tell me all the secrets of the Regnum, of Howe, and the humans. We will use their weakness against them. Let me get him to talk alone, without any cameras and without guards.”

Daniel shook his head, “I don’t believe this; none of it. You betrayed us once, and we cannot trust you again.”

“Then as a token of my allegiance, as a sign of my redemption, let me tell you who Alex really is.”

“Alex? So that is his name,” Daniel reflected. He wanted to know more, and Nick sensed this.

“Hmm,” Daniel said with nonchalance, not wanting to believe what his father had said. “Only the blood tests will prove that.”

“And,” Nick said, “He is the direct heir of Argos I.”

“What do you mean?” Daniel said, “That’s impossible.”

“Do you know the real reason why Anaxagoras cast his son out of the Nyrax Dynasty?”

“No!” He couldn’t believe what his father had just said; he didn’t want to. “Do you mean...?”

“Yes,” Nikolas smiled, “Alex is Aidan’s son, born of a human mother, who is...was Howe’s sister.”

“Then, that means...” Daniel’s eyes widened, the whites contrasting with the dark crimson, “No...no, it can’t be.” He looked at Nikolas, who was laughing at the shock on his face. “Well, if the scans show that what you say is right, then I will immediately tell the council that your true allegiance is to Lord Anaxagoras.”

“Daniel,” sighed Nikolas, “You think I don’t see what you’re doing? You want power! They want power, Erik wants power; all of us want power over the king. I’m right, aren’t I? Listen to me. Like I said, my allegiance is not to the king. The truth is...it’s to myself.”

“I have only one objective and that’s to do the bidding of Anaxagoras.”

“I know...I know what you’re saying is just for your own benefit. You’re waiting for the right time and so am I. You went away from me and Aidan. You left us all and made your own plans. Then you joined him and are now waiting. You’ve been waiting a long time for your opportunity. Now, my son, with Aidan dead and Anaxagoras far away, is the time to overcome this rule. We can join forces and create our own dynasty: the Gareng Dynasty!”

“What?” Daniel jumped off his chair. “How can you say that? That’s treason.”

“Calm down. If you think I don’t know that you want power, then you’re mistaken.”

“Get out! How dare you— I can’t have any of this.”

Nikolas smiled and walked calmly out of the office.

*****

As soon as John walked downstairs to keep his friend and mother company and get ready for the meeting with the Senate, the doorbell rang. A butler answered it and led the guest into the living room. It was Angel. Helen got up and welcomed her. “Oh Angel, what a pleasant surprise!”

“Hello, Mrs. Howe,” she smiled at Grandma Howe and hugged her, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, my girl. The question is: how are you? Is everything okay?”

Angel sighed, “I really don’t know,” her eyes watered up, and Mrs. Howe embraced her once again.

John smiled at Angel, “Hi Angel. How are things?”

“Okay, I guess.” She said, trying to be optimistic. “Any news about Alex?”

“He’s fine,” John said as he gave her a quick hug. “Um, you know Mr. Bacon, right?”

“Oh yes, of course,” she shook Richard’s hand, “How do you do?”

“Fine. Thanks.” Richard gave her a warm look.

“Your paper on the Political System of the Pre-WWIII era was excellent,” Angel said, trying to make light conversation as they sat down.

“I’m glad you think so,” Richard said, “Not everyone agrees on it, though.”
Grandma Howe went to the kitchen to fix up some tea for John and Angel.

“Oh, wait Mrs. Howe, let me help you.”

“It’s alright, Angel. Stay here and I’ll be back in a sec.”

“No, Mom. It’s okay,” added John, “We won’t be here for long. We have to get back to the Senate.”

His mother ignored him saying, “Your work can wait. Besides, we have visitors and I don’t want them leaving without any refreshment.” She left them and could be heard calling one of the maids to come and help her.

“So, what brings you here?” John said as Helen walked out of the room.

“I needed to talk to you about Alex, Mr. Howe. I’m really worried about him.”

“So are we,” John said. “But don’t worry too much. Everything’s going to be fine.”

“I saw the news and my parents are a little apprehensive.”

“This is only temporary,” said John. “I’m only doing it for Alex; I want him back and this is the best option we have. Don’t worry about politics, Angel. These things happen every ten years or so.”

“Mr. Howe, if I don’t get married to Alex, it will be bad for everyone.”

“What do you mean?”

Mrs. Howe came back with four cups of tea and a plate full of scones and biscuits.

“Mom! There’s no need–”

She shushed him and sat down, taking her own cup of tea. John smiled and shook his head, sipping his cup. He sighed and sat back, more relaxed. “Now, Angel, what do you mean by all this?”

“I need to tell you...alone.” She said, eyeing Richard. “It’s a family thing.”

Richard cleared his throat and finished his cup of tea. “Thanks, Mrs. Howe, for the tea.” He got up and walked to the door, as the butler opened it for him. “I’ll be waiting in the car.”

John nodded and said, “It won’t take long.”

“Sure,” said Richard. He left the Estate and waited for John outside.

“So, what’s this big thing?” asked Mrs. Howe, “I hope things are fine between you and Alex.”

“Everything’s fine. I love Alex very much and want to marry him and like I told you...” she looked at John, “I have to marry him and no one else.” But she stopped, her eyes moving rapidly as she pondered on what to say next.

“Well?” John and Helen said.

“I’m pregnant.”

Mrs. Howe coughed uncontrollably, choking on her tea. “What did you say?”

“Calm down, Mom,” said John. He called one of the butlers, “Charles! Charles!”

The butler rushed in, “Yes, Mr. Howe?”

“Get some water! Can’t you see her coughing?” The butler ran out quickly, fetched some water and served it to Mrs. Howe.

She drank it and after a few moments was fine. Finally, she sighed and said, “How do you know? Are you sure?”

“Yes, Mrs. Howe. I’m sorry if you’re hurt about it. I want you to know that even if I wasn’t pregnant, I would still marry Alex.”

“I know,” said Mrs. Howe, composing herself, “I’m not hurt; it’s just a bit of a shock to me...to us,” she said, turning to John, who seemed not to have heard because he was lost in his own thoughts. “Isn’t that right, John?”

“What?” John shook out of his own thoughts on the situation. How could Alex impregnate someone if he was a vampire? “Right...yes... well, Angel...I’m not angry about the situation, just amazed.”

“Amazed?” Angel said, smiling. “I don’t quite understand.”

“I mean.” He got a hold of himself, “I’m surprised by it. I don’t have a problem. Just don’t tell anyone else, alright?”

“Oh of course not,” Angel said.

“Did Alex tell you anything important in the afternoon, Angel?” he asked her.

“Well, I don’t suppose so. No, not really. Why?”

“No, it’s fine. He’ll tell you when he can and when he’s ready. Soon enough everyone’s going to know.”

Angel seemed confused by this statement. “Alright, Mr. Howe. So, I guess I’ll be leaving.” The three of them stood up together. Angel hugged both of them, thanked them for the tea and left reluctantly.

“Well, what do you think?” John asked his mother.

“About what?” Helen said.

“Angel’s situation.”

“Whatever it is, John, I have always accepted Angel as my granddaughter. I’m happy that they will have a child, but I would have preferred it if they were married first.” She sighed.

“I have my mind on something else,” said John. “The fact that Angel is going to have a baby and that it’s Alex’s
is something I don’t understand. Alex’s genes, I’m sure, are dominated by vampiric DNA, and yet he is able to procreate. It doesn’t make sense.” He walked towards the hallway and to the door. He turned to his mother and hugged her. “But, it’s a good thing, I guess. The vamps down there are going to find out soon and they’re probably going to take advantage of it. By now, they must have found out his true lineage and who he really is. It’s bound to come out, and it’s safer for him. It gives him a sort of protection, on top of the protection that he has from Nikolas.”

“What about him and the others? Are you going to make sure they get in?”

“One way or another I’ll make sure of it,” John said and left.

This day was like a dream and yet so real. After listening to Nikolas’s story about what his father had told Uncle John, his mind was dazed and tired. Hearing about his father made him feel happy and proud. He imagined what it must have been like for Uncle John, on that cold frosty night, to have known about the initiation. Alex was sure that it must have been like how he felt now, knowing that his time would come soon. This would be so beneficial for the Human Race. Nikolas must have known that it would be the secret weapon to defeat the vampires. If only they had used it earlier, none of this would have happened. They would all be on Earth and everything would be alright. But, alas, it was not to be! And Alex understood that his father knew it and accepted that it was meant to be this way so that the prophecies could be fulfilled.

He couldn’t sleep. He was paranoid that they might kill him while he slept. He sat on a chair, staring at the door and broke out into a sweat. He was inside the Earth’s crust now, and it felt wrong. He would rather have stayed above, where he could see more of his home planet. He wanted to know exactly what was going on. Why did Daniel react the way he did and who was the other man? It was puzzling to see this cousin of his so happy and welcoming. Daniel had spoken incessantly about the grandeur of the Earth and other matters ranging from history to science. Alex had noticed, however, that he never made eye contact with him.

Sleep grew heavier by the minute. He felt suffocated and frustrated that he couldn’t know what was going on. He was curious to know more about the Earth, his heritage, and ultimately his final destiny. He also worried about Angel and wanted to know when exactly John would come to rescue him. He got up from the chair and lied down on the bed. He closed his eyes and slowly let his mind relax. In a few seconds, he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

The limo flew into the air to avoid street traffic. John and Richard were told to be in the Senate Hall by 8:00 pm and they wanted to be on time. Right now, John’s watch read 7:45. “Damn it! I don’t want to be late, Bill,” he said to the chauffeur.

“Relax, John,” Richard said, laying his head back and sighing. “I know things will work out for us.”

“Yeah, I hope.” He folded his legs and sat back.

“Is everything okay? Did that girl say something?”

“No, nothing important. Just something between her and Alex.”

“I hope everything’s fine.”

“Yeah, everything’s alright. I’m just nervous, that’s all. There’s still a chance that they might not–”

“We’ll be fine, John. The Senate will have to give you emergency powers. The vampires are going to send an ultimatum and we will send them one of our own.”

“Will our boys be ready?” John shook his head. “I’m not sure they will.”

“We’ll give them time. When the Senate hears of the ultimatum, they’ll know it’s come to war, and they’ll have no choice but to elect you Supreme Leader.”

They arrived at five to eight and stepped out of the limo. “Wait here, Bill,” John said to the chauffeur.

“Yes, Mr. Howe,” said Bill.

John and Richard walked up the massive stairs to the Headquarters and entered a lobby. A different receptionist from the one they encountered earlier smiled and said, “Sir, the Senate is waiting for you, in there.” She pointed to the Great Hall.

“Thanks,” said John. As they approached the entrance to the hall, they saw two guards outside. For a moment John was scared that they were there to take him away. “I have come to meet the Senate. Let me in,” he said, trying to hide his fears. The guards opened the massive double door.

Once again, Senator Gars greeted them. “It is time, Leader Howe,” he said. He led them inside the Great Hall silently as the others watched their movements. John stepped up to the podium, and observed the faces of each member of the Senate. There was nothing he could read from them. No news reporters stood by to cover the story. The Senate did not want any more publicity and so strict orders had been given to ban reporters from the Headquarters. They were also not allowed anywhere near John’s Estate, nor the Regnum Central area.

John spoke: “Senators of Regnum, I have come now to hear your voices and to act on your behalf.” A feeling of anxiety crept up his spine when he scanned their faces; he was afraid they might not be with him. Had they perhaps
planned to throw him in prison? If they had, there would be nobody to protect him. Despite these thoughts, he continued. “Whatever it may be, let it be heard and let it be followed.”

Senator Blake stood up and said, “From hereon, the Council has been disintegrated. A majority of the votes dictates that all the members, excluding Richard Bacon, shall be detained for further hearing on the accusations put forth by General John Benjamin Howe. They will be tried and the court hearings will be overlooked by the Justices of the Supreme Court.” He read from a scroll, “You, John Benjamin Howe III, General of the Army of Earth and Council Leader, have hereby been appointed Supreme Leader of all Regnum. From now on, after this appointment, the Senate, the Judiciary, and all other governmental bodies will be under your command, for the good of all Regnum. You will be responsible for implementing the return of human life on Earth. Richard Bacon, you have been appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Leadership of Regnum.” Blake rolled up the parchment and said on behalf of his fellow senators, “However, before we grant both of you these posts, we have a question to ask you.” All eyes were on them like predators.

“And that is?” asked John.

“What is your plan for the next year, in terms of this coming war? What will be the fate of the Rebels, if you are to bring them here, and why, more importantly, did they take Alexander Howe, your nephew?”

“Well, let me begin, Senators, by thanking all of you for your decision. I assure you that you have made the right choice in appointing me Supreme Leader with Richard Bacon on my side as Vice-Chancellor. I promise you as I have promised myself and the people of Regnum that soon we shall be the People of the Earth once again! I love the Earth, as much as anyone else does. It belongs to me, you, and to all of us. We are its children and we have been banished against our will. I do not propose that we cooperate with the vampires and let them stay on the Earth, for they will not accept it. Therefore, I say we take what is ours by force. We must train our men to fight in battle, on land, in air, and by sea. We must destroy them and reclaim our home. I propose a mission, firstly to rescue my nephew, Alexander. I admit I allowed it to happen because I knew he would be in safe hands. The Rebel known as General Nikolas Gareng is a very close friend of mine, and before taking away my nephew, he gave me a message.” John took out the canister and the scroll.

“Nikolas,” he continued, “has promised me that Alex will be safe with him and the other Rebels. They have become stronger since the last time we met them, and now they will be our greatest ally. If you did not notice, they were covered in silver at the time of the kidnapping. This shows that the Vampire Government is preparing by testing on the Rebels for immunity against silver, so that they can defeat us in this war to come. We too must prepare, and with the Rebels on our side, with their enhanced powers, we will be unstoppable. I suspect tomorrow we will receive an ultimatum, for we have breached clause 108765. In return we will send them an ultimatum: give us Alex, or it shall come to war!

“Now, there is a confession I want to make.” He thought for a moment about what he was going to say. “My nephew has been captured by the Regime because he is the Falsifier, a man and a vampire, believed by the Anisaei to be the one to bring about their destruction.” For a moment, it seemed like what he had just said hadn’t registered in their minds.

“Wait a minute,” said Senator Keegan, a woman sitting at the far end of the hall, “Are you saying that your nephew, the boy we know as Alexander Howe, who graduated from Regnum University as the valedictorian of his class, is a vampire?”

To this, some of the other senators remarked:

“Unbelievable!”

“This is completely wrong!”

“If we had only known!”

Senator Gars ran towards John and whispered to him, “What you’re saying is shocking, John. How do you expect us to believe this and to accept you now as our leader?”

“I just do.” He faced Gars with complete resolve.

Gars returned the look and gestured for silence. As the noise died down, he said to John with a smile. “I’m glad you were honest about it. I’m with you.” The Senators erupted once again and started cursing John. Some of them even left. “Senators, listen to me!” Gars pleaded. “What John Howe has said is quite unexpected. Nevertheless, we mustn’t react in such a way. After all, Alexander has been a citizen of the Regnum as long as any of us has been. He has proved himself to be a man of great caliber, in his thoughts, in his words, and in his actions. Never has he shown contempt for any of us and he has done so much, in terms of helping this society in whatever way he could. Granted, he is a vampire. Yet you would allow other vampires on board the Regnum; those who we call the Rebels. Besides, Alex is more human than vampire. According to Leader Howe, he is our only hope.

“His behavior only shows that vampires, if they are on our side, can be trusted. I say that Alex should be rescued and that the Rebels can come on board the Regnum, under one condition. That is: if any harm is done to any human
of the Regnum by any one of the vampires, they are to be deported back to the Earth. We will not send them back to the Government, but to Antarctica, for we know no vampire is allowed to set foot on that land without prior permission from the higher order, from Anaxagoras himself. Under these terms, he shall be accepted. Is that understood?” Gars turned to John. The latter nodded. “All those in favor?”

Total silence. Then, one by one, they spoke the word, “Aye!”
Chapter Six
Ultimatums

Alex had the same dream as the previous night. He saw the emerald cross with the serpent entwined around it. Once again there was the same comforting, white light between him and the emblem.

He heard a voice, Anaxagoras’s perhaps, calm, yet icy. “Alexander, your time is soon approaching.”

Alex turned around looking for the owner of this voice, but there was none. He saw a stairway, carved into the walls and leading to a cave. There was a dim light coming from it. He walked up towards the cave and entered. The flickering light came from above him. It was not white, but rather like a yellow flame. “Alexander,” the voice said again, “You must follow me. Listen to what I have to say.”

“Why?” Alex said. “Why should anyone listen to you?”

Anaxagoras laughed, “No one listens because they are forced to. Do you really think that? No.” he paused. “They listen because they know what I say is right.”

“I know what is right. So why should I listen to you?”

“You don’t know what the truth is. Do not listen to anyone. That is what I am telling you. Listen to what I have to say and you will see the truth.”

Alex kept his eyes upwards at the flame-like light. “Why are you telling me all this? What do you want me to see?”

The light grew larger, more radiant. “What do you have to lose?” The light, ten feet away from Alex, grew as bright as the sun. A figure stepped out of it: Anaxagoras, cloaked and completely dark. Only the pale outline of his face could be seen. “Come with me,” he said, hovering in the air like the angel of death. “Come and see for yourself what will happen.”

Suddenly, Alex too hovered in the air. He knew Anaxagoras was controlling him. They sped higher and higher. Alex could see they neared to the top when he saw clouds. The edifice resembled the opening of a volcano. When they reached the threshold, Alex saw that the structure was in the ground and did not rise up like a mound.

“Where are we?” He asked. “What is this?” He saw a large amalgamation of structures, a complex of pyramids, marble obelisks, and statues. They had come out of an eight hundred foot pyramid through a small ventilation shaft. The pyramid resembled the ones in South America. “This is amazing!” Alex gasped.

“This, my boy, is called the Mausoleum of the Anu-Sa-Rimh!” Anaxagoras raised his hands and gestured to convey the majesty of the area.

“You mean the Blood Gods?”

“Ah, so you know about them?”

“Is this Migra?” Alex asked.

“Yes.”

“But the place we were at before—

“That was Antarctica,” Anaxagoras said.

Migra, the real Migra, was so lush. The complex stretched as far as Alex could see. The gigantic monuments were surrounded by lush gardens and sparkling fountains of gushing water.

“This is the city of the gods,” said Anaxagoras. “This is what people on Earth called Heaven, the Kingdom of God, Devanagari, Nirvana, and all the other names they have for paradise.”

“So, they’ve seen it,” Alex said, confused. “But how?”

“In their visions, they have seen it.”

“Why are you showing me this?”

“This is your destination. This is where you must be, Alexander. You must join me!”

Alex turned hostile, “You will never persuade me! Tell me what you must and let me go!”

“You have no idea what you are talking about. I have the power to kill you here in the realm of consciousness.”

“You killed your son! What’s stopping you now?”

“I’m giving you a choice, like I gave my son.”

“What?”
“If you don’t join me, then it will mean destruction for everything.”
“I don’t believe that! That’s not true!”
“You have no other choice.”
“That’s not what the Prophecies say!”
“If you do not join me you will see what happens.” In an instant, everything Alex saw burst into flames.
He felt the heat of the fire burning him and heard the violent screams of women and children, begging for mercy. He saw flying ships and objects of fire blazing down from the sky. The ships were massive, as big as the Regnum. As they landed soldiers flew out and attacked everything in sight. They created energy beams that caused mass destruction in every corner. Horrible painful lights flickered here and there as a result of the blasts, leaving behind dust, decay, and debris. The heavily armed soldiers attacked the Mausoleum, the pyramid in which Alex had been. They looked like oversized robots with rigid and bulky armor. They had no features, only two large lights for eyes. He realized these were just helmets. He saw other ships, smaller ships, attacking the larger ones.
They landed and the enemy soldiers rushed out. Alex saw that all these soldiers were humans! He saw John, Nikolas, Richard and so many other familiar faces.
“This is impossible!” Alex yelled.
“It will be so. You shall see,” Anaxagoras said, his voice penetrating through Alex’s veins and beating in his heart.
“But, the war. It’s...who are these people?”
“That’s of no importance. Now, tell me.” Everything disappeared in a flash of light and they were back to the time of an untainted Migra. “Will you join me?” Anaxagoras held out a white hand. His long glassy fingernails reflected the light.
Alex hesitated, pretending to consider. Then he smirked, “These are just your tricks, nothing more. You think I would believe you so easily?”
Anaxagoras said nothing and raised his right arm. Suddenly beams of light formed on the end of each finger. They increased in size, gradually gathering momentum and pulsating. They merged together into one and expanded to the size of his palm. Anaxagoras flung the energy ball at Alex and said, “You fool! You will die!”
Before he was hit by the blast of energy, Alex envisioned the Regnum destroyed. Huge vampire fighter ships were attacking it from all angles. The Regnum split open, spewing people into the cold dark vacuum of space. He felt their utter horror and sense of hopelessness. He saw Angel crying out for him. A large dark figure grabbed her by the hair and pulled her into his ship.
The energy amassed and destroyed his body.

*****

Nikolas awoke in his new suite. From the open window, he perceived the sun just above the horizon. The reflection of its golden hue sparkled and danced on the ocean waves. Magnificent. Nick breathed in the fresh air. He walked to the balcony, yawned and stretched. He rubbed his eyes and looked at the time. 6:40.
Someone knocked on the door, but Nikolas didn’t hear it, engrossed with the sound of the waves and smelling the fresh ocean breeze as it flowed through his thick dark hair. The doorbell rang. He heard it but it didn’t matter. He was happy, peaceful and content where he was. Again the doorbell rang.
“What in the blazes!” he scurried to the door and opened it.
A short man stood in the doorway holding a letter. “Sir, the President wishes you to read this. It’s of the utmost urgency.” He handed him an envelope.
“Thank you.”
The man walked away and Nick closed the door, looking at the envelope with deep interest. He sat down and opened it. There was a letter inside; he started reading:

Dear Father,

I wished to give you my support. But I could not afford to have anyone listen to us; it would be too dangerous. I want you to know I am ready to join hands with you in our struggle for our own dynasty. Your father was the brother-in-law of the king, and yet he was never given the respect he deserved. He remained in the shadows and was never spoken about. After his death, you swore that you would take vengeance upon the king, and you joined forces with the Rebel, Aidan. But, now the time really has come for our vengeance. Let us forget the past and look to the future, a better future for the Gareng Family.
I will speak to the Council once they have finished with the Falsifier, and you will get your audience with him, privately. Also, I have given permission for the Rebels to roam more freely and have their own rooms as you have.
When we speak to the Council, we will let them know that the Rebels are back to their old ways. Once you get the information out of the boy, give it to the Council and show them you are with them. Then, when the right time comes, we will strike them out. I remain forever your loving son.

Daniel.

Nikolas smiled. It worked! What he told Daniel last night had given the boy things to think about. Now he would have the advantage of speaking to Alex alone. He would be able to tell Alex everything he needed to.

Once again, the doorbell rang. It was the same man. He looked different now, his face panicky.

“What happened?”

“Sir, you must come quickly. There is something wrong with the captive!”

“Where is he?”

“He’s dead!”

The next day’s conflicting headlines announced victory, tragedy, and shock, all at the same time. People in the Regnum felt somewhat betrayed by John Howe. They respected him but the news of his nephew shocked them, just as it had shocked the Senate. John was to hold a press conference at 9:00 and that gave him two hours to decide what he would say to the public. Though people were shocked by Gars’s statement, they had no problem with the Rebels or Alex coming back to the Regnum. All John had to do was wait for the ultimatum, which would give him a reason to hasten the attack. He contacted the Space Force Commander Kurt J. Lord and told him to meet him at his office at 0830 hrs.

John freshened up and had breakfast with his mother. “So,” she asked him, “are you ready?”

He raised his eyebrows, gave a quick smile and sighed. “I guess so. I just hope all goes according to plan.”

“It has so far.”

“Well, you’re coming along nicely.”

“Yeah,” he said chewing on his toast. “I hope Alex is fine.”

“Don’t worry, Nikolas is there with him.”

“Yeah, but I just get the feeling...I don’t know,” he shook his head.

“What? What is it?”

“I just don’t want him to get hurt, that’s all.”

“He won’t. They know that he’s the Falsifier and they aren’t to harm him.”

“Yes, I know.” John sipped his coffee and looked at the clock. It was 7:45. His mother noticed this and said, “You’ve never been late for anything in your life. Relax.”

“Yeah,” he said, “Thanks to dad.” He laughed. “I remember the time I was late for school. Just that one day. I’ll never forget the way he nearly brought the house down.”

John’s mother smiled, “And Miriam was so scared of him,” she said.

John laughed.

“She would have been so happy to see this day,” said John’s mother.

“Don’t forget, she is,” he said. His eyes glazed over and he paused his chewing. “I miss her.”

“Me too.” Helen took her son’s hand and squeezed it. “She’s so proud of you and her son, just the way I’m proud of mine.”

John looked deep into his mother’s eyes. He saw sadness and hurt there. But there was also hope. Hope in Alex. He thought of the pain she must have felt losing both her daughter and her husband. It must have been like the pain he felt when Caryn and his unborn child died. No one knew about the child, not even John’s mother. It was a pain that he held inside and used against his enemies on the battlefield.

The doorbell rang and a butler answered it.

Richard walked in. “Have you seen the crowd outside?”

“No, but I’ve heard it.”

“Coffee, Richard?” Helen got up to get the mug and pour some for him.

“Sure, Mrs. Howe.” He sat down.

“Now, what have you decided to do?” John asked surveying his clothes, “You look good, Richard. Looks like you’re ready to take on the world.”

Richard laughed, “I guess I am.” He was wearing a suit, finely made by the best tailors of Regnum. “You don’t look too bad yourself, mate.”

John fixed his tie in playfulness, “I look better than people would expect from a General, I know that much.”

They finished their cups and went off to meet the crowd. John and Richard gave Mrs. Howe a kiss on the cheek and she gave them both her blessings.
The moment they left the house, they were met with a cheering crowd. “This is amazing,” John said in the limo, “Just yesterday, they were threatening to kill me, and now, now they love me.”

“Yeah,” Richard said, “These people will love you as long as you show them that you have their best interests at heart.”

“And we are very different to Jarad. How is he, by the way?”

“Doctors say another week and he can leave the hospital.”

“Then, we’ll see.”

“What do you mean? I thought you said that we’re going to put them on trial.”

