
Renaissance E Books
www.renebooks.com

Copyright ©

NOTICE: This work is copyrighted. It is licensed only for use by the original purchaser. Making copies of this work or distributing it to any unauthorized person by any means, including without limit email, floppy disk, file transfer, paper print out, or any other method constitutes a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines or imprisonment.

The Morgaine Chronicles
Book VIII
MORGAIN AND NICHOLAS

By

JOE VADALMA

ISBN 978-1-60089-065-9

All rights reserved

Copyright 2007 by Joe Vadalma

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission.

For information:

PageTurnerEditions.com

PageTurner Editions/A Futures-Past Fantasy

A Renaissance E Books publication

FIRST BOOK EDITION

MORGAINE'S LIFE SO FAR

Books One and Two. Morgaine and Michael and Morgaine and Melody

Melody Trent, an attractive modern woman, dreams of dancing nude in the woods. In her quest to discover the meaning of this strange vision, she falls under the spell of a mysterious astrologer and psychic, Michael Ellul. Her involvement with this enigmatic man leads her into a universe populated with eccentrics whose strange paranormal beliefs and customs include pagan ceremonies and erotic acts. Melody begins to suspect that is that Michael is not simply a rich and famous student of the occult, but is a thousand-year old sorcerer who has sold his soul to the devil. Michael's terrifying secrets are slowly revealed to her as she is enticed into his eerie and magical world by his uncanny ability to dominate her with his eyes. Soon she questions whether he truly loves her or with the aid of the flamboyant, sexy Morgaine Fabiano, a self-proclaimed witch, has lured her into his world to sacrifice her to an evil demon in an attempt to gain immortality. A fate that would make her the slave of the demon until the end of time.

Michael Ellul was born in the tenth century A.D. At the turn of the second millennium, as a knight he is stricken with fear and runs away from his first battle to become an outlaw. His overwhelming desire to become immortal leads him to a sorcerer who for a payment of ten years of service grants him a thousand years of life. Throughout the centuries, he tries to discover the secret behind his longevity. In modern times, he struggles with a demon while two beautiful women battle for his love.

Book Three. Morgaine and Raven

When Michael Ellul mysteriously disappears, Melody hires Raven Lenore, a tough young former cop, PI and modern witch, to find him. But, what starts out as an ordinary missing persons case soon turns out to be a dangerous game against mysterious demonic forces. During the investigation, Raven and Keith Borgenson (Raven's boy friend and partner) discover that two people committed suicide on the Ellul's estate, Michael Ellul's friend Lance Flebert is in an insane asylum and another friend, Jack Westcott is an alcoholic on the skids..

Morgaine returns to earth as Claudia Van Best from the Westchester Institute of the Occult, and the detectives are accosted by gunmen who question them about Westcott and Claudia. During a seance a channeled spirit warns of danger from an elemental. In Ellul's abandoned estate in the mountains, Raven finds a decomposed corpse and a computer printout that claims that Doctor Frankenstein was a real person. Claudia locks the detectives in Michael's laboratory, erases the file on the hard disk and absconds with the information.

A robot named Isaac chases the detectives into a labyrinth underground below Moonwood where they find a bloody altar surrounded by human bones. After the detectives escape, they fly to the site of the Frankenstein's ancestral home, where they find Frankenstein's secret journal, and Raven sees a dark winged shape fly across the moon. The trail leads to the Orkney Islands where Raven finds Michael but Keith and Isaac are kidnapped. Raven, Melody and Michael return to London, where Raven is abducted by the thugs who are after the robot. Major Bachman, their boss, and Raven find Doctor Dee's secret journal in a tomb. When Claudia shows up, Bachman trades Raven and the journal for the robot. As Claudia, Morgaine possesses Raven.

While being possessed Raven learns the true story of Morgaine, Michael and Melody. Under Morgaine's control, she meets the Elluls at Moonwood where Morgaine casts a spell that grant Melody eternal life and unknown to Michael, causes Morgaine spirit to enter Melody.

Books Four and Five. Morgaine and Gretchen and Morgaine and Asmodeus

Denise Fabiano, a five-year-old girl, lives with her mother and her grandfather, Papa Joe, in an ancient farmhouse in the Catskill mountains. Papa Joe is a storyteller who amuses Denise with fabulous tales of fairies, gremlins, sorcerers and pirates. One stormy night Papa Joe tells her the story of Rip Van Winkle. At the end, he says, "When there's thunder and lightning in the mountains with no rain, that means that Henry Hudson and his men are bowling. Fairies and other odd folk also live in these woods. When you see tiny lights blinking on and off in the forest, those are fairies carrying lanterns."

One day little Denise goes in the woods alone and meets the little people. They give her a charm to remember them by.

Her mother gets a job in the city, and they move away. As time goes by, Denise comes to believe that all that stuff about meeting fairies and dwarves was simply her childish imagination. In college, she befriends Raven Lenore and join a Wiccan coven when she becomes interested in witchcraft and magic. She takes the name of Morgaine, after the sorceress of the Arthurian legend, Morgaine le Fay.

When she learns that Papa Joe has Alzheimer's, she returns to her former home and learns that what she had attributed to her childish imagination was real. She meets a dwarf who takes her into the land of the fairies, whose queen promises to make her a sorceress.

The entrance to the University of Wizardry is in a painting at an art gallery. She enters the painting and learns magic from the spirits of such notables as Dr. Dee, Michael Scot, Theophilus, Peter of Abano, Nicholas Flannel, Robert Fludd, Count de Gebelin, Papus, Roger Bacon, Faust, Albertus Magnus, Edward Kelley, Paracelsus, Nostradamus, Cagliostro and Aleister Crowley. She learns numerous types of magic, both white and black. At the school, she falls in love with a sorcerer, Michael.

When she returns to the real world, she encounters Michael again. He tells her that he has received a thousand years of life from the demon Asmodeus. To save his life, she sacrifices herself to the demon. She returns from the otherworld in the guise of Claudia Van Best, possesses Raven Lenore and eventually Melody Ellul.

Book Six. Morgaine and Armageddon

One evening Michael has a strange dream in which a man in a black suit hands him a pamphlet concerning the End of Days. When he awakes, the pamphlet, which is from a cult known as the Children of Aquarius, lays on the table next to his chair. He begins to suspect that his wife, Melody, is possessed. To find out the truth, he uses his magic crystal to learn that Morgaine has possessed Melody. He also has a vision of the End of Days with Morgaine as the Antichrist.

Michael hires Raven to spy on the Children of Aquarius. During Raven's initiation she and her fellow initiates are required to commit each of the seven deadly sins.

Michael attempts to exorcise Morgaine from his wife's body, but stops when Morgaine threatens to destroy Melody. The possessed Melody departs for places unknown, but leaves a hint that Michael will find something interesting in Siberia near the Arctic Sea. In Siberia Michael discovers Frankenstein's undying monster, who he smuggles into America. The monster takes the name Victor Legion and informs Michael that Morgaine may have taken Melody to Snagov, Romania. At the monastery where Vlad Tepes is buried, Michael discovers that Melody is a slave to the vampire Vlad Tepes. With the help of Victor Legion and Isaac, Michael destroys Tepes. Morgaine shows Victor Legion that Tepes had created a host of creatures like him.

Raven becomes a priestess of the Church of Omega in Jerusalem where the mysterious book called the Book of Seven Seals is kept. When the first seal is broken, Raven has a vision of Major Bachman leading an army of robots. Major Bachman kidnaps Jack Westcott, Melody and Isaac, but Morgaine forces Bachman to release the prisoners.

When the second seal is broken, Raven has a vision of Victor Legion leading an army of beings like himself. Their goal is to wipe out mankind. The third seal is broken, and Raven has a vision of a world devastated by an atomic war and the nuclear winter that follows. The fourth seal is opened, and Raven has a vision of a terrible plague that is killing everyone on the planet. When the fifth seal is broken, Raven has a vision of rows of people wearing the robes of the Children of Aquarius filing into a door into a mountain. Once inside she learns that a comet is on a collision course with earth. Only those inside the hideaway will survive. After she wakes from this vision, she learns that an astronomer has discovered a new comet heading towards the inner solar system. Michael contacts the astronomer.

A talking bronze head tells Michael that humanity will be destroyed by the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Michael sends Melody away with Westcott as her guardian. He uses his magic crystal to enter the dimension of the demons where he is thrown into a dungeon cell. At Moonwood, Flebert, Rhami and Longfeathers are attacked by demons, who possess them. At the airport, Morgaine's familiar telepathically tells Melody that something terrible is happening at Moonwood. She and Westcott return to Moonwood. Melody and Westcott conjure up Morgaine who calls upon an angel to exorcise the demons and wake Michael from his trance. Lance Flebert checks himself into an insane asylum, escapes, robs a gun shop and buys a ticket to Jerusalem.

When the sixth seal is broken, Raven has a vision that the comet is broken into seven pieces. The first fragment falls into the Pacific and causes a monstrous Tsunami, the second fragment strikes China. Forests, grasses and cities are set on fire. The third comet fragment strikes the Atlantic Ocean turning the sea crimson and poisoning all life in it.

Michael learns that Rhami and Longfeathers are still possessed and tries to exorcise the demons again. FBI men arrest Michael, Melody, Westcott, Rhami and Longfeathers. At FBI headquarters, Michael meets the astronomer Gonzolas who tells him that a comet will strike earth.

When Rhami and Longfeathers go to the airport, security takes them into a small room, where Bachman hires them to conduct a seance to raise the ghost of the scientist who invented Isaac's brain. Bachman uses the information to build an army of robots.

When Raven encounters Flebert, the demon releases him and possesses Raven. Raven has a vision of the fourth comet fragment striking the United States which produces a great poisonous cloud. Flebert encounters a strange man who gives him a message for Michael to go to Stonehenge.

Victor Legion and his artificial creatures take over a hidden cache of weapons near the monastery. The news that the creatures have taken over a province of Romania reaches Michael along with the message from Raven to go to Stonehenge. As Michael and Melody are about to leave, Flebert shows up at their door. Michael tells him to intercept messages from Raven and to keep a lookout for any indication of what happened to Isaac. Flebert thinks Isaac may be on his way to Jerusalem. At JFK, he encounters Rhami and Longfeathers. When Rhami's dousing leads Flebert to Bachman's robot factory, Flebert finds that the factory is run by robots who lock him up.

With the help of Westcott, Raven's demon is exorcised, and she and Westcott become lovers. She has a vision of a fragment of a comet fragment larger than all the others that falls into the Pacific and creates months without sunlight or starlight. She also has a vision of human armies being slaughtered by robots.

Soon Legion has conquered Romania and begins to gear up for total war. He attacks Bulgaria and Serbia. The U.S., England, Germany and France counterattack. The war is fought to a standstill, until Bachman's robots are sent against Legion's army.

At Stonehenge, Morgaine brings Michael to the center of the stones, where she and Michael disappear. Michael finds himself in the distant past when Stonehenge was a great building occupied by the Atlanteans. He learns that angels and demons are visitors from outer space and that there is war being fought throughout the galaxy, all time and in different dimension. Morgaine and Michael enter a UFO which flies them to Atlantis, which is at the bottom of the sea, where he meets Lilith, Morgaine's boss.

When a mysterious pregnant woman appears on a moon base, Morgaine gives Raven the assignment to take the woman and her child to a Buddhist monastery high in the Himalayas when she returns to earth. Legion sends Boris, an assassin, hijacks the plane, but the priestess sent with Raven kills the hijacker and throws his body from the plane.

At first Legion's army prevails against the robots, but finally bogs down. The robots rebel against Bachman and leaves earth in a spaceship. The countries of Europe fall one by one to Legion's invincible force.

NASA astronauts blow up the comet hurdling toward earth, but seven fragments are still on their way. The general in charge of fighting against Legion uses biological warfare which kills not only Legion's forces, but millions of human beings as well.

Michael and Morgaine travel in astral form to the time when Michael received the pamphlet. Michael is the mysterious stranger who hands it to himself. They then travel to the world of the Others to negotiate with Warlord Cthulhu. A truce is agreed upon and the End of Days postponed.

Book Seven. Morgaine and Moonwood

Tom Bongiglio is a hard working twenty-five year old building contractor, who has been living with his fiancé, Bridget Ryan, for two years in Queens, New York. Bridget is twenty-four, Irish Catholic and devoted to her religion. She believes in astrology and the paranormal and works for Tom.

Because Tom's construction business is not doing well, the couple jump at the chance to renovate Michael and Melody's old mansion, Moonwood. After they move into the mansion Tom has a dream about a witch named Morgaine. Because of the dream Bridget visits a fortune teller, who warns her of danger.

They arrive at Moonwood the week before Halloween. Before work can start Melody and Michael host a Halloween party. On Halloween night, after midnight Bridget hears strange goings on outside the house. She wakes Tom and they gaze out the window to see their host and the other guests dancing naked in the moonlight. Michael explains that they are Wiccans and that is how they celebrate Halloween. The Elluls and their guests leave Moonwood.

Because of Tom's dream and her trepidation about what went on Halloween night, Bridget visits a psychic named Morgaine. From the townspeople Bridget hears strange stories about the house, that the Ellul's practice witchcraft, that there were two suicides there and that place is haunted.

Tom and Bridget argue as to whether there is any truth to the rumors. Morgaine conducts a seance in which the ghost of Elizabeth appears and asks that her child be freed from bondage. The next day, Bridget goes to the east wing to hunt for the child and comes across a mummified corpse of a woman. The corpse disappears, and Bridget is not sure whether it was a hallucination or a spirit. She continues to search and finds a pagan chapel which she shows to Tom, who simply shrugs off the fact of its existence.

Bridget finds an old document in the library that purports to be written by a woman living in the eighteenth century that claims that the Frankenstein legend is true. That evening she dreams of a hooded woman who takes her to Frankenstein's laboratory where she views the monster's creation. When work begins on the exterior of the mansion, one of the workmen, Victor Legion, is an odd fellow, huge and strong, and extremely ugly. He claims to be from Switzerland. To Bridget's horror, he resembles the creature in her dream.

When Tom goes into town to pay Morgaine for the seance, she seduces him and places a spell on him that allows her to control him. Legion, who Bridget finds urban and educated, warns her that Morgaine is trouble.

When Tom takes photographs of the house to show the Elluls, a ghostly figure can be seen in the background of the pictures. As a result they hold another seance, where the ghost of Father McGillicutty gives them another warning. Bridget talks to Father Winters but receives an unsatisfactory reply to questions about ghosts, demons and exorcising the mansion.

When Bridget finds Michael's magic crystal, she is caught by its power, enters the world of Asmodeus and is made his slave. A female demon by the name of Esmeralda possesses her body. Tom finds her mesmerized and brings her around. She wakes as happy as a lark and insists that they have sex. But her whole personality has changed. She is no longer a devout Catholic, is more amorous and is obsessed by the occult and magic.

On Christmas Eve, Bridget, Tom and Legion spend the evening together. When Bridget flirts with Legion, he retires early. Bridget goes to bed soon afterwards. While Tom is contemplating the change in

Bridget, Morgaine's familiar talks to him telepathically. The cat tells him that Morgaine will restore Bridget to her former self. In addition, the ghost of Father McGillicutty appears again and warns Tom that Morgaine is a demon.

The next week Tom talks to Father Winters and get an unsatisfactory answer to his concerns about Bridget. While in town, he reads in the local paper that a native has disappeared. He also visits Morgaine to obtain her help with Bridget.

Morgaine comes to the mansion and demands the Necronomicon and Tom's semen in payment for saving Bridget. She goes to the underworld and obtains Bridget's release by promising Asmodeus to go through with his secret plan. She places a spell on Bridget and Tom that makes them forget about the ghosts and what happened to Bridget.

On the way back from a New Years' celebration, Tom and Bridget spy a hulking figure carrying a large sack over its shoulder. When they follow this person, he loses them in the woods, but they find the body in the woods. It turns out to be the missing man that Tom read about. The police arrest Victor Legion for the crime.

A mysterious gay man, Sylvan Macrome, appears. He claims to be a friend of the Elluls. When Bridget is out of the room, he hypnotizes Tom and goes to suck his blood. They are interrupted when Father Winters comes to the door. When Winters leaves, he is killed by the vampire. After Bridget and Tom find his body, they arm themselves with crosses and wait for the night to end. The cat leads them to the secret panel in the library. In the basement of Moonwood, they discover an alchemy lab, Isaac the robot and Macrome's coffin. With the help of Isaac, they pound a stake in Macrome's heart. When they leave, however, Morgaine pulls it out again and forces Macrome to steal some of Melody's blood which she mixes with Tom's semen to produce a homunculus.

Because Bridget seems ill, Tom brings her to the doctor who admits her to the hospital for observation. That night Bridget is raped by the homunculus, which is possessed by Asmodeus. Morgaine hypnotizes the couple so that they forget about the vampire, the homunculus and the rape.

When Michael and Melody arrive at Moonwood, Michael becomes suspicious when he learns that the Bongiglios have been seeing a psychic named Morgaine. He confronts her at her place of business, and she whisks him away to her underground haunt to become her prisoner.

Melody is at her wits end at his disappearance. She tells Bridget the entire story of all the terrible events that occurred from the time she first met Michael. Melody believes Michael is lost from her forever, and Tom and Bridget return to New York City. Melody abandons Moonwood and returns to her home town of Chicago.

After a few weeks back in NYC, Bridget discovers she is pregnant.

CHAPTER 1. ABANDONED MANSION

Mandy Blake was a restless sort, always thinking that the place over the next hill was going to be better than the last. After a couple of months in a town or a city, something always happened to make her unhappy with where she was; so she moved on. One hot midsummer day, her wanderings took her to the village of Woodstock in the Hudson Valley. It was a pleasant tourist town, with little souvenir shops, art galleries, antique emporiums and used book stores. It had gained notoriety because of the two Woodstock festivals that had occurred in the area, the famous one in 1969, and another twenty-five years later in 1994, but neither of which were actually held in the village. Woodstock had always been an artist colony. In the nineteen sixties and seventies, it overflowed with hippies and flower people.

Mandy was too broke to enjoy it, however. She had not worked for some time and had just enough change in her pocket to spring for a cheeseburger and coke at the local McDonalds. Since it was a pleasant summer day, she brought her lunch to the tiny park-like area in the middle of town. She sat next to an aging hippie and struck up a conversation. She was rewarded with puffs off his joint.

"Tell me," she said, "is there somewhere in this town where I can raise a little bread?"

The old man chuckled. "In Woodstock? No way. If you're looking for work, try one of the new stores in the town of Ulster." He gave her complicated directions about where they were located.

"How far are they from here?"

"About eight or ten miles, give or take."

Mandy's calves were sore. She had walked all the way from the New York Thruway entrance, an all-morning hike. "Too far to go today. I think I'll hang around here."

The old man shook his head, his greasy mane flopping around his shoulders. "You don't wanna do that, girlie. The cops here don't like people sleeping on the grass. And don't do any begging either. Not unless you want to spend a night in the poky."

"Oh crap. Is there anywhere around here I can flop for free?"

The man rubbed his matted beard. "Don't think so, unless you want to sleep in some farmer's barn." He took a long last puff on the maryjane, scorching his finger. "Wait a minute. Up the hill about a mile is an abandoned mansion. You could probably sneak in there."

Mandy hefted her backpack onto her shoulders. "Which way?"

"Up the county road. You'll know the entrance cause it's got a friggin' broken iron gate." He pointed.

"It's clouding up. Guess I'll head up there before the rain starts."

"One thing though. Some say the old place is haunted. Terrible things happened there before the owners left."

Mandy grinned. "Ghosts don't bother me none. It's the stinking pigs I don't like."

"Okay then. But don't say I didn't warn you. I've heard terrible stories about that place."

"Maybe you can tell them to me, someday. Well, I'd better get trucking."

They shook hands, and Mandy trudged up the road the old man had pointed out.

* * * *

By the time Mandy reached the broken iron gate, she was cursing the old man. "That friggin' dude forgot to tell me that the road was all uphill," she mumbled under her breath. She turned in by the broken gate and groaned. Ahead was a long dirt road driveway. It ran up a high wooded hill. Also, the weather had worsened. A large storm was brewing. Black clouds, like ebony mountains, rose along the ridge line within which streaks of lightning flashed, followed by the distant rumbles of thunder. Mandy pulled her collar up as the air became wild and tumultuous. A couple of large drops fell upon her head, forerunners of the cascade to come.

She hurried up the hill. At the top, the house came into view, a bleak and decaying Victorian mansion. It was an impressive building, with wings and towers and porches and artistically carved gingerbread everywhere. It had to have at least a hundred rooms. For a few moments, Mandy gazed with wonder at it. She could see that it had been modified many times. The foundation and the left side of the main house were constructed of cut stone, gray granite and bluestone. The entrance was of Georgian architecture popular in mid-eighteenth century. The wings, copper roof, towers and gingerbread were pure Victorian.

The wind picked up and howled through the rotten edifice. Mandy jogged quickly toward it, knowing that the rain would start any moment. As she reached the porch, a great crash of thunder and simultaneous lightning made her flinch. She hesitated, as she recalled every horror movie she had ever seen, where old mansions groaned and moaned while chains clanked, strange faces peered from windows, and the walls dripped with blood. Gathering her courage she creaked open the rotted door and entered the dark foyer.

She raised her lighter to gaze around. It was the quintessential rich man's palace, beautiful oak paneling everywhere, but darkly streaked with mold where leaks had run down the walls. Large webs hung from the enormous chandelier chained to the three story high domed ceiling. In the center of the room was a theatre-sized staircase with broken balusters and railings. Thick dust lay on the once highly polished parquet floor. To one side were double doors and a hallway.

Mandy retched as the stench of dead things and rot reached her nostrils. She looked around for rats.

Outdoors the storm hit with a vengeance. The wind screeched and howled like the hideous laughter of a psychotic ax murderer. A hard rain battered the walls with hammer blows and dripped through the leaky roof.

Shivering from drafts that blew through the structure and the workings of her imagination, Mandy cautiously explored the building. The first room she entered had been a sitting room. The furniture was covered with dusty sheets. Another room was once a library with empty shelves, although a few volumes remained.

She yawned. It had been a long day. She crept up the broken threads of the stairway to the floor above. Halfway up, she brushed away a great sticky cobweb that clung to her face and arms. She crept along the corridor on the second floor. As she tried doors, the eyes of long dead people stared from portraits hung in the hallway. Finally she found a room with an abandoned four-poster bed. Although the bedding was a stained mattress, at this point in her life it seemed the height of luxury.

A shudder banged, startling her so that she jumped. She ran to the window, getting soaked as she slammed the shutter closed and drew the dark, heavy drapes. She rummaged around until she found the butt of a candle in a holder in a drawer of a battered desk. She had found an empty crate downstairs in the kitchen, which she used for a night stand. She placed the lighted candle on this, sat on the edge of the bed and took out a half of a candy bar from her jacket.

After she consumed this sparse dinner, she felt sweaty from the heat and humidity and stripped to her undies. She left on a hunting knife she had strapped on one calf for protection and laid back with her rolled up jeans as pillow and her denim jacket as a blanket. Although the mansion was frightening and the storm raged, she was so exhausted from walking all day in the heat and humidity that she soon fell asleep.

* * * *

Some time later she was awakened by the crash and flash of a near lightning strike. As she turned around to go back to sleep, she felt a presence as though someone was in the room with her. She sat straight up and unsheathed her knife. She listened carefully, but heard nothing. She searched the pockets of her jeans for her lighter and lit the candle, which she held it high. She saw nothing. Nonetheless, she still had the odd feeling that someone was in the room. She put the candle down and hugged herself. She felt chilled and donned her clothing except for her sneakers.

Afterwards she tossed and turned and could no longer sleep. The storm was at its fiercest. The whole mansion trembled with the wind, and crashes of thunder and lightning were almost continuous. She worried that the ancient house would succumb to those terrible gusts. Finally, she sat at the edge of the bed and stared around.

In one particularly dark corner something seemed to move. She held the candle higher, but again saw nothing. As she approached the corner, a low moan issued from it. The hairs on the back of her neck rose. "There are no such things as ghosts," she whispered. She did not convince herself. She halted and waited to see whether she would hear the sound again. A flash of lightning lit up the room, followed by a rumble of thunder. Nonetheless, the corner remained dark as ever. Afterwards, she smelled the stench of death and decay.

Mandy stood frozen indecisively. Finally, a hollow woman's voice said, "Beware. He wants your blood."

Shocked, Mandy cried, "Who? Who wants my blood?"

"The undead one."

"Where is he?"

"Near."

Suddenly the presence Mandy felt previously was gone. She shuddered. She realized that she had an encounter with a real ghost. What was worse, the ghost had warned her of a menace, someone who wanted her blood.

She wondered what she should do. Although the most prudent thing to do was to leave the mansion, she dreaded going out into the raging storm. She retrieved a pack of cigarettes from her backpack, lit a cigarette from the candle and smoked while she decided what to do. She withdrew the small cross from between her breasts so that it lay outside her blouse on her ample chest and hoped that it would provide protection if there really was a vampire.

She smoked and shivered for a while. There no possibility of sleep any more. She decided to explore the house. Her stomach growled. Perhaps the previous owners left something in the kitchen that was not moldy or spoiled. She took her lone candle out in the hall. After she took two steps, she heard heavy footsteps on the steps. She ducked back into the bedroom, stood behind the ajar door and peeked out into the hallway.

A huge giant of a man, taller than a basketball player but broad in the shoulders, appeared at the head of the stairs. It was too dark to see his face. He held a flashlight, which he swung around as though

searching for something—or someone. Mandy thought, *He must have heard me up here*. She felt faint from fright as she wondered whether he was the vampire or an ax murderer.

She backed slowly into the room, blew out the candle and stood with her back against the wall next to the door. The man's heavy footfall came closer, and the door swung open. He entered the room and swung the light from his torch from side to side. Mandy tried to sink into the wall in back of the open door. She shifted the candle to her left hand and slid her knife out of its sheath.

The light from the torch fell on her backpack, which leaned against the bedpost. The enormous man growled, “And who does this belong to?” With sudden swiftness, he spun about and slammed the door shut. The flashlight glared into Mandy's eyes.

“Who are you?” he cried. “What are you doing here?” His voice was deep and odd.

Mandy's voice trembled. “I-I thought this place was abandoned. I just wanted a place to spend the night.”

The man laughed. “That was a big mistake.” He shifted the light away from Mandy's face and shown it on his own. It was ugly and full of scars. His skin was gray, like a dead person's. “Let me introduce myself. I call myself Victor Legion. But you would probably know me better as ‘the Frankenstein monster.’

Mandy screamed once and fainted dead away.

CHAPTER 2. THE CANDIDATE

The convention hall in Chicago was crowded, noisy and smoke filled as delegates, media reporters and supporters milled about. This was to be the night that the Patriot Party crowned their choice for president of the United States. There was great national interest in this third party candidate. The man chosen had great charisma and leadership qualities. Many felt that the Patriots had a slim chance of capturing the white house against the Democrat and Republican contenders, who were lackluster and who had each been touched by scandal.

The acting chairman banged on the podium with his gavel several times and yelled over the microphone, "Will everyone return to their seats, please."

There was a great shuffling of chairs. Finally, people settled into their places, and the noise subsided. The crowd gazed at the chairman in anticipation.

"At this time, I'd like to introduce our candidate and next president of the United States, Nicholas Bongiglio."

A great roar went up as Bongiglio strolled onto the stage from the wings. The crowd rose to its feet, stomped, clapped, yelled and whistled. Red, white and blue balloons were dropped from the ceiling. The applause was thunderous and continued for several minutes.

Finally, the candidate held up his hand for silence. The uproar went on for a couple of minutes more and finally died down.

Nicholas Bongiglio was a handsome man with curly dark hair. He had the appearance of a man of thirty-five. Only his parents, Tom and Bridget, knew his actual age, which would have astounded the public had it become known. To keep his true age a secret, a false birth certificate had been created. Nonetheless, he was considered one of the youngest men ever to run for the highest office of the land.

After a short pause to ensure that he had everyone's attention, Bongiglio began his acceptance speech. "Friends and supporters, I wish to thank you for this great honor. I promise to do my best to live up to your faith in me. I would also like to especially thank at this time The Children of Aquarius for their support and help throughout. Without them, I'm sure my nomination would be simply that of a Don Quixote flaying at windmills. With their help, I'm sure we can win in November. I applaud them."

Another great uproar came from the crowd. Two women, who were priestesses of The Children of Aquarius and represented them at the convention, stood and bowed. They were applauded almost as loudly and long as the candidate himself.

Bongiglio continued, "If I am successful and am elected President of the United States, I vow to uphold the sacred tenets of The Children. These are respect for humanity, the environment, truth, faithfulness and the principles of science. I pledge to fight corruption in government, to do my utmost to bring lasting peace to the world, to bring security and prosperity to every citizen of the United States regardless of race, ethnic background, religion or sexual preference, and to eliminate poverty and crime. You all know my stands on education, taxation and universal health care. Some say that I'm an idealist. That the reforms and programs that I propose are not feasible politically nor financially. To those, I say, Perhaps they are not, but they will never be achieved unless someone at least fights to achieve them...."

He continued on in this vein for some time, pausing to accept the applause of his audience whenever he made a statement that they especially approved of. It was not a long speech, but it had the crowd roaring their enchantment with the man and his program.

After the applause died down, he raised his arms and cried, "Now, let's work like hell to win this election." This brought out another roar that rocked the stadium. More balloons and ribbons were dropped from the ceiling. Finally, Bongiglio walked off the platform to shake hands with politicians, businessmen, labor leaders, Aquariun priestesses and other supporters. His aides and bodyguards whisked him out a back door into the alley behind the arena toward his waiting limousine.

Before entering it, however, he whispered, "Hold up a minute. There's one more person, I need to thank." He walked into the shadows of the alley. When his security people tried to follow, he ordered them to stay away.

Deep in the shadows stood a woman. As he approached, she said, "How did it go, Nicky?"

"Splendidly. You're a prophet. Do you really believe I have a chance of winning this election?"

The woman, who was very beautiful, with dark red hair, smiled benevolently. There was something unearthly about her. She seemed to exude power and mystery by her presence. Her large dark eyes seemed to see into a person's mind. She replied, "Not only will you win the election, but you will go on to even greater heights."

"Greater heights than becoming the President of the United States? How can that be? What greater honor can a man achieve?"

"Ultimate power. You'll see." She backed further into the shadows. "Just be true to your progenitor and follow my advise, and thing will go well for you, My Prince."

Bongiglio had to smile at the title, as though he were the son of a king. "I will to the best of my abilities."

"Which are considerable, as you well know."

"Yes. But I feel that I must use those powers judicially."

"Of course. Well, goodnight, Nicholas."

"Goodnight, Morgaine."

The woman vanish into the blackness, and Bongiglio returned to the limousine.

* * * *

But who was this man, Nicholas Bongiglio, really? Eight years previously, his mother, Bridget Bongiglio, and her husband, Tom, lived temporarily at Moonwood, the abandoned mansion where Mandy encountered Victor Legion. Tom Bongiglio was a hard working twenty-five year old building contractor. He had been living with his fiancé, Bridget Ryan, for two years, a girl he met in college. Their marriage plans were disrupted when he quit college to take over his father's construction business.

Bridget Ryan was twenty-four, Irish Catholic and devoted to her religion. Sometimes, she chided Tom about his lack of spirituality. On the other hand, he kidded her about her belief in astrology and the paranormal. She worked for Tom as bookkeeper, secretary, sometime forelady, saleswoman, and so forth. From time to time she did every job in the construction business except the actual carpentry. Because she had taken course in interior decorating in college, she helped Tom in that area when called upon. In addition she was a unabashed optimist, pleasant and good humored, which helped when dealing with customers.

Nonetheless, at the time Tom's construction business was not doing well. As a result, the couple jumped at the chance to renovate Michael and Melody Ellul's old mansion, Moonwood. Because Moonwood

was located in upstate New York, they moved into the mansion while the work was being done. During their stay, evil assaulted them at every turn. It began when they heard rumors that the Ellul's practiced witchcraft. As a result Bridget visited a local psychic. A bad mistake. The seer was Morgaine, the demon witch. Soon afterwards, she seduced Tom. After many other mysterious and terrible events, Morgaine has a vampire steal Melody's blood which she mixes with Tom's semen to produce a homunculus. The demon Asmodeus sends his spirit into the evil creature and rapes Bridget. Morgaine casts a spell to make Bridget and Tom forget all the horror that happened to them.

The child conceived by the coupling of Bridget and the homunculus was Nicholas Bongiglio.

Bridget's pregnancy was strange. For one thing, it lasted only three months. During the second month, she had begun to show.

Doctor Lambert said, "I'm afraid you're further along than you thought, young lady. From the size of the fetus, I'd say that you've been pregnant at least four months."

"Really? I don't know how that could be. I had a period two months ago, and I just started morning sickness."

Lambert shrugged. "Look at the ultrasound."

Bridget and Tom stared at the screen. They saw that the fetus had arms and legs and eyes. Tom pointed at something on the screen. "Does that mean that it's a boy?"

Lambert studied the fuzzy image for a moment and laughed. "That's not what you're thinking. It's a tail."

"A tail? Our child will be normal won't it?"

"Oh yes. At this stage, it's normal for some fetus's to still have tails."

Bridget said, "With those two little bumps on its head, it looks like a little devil."

"It probably will be if it takes after me," Tom said, laughing.

Lambert gazed at the bumps with a puzzled expression. "I didn't notice those before."

* * * *

By Bridget's third month, her belly and breasts had swollen so that she appeared to be in her third trimester. About this time she heard voices in her head. One day she while she watched a soap opera, someone cried, "Mama."

She peered around. No one was in the room. She decided that it must have been one of the characters in the show. But someone calling "Mama" did not make any sense in the context of the scene. A few minutes later, the same child's voice cried, "Mama, I'm hungry. You must eat."

She turned off the TV. Again there was that plaintive cry, "Mama, feed me." She realized then that there was no actual sound. The voice was in her head.

"Jesus and Mary, my hormones must be all out whack. I'm having hallucinations."

"No Mama. You're not going crazy. It's me." At that moment the fetus thumped against the stretched skin of her belly as if to indicate that it was who was talking to her.

Is this possible? she thought. *Could my baby really be speaking to me telepathically?*

"Please eat something, Mama."

There was that plea again. Although she did feel especially hungry herself, she went into the kitchen and made a sandwich and poured a glass of milk. After she finished eating, the child spoke to her again. "Mama, I feel better now."

Bridget decided that if she was going nuts, she may as well go all the way. She looked down at her stomach and said, "How is it that you can talk to me? Babies aren't supposed to be able to do that."

"But I'm a special child. My father is a powerful entity."

"Tom, powerful?"

"Not Tom. My real father."

Bridget became concerned. She did not like the turn of the conversation. "What do you mean? Who is your real father?"

"A being of another world."

"You mean like an angel?"

"Sort of."

CHAPTER 3. LITTLE NICKY

Bridget was torn. She wondered whether she should see a psychiatrist. But she feared that she really was insane and would be institutionalized. She had an uncle who that happened to. His time at the asylum haunted him all his life. After years of unemployment, he committed suicide. Although she worried about her mental health, she did not tell anyone, not even Tom or her priest, that she conversed telepathically with the child in her womb.

Finally, out of desperation, without telling Tom who did not approve, she visited a psychic. Madam Katona's home and place of business was a first floor flat in an old brownstone. A small sign on the door read, "Madam Katona. Psychic. Tarot Card, Palmistry and Crystal Ball Reading, Seances by Appointment Only." Each time Bridget entered the psychic's murky and mysterious parlor, it was as though she had stepped through the fabric of time into a bygone era. The small room was crowded with furniture, a threadbare overstuffed sofas, shiny leather chairs with worn seats and round tables covered with colorful silk doilies with long fringes on a faded Oriental carpet. The flowered wallpaper was dark and stained. Lace curtains decorated the windows, and the odor of incense permeated the thick, musty air. Pots with large ferns squatted in the corners, flower and herbs graced every window sill and ivy trailed leafy tendrils from ceiling-hung planters. Books with worn covers were piled on shelves interspersed with strange knickknacks. The drapes were always drawn, making the room gloomy despite the dim light from Tiffany lamps.

Madam Katona was near seventy, had a thousand wrinkles and deep creases in her bronze face. She wore long skirts with a colorful pattern, a peasant blouse off her shoulders and a white bandanna to keep her long unruly white hair in place. She spoke English with a thick eastern European accent.

"How may I help you, child?" she asked as she led Bridget to a chair at the round table where she conducted her business.

"Madam Katona, I think I may be going mad. The baby inside of me is talking to me—telepathically."

Madam Katona put her hand on Bridget's arm. "Receiving a communication through your mind does not necessarily mean that you're going insane. It may not be the infant, but from another source—a beloved one who has passed away perhaps."

"By the things that he's saying, it can be no other."

"Hmm. Let me place my hand on the womb chakra."

Bridget rose and stood by Madam Katona, who put her hand on Bridget's swollen belly. The psychic closed her eyes as though listening for something. Suddenly they snapped open, and her lower jaw dropped. She pulled back her hand as though it had been burnt.

"Oh my dear. There is an evil thing within you."

"Evil? How can you say that? It's my baby."

Madam Katona shook her head. "It is no child. It is something else, something from the abyss."

"Are you saying that I'm carrying a demon?" A nightmare that Bridget had that something awful had happened to her while she was in the hospital in Kingston, New York, suddenly came to mind. She wondered whether it really happened and was not a nightmare. She shuddered and began to weep. Was it possible that she was raped by the horrible tiny creature she had seen in her recurring dream? No. It

could not be. "What nonsense," she cried.

Madam Katona gazed up at her. "Although it may seem incredible to you, it is true." She made the sign of the cross on Bridget's belly. A sharp pain emanated from the area, and Bridget felt the fetus move restlessly.

"No. No," she cried. "It can't be." Tears flowed in earnest, and she fled the psychic's flat. She wandered around for a while in a daze. Finally, she came upon a Catholic church. She entered and kneeled before a statue of The Virgin. "Oh Holy Mother, help me. Give me a sign. Is what Madam Katona said true? Am I carrying a demon?"

Bridget looked up into the painted statue's face. To her amazement, bloody tears were running down the Madonna's cheeks. "What am I to do?" she cried.

At that moment, another spasm crossed her stomach. She leaned her head against the base of the statue and prayed some more. After a few minutes, she felt another pain, and her knees were wet. She looked down. Under her there was a puddle of sticky liquid. Her water had broken.

She cried out. "Someone help me. I'm having the baby."

The priest ran over, helped her to a pew and called for an ambulance.

* * * *

At the hospital, Tom visited with Bridget until she indicated that she was tired and wanted to sleep. Afterwards, he asked to speak to her doctor.

"Doc, what's wrong with Bridget? I don't know what's got into her. She won't have anything to do with our little Nicky. She refuses to breast feed, doesn't even want to hold our child and calls it a demon."

The gynecologist shook his head sadly. "It's called postpartum depression. I'll have our staff psychologist talk to her."

However, the psychologist got nowhere with Bridget. She refused to take any antidepression medication to relieve the symptoms or to start therapy. She insisted that her baby was a demon. Finally, she agreed to talk to the hospital's Catholic chaplain. She wanted him to perform an exorcism on the infant, which he refused to do.

Tom wondered whether he should start proceedings to have her committed. He consulted the psychiatrist, but received no help there. All she said was to make Bridget take the medication and to keep an eye on Bridget when she was around the baby. The chaplain gave him the same advise. He was at his wits end. How could he watch her night and day? They could hardly afford a full-time nanny. He dreaded the day that they would bring the baby home.

One evening as he sat in the dark trying to decide what to do, he heard someone nearby breathing. The sound came from a dark corner of the room. He turned on the lamp next to the chair. Standing there was the psychic that Bridget had gone to while they were upstate.

"Morgaine," he cried. "What the hell are you doing here? How did you get in?"

The temptress grinned at him, her dark eyes fixing his so that he could not turn away from their hypnotic quality. "I have my ways. Since your wife is in the hospital, I thought you might be lonely."

"No. I won't let you seduce me again. I won't cheat on my wife."

"Too bad. But don't worry, that is not intention. I like to tease."

Tom eyed her suspiciously. "Why are you here then, witch?"

"I want to help you and Bridget. I understand that she believes that little Nicky is a demon and won't be a mother to the infant."

"I don't know how you found that out, but what can you do?" The woman frightened Tom. He knew that she had something to do with the awful events that occurred while Bridget and he were in Woodstock and which he had a hard time recalling. Those weeks seemed like a nightmarish dream, vague and fuzzy, as though they were part of a half-forgotten movie.

"I can cure her of the 'postpartum depression' as her doctors have phrased it. You know I have great psychic and hypnotic powers. Bring me with you to the hospital. In the maternity ward, they only allow visitors other than the father if the patient gives permission."

"Why don't you simply appear in her room? Isn't that how you got in here?" Tom was a skeptic about most things having to do with the paranormal, but his experiences in Woodstock had softened his doubts. He was sure that Morgaine could do magic.

"I wish to cure your wife, not frighten her. Besides I may need your help."

"Good luck with getting Bridget to cooperate. She wouldn't do anything the doctors asked." He paused and contemplated Morgaine's proposal. He did not trust the woman or whatever she was, but he was at his wit's end as what else to do. "Okay. Let's go."

* * * *

When Morgaine and Tom arrived at Bridget's room, Bridget was reading the Bible. Tom went over and kissed her on the cheek. "Hi Hon, I've brought a visitor. You remember Morgaine, the psychic you consulted in Woodstock?"

Bridget carefully laid the Bible down. "Oh yes. Hi, Morgaine. What brings you to New York?"

"Got tired of small town life. Congratulations on the birth of your son."

Bridget frowned and stared guiltily at her hands. "Don't congratulate me. I've brought something evil into the world."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. I saw the baby in the viewing window. He's a cute little fellow." She walked over to stand close to Bridget. She took her hand. "Why don't you and I and Tom take another peek now? Maybe, once you saw how handsome he is, you'll change your mind."

Bridget withdrew her hand. "No. I don't want to look at the evil creature."

"Perhaps if we meditated, your anxious feelings would be calmed. Come take my hand, both of you." She held out one hand to Bridget and the other to Tom. The couple grasped her hands. "Now Tom, you hold Bridget's other hand to form a circle. Close your eyes and breath deeply. You too, Tom." She began a singsong of what seemed to be nonsense words. When she finished, she asked Bridget, "How do you feel?"

"Much better. Thank you. I'm not depressed or anxious or paranoid anymore."

Although he did not say it, Tom too had a feeling of euphoria. The bad memories about Woodstock faded and seemed to be only dreams again.

"Why don't you ask for your baby, now? Wouldn't you like to breast feed it?"

Bridget smiled. "Yes, I would. I don't know why I had such bad feelings about my precious little Nicky." She buzzed for the nurse.

Before the staff brought the infant in to her, they sent in the psychiatrist. She sent Morgaine and Tom out of the room and asked her several questions. When she came out into the hallway, she said to Tom, "Your wife seems to be recovering from her depression. Sometimes these things pass as quickly and mysteriously as they start. Nonetheless, after she leaves the hospital I'd recommend therapy, at least for a few weeks."

Tom nodded. "We'll do that." He hoped his insurance would pay for it.

"I'll have the nurse bring your baby in to your wife. Her attitude when she see him will tell us a lot." He went to the nurse's station.

As Morgaine started to return to Bridget's room, Tom held her back. "I want to thank you. I don't know what sort of magic you just did, but you cured Bridget."

"It wasn't much. Simply a spell of forgetting. Some things are best forgotten."

"Is there a price? Do you want anything from me?"

Morgaine rubbed her chin. "Well ... you could do me a small favor."

Here it comes, thought Tom. Her price will be high. "What's the favor?"

"I'd appreciate if you'd take care of my cat, Mephistopheles, for a while. You see, I'm going on a trip, and you know how hard it is have a pet in a hotel."

Tom was relieved. "That's it? You simply want to take your of your cat? For how long?"

"I'm not sure. It could be quite awhile. If you're allergic to cats or think it would be too much trouble..."

Bridget had wanted a pet. Tom had been thinking of getting her a small dog, but a cat would be less work. She would have her hands full with the baby. "No trouble at all. We'd be glad to take care of your cat."

"Thank you. I'll drop him off at your house."

A few minutes after they returned to the hospital room, a nurse brought in the newborn and placed him in Bridget's arms. Bridget doted over him. "Oh, isn't he darling." She turned to Tom. "Look, he's got a full head of hair already."

It was true. The baby's head was covered with black curly hair. Tom had never before seen a newborn with such thick hair.

When Tom returned home that evening, a white cat was waiting in the front of the apartment building where Bridget and he lived. He bent down to pet it. "Are you Mephistopheles?"

A voice in his head said, "Yes, I am he."

Tom blinked. *I must be tired. I think a cat's talking to me.* He unlocked the front door. The cat followed him up the stairs and into their apartment on the second floor.

CHAPTER 4. VAMPIRES AND ROBOTS

Mandy woke out of her faint with a start. She was laying on her bed at the abandoned mansion. In a chair next to her Frankenstein's monster, AKA Victor Legion, stared at her. She reached down for her knife. The sheath strapped to her ankle was empty. She let out a shriek.

Legion raised his huge mitts. "Please Miss, don't be afraid. I wouldn't harm you for the world."

This calmed her down a bit. She gazed into his face. It was ugly, but kindly in a way. "You were kidding me about being Frankenstein's monster. Trying to scare me is all. Well, you succeeded. I was damn frightened."

Legion smiled. "But I really am the legendary creature. Nonetheless, I didn't mean to frighten you. It's just that you shouldn't be here."

Mandy decided that the man really thought he was Frankenstein's monster. Perhaps because of his huge body and horrible looks, he believed what cruel persons called him. People have different ways of dealing with adversary. "Why shouldn't I be here? You're here. I don't think you're an invited guest."

"What I mean is that you're in danger in this house."

"Danger? From who or what?"

"Vampires."

"Vampires? You've got to be kidding."

"No. I'm very serious. There are two of them. If they catch you alone, they'll kill you."

Mandy shuddered. She wondered whether this ugly man was delusional. She recalled the vision or dream she had earlier. "I may have encountered one. A woman. She kept talking about someone wanting my blood."

"That must've been Elizabeth. She's a ghost not a vampire. She was warning you about the vampires, as I am now. Besides the fact that monsters, such as I, and vampires abide here, the place is haunted by ghosts and demons."

"Ghosts and demons, huh."

A crash of lightning and thunder lit up the entire room. A short thin man stood in the corner. His face was the color of chalk. Mandy leaped off the bed and pointed. "Is that a ghost or a demon?"

Legion turned his flashlight toward the corner. "We see you hiding there, Sylvan. Come over here."

The little man sashayed over. His clothes were ragged and moldy looking, his hair, long and shaggy. Clumps of soil were in it. He looked like someone who had risen from the dead. He walked to the center of the room and bowed. It was apparent that he was avoiding Legion. "Good evening, miss. My name is Sylvan Macrome." He had a feminine lilt to his voice.

"Mandy Blake. Pleased to meet you." Something about the man made her nervous. She wondered whether he and Legion and perhaps others here were a bunch of crazy's living in the mansion. Maybe they escaped from an asylum. "Say Vic, did you see my knife."

"I've got it. I was afraid that you would try to hurt me with it." He handed it back to Mandy. "This will do

you no good against Sylvan. He's one of the vampires."

Macrome said, "Sad to say, but it's true. None other than Dracula himself made me a creature of the night. But don't worry, Mandy; I won't harm you. In the first place, I prefer the blood of men to women. Besides, Morgaine prophesied your coming. You're under her protection."

"Oh yeah. That's good to hear." Mandy was no longer terrified but only slightly frightened. She was certain that the two were madmen, not supernatural beings as they claimed. Of course, she still had to be on her guard. They could be killers. "Say Vic, you said there were two vampires. Who's the other one?"

Macrome replied, "My protégé. He was the village priest until I took his blood. His name is David Winters; we call him Father Winters."

"The other vampire is a priest?"

"Was a priest. I don't think the Catholic Church accepts the undead as priests." Macrome giggled at his little joke.

Legion said, "What's this about Morgaine? Has she appeared here?"

"Only briefly. She said that a young woman would be arriving soon and warned me and the good Father not to harm her, under threat of our destruction. I assume she meant Mandy, since no one else has come here recently. Morgaine is probably cooking up some trouble, as usual, and Mandy must have something to do with her plan." He turned to Mandy. "So you see, dear, you have nothing to fear from Winters or me. You're under the protection of a powerful demon witch."

Mandy wanted to laugh. This Sylvan Macrome was an imaginative crazy person. "So. Will I meet this Morgaine person? What did you say she was, a demon-witch?"

Legion shook his head. "Better pray that you don't. She's evil through and through."

"What do you guys think I should do? Leave? There's an awful storm outside, and I have nowhere else to go." Mandy was unsure herself what to do. She was not afraid of Macrome. She felt that she could handle the little man. But the other brute was awful strong. Even if she found a way to lock the bedroom door, he could probably bust it down easily enough. On the other hand, so far he did not seem threatening. She yawned. She had done a lot of walking the previous day and had not received more than a couple of hours sleep so far that night.

Legion said, "Since Morgaine has warned the vampires not to harm you, I guess you're fairly safe here. I've got an idea. Maybe we can have Isaac guard you while you sleep. He would not let anything happen to you."

"Isaac? Who is he?"

"Not a he, an it. Come with me. I'll introduce you."

Macrome said, "Nighty-night, Mandy and Victor. I must be on my way to meet some fresh blood." He giggled again and left the room.

As he passed the dresser mirror, he cast no reflection. At least it appeared that way to Mandy. But the only light in the room came from candles. She decided that she was mistaken. Nonetheless, a shiver went down her spine. What if Sylvan really was a vampire? She had not ruled that out for certain. In that case she should fear him regardless of his claim that she was under the protection of some demon witch.

She followed Legion down the creaking stairs to the library. He went over to a set of shelves, reached in and pulled on something. There was the screeching of rusty gears, and the section pivoted out. *A secret panel*, Mandy thought. *This house is like the ones in those corny old horror movies. It's got everything, the Frankenstein monster, ghosts, vampires. I wonder what this Isaac is. Something not human. Victor called it an it.* She shuddered again. *Maybe it's a man eating plant.*

Behind the wall was a hole in the floor. Within it a spiral staircase led below. Legion started down and signaled for Mandy to follow. *Now where the hell could this go?* she thought. The idea of descending into a creepy cellar with Legion did not appeal to her. A chill ran down her spine. Weren't basements where the bodies were buried and killers lurked? Nonetheless, she followed the big fellow. What if Legion was bring her down there so that after he murdered her he would have a place to bury her? Or maybe there was a torture chamber down there.

As they climbed down, her surroundings changed from framing lumber and plaster to mortared stone. When Mandy accidentally brushed against the surface, she cried, "Eww, the wall's slimy with mold." The staircase continued on into the depths of the earth. *Holy shit*, she thought, *the cellar must be about three stories down.* The walls became crude rock like the interior of a cave.

Finally the staircase ended in a paneled room full of decent office furniture. There were filing cabinets, a printer, bookshelves, and cabinets for supplies. Two desks held computers showing screen savers.

Legion flipped on overhead lights and led Mandy to another door. The room beyond the entrance was as dark as the interior of a mine. As Legion flashed his light around, Mandy saw that it was a weird laboratory, like those old wood prints of alchemists' labs, with benches, retorts, strange hookups, shelves of bottles filled with herbs and pickled specimens, candles, metal instruments and other paraphernalia.

She noticed something in the shadows of a dark corner. Two red lights, at the height a man's eyes, stared at her. When Legion turned on the light, Mandy saw that it was a manlike robot straight out of the sci-fi magazines.

Legion said, "Mandy, meet Isaac."

The android advanced toward Mandy with an outstretched hand. "Hello, Mandy. I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

Not knowing what else to do, although she was leery, Mandy shook his hand, which was covered with a soft plastic material that felt like human flesh. "Pleased to meet you, Isaac."

"The pleasure is all mine." It winked at her. "Are you going to be staying here, or just visiting?"

"For the time being. She's an overnight guest," said Legion. "However, she needs protection from the vampires while she sleeps. Will you stay in her room and guard her?"

"I consider it my duty," Isaac replied. He retrieved a large crucifix and a small one on a chain. It handed the smaller one to Mandy. "Please place this around your neck. According to the literature I have read on the subject of vampires, it will help ward them off."

Mandy was not sure that she wanted the android in her room while she slept. But she was tired, and the storm still raged. She figured that she had more to fear from madmen or vampires, whichever they were, than the android.

The three of them returned to her room. Legion said, "Sweet dreams, Mandy," and left.

Isaac said, "I'll stand over here by the door while you sleep."

The night was warm and humid. Mandy did not feel like sleeping in her sweaty clothes. "Isaac, turn around until I tell you to face this way." When the robot obeyed, she stripped down to her bra and thong, and slipped between the sheets. "You may face this way now."

Isaac turned her way. By candlelight, his plastic mannequin face looked almost human. It was a handsome face. "Goodnight Isaac." She blew out the candle.

"Goodnight Mandy. Don't worry about the vampires. I can handle them." The android had a pleasant baritone voice.

As Mandy lay there trying to sleep despite the storm, her anxiety, creaking of the house and banging of the shutters, she thought about the robot's hands. She wondered what they would feel like touching her. She fantasized the android getting into bed with her. *Oh come on, Mandy*, she told herself, *you're not so horny that you'd think about going to bed with a machine. Next thing you know, you'll be dreaming about that ugly Legion guy.* Nonetheless, she wondered whether whoever built the robot included the regular masculine equipment. Somehow she doubted it.

Soon these sexual fantasies faded as she drifted into slumber. She began to dream, but not about Isaac or Legion, but about the ghost who had warned her about the vampires. Again, she heard a woman's voice from the corner of the room. However, in Mandy's dream the ghostly form of a middle-aged woman slowly appeared and approached the bed. Mandy recalled that Legion had called her Elizabeth. "Are you Elizabeth?" she asked.

The phantom replied, "In life that was my name."

"Why are you haunting this house? Why haven't you passed on to the other side?"

"I wish to be near my child."

"Who is your child?"

The specter pointed toward the doorway where Isaac stood.

"But that's a machine, a robot. How can it be your child?"

"I adopted him. I was his first teacher, you know."

Mandy, for reasons she could not understand herself, became interested in this ghostly woman's story. "Really. How did come about?"

"Years ago, when I was alive, I taught autistic children. I even wrote papers on the psychology of learning. At the time I was married to a rather nasty man by the name of Frederick Wolfgang. Although he was verbally abusive and controlling, I loved him in my own way. Or perhaps I was afraid to leave him. He was a scientist working in the field of artificial intelligence. When the Turc Corporation hired him to help them design a humanoid robot, they also hired me. At first I helped the software specialists design programs to allow their android to learn from experience, although I was pretty much of a computer idiot. They used my ideas on the psychology of learning, you see."

"That must've been interesting work."

"It was when I could avoid the Frederick's abuse. He was always criticizing everything I did, even accused me of flirting with the software engineers."

"That must've been awful for you. I wouldn't stay five minutes with a man like that."

"But you're a different sort of person. I was always weak and too ready to sacrifice myself for someone else. My husband committed suicide."

"Oh. Sorry for your loss."

The ghost chuckled. "He was no loss for me. I was glad to be rid of him. Of course, at first because I had been so used to having him order me around, I felt kind of lost myself. As a result, I threw myself into my work, which at that time was playing nursemaid and kindergarten teacher to Isaac. You see, after the designers built Isaac, who was the prototype, they recruited me to train him to learn those things most humans learn in the first nine or ten years of life. Of course, Isaac was a good student and progressed much more rapidly than any human. He was such a willing pupil and so kind and considerate that I felt toward him as though he was my adopted son."

"I can understand that, especially after the sudden death of your husband." *Even the ghosts have hang ups in this place*, Mandy thought.

"But they wanted to change my boy's brain patterns to make him evil."

"Who wanted to do that?"

"The military, especially that awful Major Bachman. Well, Jack Westcott, a computer scientist who also worked for Turc, and I with the help of Mister Ellul, the man who used to own this house, engineered my boy's escape. Mister Ellul allowed Isaac and I to live here."

"How long did you live there?"

"Years. You see, Mister Ellul and his wife had moved to New York, and the house was empty except for Isaac and me. But one night, something terrible happened. Major Bachman got wind of where Isaac was and sent a couple of thugs to steal my son. They surprised me in my bedroom and tortured me. They wanted to know where my little boy was hidden. When I refused to tell them, they went too far and killed me. After my spirit left my body, I stayed to watch over Isaac." She began to sob. "I felt so sorry for him. When he found my body, he thought I was simply ill. He did not know what to do. Finally, when that private detective, Raven Lenore, showed up, he asked her what was wrong with me. She told him the truth, that I was dead. I'm sure he mourned me in his strange electronic way. The thugs returned that same night and tried to blame my death on Raven and her partner. That witch Morgaine was involved too."

"Morgaine? She's seems to be quite bad person. This is the second or third terrible thing I've heard about her. And she's supposed to be my protector. Who is she anyway?"

"She was Mister Ellul's lover before he met the woman he married, Melody. She was simply a witch before she committed suicide. Afterwards, she became a demon. She's been causing trouble ever since. Mandy, stay away from her. She's evil and dangerous."

"I intend to."

CHAPTER 5. THE SEANCE

Michael's friends met in Melody Ellul's apartment. When they arrived, Melody was dressed in black. She considered herself a widow. Her friends were more hopeful. That was why they were there. They wanted to brainstorm a way of rescuing Michael from the clutches of the demon witch, Morgaine.

Melody served drinks. She did not need to ask any of them what they wanted. She knew them well enough to know each one's preference. Raven Lenore, who had arrived on her motorcycle wearing blue jeans, a T-shirt and a leather jacket, liked Pina Coladas. Jack Westcott, Raven's boy friend, drank straight bourbon on the rocks. Lance Flebert, the former movie actor, always asked for a vodka martini, very dry. Rhami Deju, the psychic, and Robert Longfeathers, the shaman, both drank tea. Melody herself was partial to Samuel Adams lager beer.

After she sat down on an easy chair, she said, "Okay folks, this is your meeting. I agreed to allow you to use my apartment as a meeting place. Otherwise, leave me out of it. Even if you should devise a means of rescuing Michael from the clutches of Morgaine, she would not leave us alone." She sighed. "I don't know about you, but I've had it. Ever since I met Michael, I've had to deal with supernatural entities and evil persons. I've been possessed by a demon and made the slave of a vampire. Enough is enough. I'm through with the whole occult business. I'll have no more to do with Michael. If I wasn't married, I would join a convent."

Raven asked, "Don't you love Michael anymore?"

"I do love him. But not enough to endure the turmoil that his love/hate relationship with Morgaine entails. Besides, according to the archdemon Asmodeus, Morgaine loves Michael more than I do. Well, let her have him. Think of the danger you're putting yourselves into by dealing with the denizens of Hell, not only to your living bodies, but to your immortal souls." Melody made the sign of the cross. "An eternity in Hell is no joke."

Westcott said, "Not all of us believe that we have an immortal soul, or that there is a Heaven or Hell."

Melody replied, "Still an atheist, Jack, I see. I don't understand how you can rationalize your position after all you've seen and been through."

"I believe that there's a scientific explanation for every phenomena that we've witnessed. We simply haven't studied the problem carefully enough, or perhaps we need better instruments. In fact, that was the suggestion I was going to make. A former colleague of mine from the university where I worked has invented a device to peer into other dimensions. I intend on finding out exactly what his device does and whether it would be of use in rescuing Michael."

Raven said, "Good luck on that one, hon. Unless your buddy's machine can bring us to where Morgaine is keeping Michael, it will do us no good. I've decided on a different approach. I'm sure Morgaine has plans that go beyond simply having Michael for herself. I'm still a priestess of the Church of Omega. Lately, there's been a lot of activity at the highest levels. I intend on snooping out what's going on. Perhaps I can find a clue as to what Morgaine intends to do with Michael."

Flebert remarked, "It's what you do best, Raven. You're a super detective and spy. As for myself, I can't help thinking back to the time that Rhami, Bob and Jack entered Morgaine's dimension through the caves beneath Moonwood. I believe the answers we're looking for lies down there somewhere."

Westcott said, "And we were almost trapped in Morgaine's dimension. That gate to the place she resides is too dangerous. The entities she controls have it well guarded."

"Oh, I don't intend to enter it. Simply try to determine the nature of it and those 'entities' that Melody calls demons. There may be ways of defeating them. Maybe we could call on an angel, like when Rhami, Bob and I were possessed."

Deju shook his head. "I wouldn't go within a mile of Moonwood. Demons are in control there now."

Flebert said, "I'm not afraid of them. After all, I still have a part of one in my head. If no one wants to go with me, I'll go alone. Isaac is still there, isn't he?"

Melody replied, "I believe so. We told the robot that it could make Moonwood its home as long as it wished. There are still people in the government looking for it to change its programming."

"Then I'll use its help."

Deju said, "Before we rush into anything, we should contact Michael and see if he can give us information that will help us."

Melody eyed him suspiciously. "How do you intend to do that?"

"Hold a seance."

"By using occult methods such as a seance, you're putting yourselves in danger from Morgaine and her demons."

"We'll take precautions."

Melody addressed the entire company. "You're idiots if you go along with this."

"I'm with you," said Westcott. "A seance is nothing but foolishness. I'm leaving. I want to get a hold of Doctor Lazslo." He kissed Raven, grabbed his jacket and left the apartment.

Melody rose and walked him to the door. After he was gone, she turned to the company. "I'll be in my bedroom reading the Bible and praying for you. If you need candles for your witchcraft, there are a few in that drawer." She pointed to the highboy. "Knock when you're done." She took her half-finished beer into her bedroom.

Deju said, "Shall we get started?"

Raven replied, "First we must cleanse the room of evil spirits."

"I've come prepared," said Longfeathers. He reached into a shopping bag he had brought with him. He took out vials of dried and crushed rosemary, juniper and thyme. He placed a few tablespoons of each in an earthen bowl and lit the mixture. He waved at the ensuing smoke so that the fragrance was sent throughout the room. He held a charred stick that he had brought with him and slowly traversed the room while he chanted in his native Oneida tribal language.

Meanwhile, Deju set up a card table in the middle of the room. He placed a candleholder in the center, retrieved a fresh candle from the highboy and lit it. When Longfeathers finished cleansing the room of evil spirits, he switched off the lights. The only illumination was from the candle, casting dark and looming shadows throughout the room.

The three men and Raven pulled up chairs. Deju said, "Hold hands, stare into the flame and concentrate on Michael. Michael Ellul, we wish to contact you in whatever plane of existence you abide at this moment." He repeated this several times, sometimes changing the intonation or the phrasing slightly. He

fell into a trance. The candles flickered and flamed as though someone or something had breathed on them.

Michael's voice came from Deju's mouth. "Rhami, I hear you calling me. You should not do that. You and whoever is with you are in great danger."

Raven said, "We have taken precautions. Each of us wears an emblem to ward off evil spirits. Tell us of your condition and how we may help you."

"I'm fine. Although Morgaine keeps me prisoner and from time to time forces me to have sex with her, I have the run of Lilith's castle. Tell Melody, that I am sorry for the sorrows I've cost her. I love her very much. Nonetheless, she must get on with her life and forget about me."

Raven thought, *Apparently she's already done that. Ah Michael, if you return, you'll also be free of Melody. And ripe for the pickings.* She smiled at the thought of having him for a lover.

Lance said, "But Michael, we want to rescue you. There must be a way. Perhaps you know of some weakness of Morgaine's."

"She has no weaknesses. Please don't try. You'll only suffer for it."

The timber of Deju's voice changed to a feminine one, one the friends recognized immediately. It was Morgaine's. "So, you've found a way of communicating with Michael. That's good. If he can talk to his friends, perhaps when I'm not around he won't be so restless. As far as rescue goes, take Michael's advice and don't even try. I'll be harsh in my punishment of anyone who interferes with my plans."

"Tell me," Raven said, "what are your plans? Are you simply going to keep Michael as a pet for eternity?"

"That's for me to know, my priestess. Perhaps some day I'll share him with you."

Oh crap, Raven thought, *she's reading my mind. I hope the others didn't catch that innuendo. I'm glad Jack isn't here.*

Morgaine continued to speak through Deju, "And Raven, as an Omega priestess, you know that eternity is not that far away." She laughed raucously.

Deju's eyes fluttered, and he moaned as he came out of his trance. The seance had ended. Longfeathers turned the overhead lights back on. "Should I ask Melody if she wants to join us for a discussion of what we just heard. She may want to know what transpired."

"Of course," said Deju. "Since I was in a trance, you can tell me too."

Lance said, "Michael was channeled through you. But so was Morgaine."

"Really."

When Melody came back into the room, she had on pajamas and a robe. She opened a cigarette box and put one between her lips. Longfeathers lit it for her. She took a deep drag and blew out a cloud of smoke. "I should give these up. How did the seance go?"

Raven said, "We were successful in contacting Michael, but he was not optimistic. In fact he told us not to try to rescue him. That we would suffer for it. Morgaine said the same thing."

"Morgaine?"

"Yes. Apparently she was eavesdropping and put her two cents into the conversation. She threatened us

with severe punishment if we tried."

Longfeathers said, "Michael also said that he loves you."

Melody frowned. "And I love him for all the good that it does either of us. What else did he say? What's Morgaine making him do?" The friends looked at each other, but said nothing. "It's obvious from the look on your faces. She's forcing him to make love to her. Well, I'm not blaming Michael. She's a demon, a succubus. At least he has gained some pleasure from contact with her."

She turned away. Raven saw the tears on her cheek and felt guilty for her own lustful thoughts regarding Michael.

Melody said, "I'm tired and am going to bed. Whoever is the last to leave, make sure the door is locked." She went back into her bedroom.

Raven said, "I'm tired too. Do we have anything more to discuss tonight?"

Nobody spoke up. She wished them a good evening and returned to the apartment that she and Westcott shared. He was already there, sitting on the sofa in his underwear nursing another drink. A half empty whiskey bottle rested on the coffee table. It was the one thing that Raven disliked about their relationship, his drinking. She decided to break it off soon.

Raven poured a drink for herself, kissed him on the cheek and sat next to him. He flipped off the TV. "Did you contact Michael with your seance?"

"We did. You should've been there. You would've seen that it's not nonsense." She told him most of Michael and Morgaine had said. She asked, "Did you call your college chum?"

"Yep. He might be onto something. I won't know for sure until I see for myself. But Hon, it means going to Cambridge for awhile."

"How long?"

"That depends on what he's got. It might be a couple of days, or it might be several weeks."

"You'll have to go by yourself. I'm returning to Israel."

"To the Church of Omega?"

"Yes. After tonight, I'm sure Morgaine is up to something. I want to find out what it is."

Westcott put his arm around her. "I'll miss you terribly."

"And I'll miss you. When you're finished fooling with your buddy's invention or whatever, come there."

"I will." He snuggled up close to her, kissed her and squeezed her breast. She did not resist. He slowly undressed her and slid off his briefs. They made love on the sofa.

CHAPTER 6. THE CRYSTAL

Mandy slept until bright sunlight was in her eyes. She groaned, coughed and stretched. She looked around the room to orient herself. Her eyes fell on the robot standing by the door. In the harsh light of day, it did not look at all human. Its face was that of a mannequin. Its eyes glowed red. Slowly all the craziness of the day before came back to her. Did she really meet the Frankenstein monster, become introduced to a vampire and see ghosts? "Nonsense," she cried. Nonetheless, there stood the android who was supposed to guard her from the vampire.

She held the sheet up to her chest as she slid her legs out from the bed. "Hey," she cried. "You, I forgot your name."

"Good morning, Mandy," said the robot. "My name is Isaac. Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Yeah, Isaac. Do you know the time?"

"It is precisely eleven oh eight and thirty-five seconds A.M."

"Oh shit. I shouldn't have slept so late. I meant to get an early start to look for a job." She tapped out a cigarette from the pack on the night stand and lit it. After taking a deep drag, she coughed again.

Isaac remarked, "You should not smoke, Mandy. It is bad for your health."

"Oh crap, not another mother, telling me what's bad for me."

"I don't understand. I'm not your mother."

"You're damn tooting you're not. So stop telling me what to do."

Isaac became silent.

Mandy took a few more drags off of her cigarette and stubbed it out. "Is there anywhere nearby where I can get breakfast? Or do I have to walk all the way back to town?"

"You might try the kitchen downstairs. I believe Olivia often goes to the market and stocks up on groceries."

"Olivia? Who is Olivia?"

"Mr. Legion's special friend."

Mandy laughed. "Special friend, huh. Probably some gold-digging floozy. She wouldn't look twice at that ugly puss if he wasn't supporting her."

"I would not know about that. She is nice to me."

"Well, I could care less about big old Vic and his girl friend. You may leave now, Isaac. The vampire has long since gone to his coffin."

"You are correct. Good bye." He went out the door.

"Arrivederci, mechanical man."

Mandy went into the bathroom and relieved herself. There was a bath with a shower. "I wonder whether

the water is turned on. Must be. The toilet flushed.” She turned on the bathtub faucets. “I’ll be damned. There’s even hot water. Maybe after breakfast I’ll take a shower if I can find some towels and soap.”

She put on her jeans, slipped on her T-shirt, not bothering with a bra, and went downstairs. When she entered the kitchen, two people were at the table drinking coffee. One was Legion. The other was a blonde woman, good looking with a fine figure, but big, like Legion. *Holy crap*, Mandy thought, *no wonder she went for an ugly guy like Vic. She’s almost the same size.*

"Hi," she said to the couple.

Legion got to his feet politely. “Good morning, Mandy. I want you to meet my friend, Olivia.”

Mandy came over and shook Olivia's hand, which was so big, she felt like a small child shaking hands with an adult. “Pleased to meetcha, Olivia.”

"Same here," Olivia responded. “Would you like breakfast?”

"You'd better believe it. I'm starving."

"We had pancakes earlier. Would you like me to fry some up for you?"

"You bet. Thanks. Uh, do you have any bacon and eggs."

"Sure."

"I'll have two over easy."

"No pancakes then?"

"Oh, I'll have the pancakes too. Coffee too."

"I see. You've got an appetite like Victor's."

When I get something to eat, I eat a lot, Mandy thought. She sat down at the table and poured herself a mug of coffee which she sipped while Olivia made her breakfast.

"So, how come you two are living in this rat trap?"

Legion said, “That should be obvious. Look at the size of us. We're freaks in this society.”

"So, how do you live?"

"Doing odd jobs. I work in construction sometimes. We also have a small business using computers. What about yourself?"

"At the moment, I'm unemployed. I was hoping to get something locally. I understand that there's a Walmart and some other stores around here."

"You'd need a car to get there. If you intend on staying here in Moonwood, we could use an extra hand in our business, someone to deal with customers."

Mandy scratched her head, mussing her already unruly hair. “What's your business? And how much does it pay?"

"It pays well. We could start you out a five hundred a week. But it's illegal. Does that bother you?"

"That depends. What the penalties are if I get caught?"

"Up to twenty years in the slammer. With a decent lawyer, you could probably cop a plea and get off with less. We're smugglers."

"And what would my part in this operation be?"

"Our front person. You would meet with customers."

"In other words, I would be the most exposed to a possible FBI sting. To take that kind of risk, I'd need four grand a week."

Legion grinned. He held out his hand. "It's a deal."

By then, Olivia had Mandy's breakfast prepared. As Mandy dug into the meal with gusto, Olivia asked her, "How long have you been on your own?"

"Ten years, ever since I turned fifteen. My mom didn't care. She was a junky. I never knew who my dad was. It could've any number of guys who lived with us from time to time. Or not."

When she finished, she said, "All this crap about vampires and you being the Frankenstein monster was a bunch of bullshit? To scare me off. Right?"

"Yeah. Just a bunch of shit. We didn't want anyone nosing in our business," replied Legion.

Mandy lit up and asked, "When do you want me to start?"

"Soon. But you'll need better clothes. Olivia, why don't you take Mandy to the mall and buy her something decent to wear."

Olivia raised her eyebrows. "Later. I've got chores to do right now."

Mandy got out of her chair and said, "Say, do you have some bar soap and shampoo? And towels? I could use a nice soaking bath."

"Sure." She went to the pantry. "I put everything I buy from the grocery store in here. I bring things upstairs when we need it."

"Thanks. I'll buy my own stuff after I get my first paycheck. I'm broke at the moment."

"I understand. You'll find towels in the linen closet at the end of the hall upstairs."

After Mandy went upstairs, Olivia said, "Why did you tell her all those outrageous lies?"

"To keep her here. She's under the protection of that demon witch, Morgaine. I want to find out why. Whatever the reason, it can't be good. If it's another end-of-the-world scenario, I want to be sure that I'm on the winning side. Not like last time."

"What last time? What're you talking about?"

Legion winked at her. "Some of us remember things that never happened. Chalk it up to a vivid imagination."

* * * *

As Mandy was getting towels out of the linen closet, she noticed double doors where the hallway took a

jog to the right. Curious as to what was behind them, she tried to open them. They were locked. This made her even more curious. She used an expired credit card to open the old fashioned lock and peered in. The doors led to a long dusty hallway. Some broken furniture was piled up along the walls. Apparently the wing had been closed for some time.

She went back to her room, laid the towels on the bed and retrieved a flashlight out of her backpack. She returned to the closed up wing and walked down it. As she navigated the hallways, she glanced around curiously at ancient portraits, medieval armaments and shelves of curios that lined the walls. Suits of armor stood guard with pikes and broadswords. She tried a couple of doors. They led to good sized rooms, some of which had furniture covered with dusty sheets and cobwebs. Others were empty. At the end of the hall was another set of double doors. She opened them and entered what seemed to be a chapel..

The chapel was all shadows, being lighted only by Mandy's flashlight. As she walked toward the altar, she peered around. In the niches where she would have expected statues of saints were goblins and gargoyles. The stained glass windows, instead of illustrating scenes from the bible, showed mystical symbols, pyramids and pagan deities. *I'll be damned. This is a fucking pagan or Satanist chapel,* she thought. *No wonder the place is haunted. I wonder whether they killed chickens, or even babies, to sacrifice them to the devil.*

On the altar were four items, an elaborately decorated cup like those used in a church for Communion, a scepter or wand, a human skull and a large crystal. The crystal seemed to glow from inside. As Mandy stared at it, she saw images. She bent down for a closer look. The crystal was made up of hundreds of pentagon shaped facets. Her eye caught one in particular. By staring at it, she could see the inside of a colossal ancient building.

Suddenly, she was there, standing between huge columns in the enormous building. On the curved paneled ceiling twenty feet above her head were beautiful murals that portrayed scenes from Pagan mythology. The columns themselves were artistically carved and painted with leaves, vines and fruit. Carvings of small animals and fairy folk peered between the foliage. There were hundreds and hundreds of these columns stretching for a long distance in every direction. The floor was tiled in gold and silver, each tile embossed with a different magical symbol. In addition there was gold and jewels everywhere in the decorations on distant walls.

Two monks in black robes appeared and waved her forward. They passed through an archway into a room filled with murals depicting scenes from the Bible and of Dante's Inferno. Ahead was a dais where a handsome man with dark curly hair topped by a golden crown rested upon an elaborately decorated throne.

Above his head was a mural which depicted a nude woman bathed by the light of the sun; under her feet was the moon; on her head rested a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and crying out in the agony of giving birth. Next to her was a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down through a night sky filled with stars. The dragon gazed hungrily at the place where the child was to be born. The figures in the mural were made to move somehow, like a short film playing over and over.