“Maybe not,” John said, waving to the crowd outside, “There’s been a change of plans.” John tapped his temple with his forefinger.

Nikolas, the Rebels, and a few guards ran along the corridor. The door to Alex’s room was already opened. Daniel stood next to the Falsifier, where he lay on his bed. Nikolas said, “It can’t be.”

“It is,” said Daniel. “So much for your Falsifier. He’s dead, father. Dead!”

“But he is the Falsifier,” cried Nikolas. “Wait! Get some blood samples done. Now!” The guards scurried off to the elevator. Nikolas shook Alex’s body furiously, “Alex. Alex! Get up! Get up!” He took his body and grabbed him around the collar and slapped him. There was no response.

“How did this happen?” Daniel asked.

“Sir,” One of the guards said, “He was...” the guard paused, wondering how he should say this.

“What? He was what? Tell us, damn it! What the hell was he doing?”

“It was about fifteen minutes ago that he was stirring from his sleep. We could hear screams, curses in the ancient dialect coming from inside and then a large burst of energy. The camera footage shows him transforming.”

“Transforming? Into what?”

“We couldn’t see that. He began to convulse, calling out, ‘Uncle John! Uncle John!’ Then he collapsed.”

The scientists arrived and Daniel turned to speak to them. “Find out what’s wrong and what we can do.”

One scientist pricked Alex’s skin and took a blood sample. The wound should have healed immediately but it didn’t, instead dripping ounce by ounce. He put a few drops of blood into a small tube which was inserted into a blood monitoring system. “The cells in his blood are still moving,” he said. “His vampirism is still evident but it’s very faint.

“We will need a transfusion from another vampire if there is to be any hope of reviving him.”

“I’m ready to give it,” Daniel said, folding up his sleeve. Nikolas was surprised.

“No, wait!” Nikolas stopped him. “Don’t infect him with your blood. There is only one blood that can save him.”

“What?” Daniel asked.

“Who else’s but his originator?” Nikolas said.

“You mean...” Daniel didn’t say anything. No one yet knew that Aidan was the Falsifier’s father.

Nick just gave an abrupt nod.

“We will have to meet the Council for this,” Daniel concluded.

“We can’t tell the Council,” Nikolas said. “They will be furious. You know that.”

“Sir,” One of the guards said, “He was...” the guard paused, wondering how he should say this.

“What? He was what? Tell us, damn it! What the hell was he doing?”

To everyone’s surprise, Daniel leaned back and punched Erik in the face. Blood flowed from his nostrils. “You’re dead as well, Daniel.”

To everyone’s surprise, Daniel leaned back and punched Erik in the face. Blood flowed from his nostrils. “You’re dead as well, Daniel.”

“Are you insane? This is the Falsifier we’re talking about.”

“Are you insane? This is the Falsifier we’re talking about.”

“How dare you!” Erik spat with vehemence. “Now the Council will surely hear of this!” He stormed out and got back into the elevator.

“Somebody stop him!” Daniel said, “He must not tell the Council what has transpired here.” He sent four guards after Erik and told one of them to send a message to Mikhail to stop the regent. “This is...so frustrating. I hate that guy!” he cursed.

“Now the only thing we can do is get the blood,” Nikolas said.

“Guards, everyone, leave us,” Daniel said, and everyone left. “Not the Rebels. You stay here.”

“Aidan’s blood is essential,” Nikolas said. “That is the only blood that can save him.”

“No it’s not,” said Gavin. “Listen, this isn’t the only solution.”

“He’s right,” said Varenkoff.

“There’s the ritual, the technique,” Joqetu said.

“No!” Nikolas shook his head. “That’s a grave risk. You know that. Besides, not all of us have that sort of energy. It’s not been used for the last twenty years or so. I’m sure everyone’s forgotten it.”

“You mean,” Daniel said slowly, “the Resurrection technique. The one given to Christ?”
“Yes,” Gavin said.
“But it’s illegal,” said Daniel, “Anaxagoras has forbidden it.”
“How does it matter?” Nikolas asked. “We’re not working for Anaxagoras anymore. Remember?”
“Right,” Daniel said, “but like you said, it will take time and energy.”
“Do you remember the technique?” Nikolas asked.
Daniel shook his head and squatted down to get a closer look at Alex.
Nikolas said, “Neither do I.”
“It’s not you memory that’s failed, it’s Anaxagoras,” Daniel corrected. “He has taken away all knowledge from
our minds so that no one else would learn it, and it wouldn’t fall into the wrong hands. You know that.”
“How can I forget? We were not allowed that information after the Rebellion. But, that does not mean we can’t
try.”
“Try? How the hell can we try when don’t know one word of the incantation?” Daniel said, getting up and
looking at his father.
“But that has restricted access. Only Council members and government officials can go there.”
“Exactly,” Nikolas’s smile widened.

Central Headquarters was off-limits for press and those who were not in the Senate or Supreme Court. A large
crowd gathered at the main building and at Central Square, where the ceremony was to take place. Never before had
people been so ecstatic about a man coming to power. Even though John knew the position was temporary, he was
happy. But at the same time, his mouth was dry and his heart rate quickened with anxiety. The sound of celebration
and press rang in his ears as they followed him. He shook hands, kissed cheeks, waved, and smiled.

John and Richard strode inside the building. To their surprise, they were greeted with mirth and laughter by the
Senate, the Supreme Justices, and the Municipal officials. “Well done, you both!” said Justice Herbert K. Marks, an
African American man in his late sixties. Herbert was a jolly figure with his white walrus mustache and wide
grinning mouth. He effortlessly projected a happy vibe onto all around him. He had always been supportive of John
Howe and was one of the first people who nominated him as the then de facto and eventual elected Leader of the
Council. While shaking John’s hand, he whispered into his ear. “You definitely are the right choice. That idiot,
Jarad, is nothing but a two-faced liar.”

John said, “All will be revealed in time, Herb. Jarad may be two-faced, but I think there’s more to it than that.
You’ll soon see.” John smiled. “Anyway,” he patted Herbert’s hand which still clasped his own, “I’m glad and
grateful for your support.” John respected Justice Marks and trusted him with his life. The man was a rational
thinker with a warm heart.

Herbert patted John and Richard on the back, a little hard but jovially and gave a deep laugh.

The other Justices greeted them along with the Senate. The Municipal officials had little say, but each
congratulated Richard and John, shaking their hands and embracing them.

“Now, remember,” said Herbert, “you must realize that this outcome has come upon us for a very good reason.”

“Oh, of course,” John and Richard said together.

John continued, “This is a new chapter in the History of Humankind, my friends. Life as we know it is an unjust,
passing existence, full of grief, pain, remorse, and vengeance. Therefore, I want to make it clear to everyone.” He
looked at them seriously, “I will not shy from my responsibilities as leader; I am fighting for liberty. I am grateful
that you have given me your trust. Make no mistake; I will lead us towards happier days.”

“Oh, of course, we trust you. We trust you both,” Nyazika, one of the Justices, said, turning to Richard. “Do you have
anything to add?”

“John has spoken for both of us,” Richard said.

“Well then, we will prepare for the ceremony.” Nyazika projected a grandfatherly smile. “You two go and do
what you need to and be back here by 9:00.”

They left the premises, only to be bombarded with shouts of praise and adoration from the crowd. “I think we
need to pay Jarad another visit,” said John.

Daniel and Nikolas hurried to Erik’s office. They spoke nothing of the matter to each other and remained quiet
throughout. Once they reached the office lobby they saw Sirach waiting alone. “Where is the regent?” Daniel asked.

“He’s inside sir, with your secretary,” said Sirach, standing up.

“Good,” Daniel said. “Let us in.”

Sirach pressed the intercom speaker button and said, “Sir, it’s the President. He wants to see you.”

“Let him in,” said Erik through the intercom.
Sirach smiled and gestured them to go in.

The door opened automatically. When they entered inside, Erik was waiting for them. They were surprised to see a smile on his face. Daniel had a feeling he knew what was going on. Mikhail stood up and Erik bid the Garengs to sit down.

“Look, Erik. Let’s talk straight here,” Daniel said. “Whatever has happened couldn’t be prevented.”

“Really?” Erik shook his head, “I doubt that. I am going to summon Lord Julius and notify him of your lack of care and your sudden allegiance, with this gang of vagabonds... these,” Erik gave Nikolas an evil glare, “Rebels!”

“Listen,” Daniel said, “there’s no need for all this. Just hear my proposal.”

“No, listen to mine. I don’t have to tell Lord Julius about this mishap. All you have to do is...”

“Just tell us, damn it!” Daniel frowned.

“No, listen to mine. I don’t have to tell Lord Julius about this mishap. All you have to do is...”

“Give me the blood of the Falsifier!”

“What!”

“That’s right, I want his blood.”

“But why his?” asked Nikolas, “What’s so special about it?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? His blood is the most powerful there is next to Lord Anaxagoras’s.”

“But it’s dangerous,” said Daniel. “Drinking his blood will kill you.”

“That’s right,” Nikolas said. “His genetic code is too complex to decipher and his blood is a mix.”

“A mix?” Erik looked at Nikolas with interest. “What do you mean?”

“Yes, it has been said before. He is half human and half vampire. Plain and simple,” said Nikolas, “He is a very important ally to us.”

“To us?”

Daniel laughed. “You don’t realize it, do you? Father and the others have decided to join us.”

“Is that so?” Erik said, scrutinizing Nikolas’s face. “How do you know of this?”

“The truth is Alex, the Falsifier, is from the lineage of Argos I, and the grandson of Anaxagoras.”

“That’s impossible!” Both Erik and Mikhail looked at Nikolas, their faces a picture of incredulity.

“But that is impossible,” Erik repeated.

“He is Aidan’s son. You must accept this. His blood would be catastrophic to ours. If his blood came into contact with ours, it would literally explode. You can see for yourself. Aidan created him and formed his genetic structure.”

Erik rubbed his chin, leaning back in his chair. He took out a cigarette from a platinum case and lighted it. He took a large puff and exhaled. “These humans have some unusual ways of intoxicating themselves. But I love it.”

Daniel grew impatient. “So?”

“Well,” said Erik. “I would want to see for myself. If what you say is true then I will personally see to it that the incantations be brought so that he may be resurrected. And surely, the Council will be informed of his heritage, but not of this incident.”

“Of course,” said both father and son.

Erik took out a pen and paper and began to write. “Give this to Sirach,” he told Mikhail, “and tell him to go to the Vatican Library and get the book, Incantations of the Dead.”

Alex awoke. He knew he it had all been a dream. His eyes fully opened and adjusted to the light. He gasped, finding himself once again in an unearthly and sad place. He was sitting on dirt. All around him was a thick layer of mist. There were caves with lights flickering from within. A murky river flowed slowly, close to where he sat. Worms and snakes squirmed out of the ground and made him jump in fear. He tried to make out what lay behind the mist. Beyond, on the other side of the river, he saw shadows in the darkness. People walking. He stood up and turned around, accidentally knocking into an old man who was naked except for a loincloth around his waist. The old man’s skeletal figure creaked as he fell backwards. “Uh...sorry. I’m sorry.” Alex said, helping him up. The old man’s beard was greasy and yellow and there were maggots coming out of it. His pale face, tired and drooping, gazed helplessly at Alex with filmy grayish eyes. Moaning and stumbling, he leaned on Alex for balance.

Flames burst from out of the river and a voice called, “Alexander Nyrax! You have been expected.” It sounded like many voices in unison. The voice of many waters from the Bible, thought Alex. So then it was true. He had died and now he didn’t know where he was. Was this hell, Hades, Sheol, or the river Styx?

Alex mustered the courage to ask, “By whom?”

Deafening laughter erupted from the flames and when it subsided, the voice said, “You will be taken by the Boatman. He is to tell you all you need to know before you meet the One.”

“The One? Do you mean God?”

“That who is called by many names and is one. Some call him God, some call him Allah, or Elohim, or the One,
the Universe, the Creator.”

“He is expecting me?” Alex asked.

“Yes.” The voice and fire died down. The mist thickened around Alex. He stood with his feet planted firmly on the ground and waited for it to dissipate, but the mist coalesced and engulfed him. After a few moments, the mist cleared and he could make out a boat with a dark figure floating along the water towards him. The figure wore a cloak and held an oar in both arms. He seemed to be the very manifestation of death; the Boatman.

“Come,” said the Boatman.

Alex did as he commanded and stepped into the boat. He sat down and looked at the figure with an innocent expression. The boat slowly and steadily traveled upstream. Along the way, deathly sounds echoed in the air. There was no light, only gray. To his left and right, he saw figures aimlessly walking up and down.

The boat entered one of three caves. A holy white light emanated from it. When the boat was fully immersed in this light, Alex felt a sense of peace, joy, and complete surrender. He smiled and his eyes brightened and shone with the luster of a thousand suns. He looked at his body. Instead of a shirt and denim jeans, he now wore a long white robe. He remembered the book of Revelations and realized the things that John at Patmos had said about his visit to heaven must have been true.

“He is expecting me?” Alex asked. He realized telepathy was a means of communication. So many different fragrances were in the air, in the atmosphere. There were aromas of exotic flowers and perfumes. He felt invigorated. He seemed more alive than dead now. I must be in heaven, he realized. His body and hair were anointed with fragrant oils and perfumes. Even the boatman who had worn a long dark cloak had changed his appearance. His cloak transformed to a completely white luminescence and shone with a blinding patina.

“Now,” said a voice, “You look fit to meet the God of gods, King of kings, and the Lord of Hosts!”

The boat no longer floated on water but on air. Everywhere lights, colors and glimmering stars shone brighter than anything Alex had ever seen. His eyesight was not affected by the brightness; it was as though he could see things unimagined. He heard rolling waves, soft thunder, and the distinct humming sound he had heard when drinking blood. He heard soft bells and voices singing in a choir. This must have been the choir of angels singing everlasting praise to God. As they came closer to God, the sounds and the smells became more distinctive. Color and light transformed into a mosaic of rainbows. There were no words to describe it.

The boat slowed down and gradually halted to a complete stop. In front of them was a double-gate of immeasurable proportions. It was infinitely high, and stretched down beyond Alex’s vision. There were seven rods on each gate. The voice said something indistinguishable and they opened up. The boat did not move any further. The Boatman gestured for Alex to step out.

Alex stepped into the light. There was no boundary and no horizon, only the bright white glow. Alex felt disoriented at first, but once he walked to the other side, watching as the boat left and vanished slowly from his sight, he got the hang of it. As he walked on, his anxieties dissipated. From the midst of the light, a figure appeared and said, “Think and it shall be done.”

“What?”

“Realize yourself, young one. You must embrace the truth.”

“What do you mean?”

“The only way you can get to the one, to the truth, is to think and meditate upon it and you shall be transported there.” The figure repeated, “Think and it shall be done.” It faded away into the light.

It sounded simple enough, and so Alex concentrated on being in the throne room of God. But every time he tried, he was bombarded with images that he did not want to see. So there’s a catch to it, he thought. It’s like meditation. If he could keep his mind firm and concentrated on the thought of God long enough, he would reach the throne. He tried three more times to concentrate his mind. Each time he failed.

Why wasn’t it working? There was enough silence and solitude to attain a perfect state of concentration. Wait! That was it. He was concentrating too much on the exterior. It was simple. There was no effort needed. He needed to simplify his thoughts. There was no need for ritual or standards or anything else. It was complete surrender, simple surrender, and faith.

He closed his eyes, breathed out slowly and thought only of God as he used to at the Monolith. He felt himself melt away into the stars. Suddenly he was connected to every proton, neutron, atom and quark.

He felt as large as the Universe itself, and yet infinitesimally small. He was not Alex. He owned no body, mind, soul, or spirit. He was everything and everyone. He realized nothing mattered. When he opened his eyes slowly he saw what he had been waiting for since time began:

God.

At eight o’clock, Richard and John entered Jarad’s room. The patient followed their movements from his bed.
“How are you feeling?” John asked. They sat on the chairs near his bed, while Jarad sat upright so he could have his breakfast. He sipped his orange juice, ignoring them.

John and Richard looked at each other across the bed. Jarad cut into his sausages ferociously, put a rather large bite into his mouth and greedily chewed on it.

John and Richard said nothing for the next two minutes, while Jarad continued to stuff himself. The silence was extremely uncomfortable.

“Can’t you see that I’m busy?” Jarad said. He finished his breakfast and gulped down his juice.

“We wanted to see how you were,” said John.

“I’m doing just fine, thanks,” Jarad said, his voice muffled by the napkin he used to wipe the crumbs from his mustache.

“We have a proposal for you, my old friend,” said John.

At the mention of “friend,” Jarad burst out laughing. “Friend! What the hell is that?”

“Now you’re just being unreasonable. Remember, you started this.” Jarad was about to speak, but John raised his palm. “I’m not saying I am better than you Jarad. You and I are the same. The only difference is…” he gave a wicked smile, “I succeeded where you failed. And the reason for that is because I have good intentions.”

“Whatever problems there are you know I would have overcome them.”

“And you still can,” said Richard, preparing some coffee for all three of them.

“What?” asked Jarad, confused and keen to know more.

“That’s right; but under one condition.”

“You know it’s inevitable, Jarad,” John said, sipping his coffee. “This war was always going to happen, whether there was a prophecy or not.”

“Oh, I get it!” Jarad said sourly. “You want me to lead the battalions.”

John nodded.

“I’m retired, you know that,” Jarad said.

“Look, I’m offering you life or death; choose life for your own sake. Please.”

“Please?” Jarad raised one eyebrow in feigned astonishment.

Richard said, “Jarad, we are literally offering you life. If you join us in this war, things will be different for you and for the others.”

“In fact,” said John, “with my help, you may still have enough credibility to be part of the executive branch.”

“I’ve seen the news, John. You’ve become a bloody dictator and you expect me to join you? As what? An assistant, a butler?”

John laughed, “I never intended that for you. I have a better, much more challenging post available.”

“And what would that be?”

“You will be resuming your duty as a General, and you will also be part of the Supreme War Council. Even if you were plotting against me, you’d at least be helping all of humanity along the way.”

Jarad remained silent for a while. He breathed in deeply, sighed and gave a small nod. His face showed that he was mulling over what John had just said. “Give me time to think it through and I’ll let you know.”

“Great,” John said. “I will see you next week in the War Room.”

“Do we even have one?” Richard asked.

“We will.”

In Alex’s holding cell, they stripped him bare so that they could have a full view of what was going on with his body. It had turned pale-green.

“What’s the situation?” asked Erik.

Joqetu replied, “You can see for yourself…sir. If he doesn’t come around soon, the body will decompose and there will be little hope for him.”

“Well, no matter,” said Erik. “The book should be arriving shortly.”

“You have it then? We will be using the technique?” asked Liam.

“Yes,” Daniel said, “All of us.” The Rebels looked at Erik and Daniel suspiciously. Nikolas knew why he had said that. When they would be connecting their energies together, they would also be connecting their minds, which meant that the truth could be exposed. This was unless they protected their thoughts. By looking at each other they understood what had to be done in order to maintain their true allegiance. This would require more power than ever, but they were up for it. They had to be.

“Until then, we will have to make sure it doesn’t happen,” said Liam.

“How?” asked Erik.

“There is a way,” said Dante, “We must give him some energy, in order to slow down the decaying process.”
“Won’t that just quicken it?” Joqetu asked.
“Depends on the type of energy you give him,” said Nikolas.
“Yes,” said Yagnik, “If we give him the kind that regenerates, we can at least restore his body.”
“Exactly,” said Nikolas, turning to face the other Rebels, “Prepare yourselves.” In quick succession, light emanated from their bodies turning them transparent. The light shone so bright that it bathed the entire room and hallway. The Rebels encircled Alex’s body and raised their arms. Energy entered through their hands, and everything became silent as though they were all struck deaf. Erik said something, but no sound came out of his mouth.
They lowered their arms, cupped their hands and then with palms touching Alex’s chest, forehead, navel, and legs, they released the energy into him. The lights traveled to different parts of his body. They soaked his spine and bloodstream, glowing through his skin and then slowly fading away. As they did, a great change could be seen over his body. Color entered his cheeks and lips and the green hue left his body.
“Well, that was great!” said Daniel, “Truly marvelous. You Rebels must teach us how to do these things.”
“And in time, we will,” said Nikolas. “All these things were hidden from Aidan by his father, but soon enough the truth will be out.”
Mikhail and Sirach entered the room. Sirach held a weighty book in his hand.
“Any trouble?” asked Erik.
“No, not at all, sir,” Sirach said, and added, “although,” he passed the tome to Erik, “They did ask me why you wanted this particular volume.”
“But there was no mention of the Council?”
“Not at all,” Mikhail said.
“Good.” Erik took the book in his hands. It was bound in very old leather and in ancient letters the title read Incantations of the Dead. It was closed with two buckles on the top and bottom right corners. Erik opened it and the dust rose up from it, causing him to cough and brush it off. “Let us begin,” he said, gravely. They encircled the body once again and joined hands. Erik remained outside the circle, to give them instructions. All, including Daniel, Mikhail and Sirach joined in the process. All Nikolas could do now was hope for the best.

The Throne Room was simple yet elegant. The light disorientated Alex. Alex could not make out what he looked like but he saw his figure. He wore white robes and in one hand had a book, and in the palm of his other hand seven lights flickered. The light of his face dimmed so Alex could make out his features. He was not old, but immortal and wise. His long thick beard glowed white, as did the hair on his head that flowed down his back. “My son,” He said.
Alex prostrated himself in front of him. “Father,” he said.
To Alex, God was exactly as he had seen him represented in Michelangelo’s paintings. God laughed. “Oh, you really think I look like this?”
“I don’t know. What do you look like, really?”
“Whatever you want me to look like,” God answered, smiling benignly.
Alex was confused.
“Because of your Catholic upbringing, you picture me and heaven this way. But you have studied other religions.”
“So, you’re saying you’re not like this at all?”
“No, nor is Heaven. It is all according to you. You know Jesus.”
“Your son.”
“All are my children, and more so, they are me. Think of me as Jesus.”
Suddenly the figure of God changed and resembled Jesus.
God continued, “Now imagine me as the Buddha.”
Again Alex thought and once more the figure changed. He sat down, levitating in a lotus position, with a smiling clean-shaven face and his hair tied in a bun. He wore a loincloth and a saffron color shawl.
“You see? People see me as they want. It does not matter as long they realize that I am not different. I exist, and you exist only because I exist.
Existence is the same as non-existence. Perception is based on consciousness, which is my consciousness. You are me and I am in all. Life and death are illusory. Existence, as you see it, is formed from the pictures in your mind. Your consciousness is borrowed from the source.”
“That is you?”
“That is you! Realize that I am all these things,” the figure changed from Buddha, to Jesus, to Krishna, to Michelangelo’s representation, to Rama, to the Virgin Mary, to some of the Catholic saints, and then to the Hindu goddesses, “and ultimately I am you!” Alex suddenly saw himself standing opposite. “You and I, these are only
words, Alex. There is no Alex, or Aidan, or Anaxagoras, or the Red Serpent. Realize that you do not have a destiny that has been decided. You are Me and I am You! You have all power over whatever worlds your consciousness stirs up. All have that power. Your father, your grandfather, you mother, your uncles, your ancestors, your descendants are all You!”

“Then why must I be the Falsifier?”

“Who said you have to be anything?”

“I am fighting against a terrible evil, am I not?”

“No! Realize there is no good, or evil, no joy, no pain, no beginning, no end, no life, no death.”

“Then why create this world?” Alex asked.

“I did not create this universe. I am not here; I do not exist, and I am existing. I am non-existence and existence as you are. You created this universe; you created this world, with your consciousness, which in itself is an illusion.”

Alex shook his head, “I have heard all this before, yet when you speak to me, I do not understand it.”

“People are not good or evil; people are people because they believe it. When they realize that they are all and none and they are what they choose and ultimately they are light, they are one, then none of this will be there. You saw that river and the people there because you thought this was how it would be. Others saw it differently. God is not individualistic, but he is what he is according to individuals.”

“What about atheists, then?”

God laughed. “They see me as they want to as well. But you are missing the point; you have to see me as you! You have to see that there are no individuals, there are no egos. When you realize that all things are one, then you will see yourself as everything. I am there only because you, as a civilization, see me to be so. Time has seen other beings that imagine me as something else, concepts unimaginable to you, because they are on higher dimensions. Just realize what you are doing and why you’re doing it. Everything: Karma, Destiny, Life, Ego, Faith, Belief, and all the other terms are just terms. What’s more important is the power behind them, and that power is consciousness. Therefore, realize the prophecies of your father are real and they do mean something. You must follow them, only when you think you must. Otherwise don’t follow them at all.

“Everything, sound, light, music, shadows, everything is just a part of your thoughts, your perception. They don’t have meaning unless meaning is given to them, and the one who gives meaning to it is you! Heaven means this to you, because of your conditioning. Leave it all, or enjoy it all, and in any way, all are bound to realize the Truth! This life, this world, this Universe, is like this because of your perception and the meaning you give to certain things. When that meaning ceases, then the actuality will be known!”

“Then, that means I am not dead. I am not alive, but rather I AM, because I say I AM.”

“More importantly, you are because you just are. Realize everything is because it is. Don’t take anything out of it or add anything. See it for itself. Life is just for observance, for witnessing, for education and when you finish it, you can choose to go back, or choose to stay here depending on your perception. If your perception and your choice of perception cease, then Truth will be.”

“Then, that’s what I want.”

God laughed. “Because you force, because you see it as that, because it is a goal, a desire, it cannot be within truth. Yes, all things are within Truth, but they do not lead to the ultimate. It must be, and then Truth will be; it cannot be taught, spoken, felt, forced upon; it must just be! It cannot be waited for either, it cannot be a desire; it just is!”

Alex said. “Destiny doesn’t matter.”

“Exactly. Just let it be.”

“I understand; I must go with the flow and things will be the way they are, regardless of my thoughts, my words, my feelings, and my conditioning. I will let them be. No good, no bad, just be!”

“Let things go and see them for what they really are.”

Alex nodded to God, who still looked exactly like himself.

“Now, go!”

“Wha–”

With a jolt, he felt his body being pushed and pulled. It automatically backed away from God, the throne room and the gates of Heaven and went back to the River of the Dead. The next thing Alex knew ... he was back in his body!

“He’s alive!” he heard a voice say. He opened his eyes slowly and saw people around him, looking at him from above as if he was being operated on. When his eyes adapted to the Earth light again, he could see the Rebels, as well as Nikolas and Daniel looking warmly at him as if to ensure him that his worries were over.