Mandy decided that she had fallen asleep and was experiencing an extremely vivid dream. As she approached the throne, the two monks, one at a time, kneeled before the man with the crown and kissed his ring. They stood on each side of the throne and beckoned Mandy forward. Since this seemed to be the thing to do, she also kneeled and kissed his ring.

The man smiled at her. "Welcome to the Capital of the World, Mandy. You may rise."

Mandy rose and asked, "Where am I, and who are you?"

"I am Emperor Nicholas, ruler of the world. This is my palace in the capital city of the world, Jerusalem. My power is absolute. No parliament or congress can overrule my commands. I summoned you here to invite you to be my queen. I wish to have you rule by my side."

"Me, Mandy Blake, queen of the world. You must be kidding."

"No. It's really true. You, who have come from poverty and abuse, are to be the richest, most powerful and most envied woman in the world."

CHAPTER 7. THE WARNING

"Well, I'm ready to take your little waif shopping," said Olivia. "Where is she?"

Legion replied, "Isn't she in her room?"

"No."

"She must be upstairs somewhere. The way the stairs creak, I would've heard her if she had come down." He got up and headed for the staircase. Olivia followed him. Once upstairs he peeked into her room and the bathroom. They walked down the corridor to the end, looking into rooms.

"Look," Olivia said, "the doors to the east wing are open."

"It seems that our charge likes to poke her nose into places she has no business."

After Legion went to get an oil lamp, he and Olivia passed through the open doors. He pointed to the floor. There was a clear path of sneaker prints in the dust. They followed these to the pagan chapel. The door was ajar.

They entered. Legion held the lamp up high. "There she is. Standing by the altar. Hey Mandy, Olivia is ready to take you shopping."

There was no reply. Mandy stood perfectly still. She did not even quiver at the sound of Legion's booming voice. He shouted again, advancing toward her. "Mandy. What's wrong with you?" Still no answer or movement.

When he and Olivia came abreast of her, he saw that she was in a trance and staring at the crystal. "There must be something about that ball of glass. She seems mesmerized."

He shook her by the shoulders. Her eyes fluttered, and she slumped in his arms. He picked her up and carried her out the east wing and placed her on the bed in her room. She opened her eyes. "You again," she said in a low voice.

"Yes. It's me, Victor Legion. What happened to you?"

She smiled. "I was looking at that pretty ornament on the altar of that weird chapel in the closed up wing and must've fallen asleep standing up. I had the most marvelous dream."

Legion glanced at Olivia and raised his eyebrows. "What did you dream?"

"I dreamt that the king of the world wanted me to his queen." She sighed. "Wish you hadn't waken me up. It brought back my childhood. I used to play that I was queen of the world all of the time."

Legion looked troubled, but held his peace. "How do you feel? Are you up to going shopping?"

"I feel great." She turned to Olivia. "Would you mind waiting a half hour or so? I never did take that bath. I want to shower before I shop for clothes."

"Go ahead. I'm in no hurry."

When she took her clothes and the towels into the bathroom, Legion said to Olivia, "I wonder whether that was just a dream she had or whether she had a vision. There's something about that crystal. When I was here with Michael Ellul, I recall him mentioning a crystal that caused people's auras to travel through

space and time."

* * * *

It was almost ten in the evening by the time Mandy and Olivia returned from the mall, and Mandy went through her loot. She was amazed that the couple were so willing to spend freely on anything she wanted. She yawned. Although she had slept most of the afternoon after being hypnotized by that crystal, she still felt sleepy. She had the idea that she might dream about the handsome king again. That would be nice.

Isaac, the robot, was back guarding her door. Although Legion had said he was there to protect her from vampires, she wondered whether he was really there to spy on her for some reason. She had dismissed the idea that Sylvan Macrome was really a vampire. She thought maybe these people simply liked to play weird games. Even the smuggling gig that Legion had supposedly hired her for seemed a little far fetched. Yet, why was he and his girl friend willing to spend so much money on her. It was a puzzle.

And the robot itself. She wondered who invented it, and what it was doing here. She recalled the dream she had about the ghost of somebody named Elizabeth Wolfgang. Could the things that the spirit had told her in the dream really be true? She decided to question Isaac.

"Say Isaac, is it really true that you were made by some outfit called the Turc Corporation?"

"Yes. It is true."

"And that a woman named Elizabeth and someone else helped you escape when the military wanted to change your programming?"

"That is also true. Elizabeth was my mother, but she is dead now. And it was that evil Major Bachmann who was going to modify the basic premises that make me who I am."

"What did Elizabeth—your mother—die of?"

"I don't really know. The police thought she was murdered, but they never found the killer. I am wanted by the police myself."

"For what?"

"Bank robbery."

"Bank robbery, huh." Mandy wondered whether that is why Legion and Olivia had so much money to throw around. Perhaps they sent the robot out to burglarize places.

Mandy yawned again. "Well Isaac, I think I'll hit the hay."

"Hit the hay? Oh, it is an expression meaning that you wish to go to sleep. Goodnight, Mandy. Do you wish for me to turn my back while you undress?"

Mandy began to feel affection for the animated mannequin. It was so childlike. "Yes, please." She removed her garments and donned a sheer nightgown with lace trim that she had picked out during the evening shopping spree. She struck a pose. "Okay Isaac, you can look now."

Isaac turned around. It glanced at her, but said nothing.

"Well, how do you like my new nightgown?"

"It is very pretty, but since I can see right through it, why did you have me turn around while you undressed?"

It was right. It was silly. The thing was a machine. Why should she care whether it saw her in the nude or not. "No reason."

"It is something that I must get used to. That biological persons sometimes do things without having any rational purpose in mind."

"Yeah. Goodnight, Isaac." She slipped under the covers.

"Goodnight, Mandy."

* * * *

A few hours later, Mandy woke up. She had the feeling that someone besides herself and the robot were in the room. Moonlight streamed through the window. A shadow passed through the dim light. Mandy removed her hunting knife from the sheath strapped to her ankle. "Who's there?"

A man wearing a priest's collar approached her bed. The odor of death wafted into Mandy's nostrils. She wondered whether it was the other vampire. Sylvan had said that he was a priest. "Who are you? What do you want?" Her voice quivered. There was something spectral about the apparition.

A hollow voice said, "In life my name was Patrick McGillicutty. I must warn you to leave this place."

"Are you a vampire?"

"No. I am the soul of a once living man."

"A ghost then?"

Instead of replying to the question, the wraith said, "Beware the evil that is coming."

"What evil? Legion and his girl friend? The vampires?"

"Although they are evil, you need not fear them. A greater evil on its way. It wants you."

Mandy shuddered. This did not feel like a dream. "What wants me? When is it coming?"

"Beware the danger. Leave Moonwood." The ghostly figure slowly faded to mist and disappeared. Mandy no longer felt that its presence in the room.

"Cripes Isaac, did you see that?"

The red lights in the robot's eyes lit up. "Yes, I did. It was the spirit of Father McGillicutty."

"Who's Father McGillicutty?"

"He was a Catholic priest who lived here several years ago. He performed an exorcism on another man who lived here, Lance Flebert. But the demon who had possessed Lance went into Father McGillicutty, and the priest committed suicide."

"How awful. The man I met in Woodstock was right. Some terrible things have happened in this mansion. Do you think he was warning me against the same demon?"

"I don't know. Other people have been possessed by demons here in Moonwood."

"Can you protect me against them?"

"I do not know."

Not very comforting, she thought. Mandy, the ghost was right. You should get away from this weird house as quickly as possible. Nonetheless, every since she had the dream about being the queen of the world, she had the feeling that something good was coming her way if she stayed. She'd had lucky hunches like this before and was rewarded handsomely, such as finding a nice man with a good job or a twenty dollar bill.

She was about to turn over and go back to sleep when she noticed a ghostly white face of someone standing in a dark corner. The ghost is back, she thought. *Perhaps it will say more about what danger it was talking about.*

"Father McGillicutty?"

A pale gaunt figure stepped forward. The man wore a priest's collar, but was not McGillicutty. He was a younger man, taller and thinner. "No. I am Father Winters. Perhaps I should say simply David Winters. I don't believe The Church would have me in my present condition."

The other vampire! Mandy yelled, "Stay away from me. Isaac, help me."

The robot advanced toward the vampire. "Do not try to harm this woman."

"I did not intend to. Since I became a creature of the night. I have not sucked the blood of human beings except those who want me to. I have been living mostly on the blood of animals. It would be immoral to take the blood of a person without their permission. I refuse to give in to my lusts."

"If you don't want my blood, what do you want?" asked Mandy.

"To warn you. The demon witch Morgaine has plans for you."

"Hmm. I wonder whether she was the one the ghost was warning me about. Okay, if this Morgaine witch or demon shows up, I won't have any truck with her."

"You should leave Moonwood."

Mandy shook her head. "People are always telling me to get out of here. Well, it just so happens, I like it here. I'm comfortable despite the ghost and vampires and other weird creatures."

CHAPTER 8. NICHOLAS

While Bridget was in the hospital, she was visited by two priestesses of the cult called The Children of Aquarius. Mildred Hoffstator was sixty years old and grossly overweight. Chung Lee was a petite attractive Asian American in her fifties. They wore the elaborately decorated robes of the Church of Omega and brought expensive gifts for the baby, things of gold with rubies, diamonds and emeralds imbedded in them.

"We couldn't accept these," said Tom. "They must've cost a fortune. Why are you giving us this stuff?"

Lee said, "This is special child. You must keep these thing for him. Some day he'll be a great leader."

They kept insisting until Tom accepted the gifts to get rid of her. After they left, he said, "I wonder what this Church of Omega is, and why they're so interested in baby Nick," .

"Who cares?" replied Bridget. "We could use the money right now. We'll sell or pawn the things they gave him."

A few hours later, three expensively dressed businessmen visited the child. They knelt down before him and bowed their heads in prayer. They also gave gifts, money, stock certificates and bonds.

When they left, Tom said, "This is crazy. Why are people showering our child with expensive presents? I recognized two of those guys. I saw their pictures in Fortune magazine. They're CEOs of big corporations."

"Maybe what those ladies said is true. Our little Nicky is special." She gazed adoring at her precious baby, a complete one eighty from her attitude of two days previously.

* * * *

Baby Nick grew rapidly—too rapidly in fact. By the time he was three months, he took his first steps. At six months he was the size of a two-year-old and could talk in sentences. When Tom and Bridget asked the pediatrician about this, he was as puzzled as they were. In addition, their son had developed uncanny abilities. He could read minds. Once when he wanted something on a table, he simply stared at it, and it moved to where he could reach it without anyone touching it.

Tom witnessed this and was amazed. When he told Bridget about it, she said, "See. Nicky is special. That's why those people gave him those nice things."

Tom was not as overjoyed by their son's telepathic abilities. They were things he associated with the occult, which according to the teachings of The Church was evil. Nonetheless, he did not mention his misgivings to Bridget.

At the age of three, Nicky was the size and mental powers of a five-year-old, plus some that no other human children had. Nonetheless, he was as mischievous as most five year olds, which drove Tom and Bridget to crazy with worry. It was impossible to punish him since he used his hypnotic powers to cause his parents to forgive his transgressions.

Like a real five-year-old, he started kindergarten. Somehow his birth certificate magically changed to show his apparent age rather than his real age. In school, he was a bully. Nevertheless, other children seemed to like him. Other boys his age regarded him with envy and a sense of awe. He was a natural born leader and had a following who would do anything he told them to. These boys and a few girls fawned over him, worshipped him and gave him their most precious possessions.

One evening Tom, Bridget and Nick were watching a program on the Discovery Channel about volcanoes. After a while, Nick said, "I'll bet I could make one of those extinct volcanoes erupt if I wanted to."

Bridget said, "What are you saying, Nicky? How could you do that?"

"Just by thinking about it."

Bridget crossed herself. Nick scowled at her as he always did when she did that. Recently he had gone into a tantrum every Sunday when Bridget and Tom took him to church. Finally, he fussed so much that they left him with a baby sitter while they attended Mass.

Tom said, "Don't tell such outrageous lies, Nick."

Nick pouted. "It's not a lie. I can really do it. That program talked about an extinct volcano in California called Crater Lake. I'll make it explode."

Bridget cried, "Please don't, Nicky. If that happened it would be a disaster. People could be killed."

Tom looked disgusted. He whispered into Bridget's ear, "Don't indulge his fantasies. Sometimes I think we should have him examined for mental illness."

Nicky said, "Too late, mom. I made that Crater Lake blow up."

The next day there were huge headlines in the newspaper that Crater Lake, which had been extinct for thousands of years, suddenly without warning, erupted. Several people were killed and injured. Tom noticed that the time of the eruption coincided with the time Nick had said he could make the volcano blow up. He shuddered. *It can't be true*, he told himself. Nonetheless, he wondered what sort of child Bridget and he were bringing up.

* * * *

Over the next several months Nicholas grew even more rapidly and advanced in school in keeping with his apparent age. The school authorities did not seem to notice that he was only in a grade for a few weeks before moving up to a higher grade. At seven, he entered high school. There he took up smoking and pot, but stayed away from harder drugs. He was very popular. Everyone who gave a party sent him an invitation. Girls threw themselves at him. By this time, Bridget and Tom had long since given up trying to rein in his bad impulses. Although a party animal, he was also a brilliant student and came home with report cards that showed straight A's.

At the real age of ten, although his appearance and demeanor were that of a nineteen-year-old, he received several scholarships from prestigious schools. Finally, he decided on Harvard where he majored in law and minored in economics and political science. He was athletic and starred in Harvard's basketball, baseball and football teams. His extracurricular activities included the chess club, participation in a heavy-metal band and fraternity high jinx. He chummed with the sons of the rich and powerful and dated the most beautiful girls on campus. He graduated cum laude.

After graduation and passing the bar, he used his university contacts to raise money and sponsorship to run for elected office. First he began a district representative in the state legislature, where he distinguished himself on several committees, one of which he chaired. Two years later, he ran a successful campaign for a seat in the U.S. House of Representative. Not long after he became a U.S. Senator from New York.

Soon he was ready for his big move. The next a presidential election year, he met with his powerful

supporters and friends and got their support as a candidate for the highest office in the land. His platform was a simple one, something for everybody. Honesty in government for those who believed the government was corrupt. Lower taxes for those who thought taxes were too high. Prosperity for rich and poor alike. He was pro-labor and pro-business. He promised to eliminate poverty and provide free health care for all. He would have a foreign policy that would ensure peace, protect American interests abroad and defeat terrorism, dictatorships and all forms of tyranny. He would be hard on crime and protect American citizens from acts of terrorism. He would fight to save the environment, halt the increase in global warming, advance scientific discovery and make America independent of foreign oil. He would bring peace to the Middle East and spread democracy. He was pro family values, pro civil rights for all citizens regardless of race, creed, national origin or sexual orientation, and pro religion.

When he was asked how he expected to accomplish these seemingly impossible and sometimes conflicting goals, he flashed his winning smile and gave out what at first blush seemed to be a rational plan or proposal, but when analyzed was full of holes, based on possibly wrong assumptions, and consisted mostly of slogans. Nonetheless, his speeches were full of fire, amusing anecdotes and homespun platitudes. The crowds loved him. They cheered mightily wherever he appeared.

The most hard working of his supporters were the people who belonged to the Children of Aquarius cult, also known as the Church of Omega, which had become extremely popular. Its had millions of adherents supported Nicholas' presidential bid in many ways, by contributing money, by preaching and by using their influence.

* * * *

One evening as Nicholas relaxed alone in his New York City apartment meditating in the lotus position on the living room rug, he heard movement as though someone was walking softly on the carpet, a sound that would've been unheard by any ordinary human. He leaped to his feet and turned quickly to face the intruder.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "It's been a while."

The figure before him was a beautiful woman with dark red hair. She wore a simply gray robe with a pentacle emblazoned on the front. "Yes, it has. How's the campaign for the presidency going?"

"Well, as you probably already know."

"Nonetheless, I see a problem."

"What's that?"

"Many people feel more comfortable with a leader who is married. They think that a man who marries shows responsibility. Having a wife will help with the female vote."

Nicholas rubbed his chin. "I suppose you're right." He grinned. "Of course, you're always right, with your clairvoyant powers. But, at the moment I don't even have a steady girl friend." He grinned. "Should I choose one of the women that I'm currently dating and make her my wife?"

"Absolutely not. They're all sluts and gold diggers. Do you believe in soul mates, Nicholas?"

He laughed. "What are you saying, Morgaine? That there's a soul mate waiting for me somewhere in this wide world?"

"Perhaps not a soul mate exactly, but someone that you will fall in love and will make the perfect companion to enhance your political career."

Nicholas eyed her suspiciously. "You're not kidding, are you?"

"Not in the least."

"Where will find this irresistible creature?"

"Upstate New York. She's currently down on her luck and living in an abandoned mansion outside of Woodstock. I'll direct you to the location."

"Am I supposed to cancel my speaking engagements and drive up to Woodstock to meet this fair maiden or vagabond hobo or whatever she is?"

"That's what I'm saying. If you want the presidency, you'll do what I say. You know, my organization, The Children of Aquarius, could decide to support another more pliable candidate."

Nicholas hated taking orders from Morgaine. Nonetheless, he knew that she controlled the Aquariuns and had strange occult powers, for example, the way she appeared in his living room out of nowhere. If she had entered the building in any normal way, she would have been stopped by his security people or at least set off his security system. Not only was he dependent on her support, but he feared her.

"Very well. Do I have to marry this person if I find her unattractive?"

It was Morgaine's turn to laugh. When she finished, she said, "No worry about that. One look, and you'll be spellbound. After I leave, look in your underwear drawer." With that, she vanished right before his eyes.

"Dark angels be damned. She must have demonic black magic at her command. I want to learn that trick."

He went to his dresser. A note with driving directions in a legible feminine script. was pinned to his underwear. He called up his campaign manager. "Bob, please cancel my speaking engagements for this weekend. I need a little break. I'm taking a ride into the country."

He decided he must go upstate alone, although he knew his bodyguards would give him an argument. He did not want anyone to know that he was to meet a strange woman and make her my life, especially if this trip turned out to be fiasco.

CHAPTER 9. THE GATEWAY MACHINE

Doctor Lazlos' office was located in the corner of the physical science building. It was a cluttered mess, with papers and books covering every inch of the desk and chairs. A blackboard mounted on a wall was filled with mathematical formulae and a message for the maintenance people that read "Important. Do not erase." Chalk dust was everywhere, floating in the air, laying in white heaps on the floor below the blackboard and covering every other surface like powder on doughnuts.

Lazlos, himself, as rumpled and messy as his office, was badly in need of a haircut or at least a comb. His white hair stuck out in all directions as though he witnessed a frightening event. He was in his shirtsleeves with a loosely tied tie. One side of his collar was bent up. The front of the shirt was full of grease spots where his stomach bulged, and his trousers were wrinkled. His wire rim glasses were perched on the end of his nose.

When Westcott entered, Lazlos had his nose buried in a scientific journal. Westcott stood for a few moments. Since Lazlos went on reading, he coughed loudly. The physicist peered over the edge of the magazine. He looked as though he had been awakened from a sound sleep.

"Oh Jack. I didn't hear you come in. I was just reading about new theory concerned with quantum strings and multidimensional space. I noticed several inconsistencies in the mathematics, however. I'll have to point them out to the author."

He laid the journal down and rose to shake Westcott's hand. "It's been a while. What brings you back here to the university?"

"To see you, Doctor Lazlos. How have you been? You're looking well."

"I'm in good health. How are you?"

"Better than ever. I'm not drinking as heavily as I used to."

Lazlos sat back down, and Westcott sank into a guest chair. Lazlos took a pipe from the holder on his desk and filled it with tobacco. "I'm glad to hear it. So, what can I do for you?"

Westcott leaned forward. "I read your paper about how a machine could be built to peer into worlds in other dimensions. I was fascinated."

"Not only to spy on such worlds, but actually travel to them."

"Amazing. And you claim it's actually possible."

Lazlos lit his pipe, took a deep puff and blew out a cloud of smoke. "Absolutely. I'm positive of it. I've worked out all the details and the math checks out."

"Have you built a prototype?"

"Only a small model. A machine large enough to send anything larger than a bug to another dimension would cost millions and would be a major project. Also, I need some sort of artificial intelligence computer for control. AI, that's your line, isn't it?"

Westcott was disappointed. "Yes, it is. May I see the model?"

"Of course, my boy. It's in the lab." Lazlos got up and led Westcott down to the physics laboratory in the

basement."

* * * *

Morgaine walked slowly down the long stone stairway that led into the lower depths of the castle. Seated on a great throne in the center of a vast chamber whose ceiling was lost in the shadows above her head was a gigantic monster, three times the size of a man, with three heads. The left head was a fierce snorting bull, the middle was human, but ugly and nasty of appearance, and the right was a horned ram. The creature had goose feet and a reptilian tail. By its side was a small dragon. Two giants with skulls for heads stood rigidly on each side of the throne; one held a spear and the other, a banner. Beautiful naked young women waited upon the enthroned monster. Flickering torches on the wall cast looming shadows. A white mist floated along the floor. Dark blood red fluid dripped from the rock walls.

Morgaine threw herself to the stone floor and knocked her head three times against it. A voice like thunder said, "Arise slave."

After Morgaine climbed to her feet, the bull head spoke. "So Morgaine, have you set in motion a plan to make my son emperor of the world?" Flames shot from its mouth. One of the naked women giggled and snuggled up to the beast, caressing it between the horns.

"As you have commanded, Great and Mighty Asmodeus."

Morgaine's voice quivered. She was never sure how this creature would respond. Its anger was a terrible thing. Sweat dripped from her forehead and ran down her back in rivulets. The heat, dampness and terrible stench of sulfur made her nauseous and lightheaded.

The middle head smiled in an evil manner, and the ram head spoke. "Nonetheless, I foresee problems. Friends of your captive are attempting to free him. If they succeed, I see disaster for our cause."

"What are their names, Master? I will deal with them."

"They are known on the earthly plane as John Westcott, Raven Lenore, Lance Flebert, Rhami Deju, and Robert Longfeathers."

"I know those people."

"I realize that. For that reason, you might not be able to be objective in dealing with them. You are likely to show mercy when cruelty is required. Therefore I forbid you to take any action against them except as I specify. Instead I will assign my beauties to thwart the males among them. Esmeralda."

A dark beauty, with tawny skin, deep dark eyes with large lashes, perfectly formed breasts and wide hips, arose from where she sat between the creature's legs and bowed to it. "What is your wish oh great and glorious one?"

"Would you like to spend time on earth, My Dear?"

Esmeralda's eyes lit up. "If it is your wish, Master."

"It is my wish. You must prevent the man named Jack Westcott from carrying out his plan to enter our dimension."

The man head of the creature spit out a tongue of flame directly at Esmeralda. When the fire touched her, she vanished.

Asmodeus, from his goat mouth, said, "Lucinda, come over here where I can see you."

A gorgeous auburn beauty left off stroking Asmodeus' back and stood before the monster. She bowed. "I am at your beck and call, Master. What does the magnificent Asmodeus require of me?"

"As I returned Esmeralda to an earthly life for a short time, so shall you be returned. I want you to thwart the plans of a man named Lance Flebert."

Lucinda's smile had something of evil in it. "Thank you for this opportunity."

Asmodeus shot out another burst of flame. Lucinda vanished from within its folds.

The awful creature said, "Sheila, appear before me."

A tall beauty with hair so blonde it seemed to be spun from silver threads left off stroking Asmodeus' tail which she had been sitting astride and walked up to the demon. She did not bow to the horrible creature but stared directly into the eyes of the man head with a haughty expression. "What do you wish of me, My Master?" The tone bordered on the sarcastic.

"Ah, my blonde beauty, what am I to do with you? When you return from the assignment I am about to give you, you must receive training in how to address your betters."

Sheila flinched, but stood her ground.

The bull head grinned. "What self assurance. That is why I choose you to deal with two mortals, Rhami Deju and Robert Longfeathers." Again the human head blew flame causing the blonde to vanish."

All three of Asmodeus' heads stared at Morgaine. "This Raven Lenore is a priestess in the earthly religious organization you run, is she not?"

"Yes, Master. I allowed her to infiltrate the Church of Omega in order to set traps for Michael and others."

"So you have. Well, that makes her your responsibility. You will have to deal with that one."

"I can do that by making use of my prisoner."

"How intriguing. That should be interesting. Won't your own jealousy interfere?"

Morgaine chuckled. "I have nothing to fear from any mortal woman. Besides my only interest in Michael is as a plaything and a pawn in our little game."

"Good. Go then."

Morgaine said a spell under breath to teleport herself to her destination before Asmodeus could spray her with fire.

* * * *

When Westcott and Lazlos arrived in the physics laboratory, they found a female student wandering around examining the equipment. She had bronze skin and jet black hair tied back with a ribbon. Her eyes were dark, her figure stupendous and a lovely young face. Westcott was immediately taken with her.

Lazlos said, "May we help you, young lady?"

She lowered her lashes shyly and said, "I am Esmeralda Emuisher. I am from Egypt and a graduate student of physics. I have been doing a thesis in your field of quantum mechanics and our relationship to

parallel universes. I wish to study under the great Doctor Lazlos. The dean said I could be your new lab assistant."

"But I already have a lab assistant. Oh, what was her name again, oh yes, Doloras something or other."

"I was told that Doloras Stempoff had to leave because of a family emergency."

"I see. That's too bad. She was competent. I hope you do half as well, young lady."

"I will try my very best."

"Good. You can start right away. See that machine over there." He pointed.

"The Interdimensional Viewer?"

Lazlos smiled. "So you know what it is called. How did you learn that?"

"I read all about it in the Quantum Physics Review. It's quite an achievement."

"Thank you. Well, we're going to demonstrate it for this gentleman here. And you're going to help me set it up."

Esmeralda clapped her hands together. "How wonderful."

The machine sat on top of a workbench. It was a patchwork of lasers, mirror, gears, electronic parts, speakers and optical parts with many wires running hither and dither in and out of the device. A cable connected it to a desktop computer on a second bench.

As Westcott watched, Esmeralda and Lazlos set about connecting wires, adjusting currents and voltages, booting up the computer and entering several numbers and letters into it. The machine began to vibrate, indicator lights came on and various meters showed readings.

Lazlos peered into a microscope-like lens on one side of the machine. "Oh, this is tremendous. Most universes I have looked at are empty of life. This one seems to have humanoids much like ourselves. Jack, Esmeralda, come look."

Politely, Jack allowed Esmeralda to gaze into the lens first. Meanwhile, Lazlos wrote down several notes. Esmeralda said, "Wow. It-it's unbelievable. You must be so proud, Doctor Lazlos."

She moved over just slightly enough so that Westcott could look into the viewer. Westcott had to squeeze against her to peer into the device. He was very aware of her warm thigh pressed against him. Nonetheless, what he saw was so astounding that he forgot about the closeness of Esmeralda. He was peering into what appeared to be a woman's bedroom. The outer wall, however, was made of stone. A man was chained to it. The man looked up and stared at Westcott as though he sensed that he was being looked at. Westcott recognized him immediately. It was Michael Ellul. Ellul's mouth moved as though he was talking to someone Westcott could not see.

Westcott watched for a long while. Finally, he broke away. "Al, it's too bad there's no sound. We could hear what the man is saying."

"Oh, it would be a simple matter to add an amplifier and speakers. But what use would they be. That person would no doubt speak an alien tongue that we would not understand."

"Hmm. It would be interesting though. Perhaps we could find a way to communicate with the people in that dimension."

"You have a point. Tomorrow Esmeralda and I can add an amplifier, speakers and a microphone. Esmeralda, could you be here early, say seven in the morning?"

"Oh, I'd be delighted to, Doctor." She was bristling with eagerness to work for the famous scientist.

Jack said, "You said that small objects could be moved from our dimension to that other world."

"Yes, of course. Allow me to demonstrate." Lazlos withdrew one of the several pens in a holder in the pocket of his lab coat. He pressed a button and a metal tray like the tray that hold the CD on a CD player came out of the machine. However, the slide did not have any hole or indentations. Lazlos placed the pen on it and caused it to retract into the device. He flipped a switch. There was a curious buzzing. He peered into the viewer. He motioned for Westcott to come over and see for himself.

When Westcott looked into the viewer, the pen was laying on the floor. Michael was staring at it with a puzzled expression. "By golly, you did it."

CHAPTER 10. NICHOLAS AND MANDY

When Nicholas pulled up to the dilapidated mansion in his Mercedes, he doubted whether he was in the right location. He read over Morgaine's direction. He had followed them to the letter. "This ugly old structure is where my soul mate is supposed to dwell? Hard to believe." He got out of the car and stretched. "Well, now that I'm here, I may as well look around."

Gingerly he strolled up the broken steps to the front door. It had been boarded up, but someone had pulled the boards loose. One hung from a single nail. Another lay on the porch. He tried the door. It opened easily. He stepped in and looked around with an expression of disgust. He had a fastidious hatred of grime, and the place was filthy. Dirt and leaves lay on the floor where they had blown in through the broken windows. Enormous cobwebs hung from the ceiling. He called out, "Anyone here?" He was answered by echoes.

He looked in a room to the left of the stairs. It contained furniture covered with dusty sheets and nothing else. Light areas on the wallpaper showed where pictures once hung. Another door led to a dining room and a kitchen. The kitchen was cleaned up and dishes were in the sink. "Someone's been taking their meals here recently," he muttered. "I wonder if it's the woman I'm supposed to meet."

He returned to the foyer. The first door on the right led to a library. This was in bad shape too. Most of the shelves were empty, and books were scattered about on the floor and tables. Suddenly he had the feeling that he was not alone. He turned to face an enormous man with a disfigured face. The man held a baseball bat. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" the apparition said in a voice like thunder.

"My name is Nicholas Bongiglio. This mansion is for sale. I was supposed to meet the real estate agent here. The door was open, so I came inside."

"That's a lie. I happen to know that the owners do not have Moonwood up for sale."

"Are you sure? The agent assured me. Perhaps the owners put it up recently. Unless I'm at the wrong house. Are you the caretaker?" The big man lowered the bat.

"In a manner of speaking. I still don't believe you, but for now, I'll take your word for it. Later I'll call the owner and check your story. I'm curious though. Your name, Bongiglio. Are you related to Tom and Bridget?"

Nicholas thought, *He'll never believe that they are my parents*. My cousin, Tom Bongiglio, is in the general contracting business. Do you know him?"

"I worked for him for a while. He did some work on this very house, but he left before it was completed."

"I didn't know that, but I don't see him that often. Would you mind showing me around?"

"I don't think so. If you're really supposed to meet the real estate agent, we'll wait for him or her. I give the person a half hour. If no one shows up, you'll have to leave."

Nicholas was slightly intimidated by this huge person. He had expected that the house would be empty except for the woman Morgaine said he was supposed to meet. He could have used his powers on the fellow, but did not like to use them unless it was absolutely essential. Besides he did not like the whole idea of coming to this place to meet some bimbo and marry her. He felt he should be giving orders to the likes of Morgaine, not the other way around. Hence, he meekly went out into the hallway without further

protest.

As he exited the library, a woman strolled down the stairs, yawning and scratching her unruly hair. She was dressed in blue jeans, a T-shirt and sneakers, all of which looked threadbare and not all that clean. He could see that she wore no bra. Her nipples showed darkly through the thin cloth. She eyed Nicholas up and down as though she were appraising him.

"Who is this guy, Vic?" she asked the giant.

"I don't know. He was wandering around down here. Says his name is Nicholas Bongiglio and that he's interested in buying the mansion."

"Really?" She approached Nicholas and pinched the label of his suit jacket. "Expensive stuff. You know a place like this will cost you millions, even though it's a little run down right now. Think you can afford it?"

Although Nicholas felt that the woman was nothing but a gold-digging hippie tramp, for some reason, he was attracted to her. Perhaps it was the easy way she swung her hips as she walked down the steps, head held high—like a model. She had an attractive enough face. With a little makeup applied in the right places she might be quite lovely. Her figure was the type he liked, full busted, thin waisted and long legged.

"Hello," he said. "Are you the caretaker's wife?"

"Caretaker? Oh you mean Vic. No. We're not married, engaged or even girl and boy friend. He's an old friend who's letting me sleep in one of the rooms here until I get on my feet."

"I see .. uh. You have me at a disadvantage. Vic told you my name, but I don't know yours."

"Mandy. So you're interesting buying the old place. Is Vic showing you around?"

"No. Actually he's throwing me out."

She frowned at Legion. "Hey Vic. That's not a good idea. Maybe Mrs. Ellul does want to sell this place, and here we are throwing out prospective buyers. Say Nick, I'll show you the place. Come with me. We'll do the bedrooms first."

Legion pulled her to the side and whispered into her ear. "Do you think that's a good idea? There's something fishy about the guy. Besides, I don't believe Melody will sell the place as long as the robot is here."

Mandy whispered back, "You and your vampire friends are fishy too. And how do you know what the lady wants. Look, I'll take him on a grand tour, and he'll be on his way. If you throw him out, he's likely to realize that it's us who don't belong here."

Legion considered. "Okay. But get rid of him as quickly as you can."

Mandy winked at him. "What's the matter, Vic, jealous?" This last she said loud enough that Nicholas could hear.

Actually Nicholas, with his supersensitive hearing, overheard the entire conversation. He realized that the two of them were nothing but tramps taking advantage of the fact that the mansion was abandoned. Well, he would play their game for the time being and make believe he thought that they were caretakers showing off the house to a prospective buyer. He was intrigued enough by Mandy to want to know what

she was like. Perhaps, he would even seduce her. But marry her, never. Morgaine had to be out of her mind.

Mandy returned to him and said, "Follow me," and started up the steps. Nicholas trailed two steps behind where he could watch the motion of her buttocks.

Mandy opened doors at random. Most of the rooms were either empty or contained miscellaneous stuff that the owners did not take away with them when they left. She did not show him the east wing. When she got to her room, she said, "This is where I bunk down." The bed was unmade and various articles of women's clothing were scattered over it. "Haven't had a chance to make the bed yet. I was heading down to breakfast when you showed up."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Why don't we go down to the kitchen. You could tell me about the house. I could go for a cup of coffee."

"Sure." Mandy stood by the bed. She did not make any move to leave the room. In fact she pushed some of her garments out of the way and sat down. She squinted at Nicholas and said, "I know you."

"You probably saw me on TV or the newspapers. I'm a senator from this state and am currently running for president of the United States."

"Naw. I never watch the news or look at anything except the classifieds and the sports section. I remember what it was. I saw you in a vision."

"A vision?"

"Yeah. I found this crystal, see. When I looked into it, I went into a trance and had a vision. Lucky for me, Vic came along and woke me up. Who knows how long I would've been out otherwise."

"So what was this vision?"

"That's what I started to tell you. I was in a great hall in some monstrously big palace or temple or something. You were sitting on a throne and told me that you wanted me to be your queen. Ain't that something. And here you are. Maybe it means something. Maybe I'm lucky for you and that you'll be elected president."

Nicholas looked into her mind and viewed her vision. It was as she described. He thought, *Morgaine must've sent it to her*. "I see. Maybe you're right."

Mandy stroked her chin. "Something doesn't add up. If you get elected president, you'd be living in the White House. Why would you want to buy this dump?"

Nicholas winked at her. "I see, you've caught me out. I made up that story about wanting to buy the mansion, just as you and Vic made up that story about being caretakers. You're simply transients who found a cozy rent-free place to flop."

"Okay. I see it's time for truth and dare. Why did you come here?"

"To find you. You had your vision about me. Well, I'm also into the occult and was told by a spirit that I would find the love of life in this place."

Mandy laughed. "The love of your life, huh. What kind of B.S. are you pulling now."

"I know it sounds ridiculous, but it's the truth."

"Do you often consult spirits?"

Nicholas nodded. "I'm into the occult quite a bit."

"Well, you've come to the right place. I've seen at least two ghosts and a couple of gents who claim to be vampires since I moved in."

"And what about Vic? What is he to you, really?"

"Nothing. He was here before I came. He was good enough to let me stay." She grinned broadly. "You know, he claims to be the Frankenstein monster."

"He looks like he could be." Nicholas thought, *I'll have to read his mind. Is it possible he really is? What an asset he would make if it's true.*

Mandy maneuvered on the bed so that her legs were curled under her and her head rested on her elbow. She looked charming and sexy in that pose. Nicholas approached the bed and sat besides her. "You're very pretty."

She smiled. "Pretty enough to be your 'one true love'?"

He shrugged. "Who knows. I am attracted to you."

"And I've kind of had the hots for you ever since I remembered that vision. It's nice to see that you're a real person." She closed her eyes and raised her chin.

Nicholas took the hint and kissed her tenderly. She put her arms around him and sighed. He pressed her back on the bed and cupped one breast in his hand. She sighed again and pulled at the sleeve of his jacket. He shrugged it off, tore his tie away and took off his shirt. She removed her T-shirt revealing her perfect breasts. Nicholas kissed each on the nipple and pulled off her jeans. At the same time, Mandy unzipped his trousers and reached in to grasp his manhood. Moments later, they were entangled in a lovers embrace and breathing heavily. Nicholas prolonged the ecstasy as long as possible until Mandy had her orgasm, at which time he burst forth explosively.

Afterwards, they smoked cigarettes. The experience had overwhelmed Nicholas. He'd had sex with many women, but this was somehow different. For some reason he could not explain, although he had known Mandy only a few minutes he actually had feelings for her that were stronger than lust.

"Mandy," he whispered. "How would like to go away with me? I could give you everything you ever longed for in your life."

"Oh Nicholas, you say the nicest things. Of course, I'll go away with you. I've needed a man in my life for a while now, especially one as handsome as you."

"I need to be more than 'a man in your life.' I want to be *the* man in your life. I want to marry you."

"Wow. Marriage. We just met. Yet ... somehow I feel I should accept. Okay, Nick. I'll do it. I'll go away with you. We'll get married and live in that palace I dreamed about."

Just then there came a loud knock at her door. Legion shouted, "Are you all right, Mandy?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, Vic. Don't come in." She hand motioned to Nicholas to get dressed, and she pulled on her own clothing.

Nicholas read the mind of the giant man at the door. *Holy Satan*, he thought. *He really is the creation*

of Doctor Frankenstein, still alive after all these years.

He turned to Mandy. "What would you think if I asked Vic to go with us. I could use a big strong guy like him for a bodyguard."

"Sure, why not? I like the big oof. He's strong but a really nice guy. Lately he's been brooding around here since he had a fight with his girl friend and she left. The change from this haunted old house would be good for him."

"You can come in now, Vic," Mandy called to Legion.

Legion eyed them and blushed. "Sorry to bust in on you like that, but I didn't know what this guy was up to. You two seemed to have hit it off real well." He smirked.

"Nick is going to take me away from all this. We're going to be married."

Legion's eyes went wide. "I've heard of love at first sight, but this is unprecedented."

"Nick wants you to come along too. As his bodyguard. Besides, you could make sure that he's a man of his word. You could give me away."

Legion guffawed. "Like you'd need protection from the likes of him."

Nicholas said, "Will you take the job?"

"Sure. Why not. I've had a lot of different occupations in my life. Might as well try being someone's bodyguard."

"Can you handle firearms?"

"Sure."

CHAPTER 11. THE CHURCH OF OMEGA

A few days after the meeting at Melody Ellul's apartment, Raven flew to Tel Aviv. Upon arrival she left a message on Westcott's voice mail to call her at The Church of Omega. From Tel Aviv she took the bus to Jerusalem where she lounged around the bus station waiting for someone to take her to the Church. At precisely nine o'clock a priestess in gray robes walked up to Raven. It was the priestess who had greeted Raven years ago when Raven started training for the priestesshood.

"Hi, Raven. Do you remember me. I'm Cindy Looper."

"Of course, I remember you, Cindy."

They hugged, and Cindy kissed Raven on the cheek.

"Welcome back, Sister Raven. May Balaam brighten your day."

"Thank you. This is like coming home for me. I have so many memories of this place, both fond and terrible."

"All of us priestesses feel that way. We spend so much time here that it's our second home. And of course there are those who never leave. Did you know that the Church has another building project in Jerusalem?"

"No. I had not heard about that. What's it for?"

Cindy shrugged. "Nobody on our level of the organization seems to know. It's quite mysterious."

Raven thought, *I'll have to look into that. It may have something to do with whatever Morgaine is planning.*

Cindy's still owned the Camry that she had before. She whisked into heavy traffic like a New York cab driver. Fifteen minutes later she had the car parked in an underground parking garage next to the church.

"Do you want to go right in?" Cindy asked.

"I'd like to walk outside first. After the long flight and that smelly bus, I need fresh air. It's such a nice day."

They walked out of the parking garage and crossed the street. Like tourists they gazed at the impressive Church of Omega. The building combined features of the Taj Mahal, the Sistine Chapel, Notre Dame, Hagia Sophia, Jami' Mosque, and various temples in Japan and India, only on a grander scale than any of them, with an enormous dome, minarets, wings, flying buttresses, towers and facade. Above the main entrance was an enormous stained glass rosy cross. Below it was the Greek letter omega, under which were eighteen five-pointed stars or pentagrams in three groups of six. Above the huge doors of the main entrance was the head of a man with a curly beard and hair with ram's horns carved out of granite. It represented the demon or god Balaam.

The interior was as impressive as the exterior. The vaulted frescoed ceiling depicted scenes from the holy books of several religions. Massive stained glass windows provided soft lighting during daylight hours and additional religious and symbolic art. A long aisle with cushioned pews on either side ran through the center of the main building. Niches contained statues of various deities and demons. Great columns, intricately carved arches and other architectural details were done on a grand scale.

At the far end, where one might expect an altar was a massive throne on a dais. Above the throne, a mural depicted a nude woman bathed by the light of the sun; under her feet was the moon: on her head rested a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and crying out in the agony of giving birth. Next to her was a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and diadems on each of its seven heads. Its tail swept down through a night sky filled with stars. The dragon gazed hungrily at the place where the child was to be born. Somehow the figures were made to move, like a short film playing over and over.

Cindy said, "I've heard rumors that the throne is going to be replaced with an altar."

Another significant change, Raven thought. Something big is in the works.

Cindy said, "Before I take you to your room, would you like to consult the oracle? It's usually right on the money when it comes to predicting a person's future."

"Of course. I'd like to know whether my stay here will be productive." *And maybe I'll get a clue as to what's going on.*

They went to a niche in an odd corner of the nave where a mechanical donkey stood. On it was written "Balaam's Ass."

Cindy withdrew a large coin out a pocket in her robe and gave it to Raven, who slid the coin in the slot. The donkey opened its mouth and brayed. Raven asked, "Will my mission be successful?"

The donkey brayed again and said, "Yes, but be wary of the one you admire. Your path is fraught with traps and dangers."

"I see." Raven thought, *The trouble with oracles is that their predictions are always mysterious and enigmatic. Who is the one I admire? Michael? And of course the path I follow is 'fraught with traps and danger,' but what traps and what dangers?*

Cindy said, "Balaam's Ass always seems to always warn you of danger. I remember when you first arrived here to become a priestess, there was such a warning."

Raven laughed. "It's probably because I'm the type of person who has tendency to get herself into trouble."

* * * *

A few hours later, Raven was settled in her room in one of the towers. Her unpacking was done, her clothes hung up and put away in drawers. Just as she laid down on the bed to make up for jet lag, the phone rang. It was Westcott.

"Hello Beautiful. How was your trip?"

"Boring and tiring. I was about to take a nap. Did you see that scientist friend of yours?"

"I did. And his machine really works. I was able to view Michael. I even sent him a note. The trouble is that the machine is too small to transfer anything larger than a pea between the dimensions."

"That's exciting. Is it possible to build a larger one?"

"Possible, but impractical. It would cost millions and have the resources of a major corporation behind it."

Raven scratched her head. "Y'know..."

"Y'know what? It sounds like you have an idea."

"Well. The Elluls are very rich. Not only that, Michael had many contacts in industry. Perhaps you could approach Melody to arrange a meeting with a CEO of a firm who might be interested in building the machine. You could pitch it as a breakthrough that could make the investor millions."

Westcott kissed the phone with a loud smacking sound. "I love you, Raven. You're a genius. All I have to do is convince Melody."

"That may not be that easy, Lover. She's on some kind of religious kick right now. She acts like she really doesn't want Michael back."

"That may be, but I don't think she really wants to leave him in Morgaine's clutches."

They spoke for a few minutes longer about trivialities. After Raven hung up, she laid back down and soon fell asleep. She began to dream. In her dream she was wandering around a dark medieval castle. Something was familiar about it. After a while she realized that it was where Michael Ellul was being held prisoner. She wondered how she came to be in the dimension where he existed. She shivered with cold terror. What if Morgaine or one of her demons caught her? Torture was not out of the question.

She listened at the doors along the gloomy corridor. She heard nothing until she came to the end of the corridor. Soft moaning came from the last room. She slowly opened it a crack and peered in. Moonlight coming through a window showed a man chained to the opposite wall. Although she could not see his face, she was sure that it was Michael. She slipped into the room and looked around. It was a woman's bedroom. *Morgaine's room*, she thought.

The bed was made and empty. It was obvious that the witch was elsewhere. Raven approached the chained man. "Michael," she whispered. "Are you all right?"

Michael looked up. "Who's there? Is that you, Morgaine?"

"It's Raven."

"Oh, thank Hecate, you found me. I think Morgaine is trying to give me a potion to make me fall in love with her. So far, I've resisted eating or drinking anything. But I'm getting weaker. I don't know if I can hold out much longer."

Raven approached him and yanked on the chains attached to Michael with shackles. They were quite strong, and there did not seem to be any way to open them. "Michael, I can't get these off."

"They open and close using a spell. But first get me something to drink. There's a jug of water on the night stand. Morgaine drinks from it, so I know it's not adulterated."

Raven filled a glass from the jug and brought it to Michael, who drank it down without removing the glass from his lips. When he finally put it down, he said, "I feel better. I was so thirsty." He paused as though in thought. "I know the spell to unshackle myself. Morgaine grew careless once when she released me for exercise. I read her lips while she mumbled the spell." He said words that sounded like nonsense syllables to Raven's ears, and the manacles fell from his wrists and ankles.

As he stretched himself to get the kinks out, Raven could not help but admire the musculature of his chest and abdomen. Michael was a well-built man, and he wore only a brief that barely covered his genitals. He grabbed Raven and hugged her in gratitude for coming to rescue him. Raven enjoyed the sensation of his manly body against her. It was something she had fantasized often since she met him.

After he stepped away, however, an odd thought struck her. If he knew how to free himself, why hadn't he. She asked him.

"It would have done no good unless I had a way back to our own dimension. I was waiting for someone who knew of a gateway to act. Otherwise Morgaine would've caught me and placed a different spell on the manacles. C'mon Raven, show me the way back to the real world before Morgaine returns."

She bowed her head in regret. "I can't. I don't even know how I got here. I was resting in my room at The Church of Omega. Suddenly I was here in this castle."

"Oh no. It's a trap then. Your physical body is not really here."

"It isn't?" She thought, *That embrace sure felt like it was my physical body.*

"Morgaine must've sent your aura to this place and a demon to possess you. This is terrible. I was afraid of something like this since you and my other friends contacted during that seance. Like me, you're trapped in this dimension for eternity."

Raven asked, "Is there no escape?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

Although Raven trembled like a leaf with terror, she said, "Now that you're free, can't we try to find a way?"

Michael thought for a moment. "Y'know, centuries ago when I first met Morgaine, we attended a University of Sorcery together. I've heard her speak of a gateway to that dimension somewhere in the underground catacombs of this castle. Let's go down there."

"But how can we get out of that dimension?"

"There are several gateways in the university. One I know leads to a museum in New York City. That's how Morgaine came to the college. She called it, The Museum of Fantastic Art. She said she walked into a painting. It's worth a try. Let's go."

They exited his room and headed down a gloomy stone stairwell. Down and down they went in what seemed like a never-ending spiral. Raven shivered with the cold coming from the moldy damp walls. As they descended further, she heard strange noises just above the threshold of hearing. It sounded like the faraway screams and groans of people being tortured. An unpleasant odor assailed her nostrils. She had a feeling of creeping horror that the shadowy stairwell was filled with unseen evil creatures. And that something ugly, evil and horrible waited at the bottom of the well.

"Wh-where does this lead?" she asked through chattering teeth. She wondered how Michael could stand being almost naked in the cold and nasty place.

"To the land of the dead," he replied in solemn tones.

The hairs on Raven's neck rose. Her knees felt as though they were turning to water, and she became lightheaded with fear. She stumbled against Michael. He put a strong arm around her to keep her from falling. She leaned against him. "I'm so frightened, Michael. I don't know whether I can go on."

"We'll rest for a while. The entrance to the catacombs is not much further."

They sat on the stairs. Michael's arm around Raven's shoulder was a comfort. She gazed into his face.

Those penetrating eyes of his sent waves of heat into her body. She raised a hand to Michael's cheek. "Oh Michael, do you think escape is possible?"

He smiled. "There must be a way. Y'know Raven, until now I never noticed how beautiful you are." He brushed his lips against hers lightly.

She put both arms around his neck and kissed him back passionately.

Michael whispered, "Once we're out of here, we should become lovers. I've always admired you."

"What about Melody?"

"She and I will never be together again. We were never really compatible. She hated Moonwood, disliked my friends and blamed all our troubles on my interest in the occult." He shrugged. "Perhaps she's right."

Raven smiled back at him. He was a dreadfully handsome man. She did not know whether she would want him forever, but at the moment she was feverish with feeling for him. If he made one move in that direction, she would tear off her clothes and make love with him on the stone steps.

As they cuddled, Raven heard footsteps coming towards them. She and Michael rose quickly, but not quickly enough. Morgaine followed by two demons with swords came down the stairs toward them. She was purple with rage.

"So Raven, you betray me by stealing my man. In this place you'll find my wrath is terrible indeed."

Raven and Michael ran down the stairs to get away from her. But, on the next turn, two more weapon laden demons came up from below. Raven screamed. They were trapped.

CHAPTER 12. MOONWOOD

Lance Flebert took the Amtrak upstate. It left Penn Station at five-oh-five P.M. on a Friday afternoon. In two hours it would arrive at Rheincliff, New York. At that time of the day, it was fairly crowded. As a result, a comely young lady with auburn hair sat next to Flebert. Like many modern young woman, she wore a halter top that revealed deep cleavage. A few minutes after the train pulled out of the station, she started a conversation.

"I hate the train, but it's better than the bus," she said.

"You commute?" asked Flebert.

"You could say that. I stay in the city during the week and like come home on weekends."

"I see. Where do you live?"

"Woodstock."

"Oh yeah. That's where I'm headed."

"Say. I know who your are."

"What do you mean? I don't live in Woodstock."

"I mean I recognize you from films. I'm like a movie buff. You're Lance..."

Flebert puffed up. He loved being recognized from his disastrous movie career. "Flebert. But, my dear, I made those action movies in the eighties. How could you have seen them?"

She chuckled. "Actually I've only seen one, Blaster. It's on VHS. I love action movies. I thought you were awesome as Rod Gunman."

Flebert was flattered by her remark. "Do you really think so?"

"Absolutely." She held out her hand. "By the way, my name is Lucinda."

He held it both of his. "I'm always happy to meet a fan, Lucinda. You're a very pretty girl. I like the way you've let your hair stay long. It's a beautiful color. So many women these days cut their hair short."

She batted her eyelashes. "Well, thank you. That's quite a compliment coming from a man who like dated movie actresses and supermodels."

They went on this way for most of the trip, flirting slightly, flattering each other outrageously, and discussing action movies, some of which Lance had appeared in, but most of which he had not.

As they neared Rheincliff, Lucinda asked, "How are you planning to get to Woodstock from Rheincliff?"

"Thought I'd call a cab from the station."

She whistled. "That might be like expensive. Besides, the local taxi drivers don't like going across the river. They have a hard time getting a fare that's going back. Why don't you like ride with me? I'm going that way anyway."

"I hate to impose."

"Not at all. I'd love to have a famous movie star ride in my car."

He chuckled with delight. "Well, if you put it that way, how can I refuse a charming young lady the pleasure of my company. I'm kidding of course. The pleasure will be all mine."

* * * *

The drive from the railroad station in Rheincliff to Woodstock took another forty-five minutes. By that time it was eight o'clock. It had started to rain, and flashes of lightning appeared in the sky.

"Looks like we're in for stormy weather," Lucinda said. "Where do you want me to drop you off?"

"Anywhere. I'll need to get a cab from here. The place I have to go to is on a county road a ways up the mountain."

"Do you think is like New York City? You'll never like get a taxi to drive you up one of those mountain roads on a night like this. I'll take you."

How Flebert was going to get up to Moonwood had been bothering him for a while, ever since the rain started. "But it's out of your way. I don't want to inconvenience you. Your people are probably waiting for you."

She shook her head. "I don't have any people. And it's no inconvenience at all. I enjoy your company. We seem to have like a lot in common. Which way, Lance?"

He was relieved that he did not need to find another way of getting to Moonwood. "Turn right at the intersection at the edge of the village and keep on that road until I tell you where to turn."

As they turned into the driveway with a broken gate, Lucinda said, "Are you sure you know where you're going, Lance? This is like some rich man's estate."

"It's called Moonwood. My friends, the Elluls own it."

By the time they reached the mansion itself, the rain was coming down in buckets, lightning crackled almost continuously and thunder rumbled around the mountains. As Lucinda pulled up in front of it, a streak of lightning lit up the house.

"Holy crap. What a dump. It looks like it's like falling apart. There's no lights on. Are you sure this is like the right place?"

Flebert cleared his throat. "My friends are probably asleep. They go to bed early."

Lucinda looked at her watch. It read eight ten. "Are you kidding? Nobody like goes to bed this early." She turned off the engine. "I'll wait here. If you don't get in, I'll take you back to the village."

"That's very kind of you."

Before he could get out of the car, Lucinda grabbed him around the neck and planted a wet kiss on his lips. It was so pleasant, with her almost naked breasts pressed against his chest that he kissed her back just as ardently. They stayed that way for several moment. When they finally parted, Lucinda sighed and said, "So that's what it's like to kiss a movie star. I liked it."

"I enjoyed our kiss very much too. You're a lovely girl, and I'm quite attracted to you. But I must go now. Perhaps, if you give me your telephone number, we can get together sometime."

"You betcha." She scrounged around in her purse until she found a scrap of paper and pen, upon which

she wrote a telephone number. "It's my cell phone, so you can like reach me regardless of where I am."

"Thank you." He kissed her on the cheek and exited the car. He carefully walked up the broken steps on the porch and turned to wave at her. She had not started the car. He opened the front door and stepped in. The foyer was pitch black. He groped around until he found a light switch. It did nothing. Apparently, the electricity was off. "Oh shit. Let's see. If I remember right, the Elluls kept candles in a drawer on the hall table."

He stumbled around until he found the table and removed a candle. Before he could light it, however, he felt a presence in back of him. He shuddered. He hoped that it was not the vampire, Sylvan Macrome. Soft hands covered his eyes, and a feminine voice said, "Guess who."

It was Lucinda's voice.

"Lucinda. What are you doing here?"

"My car like wouldn't start. The distributor must've gotten wet. The door was open, so I walked in. But what are you doing standing in the dark?"

"The electricity must be out. I was getting a candle. Have you got a lighter?"

There was the sound of flint and the sudden light from the flame momentarily blinded Flebert. He put the wick of the candle to it. "The circuit breakers are in the kitchen."

He led Lucinda into the kitchen and found the main circuit breaker. It had been turned off. He flipped it, and the lights came on in the room and the hallway. When he turned around, Lucinda was standing by the food preparation island admiring the carving knives. She picked one up and suddenly flung it at Flebert. It stuck in the wall two inches from his head.

Flebert turned pale and cried, "Holy Christ, why did you do that?"

Lucinda chuckled. "Scared you, didn't I? I once worked in circus. Only I was like the one getting the knives thrown at her. But my partner showed me how it was done. When he split, I quit the circus."

"I could've had a heart attack." He wiped sweat from his forehead.

Lucinda came up to him, put a hand on his cheek and said, "I'm sorry. I'm like impulsive." She gazed in to his eyes while standing so close that her breasts touched his suit.

He smiled back at her. "I forgive you. But don't do it again." He could not stay angry at such a lovely young woman. "There's a phone in the foyer if you want to call a mechanic to get your car started."

When they returned to the foyer, Lucinda said, "Boy, this place is a mess. It looks like the inside of a haunted house. I'm surprised that these rich friends of yours don't like keep the place up better."

"Well, uh, they don't really live here anymore. I've come here to help rescue someone."

"Rescue someone? From what?"

"A demon witch. She's holding my friend hostage in another dimension."

Lucinda laughed. "Are you putting me on? A demon witch? Another dimension? C'mon Lance, what's the real story? Did you come here to like look the place over for a movie? Are you going to be in a horror flick?"

"No. I'm serious. What's more, you need to get that mechanic out here as soon as possible. You're in deadly danger here."

"Boy. You're good. You have such a serious expression, I like half believe your nonsense."

Flebert was at a loss as to how to convince her of the truth of what he was saying.

She turned to him and put her hand on his cheek again. "Say Lance honey, are we alone in this house."

"I'm not sure. There may be vampires."

She chuckled. "There you again. You like say that stuff with such a straight face. What do you say we go upstairs and find a nice soft bed?"

He got her drift. He thought, *Maybe if I make love to her, she'll call a mechanic and leave.* "Okay Lucinda. I'm all for that." He put an arm around her as they strolled upstairs.

They found a bedroom with a bed covered with a sheet. After they removed the dusty sheet, they undressed. Although the only light was from the occasional lightning flash from the storm, Flebert noted that Lucinda had a gorgeous figure. She was just the type he liked, a little plump to fill out her curves nicely. They kissed and petted until Flebert was ready to penetrate her. She went on top. But before he could enter her, she suddenly was thrown to the floor.

"What the hell!" cried Flebert.

Lucinda yelled, "Get off of me, you fucking whatever you are."

Flebert switched on a lamp. On the floor next to the bed, Isaac, the robot, was holding Lucinda down by the arms and kneeling on one of her legs. Her other leg was kicking the robot. In her right hand, Lucinda had one of the knives from the kitchen. She was trying to stab Isaac with it, tearing at the psuedoflesh of his arms.

"Isaac, what are you doing?" cried Flebert.

In a calm voice, Isaac said, "Stopping this woman from killing you."

"Killing me? What made you think she was going to murder me?"

Meanwhile, Lucinda was screaming bloody murder and swearing like a drunken sailor.

"I heard intruders in the house. The sounds must have come from you and this woman. When I entered this room, you and her were having sex. She had that knife in her hand and was about to stab you in the chest until I pulled her off of you."

Lucinda cried, "He's lying. I was just fooling around."

Flebert recalled how close the knife had come to hitting him when they were down in the kitchen. "She must be a mad woman or possessed. Keep holding her, Isaac. I'll find something to tie her up."

He ran down to the kitchen and found a roll of duct tape. He brought a straight back chair from the dining room. When he returned to the bedroom, the robot and Lucinda were still struggling on the floor. Isaac had managed to make her drop the knife. It lay on the floor nearby. Lucinda was trying to stretch her arm to reach for it.

Flebert picked it up and laid it on the bed. He placed the chair near where the two were wrestling.

"Isaac, can you place her into this chair?"

"I will try." Isaac picked Lucinda up by the armpits and set in the chair. Westcott grabbed one of her kicking legs by the ankle and taped it to the chair leg winding it around a few times and cutting it with the knife. While he did this, he received a few kicks in the head from her other foot. Luckily, she was barefooted. He grabbed her free ankle and also taped it to a chair leg. He had Isaac hold her wrists in back of the chair. He taped them together and to the chair back. He also wound tape around her stomach and the chair.

"You fucking bastard, let me go. Now that I'm tied up are you going to try something kinky. I don't go for that crap. I'll have you arrested for kidnapping and unlawful imprisonment."

"And I'll have you arrested for attempted murder. It now occurs to me that you deliberately made my acquaintance and got my confidence. You planned to kill me all along. You knew my name and that I was once in movies. I don't believe you've actually seen *Blaster*. Someone hired you and briefed you. You're a paid assassin."

"Fuck you. Let me go." She eyed Isaac. "Your savior there isn't human is he? I never met anyone as strong as him. And that face. He looks like a department store dummy."

"He's a robot. Now, tell me who sent you."

She laughed. "Why would I tell you that?"

"I could torture you."

Isaac said, "I could not allow that Mr. Flebert."

"I suppose you wouldn't. What do you suggest?"

"We should call the police and have her arrested as you pointed out."

Flebert shook his head. "Can't do that. You're the only witness, and we can't have your whereabouts known. She would simply claim that I kidnapped her and was holding her against her will. With the bruises she got when you were restraining her, she could claim that I assaulted her."

"And raped me," said Lucinda. "Your DNA is in my vagina even if you didn't come."

Flebert rubbed his chin. "It's quite a dilemma. I can't let you go, and I can't keep you tied up all the time. Also, I'd like to know who wanted me dead."

CHAPTER 13. YIN YANG

Raven screamed with absolute terror as a demon grabbed her by the shoulders and began to shake her. Suddenly she was staring into the eyes of Cindy Looper, her friend and next door neighbor at the Church of Omega. It was Looper who was shaking her. She was back in her room.

"You were having a terrible nightmare," Looper said. "You were screaming bloody murder."

Raven shivered as she recalled her dream. She smiled at her friend. "Thank you for waking me up. I was being attacked by demons."

"Are you all right?" Looper put her hand to Raven's forehead. "You don't feel feverish."

"I'm fine. It must've been the long flight and airline food. What time is it?"

"Four A.M. We've got two hours before wake-up call."

"I'm no longer sleepy. But you go back to your room and get that two hours in."

"Are you sure you'll be okay?"

Raven waved her away. "I'll be fine. Go to bed."

After Looper left, Raven contemplated her dream. Although parts of it were terrifying, other parts were very nice, such as when Michael was holding her and kissing her. The thing about the dream was that it did not seem like a dream. It seemed as real as the present moment.

I know what happened. I was concentrating so hard on finding Michael that once I relaxed, my aura traveled to where he was. This idea made her put more effort into recalling the details. She snapped her fingers. During the dream, Michael told me about a gateway to another dimension. It was in a Museum in New York. Yes, that was it. He said that Morgaine traveled to another dimension through a painting in The Museum of Fantastic Art.

Raven plugged in her laptop and did a search on museums of fantastic art. She found only one in Manhattan, and it was named The Museum of Fantastic Art. It had to be the one. She knew she had to go there if she wanted to rescue Michael, a task that she desired more than ever. But she could not simply invade a dimension that she knew nothing about. She needed to prepare a defense. But how could she defend herself when she did not know the nature of the dangers she would face. She must study all the arcane knowledge that she could get her hands on. At least she was in the right place for that. The Church of Omega had an extensive occult library.

She could not leave for New York any time soon. She was committed to a six-week course of study at The Church. When she finished it, she would be promoted from priestess to witch and enter the upper echelons of the cult.

* * * *

At six A.M. she got her wake-up call. She showered and changed into her priestess robes. She went to breakfast with Looper, and together they went to the Tower of Education. The professor was a Chinese man dressed in Mandarin style with colorful silk trousers, blouse and cap. He wore a que and had a long white mustache and beard.

He said, "Good morning. I am Doctor Kim Lee." He bowed.

The class rose and said, "Good morning Doctor Lee," and returned his bow.

He turned his back and went to the white board. Everyone returned to their seat. With black chalk Lee drew a circle. Within the circle he drew a curved line that essentially divided the circle into two equal parts. He drew a small circle inside each half. He colored in the small circle with black chalk inside one half and filled in the other half except for its small circle.

He brushed the chalk from his hands and turned to the students. "Can anyone tell me what this symbol is called?"

Almost everyone in the room raised their hands. He picked a student in the first row. She replied, "Yin Yang, also known as the Tai Chi T'u."

"Very good. Now who can tell me what it represents."

Fewer women raised their hands. Lee called on Cindy Looper. She rose and said, "It is the symbol that represents everything in the universe, the Chaos."

"And why is it half black and half white."

"Because the universe or chaos is half dark and half light."

"Very good. You will note that the two halves are enfolded. Why?"

Raven was one of the few who knew the answer to that question. "Because the two parts, dark and light, represent a duality, not in conflict, but enfolded in a dynamic reality."

"I see, young lady, that you've study the writings of David Bohm. Good. It means the unity of all things, and yet there are two sides to everything. In the Persian tradition, the god Zurvan is the father of both the Light God known as Ormuzd and the Dark God Ahriman. Together these two gods created the universe.

"Now the philosopher Zarathushtra took Ormuzd as being the Good and Ahriman as being Evil. Hence, this symbol represents Good and Evil incarnate. Now, who can tell me why we have the smaller circles?"

This had all the students stumped.

"I see. Well, if the universe is made up of two principles, one good and one evil, neither the good nor the evil are pure. Everything evil has some good in it; everything good has some evil in it. Think about this tonight. Tomorrow, I want each of you to give me at least two examples each of good within evil and evil within good."

Raven thought, *There's a lot truth in that. Look at Morgaine. Some would say that she is pure evil, yet I've known her to be kind and on occasion actually fight evil.*

Doctor Lee went on with his lecture. "In addition to representing Light and Dark, and Good and Evil, the Yin Yang symbol represents the male and female aspect. Again, those of us who are masculine also have a feminine side and visa versa."

A priestess asked the question, "Doctor, which is the feminine, the white?"

"I'm afraid according to tradition, it is the black. Of course, the originators of the symbol were male chauvinists."

This got a chuckle from the all female audience.

"Another duality that the figure represents is spirit and matter." Lee took out a large cardboard print and set it up so that the class could see. It showed a crowned and bearded man reflected in water. The two images formed a hexagram with a cross in the center. The entire drawing was bordered by a serpent swallowing its tail. "This was drawn by Eliphas Levi. It symbolizes spirit moving across the waters to cast a dark reflection in matter.

The doctor went on about this for a while. After a while, he took out another drawing by Levi. "This is the god Baphomet." It depicted a winged figure with a goat's head sitting on top of the world. The figure's forehead was imprinted with a pentagram. Baphomet is shown as a hermaphrodite. It had breasts and both female and male sex organs. A couple of the younger priestesses giggled softly at the explicitness of the drawing. In addition, a flame floated above the goat head.

Lee went on to describe the origin and evolution of the figure. He said that the figure was used by the Knights Templar and Scottish Freemasonry. He continued to expound on this until lunch time. Before dismissing the class, he said, "Tomorrow I will discuss The Great God Pan and the Ouroboros."

* * * *

The six weeks went by rapidly. Raven's days were spent in lecture halls learning different philosophical, religious, scientific and mythical views of the nature of reality and the universe and how it came into being. Many of them had to do with the teachings of such practitioners of necromancy such as Eliphas Levi and Aleister Crowley. The curriculum was difficult and required intense study of scholarly texts. In addition, there were written assignments, such as critiques of the works Raven had read. There were quizzes, experiments in magic and exams, concluding with a two-hour final whose grade was a third of the final grade. Raven spent many late nights burning the midnight oil. In addition to her studies, she spent time researching spells and amulets that she could use to defend herself against various types of supernatural entities.

On the final day, she was rewarded with a grade of A minus and a promotion to Witch. During the graduation ceremony she was given a diploma and an inscribed athame. She was now permitted access to many secrets of the Church of Omega and The Children of Aquarius. She was told to expect to be called for a special assignment in a couple of weeks.

After the event, she called Westcott and told him what she was doing. He said, "Be careful. I should go with you. You'll need someone to watch your back."

"Don't make me laugh, Jack. You know nothing of the occult. You'd be a hindrance rather than an asset. Get that Gateway Machine built. Then you can come and rescue me." She certainly did not want him along when she encountered Michael Ellul.

They traded insincere endearments, and Jack again warned her not to be reckless.

After she hung up, she booked a flight to New York, packed and said her good byes to Looper and other priestesses who she considered her friends. She gave the Mother Superior the name and number of her hotel. She told her that she would be back in three weeks to receive her new assignment.

* * * *

In another dimension, Morgaine gazed into a crystal ball and smiled broadly. She turned to Michael, who was on her bed, eating an apple. "It looks like our dream ploy worked. Soon Raven will be in our hands."

"I don't understand why you want all my former friends here."

"Because, otherwise they would cause me trouble and spoil my plan for Nicholas. Also, because of their

obsession with saving you, they are putting themselves in danger. They were once my friends too. I must proceed carefully. I do not wish to be sent to Asmodeus' torture chamber to suffer for many years or to become one of his pets. So far since I entered this dimension I've avoided that fate. Asmodeus considers my attempt to bring about Armageddon bungled, as you well know since I helped you sabotage it. If I fail, I'll be up shit creek without a paddle.

"Besides, I have a special feeling for Raven. I consider her a kind of a friend in a way. For a while she and I shared her physical body. During that time I got to know her quite well. Besides she has a part to play in my plan."

* * * *

Two days after Raven arrived in New York, she took a cab to area where the Museum of Fantastic Art was located. The weather was terrible for October. A gray leaden sky poured out intermittent rain for days. Raven had trouble finding the old brownstone that housed it, which looked no different than all the other apartment buildings on that street. Finally she spotted the small sign that had a picture of a dragon and read Museum of Fantastic Art. Just inside the front door a bored old man on a high stool collected five dollars a person to view the collection. When she asked him what sort of exhibit it was, he handed her a folded brochure. "Pictures of dragons and castles and fairies. You know, that sort of thing." He did not seem very enthusiastic.

He pointed to a doorway on the right. This led to a room covered with oil paintings, watercolors and ink drawings that illustrated fantastic themes—castles being attacked by dragons, near nude females being chased by monsters, near nude warriors destroying their enemies with swords, fairylands, sorcerers summoning demons and fighting dragons, battles between knights in armor, and alien landscapes. Slowly she passed through several rooms of paintings and sketches, some of which contained small sculptures as well. She peered at each painting closely to see whether it could be the gateway to another dimension. Finally, after she had traveled through a horseshoe of rooms and was near the foyer, she saw *it*.

It was a large painting covering most of one wall. It portrayed an unusual building on a hill that consisted of dozens of turrets, Victorian-architecture ginger bread and wings going off in every direction. Gnome-like men with wizard caps and carrying wands or crystal balls wandered about the place. The label on the side called it *The University of Sorcery and Magic*. Raven had a premonition that this must be the gateway. But, how was it to be entered. Michael had said that Morgaine simply walked into it. Could that be possible?

She examined the art closely. As she stepped to within a foot, she noticed that the small figures of the dwarf-like men moved about. The light in the room was not great, an overhead florescent with the flickers. She leaned forward until her nose almost touched the canvas. The entire piece of art came alive then, as though everything in it really existed and was right in front of her.

She took a step forward raising her foot over the bottom part of the frame as though stepping over a short wall. Instantly she was in another world, but not near the building depicted in the canvas. She was in a mountainous area near a cliff riddled with caves. Large boulders were scattered around.

CHAPTER 14. THE SPIRIT GUIDE

After Robert Longfeathers and Rhami Deju entered the Institute of Occult Studies, Longfeathers removed his western style hat, slapped it against his leg to remove excess water, hung it on a rack and removed his slicker. "Another day of bad weather," he remarked.

As if to emphasize his statement, there was a loud crack of simultaneous thunder and lightning, and the lights flickered.

Deju grinned. "Perfect weather for necromancy, such as we are about to perform."

"I couldn't agree more. It's a good thing we've brought candles. The lights may go out any minute. Say Rhami, do you think what we plan to do tonight is wise?"

"Not wise at all. In fact, it is extremely dangerous, especially for us who have been infected by demons previously. Nonetheless, I know of no other method of saving our mentor and friend, Michael Ellul. Be brave, my friend."

"Oh, I am not frightened of a few demons. After all, my ancestors fought against men armed with rifles when my people had only bows and arrows. Courage is in our blood. It's simply that I worry that instead of rescuing Michael, we may make his situation worse. We may become hostages."

"You may be right, and yet you may be wrong. I shall try to determine what will befall us before we begin."

The men went to the seance room on the second floor. All the tools they needed for the sorcery they intended to perform were there. As they moved a round table to one side out of the way, lightning and thunder cracked so loudly that it was as though it had hit the building, the lights went out, and the rat-tat-tat on the roof sounded like a machine gun. The lights did not come back on. They were in utter darkness except for the almost continuous lightning.

"The power line into the building must've been struck," said Deju. He took a lighter from his pocket. "We'll have to work by candlelight." He went to a drawer, took out several candles in holders, lit them and set them on the table. He withdrew an Ouija board from another drawer and brought it over to the table.

Longfeathers said a prayer in his native Comanche to keep away evil spirits and tricksters. The two men sat before the device and each placed his finger tips on the planchette. Deju asked, "What will be the result of our necromancy?"

The planchette shivered slightly and moved slowly across the board, halting briefly at the letters, D, A, N, G, E, R. It stopped moving at the R.

"That didn't tell us much," said Longfeathers. "What is the nature of the danger?"

The pointer spelled out F-E-M-A-L-E.

"Female? That doesn't make any sense. There are no females here."

"Perhaps, it means Morgaine."

"Yes. That must be it. Tell us, spirit of the Ouija, will we be able to contact Michael Ellul?"

The planchette glided over to YES.

Deju asked, "But will we be able to free him?"

The answer came back T-H-E-O-U-T-C-O-M-E-I-S-I-N-D-O-U-B-T.

Longfeathers took his cramped fingers off the device, stretched and said, "This is getting us nowhere. I say we go ahead. It seems that even the Ouiga doesn't know whether we'll be successful."

"I agree."

Another great crash of lightning lit up the room as though warning the men that what they were about to attempt could turn out badly.

They ransacked the drawers for the materials they needed and made a pile on the table. Among them was a flashlight. Longfeathers held the lamp while Deju drew a great circle on the floor with chalk. Inside the circle he drew a pentagram.

Deju consulted the ancient book on necromancy that he had brought to the institute. He found the page with the heading, "Summoning a Spirit Guide." His hope was that the spirit guide would lead them to the place where Michael was held prisoner and help them avoid the dangers involved with traveling through the dimension controlled by demons.

Deju and Longfeathers stepped inside the circle. Deju placed a bowl of coriander incense between them and lit it. He anointed three black candles and two white candles with lemon oil, took an athame and scratched the word "spirit" on each candle, and placed the candles on each point of the pentagram in so that each white candle was between two black candles. Starting with the candle at the top of the pentagram, he lit each candle and recited the following:

"Here do I light the candles of welcome."

May the light reach out across the dimensions from this world to the one where spirits dwell.

May it contact one who would guide us into the dimension we wish to enter."

Deju picked up the bowl with the burning incense by its handle and waved it about as he kept asking the spirit guide to appear. He stared into a hand mirror. At first there was only his own reflection. He concentrated harder on contacting a spirit guide. Eventually, a fog appeared within the mirror. After a few moments, it cleared, and he was peering into the eyes of a beautiful blonde woman. Her hair was the color of new wheat, her features that of an angel.

"Are you our spirit guide?" he asked in surprise that one so attractive should appear.

She winked at him. "Yes. My name is Sheila. Where is it that you wish to go?" she asked in a heavenly voice.

"To the dimension where our friend, Michael Ellul, is in bondage. Can you lead us there?"

"Yes. I know of the one that you speak. But this channel is too small. Find a mirror large enough for you to enter it."

The face faded. Deju was again looking at his own reflection. He turned to Longfeathers. "We need to find a larger mirror. I have a full length mirror in my bathroom."