He shook up from his bed and gasped.

“Okay,” said Daniel, “Now that you’re back, get ready.”
“For what?”

Alex felt constricted in his body once again and he didn’t like it. He remembered God, took a deep breath and just let it be. He and the Garrens were seated in the helicopter, heading for London. “So, how are you feeling now?” asked Nikolas. “Is everything alright?”
Alex looked deep into his uncle’s eyes. In the crimson iris, he saw a light. Alex realized that light was Nikolas’s soul. He concentrated on it and without moving his lips or using his voice said, “No. But you’ll soon know why.” A flame glittered in the soul region of Nikolas’s eyes.

He was surprised by Alex’s use of telepathy. His eyes showed everything, including something quite unexpected: malice. Alex suddenly realized that malice exists in people who take the lives of others. The soul never darkens, only the ego, with or without knowing it. This was the difference between good and evil. A person who knows evil and turns away is good, and a person who knows evil but continues with pleasure is evil. But then what about someone who has no choice in anything? This was where dualities ceased to exist.

“Well, are you alright?” Daniel repeated his father’s statement.
“Yes.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Nikolas. “Remember to say nothing about yourself. Speak as little as you can and keep to the point.”

The helicopter landed on the helipad and they stepped outside.

Central Command Center 1 had been a magnificent man-made metallic island with blue, crystal-clear water everywhere. The sun shone splendidly and warmed the island. But this place, London, was frigid! Nikolas offered him a thick coat. “No,” Alex said, shivering, “I don’t think I’ll need it.”

Nikolas laughed, “Just because Daniel and I aren’t wearing anything doesn’t mean you can’t”

“I have to learn, don’t I?” he said.

“Look at you! You’re shivering,” Nikolas laughed, placing the jacket around Alex’s shoulders. “Come on.”

London was different now. Alex had come to understand a different city from the many books that he had read on its history. He looked across the helipad and saw air-cars, taxis and buses traveling to and fro in different zones of the sky. These zones started from the ground and stretched up as far as the eye could see. There was a complex network of arteries that led to different sections of the city. There were shopping areas and office areas with large skyscrapers made of glass and steel. There were also residential complexes in suburban areas where thousands of people were housed. There were large stone and marble structures, much like the Supreme Court and Headquarters of the Regnum, but bigger.

As Alex looked down, he saw a few people walking on the pavements, going about their day to day business.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” said Nikolas.

Alex nodded and his face lit up with exhilaration as the feeling that he was finally on the Earth sunk in.

They walked to the doorway, which had an elevator leading to the Main Hall. There were two guards inside, with their faces covered entirely by black helmets and wielding large plasma rifles. They came out to escort them to the Council Chambers.

They entered the elevator and went down to the ground floor. The doors opened and they stepped out into a lavishly decorated lobby. Large windows brought in the sunlight all around them. To his left, Alex saw a majestic spiral staircase, with china vases filled with exotic flowers. Immediately he felt the warmth of central heating and of a large fire place, almost eight feet in height and twice as wide, near the reception desk.

The guards led them to a large hallway leading to several rooms. Before they entered, Alex noticed the receptionist was a beautiful woman. She looked like she was in her late twenties, but he somehow sensed that she was older. There was a huge man at the reception desk. He seemed to be making an important appointment. Alex registered his face, just in case it might be important; he intuited it would be.

The guards took them to the end of the dark hallway. There were rooms and offices on both sides. When they reached the end, they took a left and walked through another hallway which ended at a large double-door protected by two guards, dressed in dark suits. The guards held their palms out, stopping Daniel and Nikolas. Only Alex was allowed to enter. He turned to Nick who nodded and winked at him.

Alex entered the Chamber and sighed. He couldn’t make much out in the darkness. He had the distinct feeling he was being watched. As his eyes adjusted, he saw the outlines of the Twelve Council Elders. He hadn’t heard much talk of them except for what Daniel had said in the helicopter. He knew they had been chosen by Anaxagoras to deal with the overall affairs of the Earth. Fire suddenly blazed from torches hung on the walls. A chair was brought forth at will and Alex heard a cold, malevolent voice command, “Sit!” He did so reluctantly.

They sat around an oblong table about two feet apart. They were cloaked and their hands were gloved in black leather. To Alex, it looked as if they were weak, afraid of everyone and everything and he felt he could intimidate
them. It was a very strange sensation.

“Truly arrogant to think so,” said Julius, scanning through the boy’s thoughts.

“There is great anxiety in you, I sense,” said Lord Augustus. “You have fear, anger, confusion, and hate.”

“You do not need any of these,” continued Lord Tiberius.

“All you need is obedience,” said Lord Otho.

Alex turned his head to the voices and looked at them angrily, trying to intimidate them.

“You would make a fine ally, I’m sure,” said Julius slowly, putting weight behind each word, “You are powerful.

Yes! I sense much strength in you, but you are on the wrong side.”

“Do you know who you are?” spoke Lord Claudius.

“Yes,” Alex said plainly. He added, “Your enemy.” This brought about evil cackles from the Twelve.

The laughter died down. There was a long hard moment. “You have made yourself that, young Falsifier,”

continued Claudius, laying a heavy ruthless emphasis on the last word.

“What do you mean by that?” Alex asked.

Vitellius said with scorn, “You think such a man as you can bring down an Empire that has been standing for two

hundred thousand years.”

“Christ did it with the Roman Empire,” Alex said.

An awkward silence arose once again, this time much longer. Alex sensed their nervousness.

The Twelve were irritated. The only way to learn the secrets of the Regnum from Alex would be through

sincerity, kindness and good intentions, characteristics which none of them had.

“You may leave,’ Julius said quickly. The fires extinguished, leaving Alex groping around blindly in the dark.

But then suddenly the double-doors opened and he saw Daniel and Nikolas waiting for him patiently.

As he stepped out of the threshold, the doors slammed shut.

“So?” Nikolas asked.

“Nothing at all.” Alex shook his head, “It was pointless, I guess.”

“Well, have they told us to come in?” asked Daniel.

“Nope. They just told me to leave.”

The doors opened once more and Nikolas and Daniel entered, while Alex looked at the guards, and wondered
what was coming next.

Out of respect for the Twelve, Nikolas and Daniel walked with their heads bowed. Then they prostrated
themselves before the Twelve. The fire roared up again and the Twelve looked down at them. Domitian asked
Daniel, “What is the enemy doing here?”

“He, my lords,” Daniel said, smiling at Nikolas, “is no longer an enemy, as aren’t the other Rebels.”

“How can we be so sure?” asked Julius. “After all, even till the last day our king trusted him, but he played a
double-game all along. Surely,” he said, a bitter irony in his voice, “you know this.”

Daniel’s face flushed. “Yes, I know.”

Nikolas spoke, his voice firm and steady, “My masters, I beg you to give us one last chance. Since the Last Battle
we have been nothing but guinea pigs for you. But now we are fully ready, instead of being forced, to serve Lord
Anaxagoras. If you allow it, I will get what information I can from the Falsifier, without any interference or
surveillance. He knows of the Regnum and its plans. I will comfort him and since he is already in my trust, he will
be easily manipulated into spilling the secrets of our enemies. Please, if you don’t believe me, let me tell you
something no one knows.”

“And what that might be,” asked Julius, leaning forward.

“He is the son of Aidan and the grandson of Anaxagoras,” he said simply, with a blank face. “He is born of a
human and has the blood of both races. That...” Nick paused for effect, “is why he is called what he is. I have earned
your trust once before. I went to the Land of the Eight Kings, and didn’t try to escape.”

Tiberius laughed. “Escape is impossible.”

“Nevertheless,” Otho said, “we will look into the matter. For now, because of your son, you will remain free to do
as you please as will all the other Rebels. If the blood analysis proves what you say, you shall be trusted. Leave us.”

Nikolas backed away, bowing before turning to leave.

Daniel remained there. As the door shut, Cassius said in more relaxed tone, “Now, Daniel. What is this turn of
events? Did you know of this?”

“Yes, I did. My father told me before this meeting.”

“I don’t sense any danger,” said Tiberius.

“Nor do I,” said Vespasian.

“We must be cautious, nonetheless,” added Nero.

“And what about the projects? Shall we continue?”
“As promised, yes,” said Julius, “And now is the time to send the ultimatum. We know now, as we have always known, that they have weapons. Send it immediately.”
“How long should I give them?” Daniel asked.
“Twelve hours.”

*****

John timed himself as he planned the words of his speech. He was no longer nervous and sensed things would be in his control. He knew everything would go according to plan, provided he received the ultimatum. He had his frequency set to the vampires’. This special connection was established for diplomatic situations such as these. He knew however, this incoming message would be a cry for blood and war. He stared at the empty, black screen on his wall. He checked the clock in the office and the watch on his wrist: they both showed 8:25. Kurt would be coming in five minutes, which gave him enough time to prepare for his speech.

The office was filled with old war relics, which John loved collecting. Some he had bought at auctions and exhibitions before the Coming of the Vampires. Life was good then. Politics were sensible. There was no constantly changing government like there had been in these twenty one years. A white marble bust of Napoleon, John’s favorite general, sat on the coffee table watching his every move. Two comfortable leather chairs were placed near a large fireplace opposite a library full of books about war strategies. The collection also included classics by Dickens, Dumas, Bronte, Hugo, and Shakespearean plays, of which John was a huge reader and adorer. His desk stretched almost twelve feet long, carved out of the trunk of an oak tree and varnished with a dark reddish-brown lacquer. A pile of cluttered files lay on it along with a computer and many books bound in leather. These were John’s own works on the vampire race. The vampires’ vast and authentic history had always intrigued him from the very beginning. In comparison, the history of the human race seemed short, tragic, and redundant. At least ninety five percent of vampiric history was conclusive. Their history was filled with extensive facts and there were no contradictions. John’s fascination grew to the point where Aidan had instructed that he be the unofficial historian for both vampires and humans alike. Aidan wanted John to convey to future generations, when the time came, the history of the War for Existence, which took place before Alex’s birth and the War of Vengeance, which he named the Coming War.

There was a knock on the door. “Come in,” he said and the door opened. The man standing at the threshold was of medium stature with a long thin face and whiskers for a mustache that were the fieriest of orange. He grinned like an innocent child as he saluted John. He walked to the desk and John told him to sit down. “It’s good to see you, Kurt,” said John, smiling.

“Same here, General,” said Kurt, his grin growing double. He ruffled his hair, which was the same color as his whiskers and sighed, “It’s been too long, I’d say.”
“Yes,” John said. “Definitely too long. You should keep in touch more often.”
“Ah, you know, with the training, and the work I got at home...”
“What?”
“Yeah, I’m actually writing a book.”
“I’m compiling a history of the Regnum. It’s still in its initial stages, but right now, I’m interested in the latest development.”
John laughed. “Brilliant! Now you sound more like a journalist.”
Kurt gave a warm smile at this. “Well, you have to admit: it’s a bloody good story!”
“Yeah,” John said. “You got up and went over to the small bar where he poured some whiskey for Kurt and himself.”
“You know, I am very interested in this project of yours, Kurt. You have to tell me more about it,” he came back with two glasses in his hands, “But,” he gave Kurt one, “I want to get down to business first.”
“Of course,” Kurt said, sipping his glass, “Tell me what you had in mind.”
“How are your boys?” John asked, meaning the pilots Kurt had trained.
“As usual, in top shape.”
“Good. Can we have them ready by tomorrow?”
“Sure. So, you really are serious?”
“Of course, my friend,” John said, “This is the time. With Alex on the Earth, I will negotiate with the Regent and the President for his release.”
“Bit risky, isn’t it?”
“Well, that’s where you and your boys come in.”
“How many you need?”
“About a hundred.”
Kurt nodded, contemplating and beginning to make plans already. “And all of them, by the next day?”

“Yeah. I figure there’s going to be an attack, and you will have to come to cover Alex and me along with a few ground soldiers.”

“That would require about fifteen to twenty, I reckon.” He paused to see John’s reaction. John simply nodded.

“So why the extras?”

“I suppose there will be a lot of defense in space itself, but very little in the atmosphere,” John said, “So, what we should do, is attack them when they least expect it. Take down their cities, destroy as much as possible, so they know we’re serious about it, and this will give us the advantage.”

“But how do we know where to attack and what to attack?”

“I figure the place of negotiation will be an important part of the Earth, somewhere the vamps deem special or vital for their security.”

“Why do you think that?”

“It’s just an educated guess, but I think that they won’t waste time looking for a God-forsaken area to negotiate. They will want to get the killing done with as fast as possible. I guess they think we are stupid and so they won’t really expect a heavy air strike.”

“Okay.”

“Just remember: first let out twenty fighters, so that they think that’s all we have and when I say so, let out the entire air strike.”

“Any places in particular?”

“Not really. When the time comes for that, you’ll know.”

“Alright. As you say, General,” Kurt said taking his glass and raising it in a toast.

The screen John had been looking at flickered and Daniel’s face appeared on it. “General Howe,” Daniel said.

“President Gareng,” John said, “how do you do?”

“We have reason to believe that you have broken clause number 108765. Because of this disobedience and outright audacity, there will be consequences.”

“Oh?” John said in a mocking tone.

“Yes,” Daniel pretended to not notice the sarcasm. “And since you have hidden the Falsifier from us, and now that he is in our custody, we ask you to destroy all your arms within the next twelve hours. We are prepared to be merciful this one time, since this is the first collective instant.”

“I see.”

“You have twelve hours,” Daniel repeated quickly.

Before Daniel disconnected, John said, “No, President Gareng. You are sadly mistaken. You have twelve hours.”

“Excuse me?”

“You have twelve hours to return Alex to his rightful place, or we will attack.”

Daniel laughed. “Is that so? Surely we can negotiate.”

“Negotiate?” John paused, acting as if he was considering the thought. “Alright. In the next twelve hours, I shall come, albeit with a few guards for my protection, to negotiate. I’m sure we will arrive at a decision that will suit both our best interests.”

“So be it,” Daniel said. “You may meet me here. I am sending you the coordinates.” As soon as the pictures had come up on the screen, Daniel flickered away. The map on the screen showed that the destination was in the Atlantic, somewhere near England.

“How can that be?” said Kurt, “There ain’t no land mass there.” “Yeah, but whatever is there, like I said, is of key importance.” “Hmm.” “Well, looks like there’s been a change of plans.” Kurt looked at him, his eyes unblinking. “We move out in the next twelve hours.”
Chapter Seven
Elements

Angel held the newspaper limply in her hand. The top story of the day covered John’s rise to dictatorial power and the appointment of Richard as Vice-Chancellor, but what had shocked and frightened her most was the news about Alex and the Rebels. According to the reports, Alex was a hybrid of vampire and human. She watched the television, waiting for Mr. Howe to come on for the coronation ceremony. She felt, like the others in Regnum, betrayed and hurt, but for her this was much more personal. She worried about herself and her mother, who was working silently in the kitchen. Her father grunted at the mention of John Howe and cursed under his breath. She felt constricted. She feared in her heart that they would soon tell her to abort the baby. In any case, they were waiting for John’s speech to confirm everything. His confirmation would more settle the matter and Angel would have little choice but to abort the unholy thing in her womb.

“Well, it looks like the Vice-Chancellor-to-be, Richard Bacon, is stepping outside of the Headquarters building,” the reporter yelled. There was immense cheering from the crowd. Bacon was smiling, waving to the people and as quickly as he had come out, he went back inside. It didn’t make any sense, until a few moments later. “Now remember, Joy,” the man on TV was saying, “About half an hour back, the General and Mr. Bacon visited the Central Hospital. It has been verified that they visited Jarad Hameed, whom, as we know, has been kept there since yesterday.”

“An interesting turn of events, isn’t it?” Joy, the anchor said, “Yesterday, the very same man who arranged a fake assassination attempt on himself, seemed to be down in the dirt, with his plans backfiring. And now we have Mr. Howe, who, as the Senate has confirmed, had no links to the attack. Mr. Howe is prepared to risk his own political career for the salvation of his people. Ultimately the people have decided. Kyle?”

The reporter nodded. “That’s right, Joy. It looks like Alexander Howe, the nephew of the Council Leader, is in fact a hybrid...vampire and human. It seems implausible, but it is so. I spoke to people here earlier asking them what they made of it and some of them said they didn’t really care. Some gave examples of the battles fought in the past side-by-side with the Rebels, a group of vampires led by General Nikolas Gareng, the one who kidnapped Alex yesterday. Some people have made allusions to Aidan, a mysterious prophet who, according to some sources, was a direct son of the enemy, Anaxagoras. And speaking of Rebels, there is a proposal set in motion by John Howe that they be allowed to rejoin their old allies, the humans, on the Regnum.”

“And what do you suppose will be the...the basis of his speech and the major outlines of his proposals?”

Again, as there was an unclear signal, the reporter simply nodded. A few moments after the anchor had stopped speaking, the reporter started, “Right...well, we can only presume, in light of the speeches he has given before, that he will want war. War is good now, people say, and many here with whom I’ve spoken confess that over the years they have felt a longing for existence on their own planet and they feel John will deliver it. He will enforce new laws, as well, if we are to achieve this common goal. There will be the proposal to rescue Alexander and establish the Rebels as an integral part of our society.”

“Okay,” Joy said and the camera focused on her. “There you have it. We’ll be back after a few moments. Stay tuned as we give you live coverage of history in the making.”

The logos of RNN, Regnum News Network, appeared and shifted to a commercial break.

Angel sighed. Ken was reading a magazine and acting like he hadn’t heard anything. Martha came back from the kitchen, with a tray containing three cups of coffee and some scones. She placed them on the table and sat opposite Angel on a cushioned rocking chair. Ken took his cup of coffee and ignored Angel. He felt her watching his every move. Her eyes shifted from him to Martha and then to him again. “That’s it! I have had enough of this,” she said.

Both parents glanced at her, mystified by her tone. “What?” they both said, as if they hadn’t understood.

“You know what!” she said. “You know exactly what I’m talking about!”

Martha said, “Why not finish our coffee first and then we can talk about it?”

Angel sipped her coffee and glared at her mother, but remained silent. The news came on again and this time, all three Stones had their eyes glued to the television as the ceremony was about to begin.

John turned to Richard. “So, how’s the crowd?”
“Ecstatic, as usual. You ready?”
“Yeah...if you are.”

The Senators came out, four by four, waving and smiling. Their names were called out by the announcer as they approached the huge stage at Central Square. After every few moments or so, the patriotic crowd went wild. It was not necessarily the names that excited them; it was more the feeling of being a part of history. Then, the names of the Judges were called out and one by one they entered the stage. After that, the Municipal officials were called out.

The big moment arrived. The announcer gave a very dramatic and anxious pause, in order to heighten the anticipation. The drums rolled and trumpets blared. He called out the name of the Vice-Chancellor-to-be, “And now, ladies and gentlemen, I proudly present to the public, the adviser to Leader Howe, Councilman Richard Bacon!” Richard strode out gracefully and, as always, waved and smiled to the beloved public. As the crowd roared with adoration, the orchestra played an imperial-themed tune. The music slowly faded and so did the cheers of the people. The Councilman was called onto the main podium, which looked like an oversized church altar, by Justice Nyazika. Richard came forth without hesitation and smiled warmly at the Justice.

He bowed and Nyazika returned the gesture. The Justice said, “Before we begin the oath, I would like to add a few words of mine to commemorate this special occasion.” There was a respectful silence for the gifted and revered political scientist and Court Justice, as everyone awaited his words. “It has been my great privilege and immense pleasure to have known these two fine gentlemen. They have been extremely professional in matters of the State and have a valiant history together as great friends and allies against the vampires...”

Meanwhile, John received a call on the nanophone that was attached to his jacket. He clicked his fingers and a holographic projection of the caller appeared in the air. The caller was a pudgy bald man with a sharp face. It was his butler, Andrew. “Andrew, what is it?”

Andrew perspired and shook vigorously. “Sir...sir! It’s your mother!”

“What? What, damn it?”

The speech continued, “They are the perfect candidates to lead us to victory. They are the embodiment of what we hold dear to our hearts and that secret desire we have always had!” The crowds cheered on.

The phone disconnected and John nervously tried redialing, clicking his fingers, and said, “Redial.”

Justice Nyazika concluded, “I hope that our struggle with these two men at the helm will lead us to our ultimate goal. I hope and pray they will lead this government into a new era of self-existence. I wish them all the best.” Nyazika winked at Richard who gleamed with joy and smiled. “Godspeed!”

The crowd cheered on for the next two minutes.

The phone finally connected and the pudgy man appeared in the air once again, “Andrew, what the hell’s happening?”

“Sir, your mother’s had a stroke.”

“So tell me this once again,” Nikolas said, folding his arms and standing tall as Alex slouched, sitting on his bed. “What exactly happened?” They felt safe now to speak openly since all cameras, sound systems, and guards had been removed. Alex told the story of heaven thrice to Nick who still couldn’t believe his ears.

“How many more times should I tell you?” Alex said. “Don’t you believe me?”

Nikolas nodded. “Of course I do! Usually, when people come back from the dead, they don’t remember anything. Few people have, like Christ and Anaxagoras.” Nikolas contemplated on Alex’s story and after a few moments said, “Okay, so this tells us more about you. It gives us more reason to believe that you are the Falsifier. God has touched you and you’ve begun to develop the powers that previously lay dormant in you. For example,” the door opened and the other Rebels came in, “when we were in the copter, you communicated with me telepathically.”

“Really!” asked Varenkoff in surprise. “That’s amazing. These things are innate within all of us, but you, I mean since you are more human than vampire...”

“Because of my conditioning,” Alex added.

“Right, so because of that, we never expected this from you. At least not yet,” Nikolas finished.

Alex understood what they were saying, “Alright, so explain everything to me.”

“Okay,” Nikolas said, taking a deep breath. “First of all, I want to tell you about your father.” He paused, recollecting his thoughts. “He was the first of the Anisaei. He was not born but created.”

“Right. I know that. But who was he? Tell me about what he would have wanted me to know?” Alex remembered the discs and the annals. “Wait!” he said suddenly, “Uncle Nick, do you know about the Annals?”

“You mean the one about the Nyrax Dynasty?”

“Yeah. Daniel has one copy, right?”

“Yes, it is with him.”

“Can we get it from him?”
“I doubt it. But, I will try. Now, stop jumping from one thing to another. Let me explain everything. Whatever happened on the ship was of Anaxagoras’s doing. What he’s done shows that he’s grown stronger, much more powerful. It also means that he is closer to the Earth.”

Alex knew it was true and a cold fear overtook him. But he forwent it and continued listening.

“Your father told me, told us,” Nick eyed the Rebels, “at a time when your mother was one month pregnant, that the Falsifier was to be amongst us within the coming year. He said, ‘He will lead us to victory and he will give us freedom.’”

“Freedom? That’s what he is... I mean that’s what I’m supposed to do?”

“That means you’re a savior for both of us.”

“But then why would Anaxagoras want to kill me?”

“Because he’s afraid of you and the recognition you will get. Anaxagoras was disgusted when Aidan joined us and he banished him. He removed his name from the annals of history. He proclaimed that he had no kin. But the truth is he did have five sons.”

“What!” Alex asked, getting up in confusion. “Five sons?” His mouth opened and it felt dry. He walked to the table near him and poured himself a cup of water.

Nikolas nodded, “That’s right. He had five sons before the conversion, before the revolution, before any recorded history of the vampires. He had five sons just the way he had Aidan. He created them out of the Elements.”

Alex gulped down the last sip. “But why wasn’t this mentioned?”

“Well, everyone knew about it, but it became a law that no one would be allowed to speak of it. We all understood the king’s sentiments at the time.”

“How did they die?” Alex asked. “I mean who were they and I know they must have a connection to me. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have brought it up.”

“Exactly, and I will tell you why. These five sons represented the five elements of the universe, because he created them out of the five elements. Their names were Dante, Timaeus, Vaspaug, Jaikan, and Quencius.”

“Wait. Dante?” Alex’s eyes shifted to Varenkoff.

Varenkoff chuckled, “No, no, not the same one. Although my parents named me after the king’s son.”

Alex smiled and nodded in understanding.

Nick continued. “Right. So, they represented respectively Air, Fire, Water, Earth, and Light. Using the elements in their grossest form, Anaxagoras created them and he planned to control the Universe through them. He and his sons fought in the War of the Eight Kings, but they were no match for their ancestors. Now, the story goes that they were killed by the one who granted the boons of controlling the elements, an Elemnauri king named Gaius.”

“I thought that the Elemnauri were extinct,” Alex said.

“Many faded with their powers and ultimately died out. But I also I told you that those who fled the planet of Migra at the time between the Creation, mentioned in the Tablets, and the War with the Twelve, were the Elemnauri.”

“Oh right,” Alex said, now understanding it somewhat. “So where did they go?”

Nikolas smiled, “A place called Gaia.”

“You mean Earth?”

Nikolas nodded, “I’m calling it Gaia, because it was called so by the Elemnauri. They found that it was already inhabited by another group of peoples, the very primitive humans.”

“Now how long ago was this?” Alex asked.

“You wouldn’t believe me even if I told you,” Nikolas smiled.

“I believed you about the Twelve,” Alex said.

“Two hundred and fifty billion years ago.”

Alex paused. Before, Nikolas had mentioned the Knights of the Elders and the time span of trillions of years. But what he didn’t understand was how it all fitted together. “We have no history of that.”

“I know, because of the Big Bang Theory, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Do the scientists know what happened before that? No. Because they have no proof of anything happening before that. However there is some information, in the religious texts, like the Vedas. You see, it is recorded that the Universe ages in cycles and so before this cycle, before thirteen to fifteen billion years ago, there were vast civilizations on almost every planet in the Universe, but unfortunately not all of their history is recorded. Every three hundred and eleven trillion and forty billion years or so, there is a reversal of creation and the Universe dissolves and it creates itself again and again. So there was a civilization that existed on the Earth, or Gaia. Now, they were totally forgotten because of the recent dissolution and Re-Creation, which we call the Big Bang.”