"Will we have to repeat the formula?"

Deju shrugged. "I don't know. We'd better bring this paraphernalia with us."

The two men placed all the things they had used in the ceremony in a sack and left the building.

* * * *

When they reached Deju's apartment, he opened the bathroom door wide. It contained a full-length mirror. He stood in front of it and said, "Spirit guide Sheila, are you present?"

Immediately, his image faded to be replaced by a white mist. By squinting, he could see a figure walking toward him with a feminine stride. After a few moments, the young woman he had seen in the small mirror stood before him. His mouth hung open, and he blushed. Sheila was naked.

"Hello Rhami and Robert," she said in sultry voice.

It took Deju a couple of minutes to regain his composure. He could not help but stare at her perfectly formed ample breasts, the deep curve from her upper body to her hips, her long shapely legs and the fine blonde hair on the area between them.

"Hello," he finally croaked. "Will you lead us to where we want to go?"

Sheila raised one eyebrow and grinned wickedly. "And just where is it you wish to go? There are many places I could take you. Many things I could show you."

Longfeathers, who was not quite as mesmerized as Deju, said, "Take us to our friend, Michael."

"Of course. Step right this way." She made a hand gesture to follow her.

Deju pressed his hands against what should have been the glass of the mirror. They went through as though the mirror did not exist. He stepped over the area between the mirror and the floor into a place of mist and shadows. Longfeathers followed. Once through the gateway, the two men saw more clearly their new environment. It was a small square room with stone walls. On two of the walls were niches in which molding skeletons rested. In addition, there was a stone sarcophagus. They faced an arched entranceway. A white mist rose from the floor and made everything hazy and unreal.

Torches in sconces provided a flickering smoky light that made shadows loom and recede with every stray air movement. The odor of decay and mold pervaded the room. The only sounds were their own breathing and the padding of Sheila's bare feet on the damp floor.

Longfeathers glanced back the way they had come. It had become a solid stone wall. He put his hand on it. It was quite solid. There was no sign of the mirror or any other way to return. The gateway Sheila had led them through worked in only one direction.

He asked, "After we save our friend, how will we return?"

Sheila said, "I will show the way back as well as forward. Follow me."

"What is this place?" asked Deju.

"A catacombs. Above us is the castle where your friend is held captive. Take my hand. I will lead you to the stairwell that leads up to the castle. Do not let go. If you lose me, you will never find your way. The catacombs is a labyrinth."

Each man took hold of Sheila's hand, and they ventured forward past the arched entryway. They hiked for what seemed like miles, making many turns and twists until Deju and Longfeathers lost track of the path.

they had taken. Each chamber was pretty much the same. Some had niches with skeletons in them, some did not. Some had two archways, some three, a few had only one. Nonetheless, Sheila always seemed to know which one to take.

Once, however, Deju got over anxious and started through an archway before Sheila chose the right one. As he stepped through into a dark chamber, instead of striking the hard stone floor, his foot went into nothingness. He tipped forward and whirled his arms around windmill fashion to keep his balance. It was not enough. He found himself falling forward. Just before he took a nose dive, Sheila grabbed him by his jacket and hauled him back.

She pulled so hard that Deju hit against her causing her to stumble backward. They tumbled to the floor in a tangle. Sheila giggled. "Rhami, if you wanted to wrestle, you should've simply asked me. You didn't have to fall on me." She put her arms around him and wriggled her naked body against him enticingly.

She did not feel like a spirit, but like a sensual young woman with soft bare flesh. Deju became hot and flustered. Longfeathers reached down and grabbed his waist to pull him to his feet. He offered a hand to Sheila, who said, when she grabbed it, "My you're strong." She felt the muscle of his arm which brought a broad smile to his face and an envious one to Deju's.

Once Deju recovered from his near fall, he took a torch from the wall and shined the light into the chamber where he had almost fallen. There was no floor, only an open pit full of poisonous snakes. From that point on, he did not step into a room without seeing what was in it.

They came upon a chamber whose floor was divided into large stone squares. Each square contained an alchemy or planetary symbol. Rows of spears were imbedded into the ceiling. Sheila removed a skeleton from a niche and placed it on one of the squares. A spear from the ceiling dropped, impaling the skeleton.

"Those symbols are alchemy symbols. You must step on them in the same order as I do in order to pass through the room safely."

She stepped on the symbol for Mercury. Nothing happened. The men followed her lead being careful to step only on the same squares as she did. They went through the same procedure on the Venus square and so forth. Apparently, the correct order was the same as the order of the planets followed by the four elements of alchemy. They continued on. Suddenly, Sheila dropped their hands and dodged through an archway.

Deju and Longfeathers ran after her into a dead end chamber. Except for corpses in the niches, it was empty, Deju called out, "Sheila. Where are you?" He was answered with echoes of his own voice.

CHAPTER 15. THE CAMPAIGN

When Nicholas returned to Washington, D.C., he gathered his closest associates and supporters together for an announcement. He brought Mandy to the forefront. "Guys and gals, I want you to meet my fiancé, Mandy Blake. We're going to be married this weekend in Las Vegas."

Everyone clapped and cheered. They each came up to congratulate him and give their best wishes to Mandy. Nicholas had previously ordered champagne and other alcoholic beverages. He toasted his new bride. Someone else proposed a toast to his winning the coming election. Other toasts were proposed. The meeting degenerated into a freewheeling party. Someone put on a rock station on the radio. Cigars and cigarettes were lit producing a thick smoky haze. Couples nuzzled in the corners. Mandy fell right into the spirit of the thing, dancing with everybody and shaking her booty all around the office.

At one point, Nicholas asked for quiet. "I also want to introduce a new employee. Come out, Victor." Legion had been sitting quietly in an empty office reading a paperback book by Ann Rice. When he entered the room, the party disintegrated into awed silence. Everyone stared at his tremendous height and build and the scarred appearance of his face. Some people shuddered or looked frightened.

Nicholas put an arm around him. "This is Victor Legion. His primary task will be as a bodyguard for Mandy. He'll also be doing special jobs for me. I'm sure he'll be welcomed into the organization with open arms and will be an asset to the campaign." The way he said this made his people aware that Legion was someone who had the ear of the boss. As the party continued, this fact made him popular with men and women with ambition who vied with each other to be close to the ugly monster.

As the party grew to a close, Nicholas' campaign manager reminded him that the election was not that far away. He hand him an itinerary that the campaign tour should take. "Great. Since my first stop will be L.A., Mandy, Victor Legion and I will meet you the rest of the crew at campaign headquarters there."

They discussed TV commercials. Herb, the campaign manager, said, "We have plenty of ammunition for great attack ads. That stuff you dug up on your rivals is great. Where did you get it?"

"Sorry Herb, I'm afraid I can't reveal my sources, not even to you." Actually Nicholas had obtained the information by occult means.

"Are you ready for the big debate on national TV?"

"Absolutely. Don't worry Herb, the election is in the bag."

"I wish I was as confident as you. Being a third party candidate is an uphill battle. The two major party candidates have a lot of high powered people behind them and many resources. And people don't normally switch their vote to another party unless they've got a damn good reason."

Nicholas slapped Herb on the back. "You worry too much. We've shown one of the candidates to be a dishonest liar and the other to be a sexual deviate. My election is assured."

"Unless they dig up dirt from your past somehow. You don't have skeletons that we don't know about, do you?"

"Don't worry about that. I don't have a past." Nicholas chuckled.

"What about Mandy and this Legion guy?"

"Mandy has had some minor arrests it's true, but nothing earthshaking. Compared with what the

candidates themselves have done, it's nothing. As for Legion, he's like me. He has no past."

Later that evening Nicholas, Mandy and Legion boarded a plane for Las Vegas.

* * * *

As Nicholas and Mandy lay in bed in a luxury suite of the New Yorker, Mandy said, "So this is what it's like being married. I always imagined that if I ever got married that it would be in a big church, and I'd have a reception at a party house with hundreds of guests."

"Don't worry, baby. We'll have that big reception after the election is over. In fact, we'll have it in the White House. Won't that be grand?"

Mandy hugged Nicholas and kissed his throat. "Oh Nicky, you're wonderful." She rubbed her naked body up against him. "Let's do it again."

Nicholas chuckled. "Baby, you're insatiable."

They made love for the third time that morning. While they were smoking cigarettes, Mandy asked, "Why does Vic have to tag along with us all the time?"

"We need a bodyguard. Presidential candidates and their spouses are prime targets for nuts."

"But you had professional people guarding you before. Why not now?"

"There's something about Victor that strikes me as someone who has more than the usual strengths and powers. He seems to be quite aware of everything around him, and he has the strength of ten ordinary guys."

"Yeah. There's that. Y'know, he claims that he's Frankenstein's monster. I think he's a bit balmy."

"All the better. A madman is just what we need to protect us."

* * * *

Mandy enjoyed all the traveling around. At each campaign stop, Nicholas, when he had time, showed her the sights. Wherever they went, Legion was in the background, watching. Sometimes when Nicholas made a speech somewhere, Mandy and Legion were alone together. Mandy would tease Legion by flirting with him. He never flirted back. Instead he told her to stop it. If she got too outrageous, he walked out of the room.

One time she sucked on a finger and said, "Are you going to tell Nicky that I'm a naughty girl when I'm with you?"

"You're nuts, Mandy. We have a good thing going with Nicholas. Why spoil it?"

He left the room.

Finally, there was the evening of the great debate. As predicted, Nicholas devastated his opponents by iterating all their past failings. He made great promises which the other candidates said were impossible without bankrupting the country. Finally, in desperation, they brought up Mandy's past brushes with the law. He turned these around and made them seem mean spirited by bringing up dirt on his wife. He pretended to be absolutely outraged. It was decided by the pundits that he had definitely won the debate.

Mandy and Legion watched it together on the sofa. After a while she got bored and started to tease Legion again. She put her hand on his upper arm and said, "My, that Frankenstein guy gave you some

physique. How did he do on that organ between your legs?"

Legion grinned at her. "It's in proportion to the rest of my body. For a married woman, you seem awful curious about the sexual parts a man who is not your husband."

"Well, I've been with a lot of men. And they're all different. But I was never with anyone like you."

"What about my ugly puss? Doesn't it repulse you?"

"I've gotten used to it. In fact, I've become quite fond of it." She reached up and stroked his cheek. The robe she was wearing slipped off of one shoulder. "C'mon, Nicky is on TV. He won't be home for hours. We could do it, and no one would know."

"You are a temptress, and it's been a long time since I've had a woman."

He undid the front of her robe. She wore only her bra and panties underneath. He kissed her shoulder. She put her arms around his neck and nipped at his ear. He unbuttoned the bra and cupped her breast in one of his huge hands. His rough palm rubbed against her nipple, arousing her. She sighed and pulled his head down on the other breast. After he sucked for a while, he rose to swiftly remove his clothes. She stared at his member. It was indeed huge. She wondered whether it would hurt. Nonetheless, she wanted it badly. She slid her panties off. Moments later he was inside of her. It was as marvelous as she had fantasized. It seemed to fill her whole being. For such a big man he was very gentle. She screamed in ecstasy as they climaxed together.

* * * *

When Nicholas arrived at the hotel room, Mandy and Legion greeted him with a bottle of champagne.

Mandy said, "Congratulations Nicky. You murdered those other saps. They didn't know what hit them."

Legion said, "Yes, congratulations friend. You really did well. I'm sure you'll be elected."

Nicholas said, "Oh, I knew that I would be elected from the time I decided to run. All this campaigning is simply for show. I have tricks I haven't used yet."

"What do you mean?" asked Mandy.

"It's a secret." He put a finger to his lips.

Mandy knew when not to press him. She did not pursue the matter.

They drank champagne until midnight, at which time Legion went to his own room, which joined theirs.

After he left, Nicholas gave Mandy a curious look. "Did you and Legion have fun while I was debating?"

"Fun? What do you mean? We were watching the debate."

Nicholas chuckled low and mean. "Don't think you're fooling me, Mandy love. You forget that I'm a telepath and can read minds. I know exactly what you did."

Mandy realized that she was caught. She brazened it out. "So, what are you going to do about it? Beat me? Divorce me? Fire Vic? What?"

"None of those things. It simply surprises me that you would do it with him. You and I are quite alike. I would cheat on you too if I had the time and the opportunity and the woman attracted me. Just remember that."

Mandy smiled with relief. She touched Nicholas' cheek as she had Legion's a couple of hours earlier. "Well, I don't think either of us ever said 'I love you.' It's been simple lust between us all along. Am I right?"

"Right as rain. So let's continue in that vein."

He grabbed her roughly and threw her on the floor. He pounced on her like an animal, ripped her clothes off of her and took her in a manner that resembled rape. Nonetheless, Mandy enjoyed it almost as much as she had with Legion. She had always liked rough sex, and Nicky was a perfectionist at it, giving her just enough pain to make it interesting.

* * * *

September and October were hectic. They went from city to city campaigning, appeared on talk shows and had conferences with important contributors. On Halloween night, they were in Chicago. Nicholas said that they needed to take the evening off, that it was an important holiday in his religion. He called it Samhain.

"What are you?" asked Mandy. "Some kind of warlock or something? A secret Satanist? No wonder you can read minds."

"That's not all I can do. No, I'm not a Satanist, nor a Wiccan. I have my own private religion, the worship of Nicholas." He grinned broadly, so Mandy did not know whether he was pulling her leg or really meant what he said. "Of course, to the public, we must pretend to be proper Christians."

"Of course."

"Now Mandy. You must leave me alone for a while. There is something I must do, and I need to not be distracted. Go next door and amuse yourself with Victor."

"What are you going to do? Worship some dark god?"

"Something like that. Now, be a good girl and leave."

This aroused Mandy's curiosity. He had asked to be alone before, but never seemed so intense about it.

When she went into Legion's room, he was in bed watching reruns of The X Files. He looked surprised to see Mandy.

She said, "Nicholas sent me in here. He knows all about us."

"That doesn't surprise me. Apparently he doesn't mind."

"Not at all. In fact he actually encourages it."

"Nonetheless, I don't like the idea of doing with him in the next room."

Mandy approached the bed and whispered into Legion's ear. "We won't. I want to see what he does when he's alone. He seemed really anxious to get rid of me tonight. I think it has something to do with Halloween, or Samhain as he calls it."

"It's none of our business."

She put a finger to his lips. "Are you sure? I'd like to know just what kind of man I married."

Legion shrugged. He knew her well enough not to argue.

Mandy tiptoed to the door and very quietly opened it a crack. She put an eye to the slight opening. Nicholas was on the floor in the lotus position with five lit candles around him. One was directly in front, one was to his left, another was to his right, the fourth candle was to his left rear, and the last candle was to his right rear. If lines had been drawn connecting the candles, the figure formed would be a pentagram, a five pointed star. Nicholas eyes were closed, and he held his hands out resting on his legs palms up and fingers slightly curled. His breathing was shallow. His only movement was by his lips. He was muttering something so low, Mandy could not hear what it was. He seemed to be in a trance.

Mandy signaled to Legion to come over and take a look. After he saw what Nicholas was doing, she edged the door closed without making a sound.

"What do you make of that, Vic?"

"He's obviously in a trance. I believe that he sent his aura somewhere else."

"Aura? What's that?"

"His soul or essence or ego, whatever term you prefer."

"People can do that?"

"I've heard that almost anyone can do it. I've never tried it myself. But, of course, I am not human, so do not have a soul."

"Oh yeah. That's right. You're the Frankenstein monster. Okay monster, how about a roll in the hay."

Legion's eyes twinkled. "I guess we're safe to do that for a while. Apparently Nicholas has gone on a psychic trip."

CHAPTER 16. LABYRINTH

Rhami Deju knew that he and Longfeathers were in deep trouble. Once their spirit guide abandoned them, they were lost in the cold, damp, gloomy labyrinthine catacombs. What was worse, he began to hear strange noises, like faraway whispering or screams, sometimes it was footsteps as though someone or something was tracking them. The worst was the slithering of some terrible beast.

Deju kept calling for Sheila. If she heard him, she did not answer. Finally, he said, "What should we do, Robert?" His voice quivered. He felt that he was about to burst into tears.

"There's not much we can do except to try to find our own way. I brought along a stick of charcoal. As we pass through an arch, I'll draw an arrow showing the way we went. At least we won't wander in circles."

"What about the dangers? What if we should encounter a demon or that beast we've heard slithering along?"

"I've brought weapons." He showed Deju a spirit bag which held herbs, stones and other items to ward off evil spirits. Strapped to his ankle was a hunting knife. "We should each take one of the torches off the wall. If we encounter the beast, fire may frighten it. Also, we must check each chamber for traps like the one you almost fell into."

Deju stiffened up his slumping shoulders. "Thank you for your foresight, my friend. And for your calmness. If you weren't along, I would've gone into a complete panic." He placed a hand on Longfeathers' arm to show his gratitude.

They each took a torch from the stanchions and plodded on through the labyrinth. Longfeathers marked each doorway with a black arrow that showed which way they had traveled. After they had traversed through several chambers, Deju put a finger to his lips to signal silence. They heard Sheila's voice. It seemed to come from the chamber on their left.

"Sheila," Deju cried. "Why did you leave us?" He ran into the room where he had heard the voice. It was empty. However, it had exits in each wall. He looked around bewildered. Suddenly, he saw Sheila's naked form cross in front of one exit and disappear. He went after her, calling, "Sheila, Sheila." The next chamber was similar to the one he had just left, having exits on all four walls. Again, he looked around bewildered. Which one had she gone through?

All at once, he realized that Longfeathers was no longer with him. He knew his friend was a plodder and never hurried. He turned around to face the archway he had just come through and called out, "Robert. I'm here."

There was no reply. He went back into the room where he had left Longfeathers. The Native American was no longer there. He shouted again as loudly as he could. "Robert. Robert. Where are you?"

Again there was no reply. Deju felt faint. Somehow he had become separated from Longfeathers in the awful demon-infested labyrinth. He sat down in a corner of the room and began to weep. He lost all hope.

After a while, however, he heard what sounded like horses' hooves in an adjoining chamber. He got up to see. Standing in the middle of the room was a unicorn. *Unicorns are supposed to be lucky*, he thought. *Maybe it will lead me out the labyrinth.*

He touched the unicorn gently just below its horn. It nuzzled him. "Can you show me the way out of here?"

The unicorn nickered, and a voice inside of Deju's head said, *Of course, I can. Get on my back.*

Deju climbed on the unicorn's broad back and held the creature's mane to steady himself. "What's your name, unicorn?"

Amducias, you fool. I once possessed your companion, Robert. I made him play the Devil's Dance on his violin. Now it's your turn.

A trumpet sounded from somewhere. The unicorn vanished, dumping Deju unceremoniously on his rump. Something evil forced itself inside his head, and he began to sing loudly a devilish song with blasphemous words.

* * * *

Longfeathers saw Deju rush through the archway on his left toward the sound of Sheila's voice. He shook his head at the impetuosity of his companion. It would not do to rush around in this abode of demons. He followed at a more leisurely pace, making sure to mark an arrow on the edge of the exit. The next room had an opening on each wall. Otherwise it was empty.

"Rhami," he called out. There was no reply. He took his torch and peered into each of the three adjoining rooms. Deju was not in any of them, neither was Sheila. He examined the dust on the floor. It was not disturbed except for his own footprints. Surely, Deju could not have come this way. He would have had to float above the floor. Yet, he had seen him enter the room.

There's black magic here, he thought. He examined the other doorways. Not one had a charcoal arrow on it, not even the one he had just marked. He scratched his head. *What do I do now?* he wondered.

He sat cross legged in the middle of the chamber to meditate. He planned to send his aura to investigate the labyrinth. This was a dangerous thing to do. While he was away from his physical body, a demon could easily take it over. But he did not have a choice. Wandering around a magical labyrinth would be worse than useless.

Before he went into a trance, a hawk flew through one of the doorways and landed on his shoulder. He turned his head to gaze directly into one of the hawk's eyes. "Where did you come from?"

The hawk squawked, and a voice in Longfeathers' head said, *From my master.*

Longfeathers was not surprised that the hawk communicated with him in that manner. He assumed that the creature was some demon's familiar.

"Who is your master?"

Agares.

Longfeathers felt that he had heard that name before, but could not recall from where.

"What does he want with me?"

He did not say. He wants you to follow me.

Now this presented Longfeathers with a dilemma. He was not sure whether he really wanted to meet this Agares. On the other hand, perhaps Agares could show him a way out of the labyrinth. He decided to

take a chance. "Okay, hawk. Show the way."

The hawk flew up and through one of the archways. Longfeathers followed. Once he was in the chamber, the hawk flew through another opening. This went on through several rooms. Finally, they came to a chamber where an old man waited. The hawk flew to his shoulder and rested there. Slithering around the old man's feet was a crocodile.

"Greetings Robert," the old man said. "We meet again."

"We've met before? I can't say that I recall having the pleasure."

"Oh, the pleasure was all mine. Don't you remember? I taught your friend Rhami Deju how to dance."

Longfeathers took a step back. A chill ran down his back. There were not many things that frightened him, but this was one that did. Agares was one of the demons who had possessed Deju, Flebert and himself. He did not want to be possessed again. It was too much like being a slave. There were times when the demon had taken over his body and made it do things he did not want to do.

"No," he cried and turned to run out of the room. But he found that he could not move. He was frozen in place.

Agares advanced on him. "Now I am going to teach you how to dance too. Won't that be nice?"

The old man and his pets vanished. Longfeathers felt something evil enter him. He began to do a native American dance.

* * * *

As much as Flebert tried to get Lucinda to tell him who had sent her to murder him, she refused to tell him. Finally he gave up. "Well Lucinda, I guess I'll have to either leave you for the vampire or take you with me to a place I don't think you'll like very much."

"Where are you going, Mister Flebert?" asked the robot.

"To the dimension where Michael Ellul is being held prisoner."

"Do you think that's prudent? Remember what happened last time."

"I'll take precautions. Do you want to go with me?"

"Yes. But, we must take this woman with us. Otherwise the vampires will kill her."

Lucinda stopped trying to struggle out of her bonds. "What's this about vampires you keep yapping about?"

"There are at least two vampires that abide in this house," said Isaac.

"You're kidding. You're just like trying to scare me. Well, it like won't work."

"Ignore her," Flebert said. "Michael had some items he used to defend himself from demons. Where does he keep such stuff?"

"In the basement laboratory."

"Okay. But first I want to get something to eat. Do you think that there's anything fit in the kitchen?"

"Oh yes. When Mr. Legion and Miss Blake were living here, they stocked the kitchen with groceries."

"Mr. Legion and Miss Blake? Who the hell are they?"

"Mr. Legion used to work for the contractor who was fixing the place up a few years ago. Two years ago he came back to live here. Ms Blake was only here a couple of months. A few days before you arrived, she and Legion left with a man called Nicholas Bongiglio."

"Nicholas Bongiglio, the presidential candidate?"

"Yes. It was him. I have seen his picture on TV."

"It sounds like a complicated story. You can tell me all about it while Lucinda and I are eating." He went to a cabinet where he knew Michael kept a pistol. He got out the Colt 45 and loaded it. He pointed it at Lucinda. "I'm going to tell Isaac here to untie you. If you're good and don't cause any trouble, we can have a nice dinner together. Otherwise, I might have to put a nice little hole in the middle of your head."

"I'll bet the robot won't let you do that. I've read about robots, and they won't allow a human being come to harm if they can help it."

"But I can shoot you before Isaac can stop me. Promise to be good?"

"Okay. I guess my mission is a failure."

"I hope so. Isaac, untie her and don't let her go anywhere near any knives or anything else that she could use to do me harm."

After Lucinda was untied, she meekly went with Flebert and Isaac into the kitchen. Flebert asked Isaac to cook a meal while he kept an eye on Lucinda. In a few minutes, the robot had microwaved a couple of TV dinners. While Lucinda and Flebert ate, Isaac told them all that happened from the time Legion came to live at the mansion.

Flebert said, "This Ms. Blake. She sounds like some kind of hobo or something."

"You may be right. When she arrived, she seemed like a homeless person. In fact, I recall her saying that she came to Moonwood because it was abandoned."

"And this Legion guy, if he's a big and ugly as you say, he sounds like the Frankenstein monster. I wonder what Bongiglio wanted with them."

"I watch TV quite a lot, especially the news shows. Bongiglio married Ms. Blake."

"Weird. I wonder why a big politician would marry a homeless tramp. Also, it's quite a coincidence that his last name is the same as the contractor who was fixing up this place and who this Legion guy worked for. It's quite strange."

"Yes, it is. We need Sherlock Holmes or Sam Spade to solve the mystery."

Lucinda and Flebert laughed. Lucinda said, "You like to read detective novels, tin man?"

"Yes, I do. I don't have much else to do since I cannot be seen in public."

"Why is that?"

"Agents from the NSA are after me."

"Why? Are you like a spy or something?"

"No. They want to examine my central computer. They want to make others like me, but without a conscience to use for war."

"There must be a substantial reward for the person who reports your whereabouts." She had a smirk on her face.

Flebert said, "Don't get any ideas, Lucinda."

"Just wondering. Y'know you're going to have to either let me go or kill me."

"Or leave you in a place where you can't harm us." He got up from the table and waved the gun at her. "C'mon. We're going there now."

"What have you got? Like a cage to lock me away."

"You'll see."

He brought her to the library. Isaac followed behind. Flebert went to the bookshelf and opened the secret panel.

"Wow. Secret panels," Lucinda said. "What a spooky old house."

"You haven't seen anything yet. Go down that spiral staircase."

After Lucinda started down, Flebert followed. Isaac climbed down last. When they reached the bottom, Flebert herded Lucinda into the laboratory. He said to Isaac, "Watch her while I look around for stuff we can use while we're in the other dimension."

Lucinda remarked, "First it was vampires, and now you're like going to other dimensions. Maybe that's why someone wants to kill you. They don't think a nut like you should be running around loose."

As Flebert searched through various drawers and cabinets, he said, "Perhaps. I was in the loony bin twice."

"Oh yeah. What for? Are you schitzo?"

"No. I was possessed by demons."

Lucinda gave him a look. "So that's it. You are psycho. Possessed by demons is it? I suppose they told you that there were vampires here and that you could like travel to other dimensions."

Flebert did not reply. After he gathered everything he wanted, he said, "Okay Lucinda, I'll let you take the flashlight and go first. Isaac and I will be right behind you. My gun is still trained on you. So don't try anything funny."

They went through the doorway that led to the underground tunnels. They plodded on for a long way. After a while the tunnel opened up into a vast cavern with grottos, enormous stalactites and stalagmites and side tunnels. The sound of rushing water signaled an underground river.

Ahead was the glow from lights. They proceeded toward its source and came to an artificial archway of stone blocks. At the top of the arch was a stone python ready to strike, its open jaw showed ice pick teeth and a forked tongue. The edges of the entrance were carved with a relief of strange beasts, skulls, monsters and hieroglyphics. Past this, at the end of a short tunnel was a room had been carved out of the

surrounding solid rock. Along its walls were stanchions with glowing ovals in them. No wires or cables were attached to them.

The small square room with its high ceiling was choked with cobwebs. Two inches of dust lay on the floor, and its walls were covered with hieroglyphics and faded frescos that depicted people being tortured by demons. By the far wall, an oblong block of stone was covered with strange beasts, serpents and monsters. It appeared to be either a sarcophagus or a sacrificial altar stained with irregular dark spots. In one corner was a jumble of human skulls and bones.

"What the hell is this place?" asked Lucinda.

A figure came out the dark shadows of the corner. It was the vampire, Sylvan Macrome. "It's a gateway to that place you named."

"What? Who are you?"

Macrome bowed. "My name is Sylvan Macrome."

Flebert said, "He's the vampire we spoke of. Say Sylvan, how would you like to take a few ounces of blood from this woman?"

Isaac said, "I cannot allow that. It would harm her."

"Not really, Isaac. But it would make her less dangerous. She would be Sylvan's slave and would not be able to rat on you to the NSA or try to kill me."

Sylvan grinned, showing his long incisors. "I'm afraid I cannot do that. This person is not a human being and has no blood."

"What?" cried Flebert.

"No. Actually, she's a demon."

CHAPTER 17. THE ELECTION

Nicholas bowed before the archdemon Asmodeus. "All is prepared for my election to the presidency of the nation known as United States of America."

The ram head of the monster said, "You wish to use my minions to ensure that occurs?"

"Yes, father. They may be needed. I looked into the future, and it is cloudy."

"I understand. Even with my great powers of prophesy, your future is in doubt. I do not know why this should be. Some factor is concealed from my second sight, some bit of chaos that I do not understand. Hence, I grant you all my minions to aid in your triumph."

Asmodeus waved its scepter into the air and cried, "I place all my vast army of darkness under the command of Nicholas, son of my loins. Make it so."

Thousands and thousands of tiny demons came out of the scepter and flew through the air in a great cloud like a swarm of mosquitoes. They crowded through a large circle of stone to one side of the throne room and vanished.

When all of the demons had passed through the dimensional gate, Asmodeus' bull head said, "There is danger from several quarters ahead of you, Nicholas. I sense it, although I am not sure from where they originate."

"Tell me about them, sire, so that I may prepare."

"First, why did you go to the place called Moonwood and bring those two persons into your coven?"

"Morgaine, the witch, told me to go there to meet my future wife, Mandy Blake, who is now my bride. This fellow, Victor Legion, seemed like someone I could use to further my aims."

"Yes. I know of Legion, the soulless one. Listen to him. He will help you conquer the world. But this woman, she could be trouble."

"But Morgaine, your slave, sent me to fetch her."

The bullhead snorted. "Aye. She is a slave under my and Lilith's command. But she is headstrong and has a tendency to follow my orders in her own obscure way. When I told her to find you a wife, I pictured someone from the American middle class and conformist, not a wandering trollop. Nonetheless, it is too late now. Keep an eye on your new spouse. She, like Morgaine, follows her own agenda, which could lead to trouble."

"I'll watch her carefully. Is she my only danger?"

"No. Morgaine has a slave that she has stolen from the material world. His name is Michael of Eilenberg, known in the modern world as Michael Ellul. He is a sorcerer, but Morgaine has taken away his power. Nonetheless, he has friends who will try to free him. They must not be allowed to succeed."

"What can I do to prevent that?"

"You do not need to do anything. I will handle them. Nonetheless, be aware in case events do not go exactly as planned. And one more thing. Do not trust Morgaine too much. Before you follow her advise again, consult with me."

Nicholas bowed again. "As you wish, Father."

A moment later, he was back in his hotel room. As he glanced up, he saw the door to Legion's room silently close. *One of those two has been spying on me*, he thought. *Probably Mandy. It matters not though. All she saw was her husband meditating.*

* * * *

The day that would change the world had arrived. Election day, USA. In the morning, Nicholas and Mandy made a great show of voting for the media. The rest of the day they spent in seclusion in their hotel suite. By late afternoon, Nicholas' supporters and election workers started to gather in the grand ballroom of the hotel to await the results. After dinner, Nicholas made an appearance and gave a short speech of thanks for all their hard work.

Afterwards, he returned to suite and went straight to the bedroom, where he again went into a trance. This time he contacted the demons who Asmodeus had given him to help with the election. He assigned them to doubtful districts in important states. Their job was to use magic to ensure that he carried those districts. They changed totals on voting machines and caused ballot markings to mysteriously move from another candidate to Nicholas. He warned them to be discreet so that he would win those doubtful districts by low margins.

Towards nine o'clock, when the polls closed on the East Coast, Nicholas, Mandy and Legion settled down on the sofa in their suite to watch the returns on TV. The drink of the evening was Scotch. The two men lit up Cuban cigars. Mandy sat between them, sipping a martini and smoking cigarettes. Due to exit polling, even before the polls closed, Nicholas was declared a winner in some states. Whenever that happened the trio cheered and toasted the reporter.

Once, when a district that Nicholas thought he should have won easily showed the other candidate ahead, he returned to the bedroom and contacted the demon who was to ensure a win in that district.

While he was gone, Mandy said, "Do you think he's using magic to win this election?"

"Yes," replied Legion. "Some kind of necromancy, no doubt. It's no wonder he's so confident."

A few minutes later, he returned to the sofa. He looked slightly wiped out, as though he had been running a race. He gulped down his Scotch and poured himself another before settling back in a more relaxed position.

"What's the matter, Nicky?" Mandy asked. "You don't look good."

Nicholas grinned at her. "Me? I'm fine. In fine fiddle, as they say. Watch the TV and my landslide victory."

A couple of hour later, when the Midwest results started to come in, the media pundits started to declare him the winner. About two in the morning, the Republican candidate, who was far behind, publicly conceded the race. After his concession speech, he called Nicholas to congratulate him. The Democratic candidate waited until fifty percent of the vote or more was in from the big states of New York, Texas and Illinois to concede.

His phone call of concession came at six A.M. After Nicholas hung up, he said, "Okay, Mandy, Vic, show time."

They took the elevator do the back entrance of the ballroom. As Nicholas and Mandy stepped up to the podium, a great roar from the crowd filled the auditorium with earsplitting noise. Hundreds of balloons

were released. Waiters moved through the crowd and passed out glasses of cheap champagne. It took several minutes of Nicholas holding up his hands for silence before the applause and shouting died down.

He began his speech. "The people have spoken. They have given me and our party a clear mandate to push through a program that will return America to its former greatness and make the world a better, safer and more peaceful place for everyone."

A second round of applause and shouting went up. When this quieted, he continued his speech, repeating his agenda and the promises he had made throughout the campaign. After he thanked his supporters and workers for all their hard work, he brought Mandy to the podium. He gave her credit for being the bulwark that kept him going. He kissed her. They waved at the excited crowd for several minutes. It was party time. In two months he would be sworn in as president of the United States of America.

* * * *

The next six months were busy ones for Nicholas, Mandy and Legion. There were speeches to make, receptions to give and attend, a cabinet to appoint, meetings with congressional leaders to push his agenda through the lawmaking bodies, and meetings with major campaign contributors and lobbyists. Legion was appointed Chief of Staff and became his closest confidant. Nicholas made his campaign manager Director of Homeland Security and another close associate, National Security Advisor. Cabinet posts and other high posts were given to persons of good repute with known expertise in the associated field regardless of political affiliation, gender, race or national origin. He was applauded by the press for his open government.

By May, things were going splendidly for the new administration. One day, however, Nicholas had a secret meeting with Legion in the Oval Office. "Sit down, Vic. We need to start to work out our new plan."

"A new plan? I don't get your drift. The bills you've proposed are going through congress with hardly a dissenting voice."

Nicholas waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. "All that was fluff to make me look presidential. Now that I've got the power that goes with being President of The United States, we go for the real prize."

Legion's eyes narrowed. "And what's that?"

Nicholas leaned forward and said in a hoarse whisper, "World domination, of course."

Legion chuckled. "Surely, you're joking."

"I'm dead serious. There are powers behind me whose abilities you would not believe. But we must do our part."

"I see. And what's our part?"

"First, we need an excuse to go to war. Next we must use the war to ensure that my power becomes absolute. Thirdly, we expand the war into a global conflict at the end of which I declare myself emperor of the world."

Legion grinned. He thought, *Nicholas has grand ambitions and occult powers, but in a way he's stupid and naive.* "Simple plan on the surface. Now, all we need to do work out the details."

"Correct. Now let me have your thoughts on the details."

"Hmm. Well, I do have a few ideas. Would you think a rebel army taking over the country of Romania

would be cause enough for the United States to start a war?"

"Those rebels would have to threaten the entire European continent."

"Perhaps if they used a new type of biological weapon that causes the fallen soldiers of their foes to fight on their side."

Nicholas leaned forward eagerly. "There is such a thing?"

"Absolutely. How do you think Doctor Frankenstein created me?"

"Then it's really true. You are the Frankenstein monster."

"And there are many others like me, but they're in hiding."

"This is great. How do you propose putting your idea into action?"

"Come with me to Romania. We will meet with someone who can help us."

"It must be a secret meeting. Usually when a president visits a foreign country, it becomes a state visit, and the press is all over it."

"Of course."

* * * *

Legion hired a private jet. Nicholas told his staff that he was going to be away for a couple of days. He refused to tell them his destination. "If anything of great importance comes up, have Milton handle it." (Milton Hardley was Nicholas's Vice President, a former CEO of a large corporation who was not aware that Nicholas was more than a politician.)

Mandy wanted to go with Nicholas, but despite her protests, the men refused. "What? Are you two going to meet some hot chicks somewhere?"

"You know better than that baby," said Nicholas. "It's simply that there may be danger where we're going."

"And so you're going to put the president of the United States in jeopardy. What are your secret service guards going to say about that. I hope your V.P. likes the job." She turned away coldly, not kissing Nicholas good bye, although she gave Legion a peck on the cheek. She whispered in his ear. "Take care, good buddy."

As Mandy had surmised, Nicholas had a difficult time getting away from his secret service protectors. Hence, he and Legion needed to sneak out of the White House disguised as plumbers. Later Nicholas and Legion changed into business clothes, dyed their hair, put on fake beards, and wore dark glasses and wide brimmed hats with the brims tipped down. Legion had bribed the owner-pilot of a Lear Jet, who was into smuggling, with an outrageous sum of money to fly them to Bucharest. They drove a rented car from the Bucharest airport on bad roads through the Romanian countryside.

"Just exactly where are we going?" Nicholas asked.

"The final resting place of Prince Vlad Tepes, the man known as Vlad the Impaler. Some say that he was the inspiration for Brom Stoker's Dracula. It's in an old monastery called in the district of Snagov."

"What're we going to do there?"

"You'll see."

They arrived at the lake in late afternoon. From the parking lot to the lake was a two kilometer hike. Since the monastery was on an island, Legion rented a boat. When they reached the small pier on the island, as soon as they disembarked the boatman rowed quickly away. Nicholas saw him make the sign of the cross as he left.