“I think I get it,” Alex said, leaning forward on his bed.
“They lived as refugees on the planet, until finally they decided to call it their home. About one hundred and fifty billion of the Elemnauri race came to the Earth and later the former civilizations of the Earth dwindled. Finally, there was a hybrid race out of which a new race called Gaian-Migrites were formed. They had the combined powers of both the Migrites and the Elemnauri. This was because every stem cell of every Migrite is psychically connected. Therefore, where there is change in one Migrite, there will be in another automatically. Now, the Gaians, the original Elemnauri, were extinct. A large asteroid hit the Earth, wiping out one third of the planet’s life. The Gaian-Migrites decided to create clones of their DNA and stem cells which they kept hidden in a space shuttle. This was sent back to Migra, with a handful of the new Gaian-Migrite Race. They knew if they came in large numbers, the Migrites would take it as a sign of war. But they never made it.”

“Why?” Alex asked.

“Nobody really knows, but the common belief is that they got lost, or something destroyed them. So once they made it back to their native planet, for many millennia, they were looked upon as gods. But soon they too dwindled. Their race lived in the High Mountains and they had their own kingdom. It was ruled by its own monarch. This gradually turned into a peaceful reign. When it came time for the reign of Anaxagoras XXIX, he made a pact with Gaius. He said he wanted to learn more about the Elements and how to control them. Sadly, he had no sons. He wanted five sons who would be able to control each aspect of nature.”

“Wait. I have a question,” Alex said, gesturing with his hands.

“What?” Nick said. The others had been listening intently to him. They leaned against the walls or sat on chairs or on Alex’s bed. Their eyes glistened with interest as they watched Nikolas.

“How did the rest of them survive the Big Bang?”

“Remember that I told you that the primitive race had the power to create universes?”

Alex nodded.

“Well, there you go; that’s exactly what they did, by creating an alternate one and so survived.”

“So it’s possible that they created this one,” Alex said, his eyes widening.

“Well...”

The ambulance arrived with Mrs. Howe in a paralyzed state. Four butlers were there to help her. The crowd at Central Square saw this and everyone remained silent as John ran towards the ambulance. They understood that something was out of place. John was in shock when he saw his mother. The paramedic team took her to the emergency room and with the four butlers, he followed them. Her eyes were closed and she was totally still.

Once they reached the emergency room, John was asked to stay outside and wait until the doctors gave their final prognosis. He waited for thirty minutes until Richard and Herbert arrived.

“I don’t know what to do,” John said. “Just a few hours back, I spoke to her about so many things. She seemed fine and now...now...” His voice trailed off.

“Everything’s going to be fine, John. Don’t worry,” Herbert reassured.

“Yeah, your mother’s a strong person. She’s not going to give up,” Richard added.

“What happened at the ceremony?” John asked.

“We’ve postponed it indefinitely,” Herbert said.

“Why?” John said. “You should have continued.”

“John, are you crazy?” Richard said. “Right now your mother’s condition is more important.”

“I know that, but I can’t have this government go into anarchy again. We should do something before it happens.”

“That won’t happen,” Richard said, shaking his head. “We have the support of the people.”

John sighed, “I hope you’re right.”

Angel and her parents walked into the small common room where they sat. “Is she alright?” asked Angel, sounding genuinely concerned.

John said, “We don’t know yet.” He shook Ken’s hand and hugged Martha, who was still sobbing. “Don’t cry, Martha. I know things are going to be fine.”

Martha shook her head, “I know,” she wiped away her tears with a handkerchief, “I just can’t believe what’s happened.”

Angel rolled her eyes. *Such a drama queen.*

The doctor walked into the room, closing the door behind him as they stood up anxiously awaiting his news. John hurriedly went to shake his hand and asked, “Is everything okay?”

The doctor said, “I’m sorry to inform you, Mr. Howe, but your mother’s in a coma.”

“Are you telling me that this universe, the one that’s here now was created by the Migrites and the Elemnauri and the Gaians?”
“Exactly,” Nikolas said.
Alex laughed in disbelief, “You’re serious?” He turned to the Rebels to find a different answer in their faces. They all smiled and nodded their agreement. “That’s...that’s unbelievable,” said Alex.
“Truth isn’t validated by belief; it just is,” Nikolas said, echoing God’s words.
Alex smiled and said, “Okay, so go on.”
“Right. Where was I?” He thought for a moment. “For a few years, Gaius refused him and when things were going badly during the War of the Eight Kings, Anaxagoras asked him for support. Gaius freely gave it. Anaxagoras said that if he was to help him with troops and with the five sons, he would give him half his kingdom. Of course, this was an outright lie. The kings made the pact and Gaius gave Anaxagoras the secrets to create life, actual life!”
“And he did.”
Nick nodded, “They were the strongest the world had ever seen. When the war finally ended, Anaxagoras failed to stay true to his side of the pact and Gaius took away his sons, one by one until no one was left. But, he didn’t take away the knowledge. He couldn’t because Anaxagoras’s mind was way too powerful. So, after the conversion, he created Aidan. Then, Aidan created you.”
They remained silent after that. Alex folded his legs and sat in a lotus position, his back leaning on the pillow. He pondered silently about all that Nikolas had said so far. The Rebels did likewise. He finally understood. His connection to Anaxagoras was a result of all these things. If the king had never learned these things, he wouldn’t have been able to make Aidan and in turn teach his sixth son the technique so that he could create Alex. It fit perfectly. He sat there, looking at Nikolas.
“Do you get it?” Nikolas asked him.
“Yes,” Alex nodded, “I suppose I do.”
Chapter Eight
Preparations

Daniel stood outside as the morning sun lighted his crimson eyes. He clasped his hands together behind his back. He had been standing there for the last fifteen minutes on helipad eight, waiting for Mikhail and the five scientists he had ordered to do the blood analysis. He thought about the future as he waited. What glory it would be to have the power of the king, over the king! He smiled at the thought.

They arrived, the sound of their footsteps reaching his ears. He turned around swiftly. “Gentlemen!” He raised his arms as if he was going to embrace them. “You have all done well! Excellent, I tell you!”

The scientists bowed in gratitude.

“Do you have a copy of the reports?” Daniel asked them.

“Yes, Mr. President,” one of the scientists said. He looked up at Daniel through thick spectacles and handed him the file.

“Good,” said Daniel. He acted as if he was reading them. He took his time and they waited. “Now, my dear scientists, you do know what we have found out is to be kept a secret?”

The scientist nodded and said, on behalf of himself and his colleagues, “Of course, Mr. President.”

Daniel remained silent for a moment and then said gravely, “That is why I must destroy anything and anyone who knows of it.” The scientists’ eyes suddenly bulged with fear. Before they could protest Daniel took out his sword and sliced off their heads. He started with the one who handed him the file and rushed towards the other four, jumping and killing them. Their corpses dissolved into fiery ashes.

He walked away coolly and said to Mikhail, “Have someone clean this up and make sure there’s a total memory wipeout done for their computers.”

He was about to go into the Command Center when Mikhail asked him, “What exactly does that file contain?”

“If I told you, I’d have to kill you,” Daniel smirked and left.

The ceremony was an hour and a half behind schedule. The crowds gathered again and the music and pomposity returned to its original zeal and vigor. This lightened the mood, especially for John, who was constantly thinking of his mother’s condition. That was the problem with a coma. There was no certainty in it. All he could do was pray and have faith. Richard eyed him warmly as they sat in the room. John sat back with his head lifted, resting on the chair and gazing at the ceiling. He sighed, “Why?”

Bacon didn’t speak; he was totally transfixed by John’s face, which was a picture of gravity and suffering. They were waiting for the doctor’s permission to see Mrs. Howe. The rest of the visitors were asked to leave. Herbert promised he would take care of the ceremony and left to raise the spirits of the crowd. Angel and her parents wanted to stay, but the doctor was strict. So, they went along with Herbert to his office for some refreshments.

The doctor came into the hallway and said, “It’s alright. You can come in now.” John and Richard followed him quickly to the doorway. The two of them entered the room where Mrs. Howe lay. Her heart and brainwaves were being monitored. She didn’t seem to be breathing, but there was an airway that went through her nostrils so that she got the proper amount of oxygen needed to sustain her body.

John cried. It was the first time Richard had ever seen him like this. John fell to his knees on the floor and sobbed. He covered his face and his hands muffled his screams of anguish. Tears flowed down his cheeks and splattered to the floor. Richard didn’t do anything for a minute, partly because this was unexpected. He had never seen John cry, not for his father, not for his wife, not for anyone. Richard felt that John needed to let it all out. It was a good and long-needed outpouring for a man who had suffered so many pains, worries and uncertainties.

Richard locked the door of the room. He sat in the chair next to John. He closed his eyes and relaxed. It was time for some contemplation.

Alex remained doubtful of what Nikolas had said. But he also knew that it all fit. “Now, what do I do with this knowledge? How am I supposed to use it?” Alex asked.

Nikolas understood how he felt as did the others who watched the boy with humility. Joqetu spoke, “Alex, this is something with which we will help you. You are our responsibility now. It’s obvious Aidan wanted us to teach
you.”

Varenkoff added, “And now that you know it, what’s stopping you? If anything, this knowledge will give you a head start with your training.”

Alex nodded. “I know that I have to do these things but I need to take it slowly. How should we begin?” He turned to Nikolas.

“Like all trainings,” Nikolas said, “this one begins with theory.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think in your case you need to study so much. You already know a lot of it, inherently. It just needs to come out through practical experiment.”

“Ohkay.”

“You know you were able to telepathically communicate with me, but you didn’t know how. Somehow, you were able to create energy, but it happened as a reaction. When we were initiating you, you took our energy, which is something only a very powerful vampire can do. Now you did these things without any prior conscious knowledge.”

“Uh-huh,” Alex was weary of how slowly Nikolas explained things.

“That obviously means that you have power and it’s coming closer, but I suspect something else. I think that your use of powers could be, perhaps, a direct relation to Anaxagoras’s coming closer to the Earth, or rather to you. You have a link with him; otherwise how do you explain the incident, the dream, and so on?”

“I don’t know about that. I have a feeling I can keep this power in control. I just need to concentrate.”

“Yes. You definitely need to control it. The last time you lost control you were killed.”

“So let’s do it then.” Alex was fired up.

“Alright. Dante,” Nikolas said, approaching the vampire, “give me your sword.”

“Wait, you’re teaching me how to fight with a sword? What about magic and telepathy?”

“Patience is a virtue,” Nikolas said.

“Yeah, and time is precious,” Alex added.

Nikolas smiled and with a flick of his wrist he threw the sword at Alex, who instinctively grabbed it by the hilt.

“What the...” he looked at the Rebels in bewilderment. They too were surprised. “How did I do that?”

“You see, it’s innate. It just has to come out. Now...” Nikolas took a swing at him, but again Alex used his instincts and blocked the attack within seconds of getting sliced. Alex smiled. Nikolas escaped the lock of their swords and leaped from one wall to another. He attacked Alex in midair. Alex, who was now surer of himself, jumped in the air and kicked him in the chest.

“Wow,” he said and the others mouthed the same word. “Sorry about that,” Alex said, grabbing Nikolas’s arm and pulling him to his feet.

“That was good. But you need to be more alert,” Nikolas said. He suddenly kicked Alex in the ankles, making him lose his balance. He smiled, “Remember this. Don’t stress yourself when fighting. Be one step ahead of your opponent. Be alert. Don’t get overconfident; and above all, feel the movements, don’t force them. Use what’s around you to your advantage, but don’t inflict anger or force, as that’s what you’ll get back.”

“That’s something I hear almost in all martial arts.”

“That’s because we started these philosophies. We are the teachers of the humans,” he said, smiling proudly.

“Then I’ll have to do my heritage proud,” Alex said.

“I think that’s enough for now. There’s something else that’s of key importance. Do you know the best way to reserve your energy? Besides food, rest and water?”

Alex thought for a moment and said, “No.”

“Meditation,” Nikolas said.

“Oh yeah!”

“Don’t meditate on anything in particular. Just do it for its own sake and you’ll get results faster. You have to let things flow and they will come to you.” Again Alex heard him echoing God’s words.

“Right,” he said.

“We’ll leave now,” Nikolas said, as the other Rebels started to vacate the room. “Meditate for the next three hours and tell me what you see and feel during that time.”

They left him in peace.

Flicking a pen with his two fingers and gazing at the closed file inside a blue plastic folder, Daniel thought about the danger this knowledge would bring, not only to him, but to everything else in the prophecies. He had read them, as a relative to royal blood, but he didn’t really understand much of them. As a child he thought it was all mumbo-jumbo. Was this boy, his distant cousin, really the Falsifier or was he something else? He had the Annals of the Kings of the Nyrax Dynasty with him and was tempted to read it. The pen fell and hit the blue plastic.
smoothed his hands over the surface of the folder and slowly he opened it.

The door burst open and Daniel glanced up, quickly stuffing the folder into his desk drawer. Erik bellowed at the top of his voice. “What’s the meaning of this? Why did you order that wipeout and where the hell are those scientists!” His face was a furious shade of red and his veins looked like they were about to pop any moment.

Daniel couldn’t help smiling and acting calm. “What are you talking about? By the way, you broke my door. Don’t you know how to knock?”

Erik grabbed him by the collar and said, “What are you hiding?” He scanned his mind but found it heavily shielded. He laughed, put Daniel down and turned around, “You’ll have your guard down some time or another!”

“I’m glad you came here.”

Erik turned back to face Daniel as he telekinetically moved the door and fixed the hinges.

“I’ve sent the ultimatum and they have a time limit of twelve hours.”

“And?” Erik sat down and so did Daniel.

“John Howe’s coming here. To negotiate.”

“What? Really?”

“Yes, and he says there may be some way we can deal with the situation.”

Erik smiled, “Is that so?”

“Well, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about.”

“What? You actually want to negotiate with him?”

“No, not that. I want to hand Alex over.”

John held his mother’s hand. It was calloused, dry and wrinkled but the feeling warmed his heart. He felt relieved that it wasn’t worse and he looked at her face. He made no eye contact with Richard. He was ashamed to have cried in front of him. His stomach acted up again but he ignored the pain, too overwhelmed by grief. He turned to see Richard deep in his own thoughts and he didn’t want to disturb him. There was a sense of calm and acceptance now. He had cried and vented out his suffering for fifteen minutes. The more he looked at his mother, the more he concentrated on her face, the more he understood the sense of stillness, the feeling of equanimity. He lay back in his chair, sighed and closed his eyes. A moment later, he said, “Let’s go.”

Richard looked at him and smiled.

“Call Herbert and tell him to get ready,” John added.

“Alright.”

John got up and kissed his mother’s cheeks and they left.

They reached the main entrance of the hospital and as he exited he waved to the crowd waiting for him, smiling as best as he could. The crowd cheered their support. Richard touched John’s shoulder and said, “See, there’s nothing to worry about. The people are with you!”

John and Richard got up onto the podium. John bowed in thanks to the people for their support and patience. As expected, the crowd went wild. Justice Nyazika held up his palm for silence. He opened his mouth to speak.

“Let us begin with the ceremony of the Vice-Chancellor.” Richard went to the podium and listened.

“Put your hands on this,” said Nyazika, “and repeat after me.” As Richard was a practicing Hindu, he was given the Bhagavad-Gita to swear upon.

“Now, repeat these words:

“I, Richard Quentin Gregory Bacon II, do solemnly swear...”

He repeated it.

“...to uphold the principles of the Constitution of the Year 3333... to protect the inhabitants of the Regnum at all times, in word, action, and thought...to defend the rights, liberties, and safety of the people... and to lead the Human Race to absolute self-determination...on its own God-given home-world, the planet Earth. So help me God.”

The people applauded and cheered on as Bacon and Nyazika embraced each other.

There were too many distractions. To listen to the sound of the universe and to feel that ever-existing flow was something that Alex seemed to have lost now. He had been trying to meditate for the last hour but every fifteen minutes or so, he had the urge to open his eyes. He attempted to calm himself by taking deep breaths, but each time he failed to reach a higher level. He sighed and said, “I’m never going to get this right.” He had another two hours or so before his uncle would get back. He hoped to achieve something by then.

But that was just it; he was expecting too much too soon. He was looking for results instead of going with the flow, as he should have. Now he realized he was always doing the exact opposite. Was this why many saw him as an arrogant, imperial brat? Was it because of the way he spoke, acted, and thought? Was that why Angel behaved the way she did at the Café? Would she forgive him for it? But then again, was he really arrogant? Maybe he was afraid to admit it. He didn’t know for sure, and as he tried to delve deeper, he felt increasingly out of touch with the people.
He had thought something completely different about himself.

None of this was making any sense. He knew he had to be humble now; he knew he had to keep what he knew about himself a secret. If it got out, the results would bring disaster. “Concentrate, you idiot!” he said to himself. He tried once again.

The ceremony continued and after taking the same oath as Richard, John cleared his throat to give his speech:

“What has occurred today, my dear people of the Earth, will not be forgotten for many years to come. I promise you that. History, the great critic, may look upon me as another Hitler, a man driven mad by his ambitions; it will say that I used the government for my own selfish purposes. Let it say so, for I don’t care.

“Naturally, I have some of my own interests at heart, but above all I am here for the good of everyone. I will not stand down until my last breath. I will not give up until we are free!” He paused for the crowds who started hailing him as their new Supreme Leader. He continued:

“Democracy has stood for many years during the course of our history. But there were times when it failed, and a plan of decisive action had to be taken, for the good of all. A leader, a single man, who could be trusted by the people, to give them what they wanted, and above all, what they needed. I assure you, the trust that you have given me will not be betrayed. I will not bow down to anyone. Every decision of mine will be thought out with the good of the people always at the forefront of my mind. As I have promised, I will make sure our race returns to the Earth and achieve complete autonomy. We will take it by force. We must take it by force, for these vampiric vermin are nothing but invaders, conquerors, literally thirsty for blood. They have nothing better to do but keep the underdog below them, begging and depending on them. I say that’s enough! I say we should have done it a long time ago, and I’m sorry we didn’t! We will crush them and force them back to their former stronghold in the valleys and mountains of Antarctica. We will send them a message. And that message is that we are free!”

The crowds applauded John’s determination. The plight of his mother still weighed heavily on his mind, but the sound of the crowd was like sweet music that pumped him full of excitement and helped him postpone his worries.

He raised a hand for some silence and the noise died down. “My mother had a stroke and now she is in a coma,” he said. He paused and saw the somber faces of the crowd. “But let me swear to you that this incident has not left me defeated; it has only made my resolve stronger. My hatred for the vampires is immense and so is my desire for vengeance. Only with our united anger and hate can we dissolve that race. We must do it together, or not at all.

“In the next nine hours,” he said checking his watch; it was five to eleven, “our troops will be down there for two reasons. The first is to get Alexander back and along with him our strongest allies, the Rebels. The second reason is to locate the Vatican Library and burn the place, so that their knowledge will be lost. But before doing so, we will record their information for our own use.

“Now, I know you want to know the whole truth. There,” he breathed in and exhaled slowly, “was a prophecy made by the vampires that a man from their race known as the Falsifier will come. He will be like them, but he will be against them. He will be a hybrid, a damphir. His real name is Alexandros Nyrax III and he is the son of my sister Miriam and Aidan Nyrax, the prophet who led the Rebellion. He is my nephew. I know it might be hard to swallow right now, but the truth is that he is our only hope. He is one of them, but to have him on our side will be very beneficial. He is more powerful than them, and with the help of the Rebels and their leader Nikolas, we will be invincible. We will avenge the deaths of our soldiers, who died for us so many years ago.” He paused to complete silence and wondered how he would continue. “Believe... trust me that I have no other intentions than to see us all on the Earth. I have already sworn that if any harm comes to anyone of us, the vampires, along with my nephew will be exiled to Antarctica.

“In the coming months, I will set up a War Council. I would also like to add that I am ready to pardon the Council for whatever happened yesterday. I have decided to have all of them as a part of this new council. This includes Jarad Hameed, a superb general and much respected for his strategic prowess. I also have a new project for this coming war, which will begin once this mission is through. It is top secret as of now. But believe me: once it is out in the public, it will amaze you and give you hope. I have no idea how long this war will last, but I know for certain that we will win this time and that we will never have to fight it again.

“The coming months may bring many hardships and angst. But now is the time for us to stand up, unite and face those challenges as we always have. I know there has been talk of rations. That doesn’t mean that we will starve. Look at it as a sacrifice for life and freedom. With courage we will be victorious and attain our independence!”

The crowds cheered again and a great thunderous applause shook the streets of the Square. He went on:

“After this ceremony, I will hold a meeting with five of our best generals. Already I have spoken to Kurt J. Lord and we have decided on the basic strategy for the Rescue. These five generals are Generals Ranjit Singh, Lao Chang, George Hopkinson, Sergei Romsky, and Michio Nakashima. Mind you, the diversity of the group is of symbolic significance.
“I know that the vampires believe they know our weaknesses, one of which is indeed a shameful and scarring one in our history. That weakness is racial prejudice. But we have learned from our mistakes and have come together in brotherhood, especially during times of war, when the vampires invaded. Let’s take this war as a test of our solidarity and our resolve; let’s show history that regardless of the past, we have conquered ourselves and we have learned!” Again, the people cheered. John smiled and stood silent, looking around him, as everyone behind him clapped.

“I want to conclude by saying thank you to the Supreme Justices, Senators, Officials, Vice-Chancellor Bacon, and to you all, the people that really matter. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to succeed and to make a difference, and thank you for your trust, faith and belief in me and my actions. God bless.” With that, he waved, smiled and took a solemn bow, to which the crowd became rapturous, shouting and applauding loudly.

The Rebels contemplated the situation coming in the next ten hours as the light of the sun glimmered into Nikolas’s living room through the large glass balcony window.

“There’s no way we’ll be able to get these off!” Liam said, feeling the cold metallic restraint belt around his neck. It beeped and whirred when he touched it. Like all the others’ restraint belts, this one had three sensors: one that monitored the temperature of the one wearing it, another that monitored the heartbeat and blood pressure and a third to make sure no foreign tampering could unlock it.

“Well, we can, but we would be electrocuted,” Gavin said, resting his head on the sofa. Nikolas stood outside the balcony window, observing the sea.

“There’s only one thing we can do,” Quentin said, thoughtfully sipping some migra-based coffee. “We’ll have to find the main generator room to unlock them.”

“Not necessarily,” Nikolas said. He turned to look at them. “We need to be very cautious until John comes here. We have to act like we hate him now. One of us will have to communicate with him telepathically.”

“How do we even know we’ll be there for the negotiations?” Joqetu asked, sitting on the sofa and browsing through the daily news headlines. They were full of stories about the Falsifier or the Rebels turning sides.

“I’ll be there...hopefully,” Nikolas said. He shook his head, “With any luck that meditation will work for him.” Davik asked, “You mean you’re presiding over his meditation?”

“Not at this point.” Nikolas said. He grabbed a wooden chair from the dining table adjacent to the hallway and dragged it over to sit by them.

“But you can’t do that,” Davik said, “It’s dangerous.”

“We’re talking about Alex here. He’s much more powerful than anything.”

“But aren’t you defying many laws?” asked Efarius.

“Alex will be able to handle it,” Nikolas said

“Remember the stories of the old ones, the Ancients,” Efarius said, looking deep into Nikolas’s eyes. “Even the Ancients who involved themselves or gave energy during meditation were very cautious, after one of them had his soul dissolved.”

“That was different,” said Nikolas, shaking his head. He sighed, “Look. All I want to know is if you are all with me.” He tried to read their faces. There was a long moment of silence and they nodded slowly. “Good. Let’s begin.”

The Council Room, located on the fourth floor of the Regnum Central Headquarters had now become the War Room. In appearance it was like an oversized boardroom. Its spacious windows covered up an entire wall of the room and let in a lot of sunlight. The light shone on the forty-five foot long oak table that stood in the center of the room. There were ten chairs on each side of the table and another one on each end. The five generals waited for the Supreme Leader and the Vice-Chancellor.

“So what do you think?” said Ranjit Singh, a Sikh general standing by the panoramic window and looking out. He stood six feet five inches tall, towering over the others who stood in his shadow. He walked to the coffeemaker and pressed a button. He scratched his beard and sighed. “I don’t like the look of it.”


“You know, Lao,” Ranjit said, taking his cup and walking towards the table, “This whole scheme.”

“Oh?” Lao said, his thin frame overshadowed by the black leather back of the chair. He crossed his arms and looked at all of them.

“What’s there to worry about?” General Romsky said, laughing and sitting back, relaxed. His carefree and arrogant demeanor irritated Ranjit. He had been an adviser to the King of Russia and maybe this had gone to his head. All that mattered very little to Ranjit. He smirked at Romsky. The Russian general went on. “We have the people right where we want them.”

“How can you say that?” Ranjit asked.
“Yeah,” Hopkinson said, supporting Ranjit. “We work for the people.” His thick skinned face seemed sickened and tired.

“Really?” said Romsky. “You think so?” He glanced at the others and at the Japanese man sitting silently, his eyes closed and shoulders slack. “What about you?” He snapped his fingers. “Hey Nakashima.”

Michio remained still, breathing in and out. George Hopkinson got up and walked to the window. He saw John’s limo parked across the street. “He’s here.” He turned around and went back to sit. “They’re on their way.”

They straightened themselves up and Michio opened his eyes. Romsky sighed, looking at Ranjit and George across the table. Michio and Lao sat respectively left and right of Sergei. “Well,” Michio who had been listening all the while to their conversations said, “None of it matters.” His voice remained soft. “We’re here to discuss the coming war, so politics is of no concern to us.”

“How can it not be?” Ranjit said, finishing his last sip of coffee. “We’re now following a fascist—”

“Gentlemen,” said John, as the large double doors opened and he entered with Richard by his side. The Generals stood up and John smiled. “It’s good to see all of you, my friends. Please,” he sat down and Richard went to sit at the other end of the table, “sit down.” One of the guards outside went to the coffee machine and prepared seven cups. As he left the room and tightly shut the doors, John continued. “Now, I want to make this quick and simple. We have roughly eight hours to get things in order. I’m going split us into two groups. I have already told Kurt about my plans for the air strikes, and he should have already briefed his boys about it. The first priority will be to rescue Alex and get the Rebels. This mission will be led by Richard and me. Now, I also want you and you,” he pointed to Hopkinson and Romsky, “to lead a ground attack in England.”

John pressed a button near the right corner of his side of the table. The wood opened up and revealed a large keyboard. He pressed a button and a thick white curtain closed the window in front of him, throwing the room into darkness. Behind him, above the entrance, a robotic levitating projector dispersed a large ray of light onto the curtain. The coordinates Daniel had sent John shone on it. It showed a map and the coordinates lay near the west coast of England. All eyes were on it. “As you can see, whatever is there isn’t on the mainland of Europe, but it’s close to the British coastline. So I want you two to go down there and hold off any reinforcements.”