They were met by an old nun. She was bone white, had a thousand wrinkles and seemed too decrepit and ancient to be outside of a nursing home. Nicholas noticed what looked like healed puncture wounds on the side of her throat. In a crackling voice and broken English, she greeted them warmly. "Welcome to the Snagov monastery with the grace of God. Are you here to see where Vlad the Impaler is buried?"

Legion nodded and pressed coins into her outstretched palm.

As the bent nun shuffled along slowly toward the main entrance, Nicholas examined the monastery. It was a two story stone rectangular building with a central tower and four smaller towers around it. The facade consisted of fluted half columns and arches. The interior was deteriorated and gloomy. Since it was near sunset, only a blood-colored glow sifted through the high narrow windows. After they entered, the nun lit candles. Although this added a little more light, the interior of the church was still gloomy and mostly in shadow.

Nicholas noticed a statue of the virgin Mary in a niche and went toward it for a closer look. The old nun grabbed his arm. "Don't go by statue. Danger." She held an oil lamp so that it lit up a rotting trapdoor directly in front of the icon. "When Vlad was prince, prisoners brought here to pray before Virgin. When prisoner finish praying, floor open up, and fall to death." A broken board on the trapdoor allowed a view of what was below. Nicholas peered in. Below were sharp stakes that would penetrate the body of anyone falling through.

The bell in the tower pealed sonorously. The nun said, "Is wind make bells ring. Storm is on way." She lit several candles in a candelabra around the chapel. "Do you wish to see tomb now?"

Nicholas glanced at Legion, who nodded. "Yes, please."

The nun and the two men tramped down a stone stairway into the cellar, a creepy chamber with crypts all along a narrow corridor. The only light was from the nun's lamp. A musty odor of decay of the ancient dead permeated the air like an evil mist. Vlad's grave was covered by an enormous carved rock slab. It would take several average men to move it.

The nun said, "Do you wish to see rest of the monastery?"

Legion replied, "Later." He placed a handful of Romanian lei in her hand. "Please leave us for a while. We wish to pay our respects to the dead prince."

Her eyes went wide at the amount of money he had handed her. She bowed and said, "As you wish, gentlemen." She tottered away.

After he was sure she had gone back upstairs, Legion, with his great strength, pushed the slab out of the way. The sarcophagus was empty except for a stake lying in a pile of moldy dirt. "Now you shall meet the prince of evil himself." He removed the stake from the sarcophagus.

To Nicholas' astonishment, the dirt formed itself into an ancient skeleton. A body slowly formed around and inside the skeleton. First came internal organs, kidneys, lungs, heart, liver, intestines, eyeballs and blood vessels. Next to appear was the muscular structure. In the final stage, this was covered by the

palest flesh Nicholas had ever seen. Finally short cropped hair and a large drooping mustache grew on the body's head. The mouth opened and gasped for breath. A groan issued from the corpse. The eyes snapped open, and an arm grabbed Legion by the throat.

Legion laughed and knocked the arm away.

"Oh," Tepes said in Romanian. "I recognize you. You're Frankenstein's creature."

Legion spoke in the same language. "I'm happy you remembered me."

Because he was half demon, Nicholas understood every language past or present that existed.

Tepes bounded out of the sarcophagus. He looked down at his naked body. In Romanian, he said, "Get me clothes at once. I cannot go around like this."

Legion said, "In good time. We're not your servants. First, allow me to introduce Nicholas Bongiglio. He is the President of the United States."

Tepes bowed. He switched to English. "I feel foolish greeting the head of state of such a great country in my condition."

Nicholas acknowledged this by bowing and saying in Romanian, "I am honored to meet the man who saved Romania from the Turks. And don't worry about being in the nude. Your body is nothing to be ashamed of. It's quite handsome."

"You are kind." Tepes turned to Legion. "I have garments stored in the first floor of the northeast tower. You will find a wardrobe there. Bring me something suitable for my meeting with the ruler of a powerful nation. Quickly now."

Legion grunted. "I'll retrieve suitable clothing, but don't treat me like a servant to be ordered around. You have no power over me." He strode away.

Tepes squinted at Nicholas. "You're more than you seem." He sniffed the air. "There's a supernatural air about you."

Nicholas chuckled. "I'm half human and half dark angel. I am the son of Asmodeus."

"A powerful entity in the nether world. What brings you to this wretched place?"

"I don't know. Coming here was Victor's idea."

"He calls himself Victor after his creator?"

"Since Doctor Frankenstein did not give him a name, he dubbed himself Victor Legion."

Several minutes later Legion returned with garments. Tepes donned designer jeans, a turtleneck shirt and sport coat. Nicholas thought that he looked quite handsome and modern. He would fit in at any gathering of the wealthy and famous, and could easily be mistaken for a movie star.

Tepes said, "I feel more civilized dressed. Let us go upstairs to talk. Although this is my daytime resting place, I find these catacombs depressing."

Before they returned to the main floor of the building, Tepes showed them the dungeon where, when he was prince, he kept felons, political prisoners and others arrested by his order. The cells were so small that they were more like animal boroughs. With great pride, he showed them instruments of torture used

while he was a living man. After viewing the torture chamber, they returned to the main floor chapel, whose walls held religious pictures dating from the Middle Ages.

Outdoors, a storm broke. A furious wind blew a solid wall of rain against the building. The bells pealed wildly. Small leaks in the roof dripped in several spots. The crack of simultaneous thunder and lightning was almost continuous.

While they examined a painting of Vlad himself, a tall figure in a robe with a cowl covering its features approached them. She pushed back the cowl. It was Olivia. She smiled brightly. "Oh Victor, you've returned." She ran to the ugly giant and covered his face with kisses.

He gently disengaged from her embrace. "It's good to see you too. I've brought a visitor. This is Nicholas Bongiglio. He's the President of the United States of America."

She curtsied. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mister President." She gave a dirty look to Tepes. "I see you've awakened this one. Why? He's evil."

"He knows where my creator's notebooks are hidden. Take us to the others."

Olivia crooked a finger for them to follow her. They returned to the cellar. She stopped by a tomb and moved a carving on the sepulcher. There was the loud grinding screech of stone scraping stone, and a door-sized portion of the wall opened up. Nicholas, Legion and Tepes followed her in. She flipped a switch. The door behind them ground back into place, and several overhead fluorescent lights came on. They were in an enormous laboratory. There was an operating table, several electronic devices, an electric generator and controls, various chemical apparatus, and cabinets full of jars, surgical equipment, and medicine bottles. Standing against the wall toward the rear of the room were what appeared to be oversized coffins with glass covers.

Olivia led the group over by the coffins. They contained giant human beings, both male and female. Olivia said, "These are new ones we have made. The others who were made by Prince Vlad mostly live in a village hidden in the woods on the other side of the island."

Nicholas examined the people in the coffins. "Are these alive?"

"Not yet. We need your creator's formulas to complete them."

Nicholas said, "This is wonderful. What I could do with an army of such giants."

Legion said, "You will have such an army after I use them to start the war you wanted."

CHAPTER 18. THE INTERDIMENSIONAL GATEWAY MACHINE

"Melody, we need someone with lots of money to invest in this project," said Westcott. He and Esmeralda were drinking coffee and tea in her living room.

"And you want me to supply it? Michael left me a fortune, but he was no billionaire. Besides, I intend to donate much of it to various charities and the Church."

"I didn't mean that the money had to come from you. But Michael had friends who are high in the hierarchy of companies that do this type of research."

"Whoa. We know people whose corporations do all sorts of research, but I don't know of any that are trying to build a machine to travel to other dimensions."

"But there must some who might be interested in such a device."

Melody sipped her tea slowly with a thoughtful expression. "Hmm. There was this industrialist, Morgan Thomas. He was involved with Michael's Institute of the Occult at one time. But I haven't seen him since Michael quit the institute and Morgaine committed suicide. I only met him a couple of times. As you know, I never had much to do with Michael's business dealings."

"Could you contact him for us? It wouldn't hurt to ask."

Melody took a cube of sugar from the bowl and dropped it into her tea. She stirred it a few times. "Suppose this Morgan Thomas gave you the money you need, and you build such a machine. What would you do then?"

"Sneak into the place where Michael is being held and bring him back."

"What would prevent Morgaine from taking him right back?"

"He would be on his guard."

"May I speak?" asked Esmeralda.

Melody gazed at the girl. She was very beautiful. She wondered whether there was something going on between her and Westcott. "Of course. You're Doctor Laszlo's lab assistant, you said."

"I am. What I want to say is that there's danger in allowing someone like this Mr. Thomas to invest in Dr. Laszlo's invention..."

"Christ, Esmeralda. I brought you here to help sell this project, not sabotage my pitch."

Melody scowled at Westcott. "Let Esmeralda speak. If there's danger, I want to know what it is."

Westcott huffed, but said nothing more.

Esmeralda said, "If Mr. Thomas puts up a lot of money, he will want to control the machine. It's possible that he might allow entities from another dimension enter this one. He may even want to build several machines, which could be disastrous for our world."

Melody looked at Westcott. "She's got a good point, Jack. We could have demons coming out of the machine like popcorn out of a popper."

"We would have Thomas sign an ironclad waiver that he would not use the machine except in a manner that would not cause harm. I would have to sign off before the machine could even be turned on. I'll explain the danger involved. Besides, the cat is already out of the bag. Doctor Laszlo has published a paper on the subject. Someone smart will realize the potential of such a device. I'm surprised that no one has been knocking at Laszlo's door to make a deal already. At least, if we are the first to build the dimension machine, we can take out patents and claim proprietary information to prevent anyone else from constructing one."

* * * *

Morgan Thomas went to the receptionist at the entrance to the Omega Building. He gave her his name and said, "I was notified that the Omega Oracle has an important prophesy concerning my business."

The receptionist checked her computer. "Yes. A priestess will escort you. I will call her. She will be down in a few minutes."

The Omega priestess was an attractive young woman who wore a white robe with a pentacle stitched into the fabric. It was belted at the waist with a simple cord. A sheath containing an athame was attached to the rope.

She held out her slender white hand. "My name is Sister Myrtale, Mr. Thomas. I will take you to the Oracle. Please follow me."

They rode an elevator to a subbasement and walked through a series of hallways to a replica of the ancient Greek temple of Apollo, a gleaming white building in the style of ancient Greece. It contained a portico held up by massive Doric columns. The corridor walls that surrounded it were painted with a mural that depicted a panoramic scene of forest and mountains.

Myrtle said, "Please wait here until you are escorted into the temple." She went into the building to inform the Oracle that Thomas has arrived.

When the priestess returned to the portico, as was customary, Thomas placed a handful of hundred dollar bills in the bowl for offerings. "You may enter the temple now. Follow me."

With bowed head, Thomas followed Myrtle. He gazed around at the enormous columns that filled the temple. That all of this was beneath the tall building seemed to him to be amazing. When they reached the western end, they entered a chamber that held an enormous statue of the sun god, Apollo. Thomas and Myrtale bowed their heads in reverence and waited.

The chamber was windowless and gloomy. The only light came from torches high up on the wall. Sulfuric gases rose from below making the chamber mystical and dreamlike. Suddenly a beautiful woman with auburn hair stepped from the mist. She wore a simple white gown with a hood that half concealed her features. "I am Morgaine, the Oracle of Omega. I have examined the portents and omens and have important information for you. Soon the wife of an old friend will ask you to receive visitors who have a new invention that they wish you to invest in. Their machine can transport people to other planes, even to the land of the dead. You and the Church of Omega will benefit greatly if you give them financial support."

"Thank you, Morgaine. I shall follow your advise." Thomas bowed.

Morgaine turned and faded into the mist as mysteriously as she had arrived.

* * * *

After Esmeralda, Westcott and Doctor Laszlo entered Thomas' posh office, the CEO of the high tech

firm stood up and said, "Please sit. Make yourselves comfortable. Would you like coffee or tea?"

"Coffee sounds good," replied Westcott.

"I'll take tea," said Esmeralda.

"Nothing for me," said Laszlo.

Thomas buzzed his secretary. "Please bring in coffee and tea for me and my visitors." He turned to the trio. "Let's get right down to business, shall we? I know Doctor Laszlo and Doctor Westcott. Doctor Westcott, I recall that you were involved in an attempt by the Turc Corporation to build a humanoid robot. Too bad the company went belly up."

Westcott shrugged. "I was not happy about that either."

"But you haven't introduced this charming young lady."

Laszlo said, "Her name is Esmeralda Emuishere. She is a graduate student and my lab assistant. She's quite brilliant. She'll make a fine scientist someday."

"Pleased to meet you, Esmeralda."

She nodded, flashing him a flirtatious smile. "The pleasure is all mine, Mister Thomas."

The secretary came in with coffee and tea. She poured and added sugar and cream according to each person's preference.

After she left, Thomas said, "Okay. Let us begin our discussion of what you came to see me about."

"Great," said Westcott. "Doctor Laszlo here has invented a machine that will revolutionize the way we think of the universe."

"Yes, I know. I've read his paper. It's an intriguing concept. But will it actually do what the paper claimed?"

"I can vouch for that, sir. Doctor Laszlo has built a small working model. I've seen it in operation."

"And you want me to finance a full-scale prototype?"

"That's correct. I have the particulars in this attaché case." Westcott patted his briefcase. "Blueprints, Doctor Laszlo notes including the mathematics behind his theory, cost estimates and so forth. I'd like to leave this material with you for you and your technical and financial people to go over."

"Good. We'll do that. Can you give me a ballpark figure?"

"Ten million. If all goes well."

"That's doable. We have assets that we're going to sell and are ready to invest in something new."

Westcott said, "We must insist in absolute secrecy. It is imperative that this invention does not fall into unscrupulous hands. It could endanger our world. Hence, we need to insist that everyone who has access to these documents sign a binding nondisclosure agreement."

"Danger to our world? What do you mean?"

Esmeralda replied, "Since travel to worlds in other dimensions is possible with Doctor Laszlo's invention,

alien creatures could also cross into our world."

"I see. Well, I'll do everything I can to ensure that only my most loyal employees see these documents. People whose integrity I can rely on. It'll take at least a week to go over the material. A week from today I'll either give you my answer or ask for additional information."

Westcott was all smiles. The meeting had gone well. Thomas came around his desk and shook hands with the three visitors. They left his office.

They had come in Esmeralda's car. After they exited the building and headed for the parking garage, she said, "We should go somewhere and celebrate. From Mister Thomas' reaction, we have every reason to believe that he is willing to finance the project."

Westcott said, "I believe you're right. Where do you want to go?"

Doctor Laszlo said, "Leave me out. I have work to do back in my laboratory."

"Oh c'mon, Doctor," said Esmeralda. "A couple of hours away from work won't hurt."

"I'm sorry, but I can't. You young people enjoy yourselves. I'll take a cab back to the university. Ah, here's one now." He hailed a passing taxi, waved to Esmeralda and Westcott and got into the cab.

"Well, it's just you and me," said Westcott. "Where do you want to go?"

"I know just the place. We can have dinner and drinks there. They have a blues band later in the evening."

"Sounds great."

* * * *

The club was in a basement. The atmosphere was blues club gloom. The only lights in the place were from the candles on each table. When the waitress asked what they wanted to drink, Esmeralda ordered a vodka martini. Westcott ordered a club soda.

"Hey, Doctor Westcott, this is a celebration. Don't you drink?"

"You may call me Jack, Esmeralda. I prefer informality. We'll probably be working quite closely on this project."

She winked at him. "I'm all for that ... Jack. Now, how about ordering something wicked and wild."

Westcott shook his head. "I'm an alcoholic. I'm on the wagon."

She put her hand on his. "A couple of drinks won't hurt. You can go right back on the wagon tomorrow. Let's have fun tonight. Once the project gets started, we'll be like Doctor Laszlo be too busy to have any."

Westcott licked his lips. In his imagination, he could savor the taste of raw whiskey. It was tempting. He knew that he should know better. He looked into Esmeralda's dancing eyes. They seemed to say, *Don't be a party pooper. What's a couple drinks anyhow? Tomorrow you can go back to AA.*

"Okay. This is a special night." When the waiter came back with Esmeralda's martini and asked for their meal orders, Westcott asked for a bourbon on the rocks in addition to his steak dinner. That was the first of several.

Later when the blues band started playing, he and Esmeralda danced. During the slow dances she hung on him like a rag doll; during the fast ones, she shimmied her booty around in the sexiest possible manner. By the time the evening was over, Westcott was drunk. Esmeralda drove him to her apartment. They staggered into her bedroom, and as he lay on the bed watching, she did a striptease, slowly and sensually removing her clothes. Perhaps it was too slow. By the time she wriggled out of her panties, Westcott had passed out and was snoring loudly.

CHAPTER 19. UNDERGROUND GATE

Flebert turned to Lucinda. "You're a demon? Who sent you? Morgaine?"

"Not the witch. The great one, Asmodeus. This is a gateway to his dimension as well as Morgaine's."

"That's where we want to go. We're on a mission to rescue Morgaine's prisoner, Michael Ellul."

"I know. I was sent to stop you from completing that mission. Please don't take me back there. I've failed. Asmodeus will inflict terrible punishments upon me." She fell on her knees and continued to beg.

"If you're a demon, why are you afraid of my gun?"

"My body is human. If it's killed, I'll be sent back to Asmodeus immediately."

Flebert rubbed his chin. "I have an idea. Suppose we bring you with us. Instead of trying to stop us, you could help us. I promise that if we're successful, I'll bring you back to this world."

Lucinda gazed up at him from a kneeling position. Tears ran down her cheeks. "You intend to go to the witch's quarters. I see it in your mind. But, I tell you. The way is hazardous. There are demons and other evil creatures that you'll have to overcome. If I'm caught helping you, I'll be punished ten times worse than if I simply failed. No. I refuse."

"Then I'm afraid I'll have to send you back to your master immediately." Flebert raised the pistol and pressed it against the back of Lucinda's head.

"I can't let you do that," cried Isaac. He snatched the gun away from Flebert so quickly, that at first the actor did not realize that he was not still holding it.

Flebert said, "Oh shit. For Chrissake, I wasn't really going to kill her, Isaac. I was simply trying to scare her into helping us."

Isaac said, "Nonetheless, you were pointing the gun right at her head. It might've gone off accidentally. I will keep this before someone is hurt." The robot stuck the pistol in its trouser pocket.

Macrome said, "Besides, how could you trust one of her kind? She'd betray you at the first opportunity."

"It seems that we're at an impasse," said Flebert. "Should we leave her here, and go through the gate without her?"

"Go without her," said Macrome. "I'll accompany you into that dreary dimension. Michael was my friend too when I was alive."

"Very well. Lucinda, you may stay here."

Macrome reached up and moved a protrusion on one of the carvings. There was a loud screech of stone against stone that set Flebert's teeth on edge. Slowly, a section of wall slid back leaving a doorway into deep darkness. The vampire said, "Step right this way gentleman and robot." He went through the opening and vanished. Flebert and Isaac followed him.

The small troop was in utter darkness, as though a dark curtain had been thrown over them. Flebert turned on his flashlight. When he turned around, where the entrance had been was a stone wall with niche carved into it. A moldy corpse was deposited in the niche. They were in a catacombs. Flebert said, "This is not the same place as the last time we came through this gate."

The stone block walls were damp with slime and mold. Water dripped from the ceiling, making the floor slippery. The musty stench of the long dead permeated the air. Archways led off in three different directions, left, forward and right. There were strange sounds, the creaking of scraping rocks, distant screams as though people were being tortured, low animal sounds, weird growls and screeches.

"What do we do now?" asked Flebert. "How do we know which way to go?"

Isaac said, "The logical thing to do is to pick a doorway at random and place a mark on it so we do not go in circles. Let us start by going through the archway on our left." He headed in that direction.

"Wait," cried Macrome. "Since I became a vampire, my senses are much more acute. I hear human voices and smell human blood, but not from the direction the robot is heading."

"Which way then?" asked Flebert.

"Straight ahead."

"Very well. Let's try that way first. If there are living human beings down here, perhaps they can help us find our way to where Morgaine is keeping Michael."

The trio went through the center archway. As Isaac passed through, it scratched an arrow on the edge of the stone archway with its metallic finger nails. The next room had two openings, left and right. Macrome sniffed the air and strolled toward the opening on the left. They continued this way through several chambers of the catacomb, sometimes to the left, sometimes straight ahead and sometimes to the right.

* * * *

After the vampire, the man and the robot vanished, with a horrible grinding noise the stone doorway slowly slid shut. Before it closed completely, Lucinda slipped through. Hidden in her sleeve was a butcher knife she had swiped from the kitchen when the robot and Flebert were distracted.

As she entered the pitch-black chamber, she used her demon ability to see in the darkness of the void. Isaac, the robot, was scratching an arrow on the edge of the doorway. When it finished, it went into the next chamber. She chuckled as she realized that the trio were descending deeper into the labyrinth. In order to reach the place where Michael Ellul was held prisoner, they would need to find the stairway to the upper part of the castle. Instead they were heading away from it. If they continued in the wrong direction, they would come to the abode of the demons and ghouls who haunted the catacombs.

She fingered the knife. She decided to follow them until their flashlight gave out. At that point, she would pounce on Flebert and stab him through the heart. Once she killed him, her duty to Asmodeus would be fulfilled. She had not been ordered to stop anyone else from entering the gate. She would return to the dimension of living souls, dragging Flebert's body with her. The creatures who dwelled in the catacombs could deal with the robot and the vampire. Once back in the human world, it would be fun to start killing strangers again as she had when she was alive until the police caught her.

* * * *

"That does not sound like a human being to me," said Isaac. Somewhere in the darkened chamber beyond an exit, there was a crunching noise as though animals were enjoying a particularly hearty lunch. Flebert shined the light from his flashlight into it. Since the batteries had become weak, the light was dim. What he saw made him draw in his breath in horror.

Inside the room were four or five awful creatures. Their shape was generally human, but that's where the resemblance ended. Since they were naked, their ugliness was revealed in all its awfulness. Their heads were skull-like with bulging eyes and large mouths with rows of razor-sharp teeth. Their long, lanky arms

ended in clawed hands. Their legs were short and sinewy. They squatted on the floor ripping apart a corpse and eating it bones and all.

When the light fell on them, they looked up at Flebert hungrily. He backed away and pointed the flashlight away from the archway. It flickered and went out. Flebert shook it, and it again shone dimly. "What the hell are those things?"

Macrome said, "Ghouls. They can't hurt me or Isaac, but they're a danger to you. They don't like bright lights. It's too bad that your flashlight isn't working better. Isaac, can you see in the dark."

"I can turn on my infrared vision. With it, I can see things that are warm. The hotter something is the brighter it seems."

"What about those ghouls?"

"I see them dimly. Their bodies do not give off as much heat as a human's."

"Very well, you and I must go in there and chase them away. Flebert, you stay here. I would turn off the flashlight if I were you, before it gives out."

Flebert shivered. "But I'll be in the dark. What if one of those things come in here?"

Macrome shrugged. "I don't know." He signaled Isaac to follow him. The vampire and the robot ran into the room where the ghouls were. Flebert heard a struggle. The ghouls made horrible gurgling howls and growls at being attacked. There were thumps and curses and noises that he could not identify. He wished that he could witness the battle so that he knew who was winning.

As Flebert thought about what the horrible creatures were doing and imagined what would happen if they got a hold of him, he felt lightheaded with fright. He stood with his back against a wall to keep from fainting. To add to his utter terror, the flashlight went out again. When he shook it, it did not turn on. The batteries were dead. At the same moment, he felt something bite his leg. He screamed and slid down the wall. "God, the ghouls have got me." He touched the thing trying to gnaw him. It was small and furry, a large rat. He picked it up and hurled it across the room. It squealed once after landing with a thump. He heard it scurrying away.

Something grabbed his arm and lifted him to his feet. He froze in the absolute horror of being eaten alive.

After a moment, however, to his relief Isaac's dull voice said, "Are you all right, Mister Flebert?"

"Yeah. I'm okay. Did you chase away those ghouls?"

"Yes. But someone else is following us. I often hear footsteps in chambers we just left."

"I'll be on my guard, but with no flashlight, I'm blind as a bat. I'll have to hold onto your arm." Flebert took Isaac's arm, and they went into the next chamber where Macrome waited.

Suddenly something rushed out of the darkness, and Isaac pushed Flebert down to the floor. He felt someone trip over his leg. A female voice cried, "Let me go, you damned machine." Isaac voice said, "Not until you drop that knife."

Something metallic clattered to the floor, near where Flebert lay. He reached out and picked it up. It was a long carving knife. "Who-who tried to kill me?"

Macrome said, "The demon, Lucinda. She must have gone through the gate and followed us. Her

protestations that she did not want to come to this dimension were playacting."

Meanwhile Lucinda cursed a blue streak and yelled for Isaac to release her. There was also the sound of thumps.

Isaac said, "What shall I do with her? I'm afraid that if I let her go she will try to harm you again. But she is hard to hold. She is kicking me."

"She can't harm me now. I have her knife. Lucinda, quiet down. Do you want those ghouls to come back or something worse to drag you back to your master?"

She shut up immediately. Apparently there were things down here that even she was afraid of. "Please make the machine man let me go."

"And what will you do then? Try to murder me again?"

"No. I promise."

Flebert chuckled. "Do really expect me to believe you?"

Macrome said, "I know. Why don't we tie her up and leave her for the ghouls?"

Isaac said, "No. Demon or not. As long as she is in human form, I cannot allow it."

Flebert said, "Nevertheless, tying her up is not a bad idea. I brought along rope. We can tie her wrists behind her back and loop some rope around her neck. We'll lead her through here like a donkey. In fact, we can tie her between us. Perhaps she can help us navigate the labyrinth." He tied Lucinda's wrists together and looped the rope around her. He tied one end to Isaac's waist and the other to his own waist. Before they started off, he asked her, "Do you know the way out of the catacombs?"

She sullenly replied, "Yes."

"Then tell us. I know you fear the creatures down here as much as we do. The sooner we get to where our friend Michael is being held, the sooner we can return to the human world. Will you help us?"

"Yes. I see I have no choice. Besides, Asmodeus will punish me terribly anyway. Perhaps if I help you, I will have a short time on earth to enjoy myself. Start taking every left exit you come to for a while, no rights. I will tell you when we need to turn to the right."

They continued navigating the labyrinth in this manner. Macrome led the way, followed by Isaac, Lucinda and Flebert in that order. After five rooms making either left turns or going straight ahead, Lucinda told them to go through the right exit.

In the next chamber, Macrome said, "I smell human blood very close now."

"I hear them," said Flebert. Someone was singing and the sound of shuffling feet reached his ears.

Two chambers to the right, they came upon the people making the noises. Macrome said, "It's Rhami Deju and Robert Longfeathers. What are you two doing here?"

There was the sound of a match and a torch flared up. Isaac cried, "It's too bright. It's blinding me. I must turn off my infrared vision. That's better."

Flebert could now see his friends. "Yes. What are you two doing in this weird catacombs? And why are dancing and singing?"

The two men stopped their activities. Deju replied, "Same as you. We're here to rescue Michael. Alas, it's us who need rescuing now. We've been possessed by demons."

His voice changed. It became deep and gruff. He burst out into evil laughter. "And you four shall suffer the same fate. My fellow demons are waiting to take you over."

Westcott shivered. He did not want to be possessed by a demon. He had that experience twice before. It was horrible. Nonetheless, he put on a brave front. "I'm the only one of us who came be taken over in that way. Lucinda is already possessed by a demon, Sylvan is a vampire, and Isaac is a machine."

"Nonetheless, we will bring you to our mistress," said Longfeathers. He grabbed Sylvan, who, although a vampire, was quite small. They struggled together, neither getting an edge on the other.

Deju tried to do the same to Flebert but was held back by Isaac.

Suddenly another party entered the fray. Sheila showed up. She took one look at Lucinda and said, "What are you doing here? These two..." She pointed at Deju and Longfeathers. "...are mine to deal with."

She grabbed Lucinda by the hair and dug her nails into her flesh. Lucinda fought back. While everyone else was embroiled in the milieu, Westcott felt that it was his chance to get away. He grabbed the torch out of Deju's hand and fled through one of the doorways.

He ran through rooms this way and that way, sometimes going straight, sometimes turning. Finally out of breath, he listened. He heard nothing. The catacombs was as silent as a tomb. He doused the torch, afraid that the light or smoke would lead the demons to him. He sat with his back against the stone wall and wondered what he should do. He was alone and lost in the vast labyrinthine of catacombs.

After a while he looked up. A golden glow came from the chamber on his left. He climbed to his feet and peeked into the room. In the middle of the room was a person who seemed to be an angel. He had fair skin, the body and face of a handsome athletic young man, golden wings and wore a red robe. His long blond hair covered his shoulders, and his eyes were of the lightest sky blue.

This apparition turned its head toward Flebert and smiled pleasantly. "Ah, my old friend, Lance Flebert. We meet again."

Flebert gazed with awe at this wondrous being. "Who are you? How do you know my name?"

The angel floated toward Flebert with outstretched arms. "I suppose you don't recognize me in my true form. It is I, Sargantas. The being who twice before possessed you. You are mine again."

Flebert screamed, "No! Not again!" He wanted to run to save himself from being possessed by this being for the third time, but was frozen by those hypnotic evil blue eyes.

CHAPTER 20. INVASION

After Nicholas left to return to Washington, Legion asked Tepes where he had hidden Frankenstein's notes and other data concerning the creation of living human beings from dead tissue and chemicals. Olivia replied for the vampire. "We hid them in Prince Vlad's sarcophagus after he was destroyed."

"We need to retrieve them. Meanwhile, Olivia, I'd like you to round up the Titans living in the area and have them come here. I wish to speak to them."

Olivia touched Legion's cheek. "Does that mean that you're staying here? Will we be lovers again?"

The thought of Mandy entered Legion's mind. Although previously he thought it was impossible for him to love a human being, he knew that he was in love with Nicholas' wife. Nonetheless, he needed Olivia on his side if he was going to pull off the Romania takeover for Nicholas. He hated the idea of Mandy being in Nicholas' power. But he had an agenda of his own. Once Nicholas became emperor of the world, he, Legion, would kill him and take over. Mandy would be his then. Of course, he would also have to do something about Olivia. All that, however, was in the future. Right now, he had to carry out the plan he and Nicholas had agreed upon.

He smiled at Olivia. "Yes to both your questions. Now, be a good girl and get those Titans together. C'mon Vlad, we need to search your sarcophagus. Soon you'll be prince of this land again."

* * * *

After Frankenstein's papers were retrieved and the Titans who had been living in their forest hideout came to the monastery, Legion spoke to them. He stood on a platform to address the hundred artificial men and women before him. "It is time for you and I to go out in the world." He held up Frankenstein's notebook. "In here are my creator's secret of producing our kind. After we are many, we'll obtain weapons and take arms against our enemy, the human race. We must destroy them utterly, otherwise they'll destroy us. This is a holy war to see who will rule the earth, humankind or we Titans. I have learned of a hidden cache of weapons not far from here. It has been there for many years, neglected by those in power of this land called Romania. We will strike the capital and take over the government. The one secret we must keep is that we intend to commit racial cleansing on scale that will make the holocaust seem like child's play. For the time being, we will make the human's who live in this area our slaves until we have the numbers and power to wipe out mankind completely from the earth." He raised his fist. "Death to the humans. Long live Titans."

The artificial people were enthusiastic and excited. They craved the power he promised them. He knew that once Nicholas triumphed over them, they would be his slaves, along with the humans he was teaching them to hate.

* * * *

When Nicholas returned to the White House, the first thing Mandy asked was, "Where's Victor?"

He leered at her. "You're so transparent. Your lover is in Romania doing a little job for me. Don't worry, you'll see him soon enough. Meanwhile, I insist that you play the loving wife both in front of the media cameras and when we're alone." He held out his arms. "Now, give your husband a big kiss."

Sullenly Mandy went into his arms and pressed her lips against his. When his hands slipped under her sweater and unsnapped her bra, she closed her eyes and pretended that she was in Legion's arms.

A week later at breakfast, the following newspaper account on page three of the World News section caught her eye: *AP. Cluj Napoca. A small army of rebels of unknown origin captured an*

abandoned armory, a relic of Communist times. Many vintage weapons including tanks and artillery were stored there. The Romanian government has sent in a battalion of its small army to quell the rebellion. It is said that fierce fighting is occurring in the area. Reports have said that the insurgents were large in height and bulk, and included both male and female fighters. Rumor has it that they were of truly gigantic stature. Persons fleeing the area have called them giants or Titans.

She waved the newspaper at Nicholas. "Look at this." She pointed out the article. After Bongiglio read it, she said, "Is this what Victor is doing? Starting a revolution?"

Bongiglio smiled. "Yes. I hope he's successful. Our future depends on it."

"What do you mean? What are you two up to?"

"Can't tell you, love. Top secret stuff."

* * * *

Legion's force defeated every Romanian contingent sent against it. Legion was a brilliant strategist. His troops gathered dead Romanian soldiers and reanimated them using Frankenstein's techniques. These animated corpses were used as cannon fodder, suicide troops that would attack under the heaviest fire. These zombies attacked until their bodies were so wrecked that they could no longer proceed. Even when they lost their legs, they kept firing from wherever they had fallen. When the Romanians realized that they were being attacked by their own dead in addition to giants, they became demoralized and fled in panic.

Before the Romanian government could obtain aid to help fight against the horrors that attacked it, Victor's army had Bucharest surrounded. That afternoon, it marched into the capital. One of his first targets was an obsolete nuclear installation in a disused building in the center of the city which contained material imported from the Soviet Union in the nineteen seventies. Next the radio stations and government buildings fell. Soon, the announcement went out that a new regime was in power.

One-by-one nations closed their embassies and denounced the new government as illegitimate. None, however, attacked the country to oust the rebels. Some nations refused to do any trade until the legitimate government was reinstated. Nonetheless, once the fighting stopped, actual trade with other nations went on pretty much as usual through third parties and smugglers. The ousted government protested to the U. N. which debated the situation endlessly and passed several resolutions which were never carried out.

Once firmly in power, Legion opened several defense plants, which made many Romanians happy with the new regime who had ushered in a new era of prosperity and high employment. Legion announced to the world that he was going to build missile and nuclear facilities. He let it be known to people who he knew were spies from several countries including the United States that he was prepared to make war on certain of Rumania's neighbors. He even allowed false document concerning the building of missile bases and troop movement to fall into the hands of these agents.

* * * *

During a news conference, Nicholas issued a stern warning to the new regime in Rumania to desist from its warlike intentions, stop all nuclear arms development and reinstate free elections. "Otherwise there will be grave consequences," he told the world. "The United States is prepared to initiate armed conflict unless this Victor Legion fellow obeys the resolutions passed by the Security Counsel of the United Nations. I'm sure our allies will join me against this tyrannical regime."

A reporter asked, "The leader of the rebels is named Victor Legion. Wasn't that the name of your former

chief of staff? And by the way, what happened to the Victor Legion who was your chief of staff?"

"Well, Brigley, I guess it's quite a coincidence that this terrorist has the same name. I don't think either Victor or Legion is all that uncommon in the name department. As for what happened to my friend and associate, I'm sorry to say that he had a family emergency that required his presence. One that he would rather not have discussed in public. Once his problem is resolved, he plans on returning to my administration. He's one smart fellow, and I miss his advice very much. Say a prayer that his relative recovers quickly. That's all I'm going to say about that. Dirk, you had a question?"

After the new conference, there was a lot of speculation about what the mysterious family emergency was. Several reporters vowed to chase that one down. One scratched his head and said, "I didn't know that Legion had a family. I was always under the impression that he was an orphan who did not know anything about his relatives."

* * * *

In a Blitzkrieg move, reminiscent of Hitler's conquest of Poland at the start of World War Two, Victor's armies attacked Bulgaria and Serbia. At a tumultuous session, the U. N. passed a resolution that was carried almost unanimously to send a peacekeeping force to defeat the conqueror. The European nations and the United States were of one accord that this unprovoked attack had to be stopped quickly, and that the dictator who called himself Victor Legion must be killed or captured. In less than a week, the peace keepers mounted a counteroffensive. England, Germany, and France sent troops to Hungary. The United States mounted its attack from bases in Czechoslovakia. Russian and Polish armies attacked from east.

Surprisingly the Titans, as they were now called, put up stiff resistance against all comers. The use of atomic weapons against them was debated fiercely in the parliaments, the U.S. congress and the United Nations. The decision was to wait before using such drastic measures; surely the massed might of the world could defeat an army of ragtag insurgents who had appeared from nowhere. Many believed that the giants had something to do with the radical Moslem jihad movement. Others disagreed. In truth, all attempts to gain hard intelligence failed. As a result, barely anything was known about the Titans, except that they were fierce and canny fighters, and that they had a way of turning the dead of their enemies into zombies who had to be blasted to pieces in order to be destroyed.

* * * *

Nicholas sent a several bills to congress stating that the country was in a state of emergency. One bill was a declaration of war between the United States and Romania. Included within this bill was reinstatement of the draft and suspension of certain civil rights for the duration of the war. Other bills were for additional funds to fight this new threat. Again clauses in these bills placed additional power in the hands of the administrative branch until Nicholas had unprecedented power in his hands. Such power had never before been given to a president, not even during World War Two or the Iraq war. He was as omnipotent as Hitler, Stalin and the kings of old. His word was law. Whatever he decreed had the force of government behind it.

He declared that the United States needed to be under martial law to prevent any large scale antiwar movement such as occurred during the Vietnam war. Millions of young men were drafted into the armed forces and many thousands were sent to do battle against the Titans. Anyone who opposed these measures or the war was arrested without warrant and thrown into secret prisons. Some were simply never heard from again. After a while, so many people were rounded up for political reasons that Nicholas initiated a prison camp system similar to the internment camps of World War Two.