“How many will we have?” Romsky asked, studying the map.

“About two thousand units each. Is that enough?”

“More than enough for me,” said George.

“Wait till I call for you, which won’t take more than five minutes after I am on the Earth. The transport tankers will keep you near the atmosphere and you’ll be taken down within minutes.”

The two Generals nodded.

“Now, like I said,” John said, “Richard will be with me commanding an aggregate of five hundred men, if needed.”

“I doubt it,” Richard said, turning around in his chair to look at John. “Our main objective will be to get Alex and the Rebels out of there safely first.”

“Right,” John said, “That’s why you’ll make sure they do. Once they’re secured, we will have to stop Daniel and whoever else will be after him from getting off the Earth. Now the second part of the mission: the Vatican, you know we failed the first time. But that won’t happen again, now will it?” The three remaining Generals shook their heads and John continued, “The main objective will be to get inside, collect all the information we can, and then sabotage the library.”

“That’s going to take a lot of time,” Lao said, “There must billions of files in there.”

“Two of you have to watch over the other while he gets the files. Who wants to go in?”

“I will,” Singh said.

“Alright. Then, you two will be allotted seven hundred and fifty men each and you, General Singh, four hundred men. Is that fine?”

“Definitely,” they confirmed.

“Good. Get your men ready and meet me at the main Hangar at 1700 hrs. This meeting’s adjourned.”

Another half hour to go. This wasn’t a good sign at all, as Alex was still struggling with his meditation. What was going on here? It was as if everything he had gained had been lost in a second. He felt so confident and so sure. Perhaps he became overconfident. “Alex!” He was in the lotus posture with his eyes closed and his face strained. He tried too hard, even now. What was he supposed to get from this meditation in any case? Nikolas hadn’t given him any instructions.

“Alex!” The voice distracted him even more. “Alex, listen to me!” It was Nikolas. “Listen to what I have to say.”

“Alright.”

“I didn’t want to risk the trouble of people overhearing us, even if we were safe. You know what I mean.”
“Right,” Alex thought. “So this was all just a ploy.”

“Exactly. You can’t ever be too safe. Now listen. You have to do something for us. John’s coming in a few more hours. We are sending some energy to you.”

“Is that really possible? At such a distance?”

“Judging by all that has happened Alex, it shouldn’t be such a surprise to you. Now, once you get this surge, you’ll feel a sensation in your spine.”

“I know; I’ve felt it before during meditation.”

“No, this will be far worse. It’s not pleasant. In fact, it can be dangerous.”

“That’s good to know,” Alex said sardonically.

“The pain will make you want to move, but you must not. There will be a sensation like fire in your spine. If you bend at all, it will flow out and destroy you. You have to stay totally still and wait until it goes away. But, wait until I tell you to. In that time, your body will be as hot as glowing metal. Your spirit will see into the future and you will achieve immense power. After that you will learn many things, things that will be needed for the short-term future. You’ll be able to fight like a master swordsman; you’ll be able to use energy at your will, with just a flash of thought.”

“But how long does it last?”

“The calculation is a little complex. After you get the energy, you have to be still for at least an hour and you will gain about a hundred and twenty years worth of knowledge and skill.”

“Okay, and how long does the process last?”

“Six hours.”

There was a pause, “So that meditation for three hours was completely useless?”

“No! I have been trying to create a clear, undisturbed channel between you and me mentally, and you had to meditate to clear your mind. So should we begin?”

“Yes, let’s.”

Daniel and Erik stepped out onto the balcony of Daniel’s office. A light shower of rain started to fall. Daniel pushed a button near the threshold and a window swiped down and joined with the lock on the railing of the balcony.

“That really sounds like a good idea. But will it work?”

“Of course it will. Howe knows us, thanks to the stupid actions and word of the Rebels in the previous war.”

“So you really think this will be the catalyst for war?” Erik said, looking into Daniel’s gray eyes, which turned crimson at this remark.

“If not this, what? If not now, when?”

“Alright,” Erik sighed. He looked out at the violent sea as the waves collided with one another and the rain pitter-pattered on the window with an increased force. “What of the other cities? Shouldn’t we warn them about the attack? We have to protect them.”

“If you must, go ahead and warn them,” said Daniel. “After they see our powerful ships in space, they won’t dare come here. They’re weak and pathetic. They don’t learn from their mistakes and they’re too stupid to suspect a plot.”

“Don’t be so sure, Daniel. That’s exactly why I’m telling you about extra protection. They might not learn from their mistakes but you shouldn’t underestimate them like that.”

“Look at them now!” Daniel said. “They’re nothing.”

“You’re missing the point here. They’ve planned everything, I’m sure of that. Despite the clauses, you and I both know they’ve been preparing for another war since the creation of the Regnum. They’re pissed off after all we’ve done, and this is their opportunity to vent out their anger and their first strike will be their strongest. That’s why we have to take caution.”

Daniel gazed at Erik with some intimidation. “Alright,” he said a little malevolently, “If you say so, but I still think it’ll be a waste of time and men.”

Erik shrugged, and walked to the door, ready to leave. “Only time will tell.”

Nikolas focused on the energy emanating from his body. A few minutes passed before he heard its hum. “Wait,” Efarius said. “Are you sure about this? Think about it, just once more.”

“More importantly, are you all ready?” He looked at them, these men who had been loyal to him since before the death of Aidan. They stood in line as if waiting for their execution. They stared at Nikolas, unblinking and though they were ready to follow his command they were afraid.

This particular technique had not been used for a very long time, almost 163000 years. The last time it had it
failed horrendously. The man who tried it flinched for a second and the fire in his spine moved into his solar plexus. His entire body had gone up in flames and he was reduced to ashes.

Nikolas repeated himself, “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” they droned in unison.

“Listen, even if there is a problem we can resurrect him.”

“It may not work this time,” said Noel.

“Why not?” Nikolas asked.

“We only have one chance at this, because of what’s going to happen in the next five hours.”

Nikolas was preoccupied with the technique that he had almost forgotten about the battle. “Right,” he said simply.

“Well, just trust me. I know this will work; this is our only chance. You know after giving him the energy, we will be useless; we won’t be able to fight as hard as we were able to before. They need to know who he is and what he is and they have to fear him.”

They nodded and along with him concentrated their energies. All of them closed their eyes and concentrated on Alex’s soul, on his mind and on his energy. They visualized his spinal fluid being charged and magnetized by the energy at its base, and a few minutes later they could actually see it.

Waves of light and fire burst out of the windows and door of the suite into the hallway leading to Alex’s room, in a large cylindrical blaze of raw energy. Because it traveled through an astral dimension, only those tuned in would be able to perceive it. It was invisible to everyone else. A buzz surrounded the tube of light that moved throughout the hallway.

Alex felt the heat in the base of his spine. During his previous meditation sessions he had felt a slight tingling sensation there and he knew it was the rising of the energy, the force called the Kundalini. But every time he felt it, he became excited and it went away. After a few months, he learned to control his feelings and became unattached and the energy rose up again. The Rishis of Ancient India founded that primordial art of yogic meditation. The purpose was to activate this Kundalini in the brain, enabling a person’s ability to enter the super-consciousness. But this seemed different. This burst of energy would reach the brain and remain there for so long that Alex would attain new powers, skills and knowledge, just as Nikolas had said. At a certain state, when the person meditating kept his mind in control and his breath along with it for thirty seconds, that equaled a year of spiritual evolution. That meant that one hour equaled a hundred and twenty years! That was what the Migrites had come to teach, and now Alex realized it truly was possible for everyone, including humans, to use that knowledge.

He felt the middle of his back heat up and a certain pressure in between his eyebrows, just where the ridge of the nose began. He kept himself straight. He knew if he didn’t adhere to Nick’s words, there would be deadly consequences. A swirling energy revolved around him and a white light engulfed him. He felt lighter. His uncle’s voice echoed in his mind, “Alex, we have just begun. Now, like in the ship, your body is going to levitate. When that happens, don’t move an inch; don’t bend your spine. When the energy reaches your brain, you will feel pain. It will intensify, but only for some time. Then you will feel new, different.”

“Okay. I won’t move.” Alex’s body levitated and he felt the light in him radiate outwards, just like it had on the ship. A feeling of calm and a sense of oneness with the universe washed over him. He lost the ego, but not his individuality. He heard that low buzz in his ears and it became unbearable. “Concentrate,” he told himself, “I have to concentrate!” And then he felt it, the fluid of bliss and the cosmic power rushing into his brain and he knew nothing, felt nothing, and thought nothing. He was lost to his self, to his identity, individuality, and to his name. He felt nothing; there was no black, no white, no color, no sound, no senses, no feeling, no emotions, no reason, no duality, no singularity even. It just was.

John wanted to see her before he left. He sat in the room alone. His hope remained intact, even though thoughts of finality tried to seep in and diminish his spirit. In the end he knew she would live. He wouldn’t allow her to die!

As he observed his mom’s face, he thought of old times, long gone. Times were rough during the war, but at least Miriam and Aidan were alive. During those days, they were fighting for something they believed in. He knew it would happen again but these soldiers were young and inexperienced. He sighed as he gathered his thoughts. He wasn’t afraid or unsure of his men’s competence and skill. He was unsure of himself.

Although he had kept up his sword fighting as a recreation it had been a long time since he had fought. He had no idea what the Earth would be like and he wondered whether the vampires were up to mischief. He just hoped that everything would go to plan and that Alex would be safe.

There was a knock on the door, disturbing his flow of thought. Richard came in. “You ready?” Richard’s face seemed grave and suddenly a little old.

“Yes. You okay?”
Richard smiled, “Yeah, of course.”

“Sit down.” John’s attention shifted to Richard who was now seated. “So what do you think?” His face creased with lines of worry and fear.

“You mean about this war?”

“No, about this particular battle. The war will come in time; the real war will come soon. You know this is only the beginning.”

“Above all, it’s Alex’s safety. Everything else will fall into place.”

“I hope so,” John said, once again looking at his mother. Her face was tired and lethargic, as if all the life had been sucked from it. The life supply systems and heart monitor remained normal. At least physically she remained intact. John knew she struggled for her life, but he intuited that there was more to it.

“Trust me,” Richard put his hand on John’s shoulder. “Everything will be fine.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Let’s go.”

They exited the hospital, where the crowds began to disperse. They cheered as they saw John and he smiled at them. He and Richard went into the limousine and the vehicle sped off to the Main Hangar, where everyone would be assembling and getting their supplies, arms, ammunition, swords, and space fighters ready.

The Hangar remained a restricted section of Regnum where only those with access cards could enter. These access cards could be issued only to those in power, and all official military personnel. The Hangar was located on top of the Regnum, outside the glass containment. Alongside it were two more hangars, where civilian spaceships and tourist cruisers were located. These were used for those who wanted to take a fifteen day cruise of the Regnum, orbiting the man-made planet. The third hangar was used for scientists who would send satellites and unmanned ships to monitor the Regnum from afar. They did this for their own personal researches and for communicating to the military about its position.

The Main Hangar could hold two thousand fighters, four hundred space tanks (which held a thousand ships at a time and three hundred thousand men), and eight hundred transport tankers (which were used as larger fighters and transportation for soldiers who had to go from one area to another) at a time. There were many more fighters kept in storage in the lower levels of the Hangar. If needed, they could be quickly transported by large cargo elevators.

John and Richard left the limo and took a lone elevator located in the middle of the Regnum and thirty kilometers from Central Square. Here too access cards needed to be used in order to enter. The elevator looked like a large metal rod that extended upwards to the outside of the Regnum like a spinal cord. They arrived there at 4:55. A soldier saluted them and escorted them into a large skyscraper, towering four hundred feet in the air, above the glass like an antennae. Here all the administrative work of the army, navy, and air force was collected, distributed and dealt with. Two soldiers with guns slung over their backs led them to the elevator which took them all the way to the twenty seventh and top floor. From there, they were further escorted up the stairs, to the terrace. The terrace was contained within a glass oxygen bubble. There, a private space-jet waited for them and took them to the Main Hangar. This was one of two ways to get the hangar. The other, slower way was through the Fortress, a large base protected by heavily armed guards and surrounded by an electric barbed wire fence. The guards opened the gates to let in cargo and military trucks. These transports would pass through a tunnel, one and a half kilometers from the entrance that would lead them to the lower levels of the Hangar. This base and the skyscraper were part of a huge complex dealing only with the armed forces.

As soon as they stepped out of the jet they were saluted and greeted by the five generals and their respective soldiers, along with Commander Lord and his pilots.

“At ease!” John said firmly. “Gather around fellows. In a few minutes from now, we will embark on a course for Earth. Many of you haven’t ever been there before. Nevertheless, you must know and realize it to be your home. Take this as your first of many exoduses, back to the promised realm. You will fight those who took our rightful place from us, and I urge, nay, I command you to show no mercy!

“Don’t be afraid. Remember that your fight will never go in vain, for we are the righteous. Our fight is not a fight of force but a war for life itself. We struggle for our rights, and we shall have them! I swear to you we shall have them!

“Now, lift your swords with me,” a sword was given to John, “and swear an oath along with me.” They all lifted their swords. “I swear by this sacred weapon, and by the blood that it defends, that I will never let this fall from my hands, until I am dead, or until I have returned from promised victory. Never shall I go against my people in times of war or peace, and I shall respect the ancient traditions of war, battle ethics, and will not falter in the eyes of my enemy. So help me God!

“Now, get yourselves ready. In a few minutes, we attack!” A large resonant battle cry shook the walls of the Hangar as the men shouted in excitement, anxious to fight.
The soldiers were dressed in black and they wore shiny lightweight metallic armor. It fitted easily, and with help of the latest nanotechnology and quantum mechanics, adapted to their stature, muscle mass, and body weight. Their helmets covered their entire faces except for two eye holes. The eye holes could be fitted with night-vision lenses, infrared, thermal vision, or lenses for the desert and the tundra. The armor had its own heating system for fights in the tundra and cooling vents for hotter climates.

John pulled Richard aside so he could speak to him privately. “Listen. If anything happens to me, take care of Alex and my mother.”

“Nothing’s going to happen,” Richard said. “You’ll be back to protect them.”

“You really think so?”

“You can’t die so easily. You know that.”

John nodded and kept one hand on his sword, which was sheathed and latched onto his belt. “Be careful out there.” John put his right arm round Richard’s shoulder and they walked to the private space-transport jet. They sat down, while the others prepared themselves. John pushed the intercom button on his right armrest and said, “Captain.”

“Yes sir,” said the pilot of the jet.

“Connect me to all frequencies.”

“Right away.” There was a pause and then the pilot said, “You’re connected sir.”

“Thanks,” John said and gave the orders, “All units move out on my command.”

“Yes sir,” they responded.

“Let’s go, captain,” John said.

“Sure sir,” the pilot said, and the main thrusters heated up, their force vibrating throughout the jet. A few minutes later, it sped off at mach 5 and John closed his eyes, thankful that he would be back on the Earth.

Alex thought his spine was bound to break any moment as the heat rose to an unbearable level. It was as if a large gush of acid had been pumped into his vertebrae and was trying to break free. Whatever little space that must have been in between the vertebrae was filled up and whatever was filling it was growing larger, wider, and more painful by the minute. It was like something was crawling and eating away at his spine. He wanted to move, to be free, but he knew he couldn’t. His body wavered in the air as if some invisible giant shook him around. His neck straightened further, and his chest widened, but he wanted to bend and move to relieve the tension. His patience was tested to the limits and every moment only got worse. He concentrated on the space between his eyes. He concentrated so hard that he felt like his eyes were going to pop out of their sockets. He clenched his gums, tightened his cheeks and ground his teeth to break the monotony of pain. If he moved another muscle related to or connected to the neck and back areas he would be reduced to a pile of burning flesh and ashes.

A spirit or one who had perfect vision would have been able to see the play of light, shadow and rainbow colors as they all flowed from Nikolas’s room and down to Alex’s mind, heart and spine. Alex soon felt the calming effect and he realized the pain subsided when he concentrated on the lights he felt and saw through his meditative inner vision. The immaculate and holy colors comforted him and cleansed all his worries, taxing emotions, and burdening thoughts. The pain seeped out little by little.

Suddenly he felt a stabbing pain in his brain that came and went in an instant. But the overtly soothing sensation of joy and power overwhelmed all pain, dissolving it fully. He felt energized and electric. He wanted more of it. He calmed his mind and listened intently to the hum and the whirling sensation, as if the neurons in the pathways of his brain were fueled and accelerated by pure energy. Now came the second phase: patience and revival, rejuvenation and absorption of power, silence of mind, and the relaxation of what felt like a thousand years.
Chapter Nine

Mission

Well,” Nikolas said, “We’ve done what we could. Now the rest is up to him.” His chalk-pale face aged considerably and the whites of his eyes had yellowed as a result of fatigue and a sudden loss of energy. He panted as the others reached his state. They sat down to conserve what little energy they had. “I know it will not go in vain.”

“You’re right,” said Dante. For some reason, he seemed older. It was as though they showed their true ages on their faces, appearing graver by the minute.

Efarius said, “I just hope our lives won’t go in vain.”

Dark bags started to appear under their eyes and seemed to pull their faces towards the floor. Nikolas struggled to breathe. “We won’t die. We will have to call Daniel and refresh ourselves with blood.” He wondered whether it would be too late.

*****

Alex saw many events that occurred since his kidnapping. As a result of his meditation, he developed clairvoyance and clairaudience, which allowed him to see and hear things far away in the present and the future. He saw Grandma in a coma, desperately fighting for her life. He saw that Uncle John had now taken over the democratic system and turned it into his own personal dictatorship. John said he did it for the people, but Alex felt it unnecessary. Anger rose in his veins like lava, boiling and rising into the crevices of his mind. He didn’t like this at all. He worried for Grandma and felt confusion and repulse at his uncle’s actions.

What he saw next made him wish he hadn’t. With Angel was a man with long flowing crimson hair, a vampire. He took her in his arms and unsheathed a small serpentine dagger and slit her throat. “No!” Alex yelled as he materialized a sword and slashed at the vampire’s shoulder. It was no use as the vampire revitalized himself and laughed, showing edged and sharpened teeth set crookedly on blackening gums. A foul stench emitted from his mouth accompanied by red, green, and black smoke. The colored smoke condensed into figures with eyes of reddish gold and soon enough, Alex perceived them to be demons. Their dark leathery skin shone in the light and curly ram’s horns protruded from their heads. They wore nothing but ragged loincloths and their hands held massive axes and hammers. Alex backed away as they tried to circle him.

Alex’s body remained rigid. He sweated massive drops; his t-shirt was soaked. His hair, now glossy with sweat, covered his eyes and his arms became uncomfortably hot and wet. He let out deep hard breaths and still felt restless. Claustrophobia took the better of him; the room seemed to squeeze him, the walls converged at him. Then, it stopped. Someone was knocking.

Alex opened his eyes and felt a sudden, cool relief.

A guard came in saying, “Come with me. You’re expected at the President’s office.”

A knock was heard at Nikolas’s suite as well, but no one answered it. The Rebels were now too weak and their flesh sagged to the point that it looked like it would fall off their bones. They had become like zombies, slowly decomposing before their very eyes. A muffled voice sounded through the thick, bulletproof door. When no answer came, a loud thud followed the voice. Still no answer and so this time it turned into a louder rhythmic hammering at the door.

The Rebels, half dead, wheezed with heavy efforts. The door blasted open by the power of an energy beam. “What the hell is going on in here?” Daniel shouted, glancing around the place, now filled with smoke from the blast. He saw the Rebels sitting sluggishly on the plush sofa and chairs, about to fall off them. “What’s going on?” He rushed to his father, who he recognized not by his face but by his attire. Daniel used his telepathy to call Erik.

“Listen!” he said to Erik, “I need some help.”

“What?” Erik’s voice sounded irritated.

“The Rebels...they’re dying.”

“What do you mean, dying?”

“Dying. Mortis, death. You know what I mean! Just send some guards in so we can shift them to the recuperation chambers. Make it quick. I don’t think they can stand it any longer. Neither can I.” Daniel covered his mouth, the reek of their rotting skin trying to crawl up his nostrils. The Rebels mumbled in pain. Congealed blood spilled onto
the floor like spoiled crimson milk. Daniel hurried out to the balcony to breathe. *Fresh air, at last!*

“Don’t do anything yet,” John said through his communicator. “When I reach the Earth, wait for five minutes. Then, attack these fighters but don’t approach the atmosphere. Once they spot you, make sure you destroy them quickly. We cannot, I repeat we cannot have them contact the Regime. Not yet. Is that clear?”

“Copy that,” was the response in unison.

“Good.” He looked at Richard, unsure of how things would be in the next fifteen minutes. Richard gave him a consoling look as if to say, *don’t worry. We’ll do fine!* The ship picked up speed as it was pulled in by the Earth’s gravity.

“What is that?” asked Richard, surveying the massive base covering the Atlantic.

“So this is what they’ve been up to,” John said, mesmerized. “I saw many of them when we were higher up, but I thought they might have been something natural. This is just amazing.”

Richard said, “What do we do now?”

John shook his head, “Stay calm. Captain,” he said, pushing the intercom, “Report back to General Hopkinson that there might be a change of plan.”

“A change?” Richard asked.

“Yeah,” John looked to his left at the huge CCC. “He may have to go to the other side.”

“You mean, this thing, this base or whatever it is,” Richard said, terrified, “Stretches that far?”

“It’s a possibility. We couldn’t really get a good look, right? I mean there must be more, judging by what we saw earlier.”

A robotic voice could be heard coming from the main speaker of the ship, “You are unidentified and are on our borders. Please state your name and purpose before we launch an attack.”

“Looks like somebody rolled off the wrong side of the bed,” the copilot said, before they gave their details. “This is the official transport of Supreme Leader John Howe. We have come as requested by President Daniel Gareng. Do we have permission to land?”

The voice said, “Alright. We’re sending you co-ordinates of your landing zone. It’s helipad six. President Daniel Gareng will be there waiting for you.”

By the time the Rebels were taken to the recuperation chambers, they seemed dead. They breathed faintly, and some of them were reduced to skinned skeletons. Tubes were inserted into their chests and very slowly they started to come back to life. “How the hell did this happen?” Erik asked.

“I have no idea,” Daniel said. “Did you hear? They’ve come.”

“Yeah I know. I just received the message.” Erik lit a cigarette, offering one to Daniel. The President shook his head. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah, if you are,” Daniel said.

Erik blew out a large puff of smoke and sighed.

“You there,” Daniel said to a guard, “Have they brought Alex?”

The guard nodded, “Sir, he will be in here shortly.” Just then two guards brought Alex inside.

“Ah, cousin,” Daniel said, “We were expecting you.” The boy’s demeanor had changed. Alex’s body glowed faintly from under his clothes. Daniel, knowing there was a connection between his father’s state and Alex’s, noticed the difference in Alex’s appearance.

Alex kept his eyes closed the whole time. His lips murmured, perhaps chanting or praying. But they couldn’t be read because they moved so rapidly. He suddenly stopped the silent murmuring, held his head up and opened his eyes slowly. His eyes changed to the color of pure gold. Beautiful. Even Daniel thought the gold iris contrasted with the crimson-black of his pupil splendidly. Alex seemed more muscular, but lean and his facial features had sharpened. Was this his imagination or was it real? Daniel asked himself.

“I know.” Alex’s soft voice radiated around the room.

Erik said hastily, “We haven’t much time. Let me take you to the boardroom.”

“Right,” Daniel said, his scrutinizing eyes still on his cousin, “I will welcome John and bring him there.”

The Regime sent fighters into space, just in case. They floated around, making sure no ships other than John’s entered the atmosphere. But little did they notice what went on above the Regnum, hidden by the station’s curvature.

Bill Haven, one of the nine squadron leaders, gave the command, “Now!” The response was immediate. He himself didn’t realize that he had spoken the words until he saw the other leaders along with their squadrons, rushing towards the vampire ships.

The seventy two jets swirled through space, rushing as fast as they could so as to take the enemy by surprise.
When they were seven hundred meters from the enemy, they started shooting, taking out two thirds of their targets. The remaining one-third went head-on towards the Regnum fighters, who dodged, swerved and counterattacked. Bill, himself a new squadron leader, had trouble keeping up with the older ones but he had some moves of his own. An enemy fighter began to tail him. This was exactly what the young pilot wanted. He veered off through all the laser beams and flying debris, towards those ships which were still intact. In one sharp turn upward, he led the ship on his tail into a collision course with another enemy fighter. This was where the fun was; the excitement of not knowing what would happen next and staying in the moment. If one faltered in this technique, they would fall to their doom. “Watch out!” his wing-man, James Lyndon said. He shot at the ship that was about to ram into Bill. “These guys have turned into kamikazes!”

“Well, we can’t have that, not on my watch!” Bill steered and shot. He fled to the right, then to the left, confusing his enemies. He hit about thirteen of them. “Make a circle around them,” he commanded to all the leaders and wingmen and fighters, “Now!” He knew for sure that they were winning and would defeat them. They maneuvered themselves and created a surrounding circular formation around the few enemy fighters that remained.

The enemy kept shooting and ramming into some of the Regnum fighters.

“Evade the bloody kamikazes. I want all those in the attack modes, defended by three ships from behind. We can’t afford to lose any more!” As he said this, an enemy fighter clipped his right wing, tearing it apart.

“Watch—”

But it was too late. The attack had been followed through. Bill was able to tilt his fighter to the left, just in the nick of time, a hairbreadth away from his enemy, who was going to smash into him from the front. But fire sputtered out from his right wing, and he started spinning out of control—

Everything froze.

Daniel squinted at the ship that had just landed. He wore a wind-cheater as the weather became even colder and extremely rainy. He commanded the watchtower soldiers to activate the glass bubble. In an instant, glass rose from the sides of the ground and joined together in the center, protecting Daniel and the ship from the annoying rain. The main door of the ship opened and John, along with two soldiers, came out. He was wearing some light clothes, flowing and loose. As the human walked towards him with his two guards, Daniel concluded that one way or another, this man was going to die. John smiled warmly and, ever the diplomat, embraced Daniel.

“President Gareng!”

“Councilman Howe!” Daniel smiled. He returned the embrace and said, “It’s been a long time.”

John nodded, his face gradually turning serious, “So shall we get to business?”

“Of course. Take these men and offer them some refreshments,” he commanded two escorts who arrived from the interior of the base.

“No, no, no,” John said innocently, “They must remain with me. I trust in your...” he stretched the word, “hospitality, most definitely.” He gave a smirk and continued, “These men will remain with me...as they have for the last twenty one years.”

“Come with me,” said Daniel, gesturing for John to follow him. The Supreme Leader and his guards followed the Regime President’s lead.

They walked in silence all the way to the boardroom. John looked around the place, amazed by what he saw. As they entered an elevator John checked to see what floor they would arrive at. It stopped its descent to the tenth floor and opened on to a medium sized hallway. He couldn’t help wondering how the vamps had done it. The planet had suffered so much destruction and all the great cities had been destroyed. How and where had they gotten the resources? How did they build such a huge structure? He shook his head in disbelief. “Is there something wrong?” Daniel asked, although he already knew what John was thinking. He laughed, “We have been quite busy, as you can see.”

“Yeah,” John said, dumbfounded.

They reached the hall. It was painted in a majestic red and on both sides of the hallway there were portraits of great kings, emissaries, feudal lords, and nobles. Just before they were about to open the massive rosewood door one painting in particular caught John’s eye. It was a very rare painting of Argos I, framed in intricately embroidered solid gold.

Argos was a stout man. In his hand he held a massive sword, the one he had used to kill Markos. His chestnut brown hair flowed down to the nape of his neck and he donned a thick pointed goatee. His amber eyes twinkled and a warm smile lay on his soft face. Underneath the painting was a gold plaque with Argos’s name in modern Migritic.

The door opened. Alex was seated with his back to them, at the head of a table. The elegant table looked somewhat like the one in the Boardroom at the Regnum. There were large windows, about four on each side, stretching upwards almost till the ceiling. In the center of the ceiling was a large, intricate crystal chandelier. To
their right was a ten feet high fireplace with a roaring fire that heated the room. The glow of the fire gave a warm, amorous quality to the area. The thick drapes flowed like majestic cloaks from the windows. “Uncle John,” Alex said, getting up from his seat. “Is it...is it really you?” He ran up to him and John embraced him.

“Yep, kid. It really is.”

“Where is Erik?” Daniel asked the two guards inside.

“Sir, he said he had some urgent work in the recuperation chamber,” said one of the guards, “He will be arriving shortly.”

Daniel sighed, “We shall have to continue without him, then. Come, Councilman. Sit.”

“Something’s wrong,” said Kurt to his comrades in the meeting room in the transport tanker. They could see through the screen that everything had stopped. They couldn’t see much but they knew fighting had broken out because of the constant explosions of light. But now, nothing. The ships didn’t seem to be getting any closer or any further away. “I’m going to check it out,” said Kurt, walking out of the meeting room. He hurried into the elevator and descended into the hangar. He rushed out. “I need fifty men. Pronto!” He didn’t wait for any response and jumped into his own ship and flew away. Immediately, twenty, then thirty, then finally fifty fighter ships came after him. He put the fighter into hyperspeed to try and catch the enemy off-guard. When he and the rest of his squadron arrived at the battle scene the sight that met their eyes left them openmouthed. The entire first wave of fighters was frozen. Kurt could see the frightened faces of Bill and the other leaders. The men were moving around inside. It was only their ships that were stuck and not moving an inch!

One of the vampires from an enemy fighter opened his cockpit and smiled maniacally. He climbed out on top so that everyone could see him. Then, he took his hands and created an electrical mass of energy. It was red and black and growing exponentially. “Oh crap!” Kurt shouted, “Get him! Get them all and destroy them!”

Kurt’s squadron responded and in an instant shot down the vampire and his entire group. The fighters suddenly unfroze and were mobile once again. Bill’s fighter, which was going up in flames, went into a whirlwind of destruction. Bill, who had his oxygen helmet ready, ejected just before everything exploded. Kurt’s ship blazed through the inferno. He put on his mask and opened the cockpit, as Bill swam through the vacuum of space into his father’s fighter. He grabbed the seatbelt of the extra seat behind Kurt and buckled himself in. The fighters regrouped themselves and headed back to the Regnum, savoring their first taste of victory.

Tea was served. It felt good being in the warm room, sipping on some fragrant and bone-thawing jasmine tea. Outside the rain had picked up speed and pounded on the glass. The wind howled as the sea waves crashed onto the outer rims of the Command Center. John sighed as he sipped the last of his tea, “So, Daniel. How do we start this negotiation?”

Daniel yawned. “You tell me, General Howe.”

“You know what I want,” John said, as he handed his cup to the waiter. Alex remained still with his eyes closed in silent contemplation.

“Yes, but you think you know what I want, or should I say, what we all want?”

“What’s that?”

Daniel’s face darkened and contorted with disgust and anger. His nose crinkled up as if he had smelled something awful. He bared his three-inch fangs.

Daniel’s sudden transformation made John jump.

“It’s the death of you and your whole bloody race,” sneered Daniel. “You’re lucky Anaxagoras shows so much mercy. If I had my way, I’d bake you all and eat you for dinner!”

“You know,” said John calmly, “that has already happened once before in our history; at least the first part. I suspect the second part too.”

“Don’t joke with me, human scum.” Daniel’s voice rolled like thunder and screeched like a thousand nails on a chalkboard.

John was shocked by the sight of Daniel’s face. He breathed a sigh of relief when it went back to normal. “Uh, well...Alex. What have they told you?”

“Nothing at all,” Alex said.

“And the Rebels?”

Alex shook his head. “Nothing. They would come to my room and that was all.”

“Hmmmm.” John rubbed his chin.

From outside, the sound of energy blasts and thudding penetrated the doors. Then they heard the clash of metal. It sounded like a sword-fight. “What the hell?” John asked.

The door suddenly burst open in a flash of blue light, and a figure appeared as the smoke faded away. “Let him
go!” the figure said.

When the smoke settled they saw that the figure was the exact double of Alex. He held a massive sword, about four feet in length and six inches in width. The blade radiated a fiery blue light with electric sparks. The ashes of dead soldiers spread and scattered all around. “Uncle John!” yelled Alex’s double, “Get away from them. That’s not the real me! That’s Erik.”

“He,” he said, grabbing a sword from the floor. He threw it above the false Alex’s and Daniel’s heads. John caught it and jumped on the table, catching Daniel off-guard. Alex used an energy beam to destroy the remaining three swords, so Daniel and the double had no weapons.

“Lead us to the Rebels,” John said. “Show us where they are.” He pushed the tip of his sword into Daniel’s Adam’s apple and the flesh around it sizzled.

Daniel backed away and turned Erik who was still disguised as Alex. “Alright,” Daniel hissed. “As you wish.” He led them to the elevator.

The first phase of the battle was complete. Kurt was relieved for now.

“Well,” said Bill, “What do we do now?” He brushed his dark golden mop of hair aside with his fingers. His light blue eyes shone like two aquamarines.

“We wait,” sighed Kurt, clutching his cup of coffee. They were in the lounge area of the tanker, where the soldiers took a load off by relaxing and chatting with their friends. Bill’s father had died in the war and ever since, Kurt took care of him like the son he never had. Bill had even started to call him, “Dad.”

“Any news from General Howe?” Bill asked.

Kurt took a deep breath and said, “Nope, not yet.”

“Is that trouble?”

“I wouldn’t know what to make of it, but I have a feeling things are under control so far.” Just then, distorted and barely intelligible words came from Kurt’s earpiece. He could make out John’s voice. “Do you copy? Kurt...” another distortion, “Do you copy?”

“Yes! John, yes, I can hear you. Is everything alright?”

Bill straightened himself at the mention of John’s name and the other soldiers went silent.

“Tell the others to get ready. Tell General Hopkinson he’ll be needed soon.”

“What? Why? I mean can’t you get through to him?”

“You’ll see once you come into the atmosphere. I don’t know what’s wrong but this is the only frequency that I can get through to. Don’t worry; I’ve got Alex with me and we’re on our way to the next phase. Tell Richard he’ll be needed. He’s still inside the ship. I just hope nothing’s wrong with him. Now is the time to strike! Over and out!”

The irritating buzzing noises stopped.

“Alright boys! Get ready. We’re going down there!” They all stood up and walked quickly to their designated posts and ships. Kurt and Bill went to the other generals, who were having a meeting of their own, to inform them of the news.

Vampiric guards infiltrated John’s escort ship. Richard and two other soldiers dashed into attack formations. Everywhere, the vampires burned, reducing to piles of hot ash. Richard swung his sword wildly, so any approaching enemy wouldn’t have a chance of survival. The other soldiers that protected Richard ventured out to keep the enemy at bay. To their astonishment and fear, they saw hundreds of them coming towards them. “Sir,” said one guard, “There are too many of them.”

“I don’t give a damn!” Richard said, “Just make your way through! We have to find John and Alex fast!”

With that, the guards redoubled their efforts and began pushing back the enemy. Richard pushed himself out and nearly slipped in the water. The pilots, seeing that everyone was out, moved the ship and broke through the glass bubble. Richard thought they were cowards and were trying only to escape. Then he realized the pilots were actually helping them out as they flew into the air and swerved around, using laser blasters to blow apart the oncoming vampires.

The enemy’s numbers greatly diminished and Richard and the two guards were given safe passage to the opened doors. There they faced another wave of vampires. Hundreds of them. Richard used his fear to fuel his wrath. “Keep going!” he commanded. His guards followed him and attacked, wreaking death and destruction as they advanced. Piles of ash built up around them as the vampires stupidly ran to their deaths. It shocked them and the fighters in space. For the first time ever, these vampires were absolutely ready to give up their own lives for their people.

Sparks flew as the humans’ swords stabbed at weak areas of the vampires’ armor. They slashed at necks and sliced off heads. Due to the rain and heat, there was a stifling humidity that made the humans feel sick and suffocated. They managed to bare it long enough to get to the elevator.
Inside the elevator, they had time to catch their breaths. Their faces were blackened by the ash that stuck to their sweat. “Richard! Richard!” His communicator screamed in his ear; it was Kurt. “General Bacon!” Kurt shouted, his voice completely clear and annoyingly loud. “General Howe has asked you for your help. They say that they’re on their way to the fifth level.”

Richard pressed the button for the fifth level. “Tell him we’re on our way. I can’t seem to get through to him.”

“He can’t get through to you either.”

“Never mind,” Richard said as the doors of the elevator opened. John appeared, holding Daniel hostage with a sword to his neck. Alex was beside him and seemed to be holding his doppelganger hostage. “I’ve found them.”

John turned to Richard, “Where the hell have you been?”

“We were caught up,” said Richard, smiling. “There’s something wrong with your communicator,”

“Same with yours,” John said, keeping his sword trained on Daniel. “Make room,” he commanded. “We have to go to the third level. That’s where the Rebels are.”

“Or so says this cousin of mine,” Alex said, with the point of his massive sword against his double’s neck. “I think that’s quite enough,” Alex said and pulled his sword closer to Erik’s neck. “You can show your true self now.”

Suddenly Erik’s face changed. His nose elongated and his eyes stretched out. His mouth became thin and his chin turned pointy. His hair straightened and shortened and his stature grew to almost twice that of Alex’s.

“No way!” Richard said. Erik gave him a ghastly glance.

The elevator opened and they went into the recuperation chamber where there were a hundred or so scientists checking up on the Rebels. The guards inside instinctively formed into a defensive position, with their swords out.

“No one move,” John said, as they entered.

Nikolas and the others were almost finished. They were in hibernation now and had returned to their normal state.

Alex said, “When they’re finished, let them go and take those things off of them.” He pointed to the restraints around their necks. Two guards volunteered to go and take them off when it was deemed safe by the scientists, who had to unlock them with a code. This took longer than expected and Alex realized they were just stalling. Suddenly, two guards teleported into the room. They held out their swords to John’s and Alex’s heads.

“Let them go,” one of them said.

Alex did as he was told and let go of Erik. Then, in a fluid motion he turned around and swung his sword at the guard. The guard parried and stood his ground. Daniel and Erik caught the swords the new guards threw at them.

The battle had begun.

The fighters accompanying the large tanker entered the atmosphere first, in order to seal off and provide protection for the tanker. The rains disrupted their vision, so they initiated the infrared windshields. The generals readied themselves for battle and looked out the window of the tanker. They wondered how the vampires could have built such a huge structure covering the entire Atlantic. This meant they had been planning the war since the beginning.

“This,” General Hopkinson sighed, “is incredible.”

“Yeah, well...I guess this is why John told you to go to the western front,” Romsky said.

“We’re going to need someone there instead,” said Hopkinson, pointing to what remained of Africa. “I’ll go there.”

“You’d better check with Howe,” Michio said. He turned to Singh and Chang. “Are you ready?”

They nodded.

“Then, let us go,” he said and the trio unbuckled themselves, and headed for the transports which would take the allotted men to the Vatican library.

“John,” George said, pressing the small button of his earpiece, and tuning into John’s frequency. “I have to tell you something.” He could hear blasts and sword fighting in the background.

“Well, now’s not a good time.”

“It’s urgent. I’ll be short. I don’t think they’ll come from the west, John. It’s too damn far. I’m leading the troops to northern Africa. Is that fine?”

“Yeah!” Then came a large explosion and a pause, but he could still hear breathing. After about ten seconds, he said, “If you think that’s good, then do it! Just make sure they don’t get any reinforcement; that’s all. And send the five hundred allotted for me and Richard. Quick!” The frequency jammed, but Hopkinson was lucky enough to hear the last statement. He looked over to the soldiers sitting behind him. He called one of them over and said, “Send this message to the five hundred. We need them to be at the Atlantic; Richard and John need help!”

The soldier saluted and left to do his bidding. Romsky got up and opened a large canister. The Russian took out his armor and gear.

“Come on,” George said, “we haven’t much time.”
The transport ship diverged towards the Vatican library, deploying a hundred fighters in the air. The fighters circled around the clouds way above the Vatican. The transport silently sped down into the forest and hovered three feet off the ground. The three Generals dropped down along with their men.

The Vatican was completely different from what it had been in Pre-WWIII times. Long ago, it had been the home of the leader of the second largest religious group on the planet. Now it was an impenetrable fortress where the ancient secrets of the vampires were hidden. Access remained granted only to Erik, Daniel, and the Elder Council. The Library itself was a large, square building, about ten stories tall and gray in color. To look at, there was nothing extraordinary about it. The most striking thing was the heavy security around it. There were electric fences and barbed walls around its perimeter, and heavily armored guards stood patrol 24/7. In total there were three hundred guards. Another one hundred guards stood fifteen feet in front of them. Since most of Europe was now full of forests hiding secret buildings, this library, far from the original spot of the Vatican and Rome, remained hidden in the enveloping shadows of the trees. Places like Rome, London, and New York were full of metal, iron and glass. They were inhabited by millions of people who ran the economy of the Vampire Confederation.

Singh, Nakashima, Chang and their troops hid in the forest, behind trees and bushes. Through his communicator, Singh whispered, “Wait for my command. When one of them comes close to the forest, shoot him down. We don’t need any silencer; let it be as loud as possible so we can distract the majority of them. Once that’s done, move towards the central gate and we’ll ambush them. If we’re lucky, they’ll move inside the forest to investigate and that will give us a better chance of getting in quickly. All we can now do is wait.”

Meanwhile, the fighters, still hidden by the dark clouds below them, waited for the command to strike.

*****

The splattering rain created deafening, rapid sounds as the fighters descended faster to get a better view of the giant base. Already, the prescribed units for John and Richard scurried about as their transport hovered above the slippery surface and ran towards the entrance.

Colonel Justus for now took charge of the men sent for John and Richard. He ran fully armed, blinking frequently under the rain as he led his men. The entire platoon activated their protective lenses to shield their eyes from the water. He operated on the communicator and tuned in to John’s frequency. “General Howe,” he said, “I have the reinforcements with me.” Stopping four meters short of the entrance, he glimpsed around the place to see if there was any danger. There were only the remains of the massacre where the ground was black with ashen rainwater. “Tell me what to do.”

All he could hear were explosions, John’s shouts and the clash of metal as he slung his sword around. “Level five.” The frequency jammed up.

“Come on!” Justus yelled and they marched towards the entrance of the base. When he reached the threshold, he narrowly missed a beheading when a large axe flew by him, scraping his chin. “Attack!” was the only word that came out of his mouth as he stood there in shock. The soldiers used flares to light the now darkened room and saw that hundreds of vampires, all sticking to the walls, in order to create an ambush, were glaring at them with fiery eyes, baring their long fangs, and hissing spitefully.

The vampires flew off the walls and glided towards the soldiers, knocking them down and pushing them off-guard. The ones still standing grabbed their semi-automatic silver proton Uzis and fired at their enemies. As the vampires flew down for a second attack, they were caught in the fire and disintegrated. Those who were lucky enough to survive fell to the floor. They ran at lightning speed, dodging the bullets and attacked those who were reloading. They grabbed a hold of them, ripped off their helmets and dug their fangs deep into their necks, feasting on what must have seemed to them like ambrosia. It had been so long since any of them tasted human blood. The sacred life-fluid splattered across the floor as they gorged on their prey.

The surviving humans screamed in fear and disgust and ran back from the carnage, gathering their will and strength. Many of them had never seen such gruesome acts. Some of them were frozen in shock. They fell prey to the second bloody assault, not able to hear Justus’s commands to back away.

“We need to fight together! Group up! Fast!” he shouted. Some of them were too horrified to react. The ones who could gave heed to his command and grouped into a giant dense circle as the powerful vampires, now filled with a fresh supply of life-blood, flew around them.

“Justus, where the hell are you?” John’s voice blasted through Justus’s earpiece.

“We’re in a bit of a situation, sir.”

Romsky split ways with Hopkinson and took a transport tanker to the southwest coast of the British Isle. He wiped the condensation from the window. As the ship came closer to the ground, he saw at least a thousand soldiers marching towards the Command Center in the Atlantic. He sent an urgent report to the War Council, where the
seven other generals were taking in messages and sending out commands. The seven generals who were assigned to this were Strauss, Smith, Wellington, Kenmore, Park, Hussein, Lawler, Anderson, Skarssen, Di-Nardo, Huron, Jackson, and Xiu. Lawler was the one who received this printed report, “By God!” he exclaimed, “We’re going to need more men,” he told his comrades.

“Well, how many more, and where?” asked Wellington, moving his office chair around.

“Romsky says that he can see at least a thousand in Britain, so he suggests sending another five hundred to himself and Hopkinson in North Africa.” Wellington’s balding head gleamed with sweat at the mention of the numbers he had deducted from the previous reports.

“Where exactly in Northern Africa?” Wellington asked. He turned on his communicator and switched to Hopkinson’s frequency. He could hear lots of gunfire and screams. “General, can you hear me?”

Hopkinson was in the middle of a duel with a vampire who was using double swords. The swords swung in such a quick rhythmic fashion that if he flinched for a second he would have his head cut off. “Abe? Is that you?”

“Yes,” said the clear voice, “Listen to me carefully.”

“Yeah,” he dodged the vampire’s attack and backed off, “Tell me.”

“Sergei says there are at least a thousand or so enemies in Britain. He’s requested reinforcements. What about you?”

“Well we sure could use it, but not now. We had them by surprise here. Over and out!” he said and the line cut.

What George had said was true, because the vampires miscalculated that the human armies would attack cities mostly located in Europe. They hadn’t thought of Africa, particularly Morocco, where they were fighting now. Thanks to the surprise attack, the humans now had the advantage. The storm raged on, spreading across England and now Morocco. Overhead, they heard fighting in the air and sometimes a fighter would plummet to the battlefield, crushing people to death. This was getting risky on his end, George thought. Their fighters were doing well but the enemy ships could land on his troops at any time.

The only reason why fighting was taking place in Moroccan airspace was because they had been ordered to reach the Command Center in order to help out President Gareng and his troops. But the human fighters made it almost impossible for them to get through.

George screamed in pain as a vampire slashed his skin. He faltered and fell to his knees in pain. His enemy’s sword chopped through the air, aiming for George’s head, but before it arrived, George slashed sideways into the vampire’s knees. The vampire screamed as his legs burned to ashes. The fire spread up his body until it charred into dust, and flew away in the high wind.

The rain and the wet sandy ground made it difficult for them to walk, but as they advanced towards the enemy troops, their resolve strengthened with each step. There were sparks everywhere and the vampires all began to shriek in harmony making the humans cover their ears. The ones who could not handle the sound fell to the ground. The vampires devoured the fallen, five or six of them feasting on one body. “Ignore the noise!” Hopkinson yelled to his troops. But he too found it difficult as the sound pained his eardrums and the cold water pounded on his slashed skin. He used his anger to his advantage as he flung his sword in the air, whipping it round and round, killing as many as four to five vampires with each slash.

They were winning. So far.

Nikolas and the other Rebels stirred from their recuperation. As Nikolas opened his eyes, he saw the most remarkable thing. John, Richard, and Alex were fighting against Daniel, Erik and twenty soldiers. As Nick turned from his left to his right he saw all the Rebels staring at him. They nodded and he returned their greeting. All of them jumped up, transformed their bodies into silver and charged towards the battle.

At the sound of their battle cry, the two opposing sides stopped and looked. Both sides believed that the Rebels would come to their defense. In the midst of their charge, Nikolas stopped, and then the others did likewise. “What are you doing?” Daniel asked agitatedly, “Get them!”

Nikolas smiled and shook his head, “Did you think you could really trust us?” He paused to see Erik’s and Daniel’s confused faces. Daniel looked at him with a mixture of sadness, shock and disgust. Erik’s demonized face reddened in hot anger.

“It doesn’t matter now!” Erik yelled. “We have you surrounded. Activate the restrainers.” He pointed to the restraint belts.

The belts activated and electrified the Rebels’ silver bodies. They yelled in pain, their eyes bulged out and their faces contorted in excruciation. Alex slashed at Erik.

Erik blocked the massive silver sword and spat at Alex, “You can’t do anything boy!”

John jumped to Alex’s aid only to be stopped midair by Daniel, “What do you think you’re doing? We’re not
He attacked John maintaining a rhythm with the swords. This was a fight method all vampires had learned to keep their opponents in check and to give them the upper hand by controlling the rhythm.

Alex looked to Erik, who kept attacking him. Then he looked to Nikolas and the Rebels. He pushed Erik back with all his strength and stepped closer to Nikolas. He held out his right hand and from the tips of his fingers came a small flash of electricity, like miniature lighting. In a few seconds, it grew, filling half of the room. The sparks converged to the restraints on the Rebels’ necks. The chokers blew apart, leaving the bearers unharmed. Suddenly, Alex felt a jolt of pain in his back as Erik had slashed it open. He screamed. John looked over to his nephew and yelled, “No!”

But, to everyone’s amazement, the huge cut in his back healed up. Alex smiled and turned around to face an awe-stricken Erik. He put out his right hand, extended his index finger and waved it, taunting and questioning the might of his opponent. Erik, in a fit of rage, flew towards Alex, who was off-guard at the moment, only to have the powerful attack blocked by Nikolas. “Learn to fight with those whom you can match!” He pushed him away in one powerful shove. “Alex, get out of here and take some of us with you.”

“But—”

“Just do it!”

One of the guards left his post. He walked into the forest to breathe in the pine scented air and light a cigarette.

“Okay,” Ranjit murmured, “On my command.” And just as the vampire finished his cigarette, the General yelled, “Now!” There was a large explosion in the air, creating confusion amongst the guards. A non-silver bullet hit the guard with the cigarette in the head. “Troops, follow my lead,” said General Singh. They advanced towards the entrance of the gate at the edge of the forest. They would have to run as fast as they could because he and his men would be easily noticeable.

General Singh ran with his troops towards the entrance of the gate, but they were spotted and the guards shouted out to each other. They exposed their fangs and let out a hideous and unearthly howl. “Kurt, we need you! Now!” Singh shouted into his communicator. Within thirty seconds, the vampires attacked Singh’s army and the human fighters flew down and fired upon the Anisaei. Singh jabbed his sword into the unholy flesh of the vamps until fire and embers spurted out of their hellish bodies. As the large gates opened up to spew out more soldiers, Singh’s army pushed through the gate. He called for the ionic plasma bombs, which contained silver nitrate. Forty were thrown at a time, creating a large explosion of smoke and silver nitrate particles. When the vampires inhaled these particles they burst open spreading their glowing remains everywhere.

“Evan!” Ranjit shouted, “Evan! Stay with me.”

Evan, Ranjit’s lieutenant, answered, “I’m coming.” He rushed to Ranjit’s side, hacking away at the enemy and killing at least twenty of them in his stride.

“Keep those discs safe; we’re going to need them soon.”

Alex stood in the elevator with seven of the Rebels: Davik, Joqetu, Gavin, Noel, Yagnik, Hektor, and Orwen. When they reached the main landing area, they saw the vampires feeding on human bodies. Blood spilled and flowed everywhere, making the ground shiny. Justus, along with his other men, battled it out with the vampires on the ground.

“Leave this to us, Alexander,” Orwen said.

“But—”

“Just get in the ship,” Orwen barked, “Davik, Gavin and Noel: you go with him.”

Justus, who spotted Alex amidst the bloodbath, said, “Don’t worry sir! I’m coming!” He had no idea that the others were Rebels.

“Wait! Wait!” Alex shouted, “They’re here to help!”

Justus stopped in his tracks and an expression of relief covered his face. Just then, a flying vampire grabbed him by the shoulders and dragged him outside. Justus gasped. He gathered his senses and with his sword tried to literally disarm his predator. The vampire flew out of range. Suddenly thunder struck and pierced the vampire’s sensitive ears. The flying vampire let go of Justus who plummeted into the sea. Alex, quick to help, ran outside with the other Rebels, trying to catch him. But they were too late. Alex dived in the sea to save him.

“Let’s finish this off,” Orwen said. The Rebels turned into silver, took flight and prepared for the final assault.

John, accustomed to the ferocity of the fight and getting in tune with his old techniques, spun his sword around, broke the rhythm and slashed Daniel in the stomach. The sword pierced through the titanium chain-mail that he was wearing underneath leaving a searing wound there. Daniel screeched in agony and his face turned demonic. Just as it
had in the boardroom, it became sharp, angular and intense. He leaped towards John and lacerated his shoulder with his sword, rendering his sword-arm almost powerless. The President laughed and thrust his weapon at John’s chest but not before Nikolas had gathered enough energy to telepathically push his son away.

“Thanks, I owe you one.” John spun his sword and smiled at Daniel maliciously. Daniel glared at him and in a raging fury, lifted a large broken piece of glass and telekinetically threw it at John. Dante used his psychic powers and broke it into innumerable shards that flew towards Daniel. Daniel ducked but it was too late. The glass pierced his body in many places, leaving him drained and weak, but not dead.