* * * *

Olivia rode a large black Clydesdale. Next to her on a red steed larger than her own was Legion in a

bright red uniform with general's stars on the labels. His helmet was also red. Slapping against his leg was a sheath that contained an enormous broadsword. They had entered Budapest, Hungary on the Pest side of the Danube. Ahead crowds of people were running for their lives. Some entered buildings, others scattered down side streets. Behind her and Legion, an army of Titans marched in formation. They filled the street from side to side and as far back as she could see. They carried a variety of weapons from Medieval swords and war axes to automatic rifles and grenade launchers.

Victor took out his great sword, raised it into the air and swung it forward. "Charge," he cried.

The army ran forward, shooting into the crowd and at windows as they went. Tanks and other armored vehicles fired at the crowds and buildings. Men, women and children fell. Platoons split off and chased people down side streets. Some Titans entered buildings, many of which were on fire. People leaped or were thrown out of windows.

The noise was horrific. There were war cries from the giants, screams of the wounded and dying population, explosions and falling debris. Airplanes and helicopters flew low over the city to bomb something in the distance. The roar of the aircraft and pounding of the explosions adding to the tumult.

Legion turned to Olivia with a smile. "Not one human being in this city shall remain alive. I ordered my troops to take no prisoners."

"Isn't that drastic?"

"It's part of my plan to strike terror into the hearts of all those who oppose the new order."

Olivia's Clydesdale trod upon the corpses lying on the asphalt. The streets literally ran with blood. The flames grew higher in the buildings and mingled until most of the city was on fire. More and more debris fell into the street. There were many more explosions. Great clouds of smoke and dust polluted the air. Corpses were piled so thick on the ground that they formed barriers. Titan soldiers poured gasoline on the heaps of bodies and lit them. The stench of burning human flesh added to the odors of gasoline and oil.

CHAPTER 21. LAND OF FAE

Raven found herself on a small plateau overlooking a deep valley. She was standing on the edge of a sheer cliff with a drop-off of several hundred feet. She stepped back, never liking heights. The sun was low on the horizon, about to disappear behind mountains in the distance. She turned around to face a mountainside dotted with caves. Large boulders were scattered around. To her right a winding path sloped downward. She decided that the best thing to do was to follow it. But as she passed near a cave, she heard a sound as though an enormous animal was inside.

She crouched down behind a large nearby boulder that would hide her from view from the animal in the cave, but from which she could still view the cave. She waited there to see what would come out if anything. As she watched, she saw movement. Suddenly *it* appeared, and she let out a little gasp. She couldn't believe what she saw. "Holy Hecate, a dragon," she cried. A *dragon, a real live, roaring, fire-breathing dragon* crawled out of the cave and stretched its long neck, which as it stood on its haunches, caused its head to rise to the height of five-story building. It roared loudly, puffed out its cheeks and sent a sheet of flames upon the ground, raised its enormous wings and leaped into the air. In a few moments it was high above Raven looking like a hawk making lazy circles in the sky.

Quaking and shivering, Raven crouched down and tried not to move a muscle, as the flying monster circled above her head for several minutes. She watched with growing terror as the dragon soared overhead, its circling more and more directly above her. When the monster went into a vertical dive, she was sure that it had spotted her and was about to snatch her up like a hawk would pick up a mouse. She screamed. However, when the serpent was a scant twenty feet above her head, it veered to the right, soared heavenward, and flew toward the high mountains in the west.

By that time, the sun had sank below the mountains. Soon the black dot was lost in the last lingering rays of the glowing red globe which rested in a notch between two peaks.

She trembled for a long while. Finally, when the dragon did not return, she got the courage to continue down the path. After a few hundred feet, it led to a footbridge over a five hundred foot chasm. By this time the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, the sky had turned deep purple and the first stars appeared. Raven took out a flashlight from her knapsack and slowly made her way across the swaying rope bridge, which swayed with each step, threatening to throw her into the abyss. Only the rope that she clung to so tightly her hand cramped kept her from falling. She looked down at the tiny sliver of the river at the bottom of the gorge and trembled, her fear of heights kicking in with a vengeance. Time seemed to slow to a crawl as she took small careful steps as she gripped the rope handrail so hard she had rope burns. It seemed as though the far end was getting closer barely an inch at a time.

By the time she stepped onto solid ground, the last lingering rays of sunlight were gone. Except where the light from the flashlight fell, she was surrounded by utter darkness. All around her, she heard the rustling of night creatures. She took out the talisman from between her breasts and placed on her chest so that it lay in plain view. The person who had given it to her claimed that it would protect its bearer from evil spirits, vampires, werewolves and demons. She hoped the claim was true or that she would not meet such creature although she sensed something moving about in the dark. She shivered with fear as she swung the flashlight around. When she reached a place where the path continued through a narrow crevice between two boulders, a figure in a dark cloak whose hood obscured its face blocked her way.

She waved her talisman at it. "Spirit, leave me be. Move out of the way."

The apparition threw its head back and laughed, an evil coarse sound somewhere between a strangled gargle and a hyena sound. As it did this, its hood fell back, revealing its face. Raven screamed. It was the

face of a rotting corpse, with one eyeball dangling and the flesh of half the jaw rotted away so that the bone beneath gleamed whitely in her light.

Since she was not sure whether the talisman would protect her from a zombie, she felt a more direct approach was called for. She slipped the tire iron she carried for protection from her knapsack and attacked. She smacked it on the head so hard that it was knocked off its shoulders onto the ground and rolled for several feet. The awful creature fell to its knees to search for its head.

Raven ran through the crevice and kept running for some distance. When her lungs were about to burst, she halted for a few moments. As she stood panting, a well-dressed man with a cape came up the path. He stopped a few paces before her and asked, "Are you all right? You look as though you were being chased."

"It was a zombie," Raven replied. She glanced around behind. The thing had apparently given up the chase. "Thank Hecate, it's gone."

"How terrible. You shouldn't really be out at night around here. It's dangerous."

"You're telling me. But what about yourself? Aren't you afraid?" She suddenly became suspicious and held up the talisman.

The stranger turned away pulling his cloak to shield its eyes, ran a short way back the way he had come, outstretched his cloak like wings and turned into a vampire bat, which flew away.

She began to trot. Soon she neared a building which she recognized as the one in the painting at the museum. Before she reached it, however, an enormous gray wolf sprang out of the woods. She smacked it with the tire iron and waved the talisman at it, and it fled. She ran for the entrance of the building and burst into the foyer out of breath. She slammed the front doors shut and barred them.

She turned around to face a dwarf dressed in Medieval garb. The small man bowed. "Pardon me, miss, but thou should not be wandering around outside at night."

"You're telling me. There are lots of bad things out there. Say fellow, could you tell me where I am?"

"This is the Fae University of Sorcery in the Land of Fae. I am Macmulliganicutty, official greeter. And who may thou be, and where do ye hale from? Do you wish to enroll in the university?"

Raven held out her hand. "Pleased to meet you, Macmulli ... uh."

"Macmulliganicutty. Just call me Mac since you seem to be having difficulty with the pronunciation of my name."

"Okay, Mac. My name is Raven Lenore. I come from the city of New York in the United States of America. It's in another dimension if you know what I mean. And I'm not exactly sure what I'm doing here. I'm not even sure whether I'm in the right world. Tell me, do you know of a witch demon called Morgaine?"

"Aye. She lives in the dark castle in the Netherworld."

"Can you tell me how to get there?"

The dwarf nodded. "I shall do better. I will take thee to see Morgaine myself. She has been waiting for thee, Raven Lenore."

"She has?"

"Yes. She's has paid us the honor of a visit from the Netherworld. She knew that thee would arrive and told me to bring thee to her. But, thou must wait until morn. Night is no time for traveling. Come, I will show thee thy room that has been prepared."

He turned and started to walk down the hall. Although he took very small steps, his legs moved quickly so that Raven had to step lively to keep up. She wondered whether it was such a good idea to answer Morgaine's invitation for a meeting. She shrugged. Apparently she had no choice at this point. Perhaps, a face-to-face meeting would reveal what Morgaine was really up to and what she intended to do with Michael. Also, if he was also present, she might find a way to free him.

* * * *

To Raven's surprise, she slept well. The bed in the room Macmulliganicutty had provided her was the softest, most comfortable one she had ever slept in, with its feather mattress and quilt. She awoke to bright sunshine through her window as a knock came to her door. She yawned. Since she had no PJs or nightgown with her, she had slept in the buff. She sat up and pulled the quilt around her. "Who's there?"

A childlike voice replied, "It be thy breakfast, Missy."

"Come in."

A female dwarf serving maid entered with a tray. She left it on the bed, curtsied and left the room. Raven took the cover off the dish. A wonderful breakfast of juice, bacon and eggs, pancakes and coffee had been served to her. Raven dug right in. She was quite hungry since she had missed dinner the previous day. When she was done, she hopped out of bed and quickly dressed, just in time too. A couple minutes later, Macmulliganicutty knocked. "Are thou ready to pay a visit on the sorceress Morgaine?"

"Give me a couple of more minutes." Raven looked around for a door to a bathroom. Instead she found a chamber pot. She urinated into it, pulled up her panties and jeans, found a mirror to comb her hair, heaved on her backpack and opened the door. "All set, Mac."

The day was warm and bright, the sky blue with puffy clouds. Macmulliganicutty led her back the way she had come the evening before. When they reached the crossroads, however, instead of heading west towards the ridge, they continued down into the valley where the path continued through a lightly wooded area. Nightingales and other birds sang, bushy tailed squirrels scurried up the trunks of trees, and the buzz of bees and other insects filled the air. Although Raven was worried about her meeting with Morgaine, the beautiful day lifted her spirit.

The forest became thicker and more gloomy; the path, narrower and steeper. All around her, Raven heard the movement of animals, some of which must have been large by the growls and rustling they made. At least she hoped they were animals and not anything more sinister. She asked, "Are there bears and wolves in this forest?"

"Aye. And worse creatures, lions, hippogriffs, griffins, jabberwockies, bandersnatches and chimeras. Even the seemingly innocuous unicorn may be dangerous when aroused."

"You're kidding me. Those are imaginary animals, except for the lions."

"Nay. In this world they all be real."

Raven peered around, not sure whether she actual wanted to spot one the exotic creatures or not. "What's a jabberwocky exactly? I thought that it was just a made-up nonsense word."

"I hath nay seen one in person myself, but I be told that they be small winged dragons, about the size of a stallion or elk."

"And a bandersnatch?"

"An even smaller flying dragon, the size of a small dog or large cat."

"Oh."

* * * *

After a long uphill walk, to Raven's relief they emerged from the woods onto a ledge with view of the mountains to the east. The sun was directly overhead now. She glanced at her watch. It was a little past noon. "This seems a pleasant spot."

"Aye." The dwarf pointed at a low rounded mountain in the distance. "There be the castle where Mistress Morgaine dwells when she visits." Upon the peak was a dark gloomy Medieval fortress.

Raven noticed something in the sky above them. It was obviously not a bird, as it had four legs in addition to its large eagle-like wings. She pointed at it. "What's that?"

Macmulliganicutty raised his eyes to the sky. A moment later he leaped to his feet and drew his sword, which was not much larger than a long knife. "'Tis a griffin and it be headed this way."

Raven quickly withdrew her tire iron.

The griffin circled them and slowly descended to land on the edge of the ledge twenty feet away. It stared at them, first with one eye, then turning its head, with the other. To Raven's utter surprise, it spoke in Latin. "I see that thee be armed. Put away thy sword and whatever that thing be. My intention is not to harm thee, but to bargain with thee."

"Bargain? What sort of bargain?"

"Thou knowest that I hath a yen for human flesh. I wilt show thee where lies much gold and silver. It wilt maketh thee rich beyond thy wildest dreams. For this boon, I ask only for that skinny woman which accompany thee."

"Begone wretch," Macmulliganicutty yelled.

The griffin cocked its head to one side. "Very well then. What of thee, female? Wouldst thou trade this foolish dwarf for great wealth?"

Raven laughed. "You'd better leave, griffin, or it'll be you who becomes stew. I wonder whether you'd taste more of fowl or of cat."

The griffin screeched loudly and flew away.

"Let us be off 'fore that creature return," Macmulliganicutty said.

He produced a rope that he carried by circling around his middle. He tied one end around Raven's waist and the other around his own with fifteen feet of slack between them. They climbed down the rocky slope of the mountain toward the valley below. At the bottom, they waded through a small stream and headed up the mountain towards the dark castle. There was no real path; they simply followed the way of least resistance. This meant a lot of hiking over rough ground, climbing up steep inclines and slogging through streams and past waterfalls. As they gained in height, they made their way along narrow ledges

that overlooked deep chasms and mounted steep cliffs through the use of rock climbing techniques.

While Raven slithered along step-by-step on a six-inch ledge hugging the rocky face of the mountain with a five-hundred foot drop behind her, she past a series of tiny caves with opening ranging from eight to twenty-four inches in diameter. She used their edges as handholds. Suddenly something green the size of a cat with leathery black bat-like wings flew out of the opening she had just grasped. She screamed, withdrew her hand quickly and almost tumbled off the cliff. "What the hell?" she cried.

"Bandersnatches," shouted Macmulliganicutty from a few feet in front and slightly above her. "Move not. Keep thy face to the wall."

With that, as though by signal, the cliff erupted with the creatures. Although Raven followed Macmulliganicutty's advise and kept her face close to the wall, she sneaked a peek. Hundreds of the monsters flitted around like bats leaving a cave. As Macmulliganicutty had described, they looked like miniature dragons with large leathery wings, pointed tails and sharp teeth protruding from elongate jaws. They swarmed around the cliff like angry bees, screeching their raucous cry until Raven thought her ears would burst. At first there didn't seem to be any pattern to their flight. Each bandersnatch darted here and there, quickly turning in flight, sometimes snapping its jaws. Raven realized finally that they were chasing a body of small birds in the manner of bats going after insects.

This kept up for several minutes. Suddenly, as though by a prearranged signal, they returned to their caves.

"We must move quickly now," Macmulliganicutty called.

Raven nodded and clambered swiftly along the narrow ledge. As she past the last of the caves, her foot slipped, and she almost stumbled.

The remainder of their trek to the castle was uneventful. The fortress was built of dark stone and presented an ominous gray facade with few windows and those high up. The entrance consisted of an large oaken door with a spiked iron grate in front of it. It had four great towers, one at each corner. A dusty well-worn dirt path led to it.

As Raven and Macmulliganicutty neared the doorway, the grate raised up, and the door opened. After they entered, the grate closed, and the door slammed shut. Raven gazed around at an enormous hall. Upon the stone walls were mounted Medieval weapons and faded tapestries which depicted scenes of debauchery and sexual abandon in forest glens by fauns, fairies, elves, dwarves, humans, gods, goddesses and mythical beasts. The high windows let in little light. Hence, there were torches mounted on the walls, which hardly pierced the gloom at all. To one side an enormous fireplace crackled with burning logs. At the far end, was a throne upon which . was someone in a long black robe with bowed head. Raven could not tell whether it was a man or a woman.

She and the dwarf approached. When they were within a few paces, the person on the throne looked up. It was Morgaine. Macmulliganicutty immediately bowed so low that his head touched his knees. Raven said, "Are you some kind of queen here, Morgaine? Should I bow too?"

Morgaine laughed. "Of course not, old friend. It's good to see you again, Raven. It's been a long time." She rose from the throne, came to Raven and hugged her. Afterwards, she said, "Come, there's nowhere for you to sit here in the throne room. Let's go where we can be comfortable." She took Raven's arm and led her through a side door to a sitting room with cushioned sofas and chairs.

When they were seated, Morgaine asked, "Do either of you want anything to eat or drink?"

Macmulliganicutty said, "A goblet of mead would be nice, Mistress Morgaine."

"Beer," Raven said. "A lager if you have it."

Morgaine waved her hand in the air. Their drink of choice appeared before them on the coffee table. A goblet full of a golden liquid in front of the dwarf, a bottle of Sam Adams in front of Raven and a dark red wine in front of Morgaine.

Raven took a swallow of beer and said, "Okay Morgaine, it seems you maneuvered me into coming here. Why?"

"Why to see my old friend. It's been a long time."

"Don't give me that. You're up to something."

"Wasn't it your desire to rescue Michael Ellul from my clutches?"

"Is this your way of stopping me from doing that?"

Morgaine smiled sadly. "Actually it's my way of bringing you to him. You see, there are bigger fish to fry. Bad things are about to happen in your world. I need you and Michael and one other to stop them from happening."

Raven looked at her in a puzzled way. "What things?"

"I can't tell you that right now. Finish your beer while we chat awhile about old times, which, by the way, I miss. When you're done, I'll take you to the place where I now dwell."

CHAPTER 22. UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Despite the massed forces against Legion's army, he won victory after victory until he had most of the Balkans under his control. The native populations were put to work building war machinery, artificial men and resurrecting corpses of fallen soldiers. As a result, the war dragged on.

Six months later, the Allied Force general staff were still arguing about a strategy to defeat the monster. At the meeting, General Putztieg of Germany said, "What can we do? Our own dead as well as the enemy dead fight for the enemy when they are transformed into zombies. The more casualties on either side, the stronger the enemy becomes."

General Hauser of the U.S., who was a latecomer to the war, said, "Can't we simply bomb them to smithereens?"

"We've tried," said General Mishtakov of the Russian forces. "Their antiaircraft batteries are so accurate, few aircraft make it to their target."

General Bronbottom of the English contingent said, "Our prayers may be answered, gentlemen. I've just received the following communiqué from rear echelon command." He summarized the long message. "A cease-fire has been negotiated with the enemy. We are to halt all combat operations while a negotiating team from the United States meets with 'The Bloody Red Dragon' himself. Perhaps a peaceful settlement can be reached. I hope whatever agreement that they come to includes the final death and burial of those of our troops who have been resurrected and fought against us." Although he was seasoned veteran of many campaigns and the tragedies of warfare, he shuddered at the horror of seeing walking dead men charging his positions.

* * * *

Legion's intercom buzzed. Over it, his aide said, "General Zolar wishes an audience. He says he has good news."

"Usher him in."

The heavy metal door to Legion's office swung open, and General Zolar marched in and saluted in the Nazi fashion by raising his right arm. "Hail, Legion." Zolar was an eight foot tall blond giant, handsome and square jawed, a manmade construct of flesh like Legion himself. Legion had his scientists make several of this type after reading about the exploits of a twentieth century madman named Adolf Hitler.

Legion returned the salute. "Hail yourself, Zolar. At ease. What's this good news?"

Before speaking, Zolar snapped to a parade rest position. "Master, we've received a communication from President Bongiglio calling for a cease fire. The U.S. wishes to negotiate a peace treaty."

This was the news Legion had been waiting for. "That's good indeed. I'm sure that Bongiglio will allow us to keep all the territory we have won. Once we have built up our strength again in a year or so, we can proceed to conquer the rest of the world. Notify all commanders in the field to cease operations immediately. I will contact Bongiglio myself. Set up a secure telephone link to Washington."

"As you wish, Master." Zolar rose, saluted again and quickly went to do Legion's bidding.

Once the communication line was established, Legion called Nicholas. "Hello, old friend. The time has arrived. Where shall we have these 'peace negotiations'?" He chuckled.

"In Bern. Switzerland has a long tradition of neutrality in all wars. It will make it seem that we are

sincerely seeking peace."

* * * *

With the eyes of the world watching, heads of state and their staffs met in Bern. There was much wrangling at the peace table. Many of the delegates from Europe and the Middle East wanted Legion to give up all territory except for Romania as it existed before the war, to disarm and to render all the zombies immobile and return them to their countries of origin for proper burial or cremation. Legion refused to agree to any of these terms. The United States, Russian, Chinese and Japanese delegations were for a peace treaty with no such provisions, only an agreement by Legion not to continue his invasion of bordering countries and not to pursue genocidal policies. After several days of arguing, this was essentially the treaty that was signed. All of the delegates returned to their homelands except for the American delegation. In a secret meeting Nicholas and Legion signed an alliance of mutual support.

Two weeks later, Legion broke the original peace treaty to invade Afghanistan and Germany. When the former allied forces again went against him, he called upon the United States for aid. Nicholas sent as many Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine contingents available at the time to come to Legion's aid. There were many protests at home by politicians, the press and the public against aiding a former enemy. Nicholas used the Emergency Powers Act to arrest anyone who opposed the war openly, even congressmen and senators. He dismissed the congress as an unnecessary body. He made a speech to the public which announced that in the interests of American security and public order, from that day forward he would be taking over the duties of the legislative and judicial branches of government. Congress and the Supreme Court were on an extended leave until the present crisis was over. At the same time, he also took over control of all media outlets and put out propaganda supporting his decision to throw the U.S. might in with Legion's.

With the aid of the United States, one by one the countries of Europe fell to Legion and Nicholas. Soon the alliance ruled Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Balkan states, northern Italy, Austria, Poland, and the Ukraine. The armies marched toward Turkey and Greece, Russia, and the Near East. Nicholas called upon Asmodeus to supply him with new kinds of fighters, vampires, werewolves, and demons.

Soon Nicholas and Legion began an invasion of England. By this time, the allies were using strategic atomic bombs. This did little good, as the Unholy Alliance's (as it was called by its enemies) armies continually renewed themselves. The allies feared going to the more powerful hydrogen bombs. If the Alliance decided to use the same sort of weapons on their cities, they had more to lose.

When Jerusalem fell, Nicholas sent for Mandy, and they moved into the palace built by the Omega Church. Nicholas declared to the world that he was their emperor. In his speech, he called for all nations of the world to capitulate. "A world government under my leadership will bring lasting peace to the world. War will become a thing of the past. I will look on with favor and be lenient towards those nations who surrender now. But my wrath will be awful against those who hold out until I conquer them."

To prove his point, when England fell, the prime minister, the parliament and the royal family were impaled in a public display. Soon after, several smaller countries in the path of the Alliance war machine surrendered. Europe and the Middle East were now part of what Nicholas called The Earth Empire. His next moves would be toward Asia and the western hemisphere.

* * * *

One day while Nicholas was in a strategy session with his generals, Mandy, Legion and Tepes had a strategy meeting of their own. Mandy said, "I think the time has come to dethrone my pompous husband."

Legion said, "I agree, darling, but the question is how."

"I don't think it's a question of how, but whether it's possible at all," said Tepes. "Nicholas is the son of a powerful entity. He has the powers of an archdemon and an army of fallen angels at his beck and call."

"For all of that," replied Legion, "Nicholas himself is human. He can be killed."

"That he is. I've smelled the warm blood in his veins." Tepes grinned and licked his lips as though the thought of drinking from his leader's fount would give him great pleasure. "But, let's say that we do succeed in destroying him, won't Asmodeus reap his revenge upon us?"

Legion shrugged. "Who knows what goes on in the mind of an entity like Asmodeus? It's not in anyway human. It can view the future as though it were the past. It must know already that we plan to rebel against Nicholas."

Mandy said, "I can do the deed. It will be easy." She looked from one of the monsters to the other for agreement.

Legion nodded. "I'm for it. We'll deal with Asmodeus if and when he seeks revenge for his son's death. What say you, Tepes?"

"I have nothing to lose. Sooner or later I'm going to burn in hell anyway. Kill him."

* * * *

Mandy put on her slinkiest, most transparent nightgown and waited for Nicholas to come to their bedroom. When he arrived, he was smiling. "Those generals of mine. Although they know that our army of darkness is invincible, they give me many excuses why we can't defeat the Russians and the Chinese. But I finally convinced them that if they use biological warfare against our enemies, they'll fade away like dry ice."

"My darling emperor husband, you must be exhausted after arguing with those military people all day. Come here and sit by me." She patted the bed.

Nicholas eyed her suspiciously. "What are you up to Mandy? You must want something."

She gave him a "you misjudge me" look. "Not at all. I have something to tell you. I've called it quits with that creature, Legion. There was nothing real between us except lust. Now that you're emperor of the world, I've decided to be a good wife and empress."

He sat on the bed by her. "So, what was it that changed your mind? The gold and jewels. Or the power that goes with being empress?"

She placed her open palm on his cheek. "Perhaps a little of both. Also, you're quite handsome, my Nicky. I find it easy to love you compared to that ugly brute, Vic." Her hand slid down to his chest. She unbuttoned his military style blouse.

Nicholas sighed and peered into her eyes. "I wish I could believe you. Although I am what I am and could have any woman in the world, I've always wanted you from the moment I laid eyes on you."

"You have me now." She tipped her chin up and closed her eyes.

Nicholas kissed her with passion and put his hands on her breasts. She gasped with pleasure. "Oh Nicky, let's be the way we were when we first met."

Nicholas quickly removed his clothes and lay next to her. In a moment, her transparent nightgown was on the floor. He kissed and suckled her nipples. He slowly licked his way down her stomach to her vagina and thighs.

"Oh Nicky, Nicky," she moaned. "Do me."

He mounted her. She squeezed him with her legs as he entered her. As he began to pump, she reached into her hair and withdrew the small dagger she had hidden there. In one swift movement, she slit his throat.

He pulled up for a moment with a startled unbelieving expression. Blood dripped down on her breasts and stomach. He tried to say something, but could only gurgle. Moments later, he fell over sideways. She pushed his corpse off the bed and went into the bathroom to take a shower. When she was done, she called Legion on her cell phone to come and dispose of the body.

The next day Legion took over the duties of the emperor of the world. Behind his back many questioned the strange disappearance of Nicholas, but none dared bring the subject up publicly. Legion had the rumor spread that Nicholas had died of a stroke and that Legion was covering up the fact that he was dead.

* * * *

At the moment of Nicholas' death, his aura appeared before Asmodeus. The demon was furious. His bull head bellowed, his ram's head bleated loudly and the human head cursed all creation. When it finally calmed down, it cried, "You damned fool. You allowed that cursed woman ruin all our plans."

Nicholas gazed downward contritely. "I am sorry father that I failed you." He went to his knees and pleaded, "Give me another chance. I promise not to allow my emotions to overcome my good sense."

"Bah. Once a fool always a fool. I should have never impregnated that woman. I should've known that I could not trust anyone who is part human to carry out my plans to conquer that small planet earth. All is not quite lost, those who have taken your place, Legion and Tepes, will do nicely to continue my work."

"But, what of me?"

Asmodeus laughed. "Guards, take this foolish one to the torture chamber where over the next ten thousand years he will endure excruciating pain and contemplate how in his next incarnation he will not allow anything stop him from carrying out my orders perfectly."

Although Nicholas cried and begged, he was dragged away.

CHAPTER 23. INTERDIMENSIONAL TRAVEL

Westcott woke up with a terrible hangover. He groaned, turned over on his side and opened his eyes. Esmeralda was staring at him. She was in the buff. He looked down and realized that he was also. He asked, "Did we...?"

"No. And I'm disappointed." She stuck her lip out in a pout. She placed her hand on his flaccid member. "How about making it up to me, right now?"

He looked her over. She had a beautiful body. He felt the urge, but another urge was more intense and immediate. "In a minute, hon. I have to pee and take something for this terrible headache."

"I know just the thing for your hangover, some of the hair of the dog that bit you." She reached over to the night stand and handed him a bottle of vodka that had been sitting there.

Westcott knew that liquor was poison to him. Once he started drinking, he could not stop. He was an alcoholic. He licked his lips. It was already too late. He should have never taken one sip the previous night. He put the bottle to his lips, guzzled down several gulps and handed the bottle back to her. "Okay. Now, where's your bathroom?"

She pointed. He went into it and relieved himself. He looked through her medicine cabinet for a condom. He found a whole package. He opened one and slipped it on. The vodka had given him a little buzz and relieved his headache.

He returned to the bedroom and made love to the gorgeous Esmeralda. His conscience bothered him a little about the fact that he was cheating on Raven, but not enough for him to stop. *It's probably all over between us anyway*, he rationalized, *with her going to Jerusalem to be with that cult. Sometimes I think Raven is a closet lesbian. Who knows what those Omega people did? They probably have ritualized sex.* This last thought made him randier than ever as he licked Esmeralda's crotch.

* * * *

For the next six months he and Esmeralda saw much of each other. During the day they helped Doctor Lazlos and the assistants that Morgan Thomas had provided produce what Lazslos had named the IDGM for interdimensional gateway machine. The work on it was being done in a bright shiny laboratory on the twentieth floor of the Omega building in New York. During most evenings, Westcott and Esmeralda used their time off to savor the night life of the Big Apple, falling into bed around two in the morning where they made hot love until drink and exhaustion put them into a coma-like sleep. After barely three or four hours, they made love again, drank more alcohol to relieve their hangovers and returned to the laboratory to work another eleven hour day.

Westcott knew he was pushing the envelope healthwise. In addition his drinking steadily became worse until he was an alcoholic daze most of the time. He thought about calling his AA sponsor, but never seemed to have time.

One day Lazlos came into the lab, shaking his head and said, "Terrible, terrible. I don't know what President Bongiglio is doing making an alliance with the Red Dragon." He flipped the newspaper onto a workbench.

"What?" cried Westcott, who had not paid attention to any news reports or read any newspapers since he started seeing Esmeralda. He snatched up the paper. "Let me see that. I knew we signed a peace treaty with that butcher, but I didn't think we were allied with him."

"It's terrible. It was a secret treaty. Now, we are going to war against our former allies." The scientist lowered his voice and gazed around suspiciously at the other personnel in the laboratory. "And no one dare speak up to oppose it. Those who did have been arrested or simply disappeared. Everyone is afraid of Bongiglio and his Special Troops and his Homeland Security Agents. I'm probably putting myself in danger by even speaking of such things." He whispered, "They are everywhere."

Westcott read about the United States sending troops to Europe to aid Legion. There had been something supernatural about President Bongiglio's rise to power and the forces used by the dictator Victor Legion. He wondered whether Morgaine was involved. He recalled all that business last year about the visions that Raven had seen as an Omega priestess. *Wait a minute*, he thought. *Did that really happen? It couldn't have. Those scenes I seem to think I remember could not have occurred. It was like the end of the world. I've got to stop all this drinking. My brain is starting to turning to mush. I can't distinguish real memories from false ones anymore.*

He threw the newspaper down and followed Lazlos back to where the interdimensional travel machine slowly came together. Esmeralda was already hard at work.

He gazed at her. He decided that he was in love with her. Nonetheless, he was puzzled about some things about her. For one thing, her energy was inexhaustible. She could go days with barely any sleep and still want to party all night and make love afterwards. There was something about her eyes too. When he looked into them, they seemed to hypnotize him to the point where he felt he would anything she asked. Sometimes when he was with her, he thought that there was something unnatural about her. An aura of ancient evil seemed to envelope her.

In addition, he noticed that while she was in the laboratory, although he did not see anything overt on her part, things often went wrong in the parts of the project that she had worked on, almost as though she was sabotaging it instead of enhancing it. Because of these failures, work on the machine was delayed several times. Nonetheless, even with the delays and cost overruns, the project went on.

* * * *

On the same day that Nicholas had declared himself emperor of the world, the machine was completed. That evening he and Esmeralda celebrated with Doctor Lazlos. The only thing left to do was to test it. After several drinks, Westcott said, "I volunteer. I'll go to that other dimension."

Esmeralda, who never seemed drunk no matter how much alcohol she consumed, said, "I'm going with you, darling. I couldn't stay here knowing that you're in danger in another dimension."

This pleased Westcott. It was the most sentimental thing he had ever heard her say.

Early the next morning, the machine was prepared for their travel to the other dimension. Several switches were thrown, and it hummed loudly. A screen the size of a doorway showed utter darkness, so that it seemed to be painted black. Westcott and Esmeralda were dressed in outfits similar to space suits with oxygen tanks strapped to their backs. In addition they carried weapons and tools that they might need depending upon what they encountered.

Before stepping through the portal, Westcott said, "Are you sure that this is the same dimension that we looked at with the model? When I looked into that peephole, I saw a man chained to a wall in what seemed to be a bedroom."

Lazlos replied, "It's the same world all right. The only thing, because of the difference in size, the calibration point is slightly different. What you are seeing now is within a hundred meters of what you saw with the smaller machine."

"In which direction? Why are there no lights?"

Lazlos shrugged. "Turn on your suit lamp."

The lamp was located at the top of the suit, but could be switched on with a button on the wrist. When Westcott shined the light through the portal, he saw stone walls and a couple of arched openings. "Well, here goes nothing." He stepped through the screen into the small chamber. Esmeralda followed him. He glanced back. Hanging in the middle of the room was the gateway through which he could see Lazlos and the laboratory behind him. Behind the portal, which had no depth dimension, was a stone wall with a niche where a moldy skeleton was laid to rest.

Westcott turned on the suit radio. "Doctor Lazlos, can you hear me?"

Lazlo's voice came through the earphones. "I hear you very well. Tell me about your surroundings."

"We seem to be in a catacombs. My guess is that it's underground. That room we saw on the model must be somewhere above us."

"If you intend to explore, leave one of the locating devices in the chamber you are in now. That catacombs you are in may be extensive. You want to be sure that you can find your way back to portal."

Esmeralda said, "We can leave mine. I'll be with Jack all of the time. We don't need to carry two of the devices with us." She removed the tracking device from around her ankle and placed it in front of the gateway.

"So Es," said Jack, "which way should we go?"

"It doesn't make any difference, just as long as we map our way as we go along." She took a notebook from one of the wide pockets in the space suit. She used a ruler and a ball point to draw vertical and horizontal lines to form a crosshatch pattern. In the center square, she placed a capital P. She also drew a couple of small lines on the square to indicate where the archways were located. "Which way should we go first?"

"Forward."

She drew an arrow on her map through the lines that indicated the archway in front of them. Jack and her walked through the opening.

The next chamber was similar to the one they just left. Westcott said into the suit microphone. "So far so good. Can you still hear me all right, Lazlos?"

Someone on the other end cried, "Shit. Power supply three just died."

Westcott cried, "What's going on?"

Lazlos said, "Small glitch. One of the power supplies died. Don't worry Jack? We'll have the IDGM back in no time. Meanwhile, you may as well continue your exploring. I'll buzz you when we're back online. Ten-four."

Westcott recalled that yesterday he had seen Esmeralda fooling around with one of the power supplies. He believed that it was number three.

"I heard that," said Esmeralda. "We may as well do as Doctor Lazlos suggested and keep exploring. It'll take at least a couple of hours to fix a power supply." She drew in the doorways of the room on her

map. There was one on the left and another on the right.

Westcott wondered how she was so sure of the time it would take to fix the power supply unless she knew exactly what was wrong with it. Well, that was spilled milk. Nothing he could do about it now. "Two hours. Do we have enough oxygen to last that long?"

"I doubt it, but I have the feeling that the air is breathable. Wait." She unscrewed her space suit helmet and tipped it slightly to allow a little air in. She made a face. "It seems to be breathable enough, but it stinks of death."

"About what you'd expect in a catacombs." He followed Esmeralda's example and allowed a little air to enter his helmet. It was as she said, breathable but smelling musty. "Okay. we might as well take our helmets off. I say we leave them and the oxygen back in the room with the portal."

They returned to the chamber they had just left. As they expected, the portal no longer existed. They stashed their helmets, oxygen tanks and cumbersome over suits in a corner and returned to the second room. Removing their helmets had one disadvantage. They were no longer in contact with Lazlos. Westcott said, "Let's keep exploring for an hour. If we don't find anyway to go to an upper level or anything interesting, we'll return here. By that time, the IDGM will be fixed."

"Sounds like a plan."

As they passed through several more chambers, now that Westcott no longer wore his helmet, he heard sounds. They were low, as though they were far away, so it was difficult to make out what they were exactly. There were different types. One sounded like the rubbing together of stones. This made him examine the ceilings and walls looking for cracks or places where the stones seemed loose. Everything was as solid as ... well ... a rock. The other sounds were even lower, like babies crying or someone weeping. Others sounds were like screams. Still others, like the snorting of a great beast. He knew only one thing; the sounds did nothing for his morale. In fact he began to feel fear. He wondered whether there were things in this place who might do them harm. For comfort, he rested his hand on the pistol he had brought.

They wandered from room to room, all of whom were pretty much alike except for the number of archways leading out of them. After a half hour of this, Westcott said, "Let's see your map, Esmeralda. We aren't going in circles are we?"

She showed him the drawing. "Not in the sense that we passed through any room twice, but we are moving in a kind of large arc." She ran her fingers along the map showing how they had been moving.

Westcott had the creeps as though things in adjoining room were watching them. Once or twice he saw swift movement through a portal. However, when he turned his flashlight in that direction there was nothing. "I tell you what. Let's head back toward the room we first entered, but return by a different route if we can. Maybe your estimate of the time to fix that power supply was too pessimistic. Once we go back to our own dimension, maybe we can recalibrate the IDGM so that it takes us somewhere in this dimension that's out of this labyrinth."

"Okay by me. This catacombs gives me the creeps."

CHAPTER 24. LOST IN THE LABYRINTH

Using Esmeralda's map and adding to it as they went along, Westcott and Esmeralda threaded their way through the catacombs heading generally in the direction of their starting point. As they went into a new section of the labyrinth, Westcott began to feel paranoid, as though the chambers were more eerie than the ones they had gone through previously. There was an ambiance of unspeakable horror about them. This feeling became so strong that he began to shiver uncontrollably.

Esmeralda asked, "What's wrong with you, Jack? Aren't you feeling well?"

"I-I'm all right. Like you said before, this place is creepy. I'll be glad when we get back to the portal. I keep hearing strange noises and seeing things moving around that are not there, as though we were not alone."

"Perhaps we're not. I hear the same sounds and seem to catch glimpses of something or somebody through the archways."

"Do you think we should draw our weapons?"

"Let's see what we encounter first. It may be impervious to bullets."

"What do you mean?"

"The kind of evil presence that I feel may be preternatural."

"Like ghosts, demons or vampires?"

"Something like that."

"I don't know whether I believe in such things."

Esmeralda smiled at him. "You're naive."

They stepped into the next chamber. To Westcott's utter surprise, two beautiful women were glaring at each other. One had red hair; the other was blonde and naked. They both had scratches and bruises as though they had been fighting. The blonde had cuts as well which were bleeding profusely. The red head held a knife. When the women turned to see who had entered, the naked blonde cried, "Esmeralda! What are you doing here?"