“I think you better get out of here, John,” Dante said, “Alex’ll be needing you!”

“Right!” John said with a deep breath and ran out to his nephew’s aid.

Romsky knew that before the five hundred reinforcements arrived, he and his own men would have to fight with all they had. If possible, the optimal situation for the Generals in Africa, England and perhaps even the Vatican was for them to push the soldiers back to their own starting point. From there they could infiltrate and destroy as many as possible. There would also be help from the fighters who would drop as many bombs as possible to ensure maximum damage.

The Russian General’s troops ran towards the marching vampires and launched a full scale attack upon them. The storm grew even larger; lightning flashed and thunder roared through the clouds, ripping them apart. The army was at the southwestern most tip of England and pushing its way through. They did not know whether they had reached the enemy’s base or not.

“Onward!” Sergei would shout every five minutes or so at his men, making them push more fiercely. Soon enough, a fifth of the enemy was destroyed. Things seemed to be developing in their favor.

Romsky, who had trained himself in the Siberian tundra and cold mountains of the Himalayas, was like an animal when it came to fighting. For one month he roamed the Siberian wastelands and faced the bitter cold with only the barest of clothes on him. Legend had it that he faced a tiger with nothing but stones and rocks as his weapons. He ripped open the jaws of the tiger with his bare hands, and came back with the tiger’s blood all over his body and its fangs worn as a neck ornament.

With every battle, he would go into a berserk rage, not caring about his life or the outcome. He fought with such horrific sadism and was like a fearsome wild beast in the eyes of his enemies. He would use his sword just like any master swordsman, but he would also use his bare hands to poke out the enemy’s eyes and rip open their mouths. Even his own men were shocked by his brutality. The onslaught continued but soon enemy ships swooped down, dropping small but lethal bombs and killing an average of twenty soldiers with each explosion. “Do something, Ted!” Romsky shouted through the communicator to one of the squadron leaders.

“I’m on it,” Ted said. “Get those fresh fighters,” he ordered his men. And at once, the fighters were on their enemies’ tails, shooting them down and further diminishing their numbers.

The heavy rain mixed with the bodily ashes of the vampires and created dense smog that began to suffocate every soldier there. Quick to their feet, the Anisaei flew above the corporeal mist, and with their collective energy they whipped up the wind and blew the smog away. The humans, wheezing and coughing, were preoccupied with keeping themselves alive. Once the dust cleared, the vampires led a swift ambush. But soon after, fresh transport tankers flew in with reinforcements and more fighters. They blasted away at the vampires, burning them and chasing them as they ran and flew away, attempting to escape their deaths. Victory belonged to the humans.

What was I thinking! Alex rushed into the icy depths of the rough ocean to save Justus, but he figured by now he must have drowned. The water numbed his body until he felt nothing. There was no sensation, no pain, nor any thought of pain. He found that with his new temporary powers he did not need to hold his breath. He just swam, breathing in the water and expelling it out, his nasal system acting like gills to a fish.

Justus! Where the heck are you? He was agitated and worried for the soldier. It was someone he didn’t even know, but someone who had risked their life for him.

A very icy chill went up Alex’s spine as he felt something squirmy pass by his legs. This was the first time he had been in the ocean and he had heard stories as a child of monsters in the sea. Could this be one of those monsters? He shuddered, afraid to look. He wanted to swim away as fast as he could. But something in him stopped and made him turn around.

And when he did, he turned a deadly pale color. He saw a large black, lidless eye staring at him, and he had the feeling that the stare was one of hunger. As he swam back, mesmerized by the eye, he saw that it belonged to a gigantic squid. Its tentacles thrashed around in the water making it difficult for Alex to get away. He realized that the beast was pulling him towards it. Then he saw what had become of Justus.

The poor man had been taken by the creature. His neck was dislocated and his eyes were looking upward. His
mouth was drooling and opened and his body was mangled in an unnatural position. He was utterly crushed and his body shook from the force of the tentacle that held him firmly. Alex wanted to yell, to get out and swim away, but he also wanted to destroy the beast and avenge the death of what would be the forgotten brave. And so, he kicked the eye of the monster.

The vampires on the main landing area were taken care of. The Rebels proved to be unbeatable with their silver bodies and sword mastery. “Well,” Orwen said as they landed softly on the ground, all looking out to sea, “that’s the last of them.”

“Not yet,” Davik said, as he pointed to the bodies of the slaughtered humans. They would have to disintegrate them totally before the bodies became possessed by the disease and will of the vampires.

“What about Alex?” Orwen said.

“Hey!” John’s voice called out, as he heaved himself forward, holding on to his ruptured shoulder. “You all okay?” he asked them. They nodded. He looked around for Alex but could not find him.

“He’s gone down,” Gavin said, “to save someone.”

“What?” John yelled, “How could you let him?”

Just behind him, Richard and the others ran towards them. “What’s happened?” Richard asked.

“They left my nephew in the bloody water!” John yelled.

The tentacles wrapped forcefully around Alex, rendering him helpless. He yelled out in pain and concentrated his energy towards the eye. After a few seconds, the tentacles blew apart from the force of his will. He slashed the eye with his sword, causing the squid to toss him out of the sea.

Alex crashed to the ground at John’s feet. “Alex!” shouted John. He took his nephew by the shoulder and stood him up. “Are you alright?”

“Don’t worry about me,” Alex said in a daze, “I wanted to help Justus, but he’s dead.”

“What? What happened?”

“A vampire left him in the sea and a giant squid killed him.”

Just then, a hollow, deep bass groan came through the waves of the ocean and a set of large tentacles smashed onto the floor. They jumped back.

John had only ever heard of such a creature in stories. But he knew this mutation resulted from nuclear waste. “Forget it!” he said. “Let’s just get into the ship.”

“What about Nick?” Alex asked.

“I’m going back there to help him.”

“I’m coming with you,” Alex said.

“No!” John yelled, “You have to get back to the Regnum, safe and sound. Stay with these men. Go!”

The transport ship landed and Hektor pulled Alex towards it. They boarded it and, just before the entrance sealed shut, it took off into the sky.

The night grew darker and the skies over the Vatican and its neighboring forest were filled with stars. On a clear night such as this, one could see the spherical body of the Regnum eclipsing the bright full moon.

The General and his men were now inside the Vatican fighting the guards. Suddenly, General Chang and General Nakashima charged out with their men. The arrival of the reinforcements made the vampires panic. They ran for cover. The fighters attacked them with greater effort, further reducing their numbers.

“Great work, team,” Singh said, as he shot a vampire who immediately crumbled with the force of the silver nitrate. He turned to Evan and said, “Activate the sound.” Evan nodded and pushed a button on the edge of his metallic glove, and a frequency emanated from Evan’s entire armor. Every single vampire in a fifteen mile radius fell down on their knees, begging for the sound to stop. The humans couldn’t hear anything, as the frequency was so low that it could be heard only by hypersensitive ears. Ranjit approached one of the vampires who covered his ears and eyed the general with spite. “Tell us, where we can find the main computer database,” said Singh.

The vampire spat blood into his face, “Turn it off!” he yelled, “And I’ll tell you.”

“Tell me and I’ll turn it off!” Ranjit yelled back.

“No one is allowed inside. There is a code for it. Please,” tears of blood flowed down from his eyes, “Just turn the damn noise off.”

Ranjit signaled the order, and a reluctant looking Evan pressed the same button. The noise stopped immediately.

“Now tell us. Where can we find the database?”

The vampire, his long hair matted with blood, breathed heavily and paused, “We cannot tell you. It is forbidden.”

“Don’t fool with me!” Ranjit yelled, pushing his sword towards the vampire’s throat.
The pain burned through his skin and he let out a squeal. “Don’t kill me!” he tried to push away Ranjit’s hand, “I’ll tell you.” The other vampires stared at him and prepared to strike. The humans created a circle around the vampire and Ranjit.

“You will help me,” Ranjit said softly. “Lead me to the library database. If you are useful, we might spare your life.”

“Alright, follow me.” He got on his feet and gestured for the humans to follow.

General Singh said in a loud voice, “If anyone is to follow us or try to attack, you know what will happen.”

The vampires glared and hissed at them.

John ran towards the entrance and a large tentacle smacked him hard on the back. The tentacle left some kind of powerful irritant on his skin causing him to cry out. He cursed wildly under his breath and in his anger sliced off the tentacle and hacked away at the remains.

The squid’s large tubular head protruded out of the water. One of its eyes bled and the other glared at John as if it was hungry for human flesh. He didn’t fancy sticking around to fight, but realized he had no other choice. He decided to call for a fighter.

*****

“I should have known you would do something like this,” Erik said, biding his time.

Nikolas smirked. “Now you see your flaw, don’t you? Do you really think I would join a man who would kill his own son... a man so hungry for power that he would think of sacrificing his own grandson?”

Liam and Dante stood near them. The guards in the chamber were reduced to ash and there seemed to be no more on the way. Daniel remained on the floor and bled profusely. He watched Nikolas and Erik with one eye open. No way was he going to leave anyone alive, especially that brat cousin of his.

Erik suddenly disappeared and reappeared behind Nikolas, but Liam spotted him and shoved him aside.

“No,” Nikolas said, “Leave him to me. I want to enjoy killing him with my own hands.” He threw a fairly small but powerful green energy ball towards him that blasted him through the steel wall. As the smoke drifted away, they saw Erik still standing, his clothes shredded by the impact. Erik threw his sword like a boomerang at Nikolas. It missed its target by two inches and returned to its owner. “Don’t pull your tricks on me, vizier!” Nikolas flew straight for him, smashing him into the wall and creating cracks around the room.

Daniel stood up with blood still flowing from him. “You cannot escape,” he croaked. “I won’t let you.”

“Back down, Gareng. It is too late,” Dante took his sword and pointed it at him.

Daniel screamed and let out a destructive burst of energy, “I won’t let you!”

Nikolas landed on the floor. “Son, give it up,” he said. “Either let us go, or join us.”

“How could you?” said Daniel, tears of blood flowing from his eyes.

“I had to,” Nikolas said.

Erik collapsed with a fractured skull and slipped into unconsciousness, blood flowing out the back of his head.

The battle in Morocco was over. Hopkinson and the two hundred and thirty soldiers that were left rested themselves on the floor, exhausted. Some drank alcoholic remedies to ease the pain of their wounds. Others helped the wounded. George sat there with a cigarette in his mouth and observed the blood soaked sand that stretched for miles around.

The vampire base had been totally destroyed by the fighters. They had all been killed before they could call for backup. Ted and his squadron members, landed on the ash-stained bloody plain. “Well,” he said to George as he took a cigarette from him, “What’s the latest from the others?”


“No word.”

John’s voice came through all their communicators. “All units to the Atlantic. I repeat all units to the Atlantic. Stop whatever you’re doing and come here now! We need major backup and now’s the time to destroy this base!”

“Copy that,” everyone said in unison.

George sighed. No rest for the weary.

Romsky and his men reached the base and the aerial fighters gunned down whatever was left of it. His men surrounded the remaining vampires, “It’s over,” the general said.

“No!” The vampiric general spat. He was seven feet tall, weighed four hundred pounds, and wore no armor. His dark, maroon hair flowed in the icy wind and he bared his fangs as he smirked viciously. “In the next five minutes, fresh soldiers will arrive and you’ll be dead.”
“I doubt it. My fighters have probably already killed them en route.”

As he said this he looked up to see twenty fighters circling in the sky. “So I suggest you surrender and tell all
ground and air fighters to stop. Tell them you’ve won.”

“No. I will not bow down to such scum!”

John’s voice came through the communicators, sending out a message to Romsky and his men. “Copy that,”
Romsky whispered and then said to the vampire, “I guess you’ll have it your way then,” he turned around and went
to the back of the army, “Kill them,” he said softly to his units through the communicator, “leave none alive.”

“Ranjit,” John said, “What’s the situation?” His voice was coarse from screaming. Ranjit could hear massive
thuds and whipping sounds.

“We’re reaching the database. We’ve got one hostage and he’s going to take us in. When the files have been
transferred and we’re out of there, I’ll let you know.”

“All right, over and out.” The frequency switched off.

“Now,” Ranjit said, “wear these.” He handed the vampire two ear-pieces.

“What’s this?”

“Just wear them; they will block out the sound.”

The vampire laughed in disbelief.

“Wear them, damn it! They have been specially modified to block out the frequency but still allow you to hear us.
Now just wear them!”

The vampire did as he was told and Evan flipped the switch. “That should stop any distraction,” he said.

They walked into a vast hall with shelves crammed to the ceiling with dusty old tomes. There were honeycomb
shaped compartments stuffed with codices and scrolls older than any civilization on the Earth. The General and his
men felt disheartened to know they would be destroying such a precious place. But they also knew they would be
preserving all the important information digitally.

At the end of the hall was a metal door that required a coded entry with vampiric blood and a retinal scan. No
ordinary vampire was allowed entry, unless he had prior permission. In this case, there was no one to give that
permission and so the abandoned area was free to them. “Here,” the vampire said.

“Give the passwords and whatever’s necessary.”

“Nothing is required.”

“Just wear them; they will block out the sound.”

The vampire laughed in disbelief.

“Wear them, damn it! They have been specially modified to block out the frequency but still allow you to hear us.
Now just wear them!”

The vampire did as he was told and Evan flipped the switch. “That should stop any distraction,” he said.

They walked into a vast hall with shelves crammed to the ceiling with dusty old tomes. There were honeycomb
shaped compartments stuffed with codices and scrolls older than any civilization on the Earth. The General and his
men felt disheartened to know they would be destroying such a precious place. But they also knew they would be
preserving all the important information digitally.

At the end of the hall was a metal door that required a coded entry with vampiric blood and a retinal scan. No
ordinary vampire was allowed entry, unless he had prior permission. In this case, there was no one to give that
permission and so the abandoned area was free to them. “Here,” the vampire said.

“Give the passwords and whatever’s necessary.”

“Nothing is required.”

“You take me to be a fool?” Ranjit said harshly, slapping him across the face. “Now do as I say and open the
damn door!” The vampire said nothing and did nothing. “I said OPEN IT!”

He shook his head and spat at him. “No. What will you do?”

“You think we’re not prepared?” said Ranjit. He nodded to Evan who deactivated the earpieces. The vampire
immediately covered his ears and his face creased and twisted. His mouth opened but nothing came out. The pain in
his ears was so horrible that he couldn’t even scream. He grabbed Ranjit’s shoulder, then fell down and thrashed and
rolled around on the floor. “That’s enough.” Ranjit said.

As soon as Evan reactivated the earpieces, the vampire’s facial contortions stopped. He gasped as the pain left.

“So,” Ranjit went on, “Are you helping or not?”

His blood red eyes looked at the General fiercely, and he nodded rapidly. “Yes, yes,” he said in a choked voice.

He got to his feet and went to the door where he pricked his finger on an electronic pin. The first metal door opened.
Then came the retina check. It took a few seconds. Then, a digital voice said, “Access Granted.”

The door slid up and they went inside. In the center of the relatively small white room, a large two ton computer
that stored all the information stood. They saw that this computer connected to a network of smaller mini-computers.
Evan went to work quickly. He sat down at the table and a touch-sensitive holoscreen appeared. These computers
were in fact holodrives, or rather fiber optic holographic drives. Evan knew they were much faster and capable of
storing hundreds of exabytes of information per second. They contained all the information in the library. The screen
turned on and it asked for a password. “What is it?” he asked the vampire. “What’s the password?”

“I don’t know,” the vampire said. “Honesty.”

Singh asked. “Who does?”

“The one who has access to the computer is the master of the library. His name is Serayk.” The vampire said,

“Where is this Serayk?” Ranjit asked.

“The vampire shook his head, “I don’t know. He might have escaped.”

“Liar!”

“I’m telling you the truth.” The vampire said. “I have no idea what the password is.”

“Not to worry. We can hack into it,” Evan said, already trying his luck. “There must be a way.”
“Who is Serayk? Where is he?” Ranjit said, his dark eyes glinting and piercing the vampire’s.

“He...”

“Tell me!” Ranjit said.

“He is at the Council.”


“The Council of Elders. We were warned by them about this and we took precautions. So he was commandned to be with them.”

“And where are they now?”

“No one but Regent Erik and President Daniel know at any time where the Council is. They keep moving from place to place, sometimes leaving their subjects uninformed, so that no one will keep a watch.”

“Did he tell you where he was going?”

“He was forbidden to tell us.”

“Oh, so he tells you he’s going to meet the Council but you don’t know where.”

“Yes. It’s the truth!”

Ranjit shrugged and sighed heavily. “What can we do?”

The beast spread its tentacles and John could make out its circular jaws and spiral teeth. From its mouth the squid spewed out dark acidic ink. It burned through the ground and gave off a foul odor. “Bill,” John said, constantly dodging the tentacles and acid, “Where are you?”

A plasma beam hit the beast in the back of its head. John saw Bill’s fighter pass by him.

“I’m right here!” Bill shouted and a large group of fighters followed him. He laughed and said, “Go and get your men. We’ll take care of this.”

John ran into the base and Bill and his squadron kept shooting at the monster that growled in pain and spat acid towards some ships. Bill flew into the mouth of the beast, launched a timed missile and sped back out. His squadron covered him constantly firing rounds of plasma beams that burned through the pinkish gray tentacles. The squid fell back and exploded from within the ocean waves, dirtying the landing pad of CCC1 with black ink, rubbery flesh, and blood.

In the elevator, John got a message from Ranjit, “John, we got a problem.”

“What’s the matter?”

“This computer’s got a password and obviously only one of them knows it. The vamp with me tells me that the guy isn’t around. What do I do?”

“Isn’t there anyway to crack it?”

“Evan’s trying some passwords and he has another three tries before it goes into total lockdown.”

Just like the Inner Chamber, John thought; “Okay. What’s he tried so far?”

“Let’s see...Anaxagoras, Anu-Sa-Rimh, Gareng, even Aidan. But none of them have worked.”

“Are there any inscriptions anywhere?”

“Well...” Ranjit looked around and saw that there were hundreds of tiny, almost unnoticeable inscriptions on the table. “Yeah, I can see them. There are so many!”

The elevator opened and John stayed inside, waiting. “Okay. What language?”

“Uh, well...there’s Arabic or Urdu, I’m not sure. There’s Hebrew, oh wait! There’s Gurmukhi.”

“So you can read it?” John asked, hearing shouts coming from the hall across from the elevator.

“Yeah, it says...it spells out Abiskoji-Astur. What the hell does that mean?”

“No idea. It must be some Migritic term.”

“Yeah, I guess. So, is that the password?”

“Yeah. You see, they usually have reminders or hints for passwords, for those who know where to look. They are easily traceable only by vampires.”

“Well, I’m not one,” Ranjit said defensively.

“No, I didn’t mean that. Sometimes those who need to find them do; it’s some incantation which allows only the user to find it quickly; otherwise you have to scrutinize, because the inscriptions are either too small or intricately joined together.”

“Yeah, you’re right. The Aramaic and Sanskrit are joined together.”

“There...you see. Well, try it.” There was a pause and then:

“Yeah! It’s worked.”

“Good. Now comes the final phase. Over and out,” John quickly shut off the frequency of his earpiece and ran towards the ongoing battle outside the elevator.
He saw Daniel drenched in blood. He was reaching for his father and saying, “What would you have me do?”
Erik’s body had been smashed into the steel wall. Dante and Liam remained and were watching this exchange
between father and son.
“What the hell’s going on here?”
“I need blood,” Daniel said to his father weakly.
“Nikolas, what’s going on?”
Nick looked at John and closed his eyes, “John, what if I was to tell you Daniel wants to join us?”
“Can you trust him?” John asked.
“He’s my son,” Nikolas said simply.
“I still don’t trust him,” Dante said.
“Please, Father,” Daniel said. His bloody tears streamed down his cheeks. “You know I will be executed for this. I
have no other choice but to join you.”
“And how can we trust you? You betrayed your own father in the first Rebellion,” John said.
“So has my father; he’s played the double-agent for a long time. What about that?”
“I trust Nikolas with my life.”
Daniel’s face fell. He went down on his knees and cried out loud. Nikolas couldn’t handle it. He spoke to John in
his mind. “He’s my son.”
“I know that,” John responded with his mind.
“Let’s give him a chance. I think we can trust him.”
“And if the Regnumites don’t?”
“We will see to that.”
“Alright,” John sighed aloud. “You have your chance,” he said to Daniel. “Don’t blow it.”
Daniel stood up slowly. A shy smile appeared on his face, and he bowed his head. “Thank you.”
“Come on. We haven’t much time,” John said. “The reinforcements will be coming soon and they’re going to
blow this place up.”

“Okay, I’ve started the transfer process. All we do now is wait.” Evan said, his fingers typing rapidly on the
screen.
“Will we have enough discs?”
“Yeah,” Evan said to Ranjit, turning to face the vampire. “What’s the size of each hard drive?”
The vampire slouched on the floor, a broken man. “Each holodrive is about four hundred yottabytes.”
Evan got up and looked at the mini-computers, which were connected to the main CPU of the monitor. He
inspected them closely.
“What are you doing?” Ranjit said.
“Just trying to find a latch...ah!” He unlocked it and slid the cover up. The box contained one hundred mini-
drives, each one four hundred yottabytes. Evan counted. There were, two hundred and fifty such boxes totaling ten
million yottabytes worth of information!
He inspected the number of discs he had. There were not enough. He shook his head in disappointment. “I don’t
think so.”
“What?” Ranjit said, surprised. “Well, how much will be required?”
“We have two hundred discs. That means we have twenty thousand yottabytes. That’s not enough.”
“Then,” Ranjit sighed, “there’s only one thing we can do.”

Daniel ran along with the others but collapsed as soon as they got outside. There were hundreds of fighters flying
around, shooting at vampire fighters and firing missiles at the base. The base imploded and shook the ground.
“John, wait!” Nikolas shouted after his friends who were about to get into one of the tankers.
John turned around to see Nikolas with Daniel in his arms.
“He needs blood.”
“Well, then give it to him inside!” John said.
All around them, fighters shooting lasers scurried about like deadly locusts. Some collided with each other and
others crashed into the base. Kurt and his men were like a pack of wolves, ferocious, eager to kill, but wild and
savage, undisciplined.
A tanker landed near the base and four soldiers helped John and the rest inside. Daniel hyperventilated. “Will he
make it?” John asked, surprised by his own question. Daniel’s face was whiter than chalk. His eyes faded to an
opaque milky color.
Nikolas took his sword, made a small incision on his wrist, and squeezed his arm to make the blood flow. He put
his wrist to Daniel’s mouth. “Yes,” Nikolas said silently, as the others looked on. “Feed as much as you want and regain your strength, my son. You will need it.” Daniel slurped the blood hungrily and veins bulged out on his face. His fangs protruded out of his gums as he greedily bit into the wrist and sucked as much of the life-fluid as he could. His face regained a pinkish hue and his eyes turned a dark, golden color. He pulled away and let out a majestic roar. Nikolas sat down on the ground. Most of his color faded from his face and his lips turned ashen gray and dried. He moaned silently.

Daniel said, “Father, I’ll give you some back.” He bit into his forearm and squeezed it until twelve drops entered his father’s mouth. The humans on the tanker, although fascinated, were forced to look away in disgust. John was used to it and said nothing. He stood up and gestured the other Rebels to come and see him, away from the others.

When they were alone and out of earshot John said, “How can we trust Daniel?” Liam said, “If we cannot, then we must trust Nikolas. He should be Nikolas’s responsibility.” “But if Daniel does anything wrong, people will blame Nick and they may banish him,” Dante said. “They can’t do that,” John said, his eyes constantly on the Gareng kid. “Nick’s the founder of this whole thing.” He shook his head. “We will have to experiment and wait it out.” He sighed.

“At what cost,” Dante said. “We can’t afford to use anyone as bait!”

“No one needs to know about it,” John said. “Don’t worry; I’ll deal with it. Besides, with him on our side, we’re sure to learn some secrets.”

“John,” Ranjit’s voice came through his earpiece, “We’re finished.”

Really? That’s great! So you managed to do it without much trouble.”

“Well, the trouble is we haven’t enough discs, so…”

“So?”

“So, we decided to shift the hard drives to the tankers.”

John laughed. “Good Ranjit. You always have a trick or two up your sleeve!”

The tankers arrived at the Vatican Library and bulldozers were sent through so that the transportation process would be streamlined. All this while, as the loading and unloading continued, the button Evan had pressed was still on. The loading crew laughed when they saw the vampires suffering on their behalf. Ranjit felt a little remorse for what he had done and what he was doing. He asked himself if it was all worth it. Were they any better than their enemies? “I’m going outside,” he murmured to Evan. He didn’t wait for any response, but strolled into the forest, far from anyone or anything. He wanted to be alone, to think things through.

Why did he think like this? What was good? What was evil? Was this an evil that they were doing? What he had seen...his men laughing at the vampires suffering. They were behaving like merciless Nazis. Did that make him one too? A Nazi following another power-hungry Hitler: John Howe! In fact, wasn’t it John who had said that he would be remembered as a power-hungry dictator, just like Hitler? Okay, so this time it was different. Instead of fighting their fellow man they were fighting an alien race. But wasn’t fighting a race from another planet just another extension of their ethnic prejudice?

Ranjit shook his head and sat on his knees in the moist grass, the pale outline of the Regnum high above his head. “General?” Evan said softly. “I’ve shut off the frequency switch. Don’t worry; they’re too numbed to do anything for the next hour. We’ll be gone by then.” He was now a foot away from Ranjit. “General Singh? Are you okay?” Ranjit remained silent, praying. Evan continued. “That other vampire who helped us can’t attack; we bound his hands in semisilver chains. He won’t dare to move.” Again silence. “General!” Evan remained silent for a few more seconds, and said plainly, “Sir, we must board the tankers. Everything is ready.” Still, no reply. “Sir! Watch out!” Evan shouted. Ranjit opened his eyes and saw a dark figure emerging from the wild grass. The vampire moved swiftly and waved his sword around and stabbed Ranjit’s chest.

“Oh, God. You are great! Protect them and see to the righteous!” were his last words before he collapsed. Evan drew his plasma pistol to blow the head off the masked assassin, who burned up into a heap of ash.

“Sir!” Evan shouted, shaking him and trying to get a response from him. But there was nothing. Only dead eyes looking at him with compassion.

The general’s face was blank but peaceful. A subtle smile rested on his lips.
Chapter Ten

Clash

The ship descended.
Alex knew things had changed and that they were going to change some more. He wondered about Angel and her parents. He was sure they would be apprehensive after the events that had unfolded. He thought of Grandma. What was going to happen to her? He was still running the events of yesterday and today through his head.

The massive tanker hauled itself into the Hangar. Once it was on the ground, hundreds of soldiers ran towards the tanker, searching around for their friends, hoping they had made it through and were safe and unharmed.

Alex was the first to get off. The Rebels followed with Richard and finally the rest of them. When Alex and the Rebels were off, there was no commotion whatsoever. Everyone stared at them as if they were unwanted. Richard, seeing their reaction, said loudly, “Is that anyway to welcome back the Falsifier?”

“Relax,” Alex said, already knowing that the people were apprehensive, “I won’t bite and neither will they. I trust my life with these men, all of them, man or vampire! And I suggest you do the same.” That was the usual Alexander they knew; a dynamic, charismatic leader who would “suggest” rather than dictate. Alex had a way with people and with words.

“Let me introduce you to those you don’t know,” Richard added. He presented each vampire, one by one. Each one of them gave a bow, or a smile, or a wave. As he finished he said, “And of course there is the infamous Nikolas Gareng, Dante Varenkoff, and Liam Tios. But more of them later.”

To say it was awkward would have been an understatement. The backup units wanted to celebrate with their friends, and celebrate they would, but they had not expected vampires to be amongst them.

When the Generals came to greet the survivors, they warmly embraced the Rebels like old friends. Seeing this, the new soldiers thawed a bit. After saluting the Generals, they tended to those who were wounded and escorted them to the hospital.

The second tanker with John and the others inside arrived. As it landed, there was a new burst of cheering. Alex watched the newly arrived mega-ship with wonder and curiosity. The whole vibe of celebration had got to him and put his worries to the back of his mind. John came out, then Nikolas, and the other two Rebels followed by the soldiers.

“Uncle John,” Alex called out as soon as he saw him. He wanted to unleash his thoughts, but he knew now was not the time. He simply hugged him and said, “I know about Grandma.”

“Alex,” Nikolas shouted, as he finished chatting with one of the Generals, “You were brilliant out there, I heard!”

“Thanks!” Alex said and embraced Nikolas. They seemed rejuvenated by the buzzing energy.


“No one.” Alex smiled. “I knew it; intuition I guess.”

“But how? This change is so sudden.” John faced Nikolas and the others.

“We’ll talk about it, old friend. We have lots to talk about,” Nikolas said with a wide smile. “But for now; let us enjoy this day.”

“Wait, I almost forgot,” John said, noticing the physical change in Nikolas due to the blood that he had lost. “Where’s Daniel?”

“I told him to wait. I don’t think the people are ready. Let everything calm down and we will introduce him.”

“What? He’s here?” Alex said, while the other Rebels and Richard looked at the four in amazement and confusion. He turned to Nikolas for an explanation, but instead Dante spoke:

“Alex, he has decided to join us.”

Alex’s face reddened with anger. “I don’t like the look of it. I know that he’s your son, but he’s an Imperial vampire. He’s the president of that Regime for God’s sake!”

“What do you have in mind?” John asked.

Alex furrowed his brow as he thought. Everyone circled around him, waiting for his response. He sighed, “I’m not so sure about him. He just gives me a bad feeling. I know that he betrayed the Regime, but that doesn’t really mean anything.” He shook his head. “I think we better handle him with care.”
“And what would you suggest?” Nick said. He was not angry, but a little worried. “Should we keep him as a prisoner for the time being?”

“Yes.” Alex said, “Keep him as a prisoner of war. We’ll have to test him.”

“So then bind him,” John said gruffly. “Richard, take these,” he handed him a pair of silver handcuffs, “and put them on him.”

Richard did as he was told and went quietly. Nick flinched as he passed and remained silent.

As the third tanker flew into the Hangar and slowly landed, John turned to see which one it was. “The Vatican,” was all he said and ran to it, hungry for news.

Michio, Chang, and Evan came out, with grief-stricken faces. John knew at once what had occurred. “Well,” he said, “Did it work?”

Evan nodded. “We have the holodrives with us.”

“And the enemy?”

“Destroyed,” Michio said, “All of them, along with the library.”

John nodded, “Where’s Ranjit,” he asked, guessing what had happened by the look on their faces. The reserve soldiers talked among themselves, curious to know where their pals were. Then, the electromagnetically levitating coffin came out of the tanker with the soldiers following it. Ranjit was inside, with his sword on top of him. The men looked on in horror and complete surprise. “What happened?” John asked, controlling his grief.

“He went alone into the forest, to pray I suppose, and a vamp stabbed him in the heart.”

“You were supposed to stick together,” said John, a little angry. “What about the frequency?”

“I shut it off. The vamps were down, unable to move.”

“Well it doesn’t seem like it, does it?”

Suddenly, there was an explosion from the entrance of John’s tanker. Richard fell towards Dante who was closest to the ship. Blood covered Richard’s face.

Daniel flew out with an aura of red and black electricity around him. His hair flew in all directions as if he was a madman, and he rocketed into the air. His face darkened and his eyes turned the bloodiest of red.

“Oh, cousin!” Daniel shrieked at Alex. He stuck out his tongue and taunted him like a demon.

“I can’t fight him,” Alex said, as Nikolas pushed him forward.

“Neither can I; how do you expect me to kill my own son?”

Reluctantly, Alex materialized his sword. It glistened with blue electric sparks, brighter than ever before. Everyone stared at it with their mouths open in awe. Daniel materialized his own sword. It crackled with black and crimson electricity, more dangerous and daring.

“I want you, Falsifier!” Daniel said, his eyes glistening with blood, his face now more demonic than ever. His eyebrows slanted angrily and his cheekbones heightened. His nose grew much longer than before. The chin and ears were sharply pointed. He seemed to have spawned from hell.

The crowd backed away, giving space to the two challengers.

“Don’t do this, Daniel,” Alex said calmly, as he walked closer to him. A faint aura surrounded Alex. Daniel’s aura was the same color as his sword and was constantly increasing in size and intensity. The closer he tried to walk, the farther away Daniel moved. He was afraid. “You don’t need to fight; we don’t have to resolve it this way.” Just then, he felt as if a hammer had struck him right on top of the head. He fell to the floor in pain.

Daniel laughed, “What’s the matter, Falsifier?”

“Uncle John, it’s grandma; she’s dying!” He groped at his chest and began to shake uncontrollably.

Just then, John got a message on his nanophone. Andrew appeared on the hologram in front of him and said, “Sir, Dr. Wallace is on the line. He says your mother’s having an attack.”

“I’ll be there!” John said and looked back at Alex. He wanted to help his nephew but something told him he would be fine. “Make sure no one gets close to them,” he said to Richard and Nikolas. “I will not have any more deaths today!” He left.

Alex closed his eyes. He saw his grandmother. Her eyes were closed but he could feel her heart beating fast. She was suffering.

Daniel, looking at his father and the rest, gave them a bitter smile, showing his large fangs. He flung his sword towards Alex. But Alex backed away just in time. He grabbed the sword by its handle before it went back to its master and he threw it at Daniel. Daniel laughed and gloated and didn’t sense the danger. His own sword plunged into his body and he groaned in agony.

_I have to stop this_, thought Alex. _I need to control this power before it kills me, before it takes over and kills everyone_. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and cleared his mind. He opened his eyes slowly and exhaled. Then he smiled at his impaled enemy. Daniel pulled the sword out of himself and rushed towards Alex. Before Daniel could attack, Alex disappeared, teleported behind him, and threw a blue fiery energy ball at him, knocking
him to the floor.

The Rebels sensed the energy around them, pure and potent from Alex and wild and uncontrolled from Daniel. Daniel lay there, recharging his energy. Alex let him. He could have simply killed him there and then but he didn’t and it made him wonder why.

John ran into the hallway. Four doctors and half a dozen nurses rushed in and out with medical equipment and shouted frenzied orders. John pushed his way through to see his mother lying completely immobile on her hospital bed. He looked at the EEG and the ECG monitors. There were sharp dips and spikes in the graphs.

A doctor stepped in front of him, his face barely centimeters away. He smelled of tobacco and dried fish.

“Get away from me,” John said, shoving him aside.

“The hell you do! She’s my mother and I’ll be with her whether you like it or not.”

“Sir,” said a nurse behind him, “We really do need you to be outside!” John scowled at the doctor. He turned around to walk away. The computers made a faint but monotonous droning sound, which brought chills up his back.

No! It couldn’t be!

It was confirmed by a voice, “We’ve lost her.”

Alex felt his heart had fallen into a bottomless pit. She was dead! He could feel her soul leave the body. He wanted to cry, to do something, but he had to concentrate on Daniel. “Grandma!” he said softly, “Don’t leave us.” He felt her presence around him.

Daniel had gathered plenty of energy now. He grinned at Alex, trying to taunt him.

“You have yet to do something, I know it; I can feel it.”

“No. You have yet to do something. I know it; I can feel it.”

“I’m not strong enough, now, child.”

“You don’t need to be strong. You just need to be alive.”

Daniel created a massive energy ball in his right hand. The whirring of the energy was humanly audible now, which meant it would be a massive blow. The vampires could feel Daniel’s raw wrath.

“Now that I am gone, someone else will take my place,” said Alex’s grandmother.

“I won’t have it!” he said angrily. She was farther away now, “No! Don’t go!” But it was too late.

John grabbed the doctor by the collar. His eyes filled with hot spiteful tears and his face shook vigorously. “Do something!”

The doctor said nothing. His blood boiled. He stepped away and said, “I told you! There’s nothing we can do.” He stormed out of the room.

John went to his mother and the others left him alone. He laid his head on her hand and cried. Rage took over from grief and he began to smash all the damn machines in the room. None of them could save her, so what the hell use were they? He punched and kicked them and threw them around the room. Once on the floor, he crushed them with the soles of his feet. He yelled curses and flung everything within reach, vandalizing the entire room. No one was around in the hall. They were all so afraid that they left the ward. John suddenly fell to his knees and then onto one side where he bent double in pain. His stomach and throat burned like hot coal. He took out a handkerchief as he coughed into it. The soft white silk was spattered with droplets of ruby red blood.

Alex hovered in the air. He was aware of the energy ball and waited for it to be blasted at him.

Daniel leaned back and threw the ball hard and fast at Alex. Alex put his hands forward and stopped it. The droning noise stopped simultaneously. He flung the ball ten meters away from him where it hovered in the air. Alex moved his right hand backward and then forward, causing the mass of energy to spin faster and faster and out into the vacuum of space, outside the Hangar. As it reached the speed of light, it collapsed in on itself and exploded like a small nuclear mushroom cloud.

Alex wielded his sword, swinging it to and fro. He smiled. Daniel attacked him and the swordfight began. In turn they led and followed each other, circling around as if dancing. The onlookers watched in amazement.

Sparks of steel flew everywhere and the quick crackling of electricity filled the air. The blue, red and black colors converged and created a bubble around the fighters. The floor lit up in a dazzling array of colored lightning. The audience suddenly levitated in the air, thanks to the vampires’ sudden reflexes. Dazed, confused, and scared they looked on.

A swirling mixture of hot and cold air could be felt, as though a tornado were approaching. The humans felt electricity on the minute hairs of their forearms. The Rebels suddenly lost their concentration and the humans fell to the floor. Luckily, the lightning on the floor disappeared. The two fighters locked swords again, creating another wave of lightning. Just before it reached the humans, they were levitated back in the air.

This new burst of energy instantly shut down the entire power supply of the Regnum.

John stood still as the lights flickered and then went out altogether. When his eyes adjusted, he groped for the
chair, and sat down, not knowing what to do. He yelled out, “Mom! Oh Mom!” He cried his heart out. How could this have happened!

Alex gritted his teeth. “Daniel,” he said through them, “let go of all this. I will allow you to go back safely, if you just agree to leave us alone!”

“You really think I would do that? You have too much mercy, Falsifier. That is your flaw.”

Alex released a spurt of extra strength and pushed him. “And stubbornness is yours!” He quickly shot six green energy balls at Daniel. The unleashed energy flew past its target and smashed a hole in the wall. Alex head butted Daniel in his chest. He grabbed his right arm and squeezed it tightly, until Daniel’s sword fell to the ground, making a crater. With his free hand Alex choked him.

He wrestled Daniel’s arm behind his back and threw him into space, away from the Regnum. He swung his sword at Daniel’s chest. Daniel used his will to pull his sword from the crater and into his hand and blocked. The impact created bursts of lightning and wild raging energy. As the swords locked, light came from each finger of Alex’s left hand. The small lights swirled and converged together creating one mass of energy. The mass collided with Daniel’s abdomen. In surprise, he let go of Alex, staring at the deadly energy touching him. I can’t, Alex thought.

You must, slithered a voice in his head. Do it!

No! He’s my blood, my cousin!

No! He screamed at the top of his lungs into the black emptiness that was peppered faintly with sparkles of diamond dust. But he could no longer hear or make any noise. Was he even alive?

No, he thought. This was space. The eternal.

Grandma! She was still there, suspended in limbo. She wasn’t fully gone yet. He could save her, bring her back. But he felt himself weak now. He was afraid. He had used all the strength that he gained on his first kill. This last thought lingered in his mind like a worm cut in half and still fighting for its life, before it faded into nothingness.

Enough! I have to try and get her back.

He flew to the Regnum, which now had its power reconnected. The lights had turned back on and there was life once again.

He floated down amongst the crowd. Seeing him slouching as he walked and with tears of blood flowing down his cheeks, they said nothing. Nikolas broke the silence. “It’s alright.”

Alex shook his head, knowing it wasn’t.

Nikolas embraced him and said, “I wouldn’t have been able to do it.”

“I...I killed someone?” He looked at his hands with disgust. “I killed him with these hands.”

Nikolas sighed, “We’ll talk about this later. It’s time we get you rested and cleaned up.”

“No! I have to go to Central Hospital!”
The doctors and nurses returned. They saw John sitting in the chair with his head in his hands; around him, chaos. “Sir, what is it we can do for you?” the doctor said, trying to keep his cool. This was after all the Supreme Leader.

“I want to see Dr. Wallace.”

“I am Dr. Wallace,” the doctor replied.

“Why couldn’t you have saved her? Who do you think you are, telling me she’s dead, telling me you can’t do anything about it? You’re a doctor!”

“Exactly. I am a doctor, but I am not a miracle-worker. Now I suggest you leave, before I call the authorities!”

“Do you know who I am?” John said getting up suddenly and making them jump. “I’m the Leader of this World. I am the authority of all authorities!”

The door banged open, almost splintered at the hinges. Alex entered, panting and tired. His face was sullen and black bags were forming under his eyes. “Wait! Everyone...” he was out of breath, “...remain calm.”

“Catch your breath, son,” John said, “Wouldn’t want to lose you to these frauds!”

“That’s quite enough, Mr. Howe!”

“You’re too late,” John continued, ignoring Wallace. “She’s gone,” he said silently. His hard, straight face, worn out by grief, made him look like he had aged another twenty years. “She’s gone, damn it!” he shouted, “Damn you all!” He jumped up and rushed to the doctor as though he was going to attack him.

“Uncle John!” Alex came between the doctor and his uncle, “Calm down. I can bring her back.”

“Oh, so we have another messiah-complex. Suffering from an unhealthy lack of humility,” said the doctor. “What do you think kid, that you’re the next Christ?”

“Listen,” said Alex. “I am warning you, before...”

“Like uncle, like nephew, I suppose.”

“Back off!” Alex said and hissed at him, suddenly showing his fangs. “Get out of my sight!”

Fearing for their lives, the entire team of medical personnel ran out. “Uncle John,” said Alex softly, “Just sit and relax. I have just enough energy to resurrect her. I need to, for all our sakes.”

“But how?” John asked, his voice like that of a child’s.

Alex shook his head. “No time to explain. For now, trust me.”

John sat down and let the heavy lids of his eyes close, as if he was falling asleep.

The door opened again and this time Richard and the twelve Rebels entered the room. “So?” Nick asked. He saw her corpse. He nodded slowly and went to John. “Don’t worry about a thing, old friend. We’ll bring her back. Or rather,” Nikolas watched as Alex joined the tips of his fingers to form a ball, “he will.”

Blue light emerged from within his hands and emanated a sense of peace and tranquility around. Alex breathed deeply, and exhaled slowly. He closed his eyes and went into a trance.

His consciousness was all that there was. Nothing more, nothing less. “Grandma,” he said, his voice echoing in the deep void of nothingness. What is this?

“This,” the familiar voice said, “is what we call limbo.” The voice was Grandma Howe’s. He could see himself as a spiritual body, floating in the void. His grandmother’s body materialized.

He embraced her and she kissed him on the cheek, “You don’t have to do this,” he said, holding her at arm’s length. “What about Uncle John?”

She sighed, “It will be painful to leave him, but leave I must.”

“But you have things you need to tell me and show me.”

“You father is the best person to show you.”

“I know you have something my father doesn’t, some secret knowledge. When I was in meditation, I saw you dying, I also saw Angel being murdered.”

“That is why I have to go, Alex.”

“What?” He furrowed his brow. “Look Grandma, I haven’t much time. My energy is waning and I want you alive again. What is it that’s bothering you?”
“Alex, if I don’t die, Angel will.”
“What? How will she die? From childbirth?”
“No. It will be as you saw in your vision.”
He remained quiet. His heart stopped. “What can I do to change all this?”
“I have decided for you, Alex. I am going for Angel’s sake.”
“Uncle John won’t be able to handle it. You have to stay longer; you have to come back.”
“And Angel? What about her life? My time has come. I am old and she is young. She is the mother of your child, Alex. And that child will be the continuation of your heritage.”
Alex shook his head. “My duty is not to extend, but to exterminate my line. That is what I was born to do.”
Grandma Howe squinted and shook her head. “There are still many things you have to learn, Alex.”
“And that is why you must stay alive; to teach me.”
She paused, took a deep breath and said, “I don’t know. The moment I wake up, Angel’s life will be in danger.”
“You don’t worry about that. I will deal with it.”
“You have no such power yet.”
“Then when I do, I will bring her back.”
“You can’t.”
“What do you mean I can’t? Of course I can.” He paused. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be arrogant.”
“It’s not that. There are bigger and more important things in the way.”
Suddenly his face brightened, “I have an idea. No one said you couldn’t be dead and alive at the same time.”
“What? What do you mean by that?”
“I figure as long as you’re not moving and up and alive, Angel won’t be in any trouble.”
“You’re thinking of fooling God? Are you serious?”
“No.”
“Of course he will know, but that’s the beauty of it. Since you will be immovable and not alive, as such, nothing can happen to Angel.”
“So what exactly are you saying?”
“I will bring you back, but not out of the coma. Then, I will be able to learn from you, you’ll still be alive, Uncle John will have some solace and Angel will be safe.”
There was a long moment of thoughtful silence. “It will work for some time, Alex, but destiny must take its course sooner or later.”
“Don’t worry about that. When the time comes, it will. Before that, you will have to teach me.”
“So be it,” she whispered.
Alex brought forth a great burst of pure white light with his hands. It hovered above him, then went above his grandmother, turning brighter and brighter until it clothed her with a radiant gown of pure energy. When Alex closed his eyes, he saw nothing but the darkness of his lids.
When he opened them, he was back.

“She’s alive,” Alex gasped. This had taken a lot from him. He gave the last of the energy left in his body to save his grandmother and now she was alive.
John turned to look at him and then at his mother, but there was no movement, “It’s alright, Alex. It’s alright. You tried.”
“I brought her back, but...but she’s still in a coma.”
“What?” Nikolas said, “If you could bring her back to life, bringing her out of a coma would have been easy.”
Alex felt like he was at a high altitude. His head felt extra light as if he were about to fall down. “Look, I need...I need to.” He didn’t want to speak and then he fell into the chair, as if he was way too tired. He blinked rapidly, his breath shortening. “I just need some rest.”
“We can’t let him slip away,” Nikolas said. He touched Alex’s chest, right where the heart was and tried to feed him more power.
A day passed, plus one more night. Alex slept for that passing time.
When he opened his eyes, his heart jumped in joy at seeing Angel. He smiled. Angel’s face calmed and soothed his senses. He felt refreshed. She smiled and touched his face. She knew what he was but that didn’t change her love for him. Nothing could do that. “Here,” she broke the silence, “take this,” she held a cup of coffee to his mouth. The fresh fragrance alone invigorated him.
“You’re alright!” he said, remembering. “Does that mean Grandma—”
“She’s fine,” Angel said. “You saved her.” Her eyes widened. “I have no idea how, but you did.”
“I don’t know either,” he said, shaking his head. He paused. “Are your parents okay?”
“There he is!” Nikolas said, suddenly entering the room. He saw Angel there. “Oh...uh...I guess...”
“No. Stay, it’s alright. This is Angel. Angel, General—”
Angel stood up and smiled. Nikolas returned the smile. “We’ve met,” she said.
“Oh, so you know,” he sighed, “I don’t know what to say.”
John came in. “Alex, you’re okay! My God, we were so worried.” He was full of life once again, knowing his mother was still alive. He hugged his nephew and swung him out of bed. “You’re amazing, you know that? Just like your father.”
Alex reddened as did the two onlookers. “It’s alright Uncle John. As long as everyone’s fine, I’m glad.”
“Come on,” he said, “Let’s get some breakfast.”

Angel, Alex, the Rebels, John, and Richard all breakfasted together at the Howe Estate. After the private celebrations the young couple left to be alone, to catch up on things. Alex stood at the balcony, taking in the fresh air and drinking his second cup of coffee. Angel sat on a rocking chair, looking at him. “What happened to your hearing aid?”

Alex smiled. “I don’t seem to need it anymore.”
“But the doctor said it’d never be the same again.”
“Well,” Alex shrugged his shoulders, “I guess modern medicine doesn’t have all the answers.” He rolled his eyes. “And I’m not exactly the average human patient now, am I?” He sighed. He knew that, for this reason, Angel’s parents would be dead against the wedding. “So,” he said, leaning on the railing of the balcony and looking out at the sun, “Now you know everything.”
She touched his arm. “Listen, it doesn’t matter. My parents are fine with it.”
“Don’t lie to me,” he said. “I’m not that daft.”
“What am I supposed to do?”
“What about the baby?”
“I don’t know.”
“It isn’t their choice.” He turned around, his eyes suddenly dark with anger.
“How are you doing that?”
“What?”
“Your eyes; they keep changing color.”
“It’s a vampire thing,” he said.
“There’s no—”
“No need to what? I can’t believe this. You’re going to abort our child. You want it, don’t you?”
She remained silent.
“You want it, right?”
“There’s more to it than that,” she said, her eyes glazed over.
“What? What more is there? You don’t want to be with the enemy.”
“It’s not that,” She said harshly, “I love you.”
“But not the baby. Damn it, this is another life we’re talking about! You cannot take it away. You don’t want it, give it to me! And back off, if you hate me.”
“I didn’t say that. Alex, my parents have told me everything. About the truth.”
“What truth?”
From inside someone cleared their throat, “Alex,” it was Uncle John.
“Angel.” He stepped out. It was obvious from his grave pallor that he heard portions of their conversation, “It’s time for the funeral.”
“Yes, Mr. Howe.” Angel got up and walked briskly in. Alex lingered there for a few seconds longer with John. He walked inside, not making any eye contact. “Alex,” John said. Alex stopped midway, silent. “Don’t worry kiddo. Everything is going to be okay.”
“I know,” he tried to smile.

One and a half million people were present for the state funeral of those who died. The casualties of the first battle of this war numbered to twenty one hundred soldiers, including General Ranjit Singh.
In the Regnum, funerals were dealt with in various ways according to religion and culture. But the most common way was cremation. The process for a normal funeral would go as such:
The family and friends of the deceased would stand around the fire waiting till it turned to ash. Then, the ash would be put into small rockets which would be launched into the sun.
This mass funeral was a big event, and one that was performed with extreme solemnity. Trumpets blew out
military theme tunes and the soldiers, standing at attention at Central Square, saluted the deceased by firing blank rounds every one minute. They held out their swords, in salute, as the pyres were lit. Ranjit’s was the last pyre to be lit. The ceremony was accompanied by four special funeral hymns. The hymns were in Sanskrit, English, Aramaic, and Latin. Four hundred choir singers accompanied the lead singer. A plaque had been prepared to place on the ground where the pyres were. The epitaph read, “This is to acknowledge the deaths of those who fought in the first battle of the War of Vengeance. May their lives and their valiance always remain in our hearts, and may we never forget their deep sacrifice.”

From a bird’s eye view, it was quite a spectacle. At home, TV viewers could see the great fires and the dense crowds gathered around them. These sacrifices would never go in vain, they knew. The funeral created a sense of purpose and pride.

John stood with Alex on his right, and the other delegates, and Nick on his left. The Rebels stood next to Nick. They intently observed the fire that would carry their fellow general’s soul into the Unknown. Nick held his hands over his heart, saying a mental prayer for the soul. Bloody tears about to burst could be seen in his eyes.

Alex saw this and felt the sudden pain and loss. His heart struck with the understanding that they stood at the dawn of a new age. He felt guilt for a number of things, including murdering his own cousin. He was sorry that so many had had to die for his sake. His heart ached to know what would happen next. He searched inside for some solace, as his eyes looked into Angel’s, who stood on the other side, tears streaming down her face. Finding no hope in himself, or in her, he looked up to God, and prayed. He didn’t pray for himself, but for those who had died for him and for those who had yet to do so.

The guilt subsided when John touched his shoulder. With one touch, he knew so many things. Times ahead would be tough, they would be overwhelming. Life was different now. His mind cried out for this sudden loss of normality, this sudden shift of reality. A new age had begun.

But that touch; it comforted him. He knew he was not alone.
The journey continues as Alex unravels the secrets of his heritage and ultimate destiny in...

RED SERPENT
The Prophet's Secrets

Look for it in all major bookstores from December 3rd 2010!
Table of Contents

The King’s Prologue
The General’s Prologue
Chapter One: Graduation
Chapter Two: Revelation
Chapter Three: Capture
Chapter Four: Changes
Chapter Five: Decisions
Chapter Six: Ultimatums
Chapter Seven: Elements
Chapter Eight: Preparations
Chapter Nine: Mission
Chapter Ten: Clash
Chapter Eleven: Aftermath