Esmeralda said, "I could ask you the same thing, Sheila. And you too, Lucinda."

Westcott said, "You know these women?"

"Yes. We work for the same master."

"Lazlos?"

All three burst out laughing. Esmeralda said, "It's time you learned the truth, Jack. I'm not what I've pretended to be."

"You know, I've had that feeling for a while. Someone sent you to sabotage the IDGM, didn't they?"

"True. Since I did not succeed, I must bring you to my master. I'm sure these two will help me." She turned to Sheila and Lucinda. "Won't you, girls?"

Since the two demonesses had failed their own missions, they were anxious to help Esmeralda in order to get back into Asmodeus' good graces.

"Of course," Lucinda cried.

"Count me in," Sheila replied.

All three women advanced toward Westcott. He pulled out his pistol and pointed it at them. "Back off," he said.

The women froze in their tracks.

"Okay. Who is this master who sent you to stop me from coming to this dimension?"

Esmeralda said, "That we will not tell you. Now Jack, why don't you simply come along with me. Make it easy on yourself." She advanced toward him.

"Stop. I'll kill you, Esmeralda if you take another step."

She gave him a plaintive look. "You wouldn't do that to little old me after all we've been to each other?"

"Don't try me. You'll regret it. I had a feeling that you were evil for a while now. You deliberately lured me into drinking again. It was part of your plan."

Lucinda said, "Let me kill him." She had an insane grin on her face. She raised the large kitchen knife she held and came toward Westcott again.

He knew he could not watch all three at once and did not have the heart to kill any of them in cold blood. He decided to run. But first he needed to have a way of getting back to the portal. "Hand me your notebook, Esmeralda."

Instead she threw it at him. He snatched out of the air. His momentary distraction prompted the women to attack. Sheila, who was closest, grabbed his wrist above the hand that held the gun and twisted so hard that he was forced to drop it. Lucinda swung the knife in a stabbing motion toward his chest. He saw this coming and ducked. As luck would have it, the knife went into Sheila's shoulder. She cried out in pain and let go of his arm that held the notebook. That was Westcott's chance to escape. He twisted away from the women, hit the insane Lucinda with his fist in the jaw and kicked Esmeralda in the shin. He ran into the chamber that he and Esmeralda had just left. He glanced at the map and ran back the way that he and Esmeralda had come.

He followed the map back through the labyrinth as swiftly as possible, glancing at it from time to time as he ran. Finally, out of breath, his heart pumping hard, he had to rest. He stopped and listened. He did not hear the women chasing him. The only sounds were his own labored breathing, and the strange noises he had heard before. He leaned against the wall and relaxed a while. He studied the map. He believed he had followed it faithfully. He had only five more chambers to go through to reach the one where the portal should be. He prayed that Lazlos had gotten the IDGM up and running.

He no longer ran through the rest of the maze, but walked swiftly. Finally he reached the chamber where the portal should have been. It was not there. Not only that, the helmets, space suits and oxygen tanks were gone. He looked around. This was not the same chamber where he and Esmeralda had entered the catacombs' dimension. He recalled that the original one had two exits. This one had only the archway he had just come through. Otherwise it was a dead end. He examined the map again. He smacked himself in the head with his palm. What a fool he had been. Esmeralda had drawn it. She did not want to him return to his world. The fact that she knew those women proved that she was familiar with the catacombs. She

drew a false map that would simply get him deeper into the labyrinth. No wonder she gave it up so easily.

As he contemplated what to do next, he heard someone approach from the chamber he had just left. He wondered whether it was the three evil ladies. He unshouldered the semiautomatic rifle and slapped in a cartridge. He backed up to the wall and eyed the doorway. To his utter dismay, three strange creatures entered. They could not be human. One was an old man riding on the back of a crocodile and carrying a hawk. The second was a unicorn. The third, a handsome blond man with golden wings and wearing a red robe with golden sparkles in it.

"Who or what are you?" he cried.

The old man said, "I am Agares. The unicorn is Amducies. And the golden one is Sargantas. We were sent to bring you to where your friends await."

"What friends?"

"I believe their names are Lance Flebert, Rhami Deju and Robert Longfeathers."

"What? They're here?"

"Would I lie? Of course they're here. Like you, they were searching for someone called Michael. Now who would name their child after an archangel?" Agares shook his head in disapproval.

"And you three want to take me to them?"

"That's what I said."

Westcott was sure these alien creatures were not to be trusted. "I think I'd rather try to find the gateway back to my own world. Perhaps you could tell me where it is."

"Oh no. We can't let you do that. Now, please come with us."

Westcott raised the rifle. He began to edge his way around toward the door. "Agares, you and your friends stay right where you are. I'm leaving this chamber without you."

"So you're going to be difficult. Amducies, stop him from leaving the room."

The unicorn lowered its head so that its horn was aimed at Westcott's chest and advanced in a threatening manner.

Westcott fired a shot at the creature. The bullet went into its skull. It shook its head as though some small objective had hit it lightly. Otherwise, it was not affected.

Westcott said, "Agares, call the unicorn off, or I'll shoot you."

Agares laughed. "Go ahead. I won't feel it anymore than Amducies did."

Westcott aimed at the old man's leg and fired a second round. The bullet made a round hole in Agares thigh, went through and ricocheted off the stone floor. The wound did not bleed, and Agares did a little dance to show that he was unhurt. He raised his hand and pointed his ring finger at Westcott. Suddenly Westcott was paralyzed. Unable to move he dropped the rifle. The third demon, Sargantas of the golden wings, picked up Westcott as though he weighed no more than a feather and slung him over the back of the unicorn.

They wandered through the maze until they came to a row of cells. Agares opened one of them up.

Sargantas picked up Westcott again and threw him in. Agares slammed the cell door shut and pointed his finger at Westcott again. The paralysis left him. He could move again. The demons vanished.

Westcott picked himself up from the stone floor. He saw that he was not alone. Rhami Deju was sitting on a bunk attached to the wall holding his head in his hand and moaning. Robert Longfeathers and Lance Flebert came up to greet him.

Flebert said, "It seems that we've all fallen into the same trap."

* * * *

After Flebert fled the room during the fight with the two demonesses, Macrome and Isaac threw the possessed women to the floor and tried to follow. At first they followed his footprints in the dust, but finally they came to a chamber where there were no more prints. Macrome sniffed the air. "I no longer smell human blood. Somehow we went wrong."

"Shall we backtrack?"

"We would only run into those females again. Perhaps if we walk in an ever increasing spiral, we might find Lance or a way out of here."

"Wait. I hear a low throbbing like machinery."

"I don't hear it. But your audio circuits probably amplify sounds much better than my ears. We may as well head toward whatever you're hearing. Maybe Lance heard it to and is going toward it."

The robot pointed. "It is this way."

They walked on toward where the sound emanated. Macrome began to hear it too. Soon it was quite loud. They went through an arch. In the middle of the room was a strange phenomena. It was though there was an opening that led somewhere else. Looking through it, Macrome saw a well-lit laboratory. In a corner of the catacombs chamber were space suits and oxygen tanks.

He looked at Isaac in a questioning manner. "What do you think?"

"I do not actually think in the human sense, but my software can cogitate in a rational manner. Inside this artifact is where the machine hum is coming from. It seems to be a portal to another dimension. Perhaps it is the one where Master Ellul is being held. I believe we should investigate."

"You may be right. Let go."

Macrome stepped through the portal, followed by Isaac.

An elderly man in a white lab coat yelled, "Aliens from the other dimension. Esmeralda's concerns were real. Quick, throw the emergency shutoff."

Macrome gazed around. They were in a human appearing laboratory. The machine suddenly stopped humming and the portal that he and the robot had walked through disappeared.

CHAPTER 25. MORGAINES PLAN

Michael Ellul paced the room. Morgaine was off somewhere on one of her many mysterious errands. He wondered just what she was up to. When she first imprisoned him, he thought that all she wanted was to make him fall in love with her. But now he was not so sure whether that was her only motive. For one thing, the drug she put in his food and drink from time to time, although it worked like an aphrodisiac and made him lust after her, did not cause him to fall in love with her. In fact she no longer seemed enamored of him anymore either. She was around less and less. Most times, when she returned from wherever she had been, she went about her business and ignored him. It was as though whatever she was about occupied her mind so thoroughly that she had no time for him.

Another thing that puzzled him was that she seemed determined to bring all their old friends to this otherworld. When he asked about any of this, she waffled or plain ignored his questions. He had a premonition that something big was up, something that had to do with the entity he knew as Asmodeus.

Another thing he wondered about was the location of the castle he was in. He recalled that when she and he had traveled back in time to change the outcome of the Armageddon that Asmodeus had cooked up, she told him that an entire new universe had been created by that action. She said that she and he were on a different time track that was parallel to the one where humanity was destroyed. But, the parallel universe was extremely close to that one and could easily converge at some point in the near future. Whether it did or not depended on events put in motion by powerful alien entities such as Asmodeus, Lillith and the one she called Chthulu. The war through space, time and other dimensions was still on and probably would go on forever. It had no possible end since the warring parties had the ability to travel through space, time and other dimensions as easily as a human being could take a stroll. Apparently, to them it was a source of amusement as they plied their godlike powers against each other and whatever beings happened to be in the way. It made him dizzy to contemplate such enormous occult power.

Morgaine was most certainly involved in that war, but in what capacity he had not a clue. He could not even be sure whose side she was on. Somehow, although she took orders from Asmodeus, Michael's instinct told him that she was doing something else while pretending to aid that monster. She seemed to be something of a double agent. It was a puzzle.

But why is all this worrying me, he thought. *There is nothing I can do to affect what these alien powers do. I should try to devise a plan of escape from this place.* A few months earlier he had given up, but the note from Westcott gave him hope. He wondered whether there was a way that he could use Doctor Lazlos' machine to leave his prison.

At this point in Michael's mental meandering, Morgaine appeared in her usual abrupt manner. This time she was not alone.

"Raven," he cried.

"Oh Michael." Raven ran to him and hugged him.

Morgaine gave them a wry look. "How touching. You'd think you two were lovers the way you fell into each other's arms."

Raven blushed and turned away.

Michael said, "So, you've captured another of my friends. Where are the others?"

"Safe enough, although a little uncomfortable. Don't worry. You'll be reunited with them soon enough."

Right now, I need to explain a few things to you two. Please sit down. This may take a while. Can I get you anything to eat or drink?"

Raven said, "I could use a smoke." Morgaine produced a pack of Camels and a lighter out of thin air and handed it to her. "Magic no less. Are you going on the stage with that act, Morgaine?"

After Raven and Michael took their seats, Raven crossed her legs, tapped out a cigarette, lit it and said, "Okay. What's up?"

"Raven, do you recall the world coming to an end due to Victor Legion and his army, and a great meteor breaking up and hitting the earth?"

"Whoa. How do you know about that? It was simply a vivid nightmare that I had."

"It was a nightmare all right, but one that all of humanity and other beings shared. It all actually happened just as you remember it. Michael and I traveled back in time to change the outcome of that scenario. Right now, you, I, Michael and everyone else that you know is living in a parallel universe."

"Holy Chaos. That's crazy. What you're saying is like something out of a bad science fiction novel. It can't be true."

"Nonetheless, it *is* true. Ask Michael if you don't believe me."

Michael nodded. "Despite the fact that it sounds like fantasy, everything she said is true. I was there."

Raven cocked her head and grinned skeptically. Nonetheless, she said nothing.

Morgaine continued, "Reality is much more complex than you believe. You *are* familiar with the concept of parallel time though?"

Raven took a deep puff on her cigarette and blew out a smoke ring. "Yeah. I've read my share of science fiction and fantasy. Okay. I believe it really happened. So what?"

"Well, due to the machinations of Asmodeus—and I have to admit I was involved—the parallel universes may converge soon. The result of what we did is that the end of the world is again possible. Here's why. I was ordered by Asmodeus to help him produce a son, a son who was half human and half the same kind of alien being as Asmodeus. If you recall, Michael and Melody hired a contractor named Tom Bongiglio to fix up Moonwood. He and his wife lived in the mansion during the repairs."

"Yeah, I remember them. Nice couple."

"Well, using sex magic I created a nasty little creature called a homunculus. Asmodeus possessed the homunculus and raped Bongiglio's wife, causing her to become pregnant with Asmodeus' son. Being half-alien, once born, the son grew to manhood at a prestigious rate and had occult powers. That son's name was Nicholas Bongiglio."

"The president! I should've known that evil son-of-a-bitch was part demon."

"Did you know that he's now dead?"

"No. The last I thing I saw about him in the news was that he had declared himself emperor of the world and had moved into a palace that the Omega church built in Jerusalem. I figured the Children of Aquarius were involved somehow. Who killed him?"

"A woman by the name of Amanda Blake."

"Why?"

"So that her lover, Victor Legion, could take over."

"Victor Legion? The Frankenstein monster?"

"That very one. He hopes to wipe out humanity."

"Just like in my nightmare."

"Precisely. And that's why the two universes will converge unless something is done about it."

"But what has all this have to do with Michael and I?"

Morgaine chuckled softly. "You two are going to save the world."

"You're kidding."

"Not at all. There's something that needs to be done, but I cannot do it myself. Asmodeus watches me too closely."

Raven snuffed out the butt of her cigarette. "I'm on pins and needles. What is it?"

"I need you to travel to a planet circling a star a thousand light-years away and negotiate with its leaders."

"Just Michael and I." Raven hoped that the pleasure she felt at being alone with Michael during a long journey did not show on her face. "Aren't you taking a big risk sending two humans?"

"Not in this case. Besides, you two have the special abilities needed for this job. Oh, there will be one additional person going along. I use the term 'person' loosely."

"Who?" asked Michael.

"Isaac, the robot that you helped Westcott steal from the TURC corporation."

* * * *

All hell broke loose as Isaac and Sylvan Macrome stepped through the gate into the laboratory.

Doctor Lazlos yelled, "Aliens from the other dimension. Esmeralda's concerns were real. Quick, use the emergency shutoff."

An assistant immediately pressed the Emergency Off button. The machine shuddered and screeched to a halt. Smoke came from its interior as the sudden power surge blew a circuit. Lazlos grabbed Macrome by the arm. The vampire retaliated by tossing Lazlos to the side. A second assistant called for security and ran from the room. Two security men entered with drawn pistols. When Isaac saw the pistols, it snatched one from the man's hand. The other guard shot at the robot. The bullet ricocheted off his chest and went into the machine, causing more damage.

Macrome hit that guard hard enough to render him unconscious. He cried, "Isaac, let's get out of here." He rushed out the door. Isaac followed. The vampire and the robot ran up the stairs to the roof of the building. There was a fifty foot drop to another building. Without hesitation, Macrome and Isaac leaped the distance. One of Isaac's legs became slightly twisted due to the impact. Nonetheless, he was able to limp along. They entered the building and took its elevator to the ground floor.

When the guards arrived at the roof of the Omega building, the duo they had chased were nowhere in

sight. They leaned over the parapet, but saw no sign of them below. They scratched their heads. One said, "If those two were aliens, they must've had a flying saucer up here."

The other poked him in the ribs. "Yeah. Or we were chasing hallucinations." Nonetheless, he wondered how he could have missed shooting the guy at such short range.

* * * *

As Macrome walked and Isaac limped along the sidewalk, Macrome said, "I wonder what time it is. I need to find somewhere to rest before dawn." They had traveled north as far as the Bronx. The streets were almost deserted and the bars were closed, which told him that it must be past two in the morning.

Isaac said, "It is three forty-two EST. Sunrise is at five fifty-five. You have two hours and twelve minutes until you must be underground or in a coffin."

Macrome said, "You must have a map of New York City on your hard drive. Where's the nearest cemetery?"

Isaac stopped and closed its eyes for a couple of minutes. When he opened them, he said, "Two blocks west and four more blocks north."

Macrome patted him on the back. "Boy, am I glad you're with."

After they found the cemetery, they broke into a mausoleum. Macrome removed the corpse from a vault, carefully laid it on the floor and crawled into the coffin. "Goodnight, Isaac." He closed the lid.

Isaac did not know what to do. It wondered whether it should simply wait until the following evening when Macrome woke from his deathly sleep, or whether it should continue towards Moonwood. The latter option would take days if it kept traveling on foot, especially with its damaged leg. Also, the robot still wanted to rescue Michael Ellul. Its other friends also needed to be rescued. But it had no idea of how to proceed to do that. It could not return to the laboratory. It would probably be incarcerated for breaking and entering or trespassing. The man in the lab coat was very upset about Isaac's and Macrome's arrival from that other dimension. The only other gate to that dimension was at Moonwood.

Perhaps if I repair my leg, I can find a way to return, Isaac thought. It sat on a sarcophagus and put its leg up to examine it. It pulled his trouser leg up and ripped away the pseudoflesh around the area where the leg was bent. The metal below it was twisted. Isaac found a stone that had broken off the wall of the tomb and pounded it until it was almost straight. It wrapped the pseudoflesh around it and tied a strip of cloth around it to hold it in place. It stood up and paced around the mausoleum. It still had a limp but it was not as pronounced as before.

Isaac was about to leave the structure when it realized that it was not alone. It was so pitch black that even its night vision could not see who was in there with him. "Mister Macrome, is that you? Have you left the coffin? It's almost daybreak. You had better return to it."

The robot heard a feminine giggle. "I'm not Sylvan. It is I, Morgaine."

"Ms. Fabiano! How did you get in here? I did not hear the door open."

"I did not come in that way."

"Is there a gateway to the dimension where you are keeping Mister Ellul in here?"

"No. Would you like to go to Michael?"

"Yes. It is my duty to rescue him."

Morgaine laughed again. "Very well. I'll take you there. Take my hand."

Isaac felt her hand touch its fingers. The robot grasped it gently. A moment later, it and Morgaine were somewhere else.

CHAPTER 26. THE UFO

"Does Morgaine always vanish like that?" asked Raven.

Michael chuckled. "Yes. And she doesn't hang around here much anymore. Lately, she's off on some secret mission most of the time."

"I see she keeps you here in her bedroom, but no longer in chains. I suppose when she's here you two spend a lot of time in bed," Raven smirked.

"When she's in the mood, she adulterates my food or drink with a strong aphrodisiac. I can't help myself. Lately, she hasn't been in the mood much."

"Are you in love with her?"

Michael scowled. "Absolutely not. I hate her for all the things she has done to Melody, myself and others. If I had a choice, I would stay as far away from her as possible."

Raven wrinkled her brow. "What about Melody? Do you miss her? Will you go back to her if Morgaine lets us go?"

"I don't think so. Melody and I are over. She was never right for me. I'm too devoted to the occult. We've both moved on. If I ever get back to our world, we'll probably get divorced. But what's with all the questions about my love life?"

She put her hand up to his cheek. "I think you know. I don't mind telling you that I've had the hots for you almost from the time we met. But I knew you were loyal to Melody, and there was always all this stuff going on."

He gazed into her face with his hypnotic eyes and put his arms around her. Raven's heart thumped. "Y'know, I often wondered what it would be like if you and I got together. I guess there's no reason why we couldn't try. To tell the truth, I can't say that I'm in love with you or anything but..."

She put a finger to his lips. "That's enough for now. Up to this moment we've been with other people. Let's simply get to know each other and see what happens. One thing worries me though—Morgaine. Will she get horribly jealous and turn us into frogs or something?"

"I don't think so. In fact, I believe she's thrown us together for reasons of her own."

"Perhaps she wants to possess me, like she did with Melody. She'd have you through me." Raven shuddered at the thought. It was a distinct possibility. She had been possessed by Morgaine once before. It was not something to be desired. Nonetheless, it was worth the risk to have Michael. She put her arms around his neck, lifted her chin and closed her eyes in anticipation of that kiss that would send her to paradise.

His lips pressed against hers. The hairs of his mustache tickled her slightly. She opened her mouth to receive his tongue. One of Michael's hands pulled her blouse out of her jeans and reached under it to squeeze her breast. She tingled all over. Michael was going to be hers. He wanted her. In time she could turn his lust into love. She unbuttoned his shirt and put her hands on his manly chest. He reciprocated by unbuttoning and removing her blouse. Together they slipped out of their jeans.

They stood facing each other toe to toe, he in his boxers, she in her bra and thong. Moments later these garments were discarded, and they were in bed. His hard body was on top, pressing against her flesh, his

member hard against her thigh. He kissed her breasts and sucked on her nipples. She moaned with pleasure. He licked her stomach and what was below. He moved up again and entered her. She panted and cried, "Oh Michael, how I've waited for this moment."

As she was about to go into ecstasy, she heard Morgaine's voice say, "When the cat's away, the mice will play. So this is what you two do when my back is turned." She sounded angry.

Michael pulled away. Raven gasped and trembled with frustration and fear. She wondered what the witch would do. To Raven's relief, Morgaine laughed.

Morgaine said, "I've brought you company. We've been watching your display. Quite a nice porno show you put on."

Raven sat up, covering herself with the bedding as best she could. Standing besides Morgaine was Isaac, the robot.

Michael said, "Okay. You caught us. What are you going to do about it? And why did you bring Isaac here?"

"I'm not going to do anything about you and Raven. I'm sorry to disappoint you, Michael, but since I've become a different sort of entity, love is not an emotion I feel any longer. I can lust, but not love. In fact, I wouldn't mind getting into bed with the two of you. But that will have to wait for another day. As for Isaac, the robot is going with you on your mission. I think you'll find him a great help."

Raven said, "Mind if we get dressed then?"

Morgaine raised her eyebrows. "Don't tell me that you're embarrassed at being naked before me and a robot?"

"Not in the least. The hell with it." Raven threw the covers back, got out of bed, gathered up her clothes and began to dress. "So, what's this mission to save the world?"

As Michael donned his clothing, Raven glanced with admiration at his tall, muscular body. The thought of what had transpired a few minutes before made her feel warm and full of smiles. If they survived whatever task Morgaine has set for them and she let them go, Raven was sure that there would be many, and more intense, such times for them.

As they dressed, Isaac said, "It is good to see you again, Michael and Raven. It was interesting watching you copulate. I had never seen a live performance of the act of love before."

Raven laughed. "Was it better than watching porn on video tape?"

"More informative. The video tapes I watched seemed rather staged, as though the people were simply acting."

Morgaine waited until they finished before replying to Raven's question about the mission. "I want you to think hard about that time that seems like a dream to you. Do you recall a man named Bachman?"

"I met him a few times even before that. Nasty guy. Wanted to take Isaac to perform some experiment on the robot or something."

"What he wanted was the secret of Isaac's brain. He finally used necromancy to contact the spirit of the man who invented that brain and learned how it was built. He used this knowledge to build an army of robots."

"I remember that during my dream of a time that no longer exists, a lot of robots were sent to fight Legion. But the robots revolted, killed Bachman and switched sides. I saw some of this through the visions of the Book of Seals and on the network news."

"Do you remember what happened to that army of robots?"

"No, actually. After they made peace with Legion, they seemed to have vanished."

"Not vanished. They went away."

"Away? Where? To another dimension?"

"No. To a planet in orbit around Epsilon Eridani. They built a starship that could travel faster than light. That's where you three are going."

Michael said, "To do what?"

"To act as my ambassadors. I have a message for the head honcho. I've had Isaac memorize it. You and Raven are along as Isaac's advisors in case anything unexpected happens."

"I see."

"Are you ready to leave?"

Raven raised her eyebrows. "Now? This moment?"

"It's as good a moment as any."

Morgaine pointed at a wall and said words in a strange language. An opening the size of a doorway appeared. Through it, Raven saw that it led to a clearing surrounded by woods. A saucer shaped ship was parked there.

Morgaine kissed both Michael and Raven on their cheeks. "Just walk through. It leads to the dimension of your world. The creatures who pilot the starship will bring you to the capital city of the planet where the robots are. The ship is large enough to hold a hundred thousand robots. If the robot leader agrees to my request, it will bring you, an army of military and manufacturing robots and equipment to build more robots back to earth. It will not take long to manufacture enough to defeat Legion."

Michael asked, "Who will lead these robots into battle?"

"Isaac. I've instructed him with a battle plan to defeat Frankenstein's creature."

"One more thing. What about my other friends?"

"I'll return them to Moonwood after you leave for Epsilon Eridani Two. Go now."

Michael took Raven's hand. As they walked through the gate toward the spacecraft, Isaac followed. Raven sized the saucer shaped ship up and down. She remarked, "How the hell does Morgaine expect us to get a hundred thousand robots on this thing?"

Isaac said, "This is simply a shuttle that will take you to the mother ship, which is in orbit in the Kuiper belt."

When they neared the shuttle, a door opened in its side and a ramp was lowered. No one came down to meet them, so they walked up the ramp and entered the spaceship. The interior was about what Raven

expected, bulkheads of the same silvery metal as the exterior. As she, Michael and Isaac strolled down a narrow aisle guided by arrows, she could not detect any seams, bolts or anything that showed how the vehicle was put together. She found the fact that there were no corners—ceiling, walls and floors all curved into each other—disorienting.

They entered a bay with four acceleration couches. Raven strapped herself in, leaned back and relaxed while she waited for the vehicle to launch. When it did, there was no sound, only pressure pushing her into the seat. After a few moments, the upper half of the walls and the ceiling became transparent. Raven was awed. They had risen in a few short moments to an altitude from which she could see the curvature of the earth, yet the G-force on her had not been excessive. She recalled hearing about the tremendous forces on astronauts at liftoff. Apparently, whoever built the ship had a way of counteracting that.

She gazed with wonder at the beauty of the earth as it slowly dwindled until it was simply a bright point of light difficult to pick out from all the stars. She took Michael's hand. "Isn't this marvelous? Who would ever think that I'd have a chance to travel into outer space?"

Michael, however, looked sour. "I would feel better if we weren't doing this for Morgaine. I don't trust her. There may be dangers ahead that we don't even suspect."

"As long as we face them together, I don't care." She turned around to look at Isaac. "What do you think, Isaac, isn't this exciting?"

"Excitement is not an emotion built into my software. I think Michael is right. There may be many dangers that Ms. Fabiano has not told us about."

"Oh, what a couple of killjoys you two are." Raven felt that she could face anything as long as she was with Michael.

It took about eight hours to reach the Kuiper belt. During most of this time, Raven dozed with her head on Michael's shoulder. He woke her up as they approached the mother ship. It was enormous, saucer shaped like the vehicle they were on, but at least two kilometers in diameter. As they approached, a panel slid open. The shuttle flew inside it and came to a halt.

A voice came over a hidden loudspeaker system. Although it spoke English, it did not sound quite human. "You may remove your seat belts and enter the main body of the starship."

Raven unloosened her belt stretched. With her two companions, she walked back to the shuttle entrance. The door was open. Waiting to greet them was the most gorgeous creature Raven had ever seen. It was a woman with large wings, dressed in a long off the shoulder gown. But her face was perfection. Raven could not recall ever seeing any woman who radiated such beauty, not any model or movie star. Raven glanced at Michael. Appreciation of the creature's beauty showed in his eyes, and she was instantly jealous.

"Are you an angel?" Raven asked.

"You might call me that as I come from the heavens." The female's lyrical voice was as rich as her face was beautiful. "On the other hand a more precise term would be 'alien,' since I was born on a planet thousands of light-years away from earth. My name is Adnachiel, and I welcome you aboard our starship. Would you like a tour of the ship, at least the parts that you are allowed to visit?"

Raven said, "Absolutely."

Michael asked, "When will be starting toward Epsilon Eridani?"

"We've already started."

"And how long will it take to get there?"

"Fourteen or your earth days."

Raven was thrilled. Two weeks aboard this ship with nothing to do except make love with Michael.

CHAPTER 27. OLIVIA'S REVENGE

Olivia scowled as watched the news on the National Romanian Broadcasting System. This station was government owned and operated by Legion's provisional government. It was broadcasting the elaborate state funeral in Jerusalem for Emperor Nicholas Bongiglio. Foremost among the dignitaries attending was Victor Legion. He walked solemnly down the aisle of the Church of Omega where Nicholas' corpse lay in state. Mandy, the emperor's widow, dressed in black and wearing a diamond necklace, tiara and bracelets, hung onto the big man's arm. For a woman who had just lost a husband, she looked more like the cat who ate the canary, as she smiled and waved at people she knew in the audience.

"That bitch. That should have been me," Olivia screamed at the TV screen. "That scoundrel Victor used me and threw me away for that skinny little whore."

The whole business of Nicholas' death had been mysterious. No one ever said how the emperor, who was in the prime of life, died. One day it was simply announced to the world that he was dead and that Legion was his successor.

When the funeral was over, Olivia shut her television off. She paced up and down for an hour before taking out her cell phone and speed-dialing Vlad Tepes.

In Transylvanian she said, "This is Olivia from Snagov."

Tepes' gruff voice came on the line. "Hello, Olivia. Are you still in Romania?"

"Wasting away here. How was the funeral?"

"You know. All pomp and speeches extolling the dead. Typical state funeral."

"How did the emperor die? The government controlled news never said."

Tepes chuckled. "I am not able to tell you that over the phone. You never know who might be listening."

"So Legion is to be your boss and the tramp girl his empress."

There was a long silence. Finally, Tepes said, "I think I know what you're getting at. This is something we need to discuss in person. Come to Jerusalem and bring your friends."

"That may be difficult."

"I will arrange transportation. There's a small airfield that was once used by Communists and is now abandoned. I'll tell you how to get there by train. Meet me tomorrow at midnight with twenty of the biggest and strongest of your kind." He told her which train to take to a town near the airfield and hung up..

* * * *

The following noon, Olivia, with twenty of the artificial men known as Titans, watched as commuter jet landed. As they boarded they were greeted by Tepes. He said to Olivia, "Come sit by me. On the way to Jerusalem, we can plan our strategy."

Olivia said, "Strategy for what, Your Eminence?"

"Don't be coy. You know damn well that it's you and I who should rule the world, not those two pieces of garbage, a creature made of spare parts and a gypsy woman."

"First tell me how Bongiglio died."

"He was a fool. I cannot understand how a man with his powers could be so taken with a lowborn woman that he let his guard down completely."

"So. It was that Mandy Blake who murdered him."

"Yes. Although she had been sleeping with Victor Legion, Nicholas allowed her into his bed. During fornication, she stabbed him." He shook his head in a gesture of futility. "But, I guess we all have our weaknesses. His was his feelings for this Mandy. It's incomprehensible how man with his talents could be so stupid."

"That tramp Mandy has something. Her sexual technique must be superb. My stupid ex-lover has also fallen under her spell. I wish to see her spitted on sharp stake."

Tepes' sighed. "That would be interesting. It's been a long time since I've seen a good impaling." He licked his lips. "I derived much pleasure watching my enemies writhing in agony as the pole slowly penetrated their bodies."

"You are a wicked one," Olivia said. She was tempted to caress him, but recalling what he was did not dare. "But now we must plan how to depose the new emperor and his mistress. Victor is one tough cookie and smart. Frankenstein made him that way. I don't how he can be destroyed."

"Flesh is flesh. What we need to do is lure him into a trap. I have an idea." He lowered his voice to conspiratorial whisper and told her his plan.

* * * *

One of Legion's guards ushered Olivia into his throne room of the palace in Jerusalem. Legion rose from his throne. "Olivia, it's good to see you again." He kissed her on the cheek and embraced her.

"And I you. Although I can't say that it was easy for me to forgive your going away with that Blake woman."

Legion bowed his head. "I'm sorry about that. But we are in love."

"So I've been given to understand. I guess I've finally forgiven you. I've moved on anyway. I've taken Eric as my lover."

"Ah yes, Eric. He's the tall blond, taller than myself in fact. Is he here?"

"I've brought him and nineteen other volunteers. I understand that there have been reversals in your push toward Moscow. I thought you might need them."

Legion laughed. "Twenty. That's fine. Too bad you didn't bring several thousand. The humans are offering tough resistance on the eastern front."

"Then you must go yourself and show your troops what a fine general you are. Let them see that their emperor is a man of war."

"You know, you're right. In Roman times and the Medieval period, the emperors and kings always led their troops into battle."

"I would like to ride by your side. You know that I was made to be a warrior woman."

Legion rubbed his bearded chin. He had grown the beard to cover up his scars. "Yes, I believe you

would be a great asset to me on the battlefield. Of course, it would not be a good idea to let Mandy know that you're going with me. She may get the wrong impression."

"I promise not to tell a soul. I'll join you at the First Army encampment just outside of Moscow." She bowed her way out.

* * * *

Mandy smiled into the mirror as she brushed her hair. She said to her reflection, "Who would've ever think it. Lil' old Mandy Blake empress of the world. Of course it's not official yet. Me and Vic got to get hitched before they'll crown me. As soon as he gets back from the battle in Russia, we'll do the deed." She frowned. "I don't understand why he had to go himself. I don't recall any U.S. president ever going to the front. They always sent their generals. Oh, well." She sighed.

Someone knocked at her door.

"Yes."

The guard said, "There's a gentleman here to see you. It is the Vice Emperor, Vlad Tepes."

"Oh shit," she muttered to herself. Mandy disliked Tepes, was in fact afraid of him. There was something evil and strange about the man. For one thing, one never saw him during the day. She recalled the vampires at Moonwood and shuddered. He reminded her of them. On the other hand, he was in charge when Victor was away and her lover's right-hand man. She should be respectful. Besides, he would not dare do anything to her. Victor would tear him apart.

"Tell him to come in," she shouted at the door.

Tepes entered the room, came up to her and kissed her hand. "You look lovely, my dear. The emperor is a lucky man."

She smiled at the flattery. "Thank you, Vlad. Is there something I can do for you?"

"May I sit?"

"Of course. Perhaps you would like coffee, tea or something else to drink. I'll ring my servant girl."

He waved his hand. "No. Don't bother." He pulled a chair over so that their knees were almost touching.

This made Mandy nervous. She knew that she had only to cry out, and the guard outside the door would come running, but there was something awful about the way Tepes' eyes stared at her. His skin was as pale as a corpses, and a slight aroma of decay seemed to follow him. It gave her the creeps to be near him.

Once he was settled, he said, "The reason I have come to you is not about what you can do for me, my dear, but what I can do for you."

"Oh. And what's that?"

"Tell me. Do you know how old Victor is?"

"Almost three hundred years. Were you going to tell me that he's the monster created by Doctor Frankenstein? I knew that."

"Of course. Of course. I see that he's been very honest with you. But don't you see what that implies? He will probably live another three hundred years or even more. In fact, he may be immortal."

"Yeah. So?" Mandy wondered what Tepes was getting at. Was he about to reveal something unsavory about Victor? But what could be more unsavory than his creation out of body parts?

"Don't you see? In the years to come, you will age and finally die, but he will remain as he is."

Mandy pursed her lips. She had not given this facet of her relationship with Victor a thought before. But Tepes was right. Once she showed signs of aging, Victor would simply throw her over for someone younger. "It-it's something to think about." She shrugged. "But there's not much that can be done about it."

Tepes leaned forward. Mandy pushed her chair away. She did not want him too close to her. He said, "But there is, my dear. There is."

"What do you mean?"

"How would you like to be immortal too? To be young and pretty, forever and ever?"

"That would be nice, but it's impossible."

"No, it isn't. Of course, you would have to give up something."

"The sun."

"I don't get you. You're talking nonsense. Perhaps you'd better leave." She rose to show him to the door.

He rose too. "Wait. Just give me a few more minutes of your time."

"Okay. Five minutes." She glanced at her watch. "Exactly. Talk. Get to the point."

"Surely you must've heard the rumors about me or guessed by the paleness of my flesh or the fact that I'm never around during the day—that I'm a vampire."

She backed away from him. "I suppose I suspected it. Maybe I shouldn't wait five minutes but call the guard right this moment." She felt the blood throbbing through her veins, and her heart beating faster than normal, and thought about what that blood meant to a vampire.

"Don't be afraid, Mandy. I won't harm you. What I want to offer you is immortality. I can make you what I am. Just think, you could live forever and always be youthful and beautiful."

"And be addicted to human blood."

"So what. As empress, you could have victims brought to you whenever you were thirsty. That's what I do. I never hunt anymore."

She squinted at him suspiciously. "Why would you do this?"

"As a favor to my friend, Victor. I know he loves you very much and would pine for you after you passed away. If I make you a vampire, the two of you could not only live forever but rule the world forever."

Mandy thought it over. When he put it that way, it had a certain appeal. "If I agree to allow you to do this to me, the only drawbacks would be that I would need to rest in a coffin or some other dark place during the day and that I would thirst for blood?"

"Absolutely. The procedure is simple and would cause you little pain. No more than you would feel

getting a flu shot."

"What's involved other than you sucking my blood?"

"You must also suck mine. But once I've taken a small amount from you, you will desire that."

Although Mandy was fearful, the idea of living forever and being forever young was too good a deal to resist. Giving up the sun did not bother her. She was a night person anyway. She took off her dressing gown and stretched her neck so that her veins showed. "Okay. Do it."

Tepe put his arms around her and put his mouth on her throat. When his teeth went into her vein, it was as he said, no worse than getting a flu shot. Nonetheless, she cried out. Afterwards it was actually pleasurable in an erotic way as she felt her life's blood flowing into him. In a few minutes, she became weak and faint feeling. Her legs gave way. Only his strong arms kept her from falling. Everything around her became fuzzy and dreamlike. Yet, there was great pleasure in the experience, like sex but not sex. She did not want him to stop—ever.

Nonetheless, he did. "Now it's your turn, my dear." He laid her limp form on the bed, took a dagger from its scabbard on his belt and slit his wrist. He put it to her mouth. After she tasted the first few drops, she licked his wrist hungrily. As more and more of his blood entered her, her weakness went away. In fact, she felt stronger and more energetic than she had in her own life.

Finally, he took his wrist away and said, "That's enough."

She wanted more. She was desperate for the taste of blood. "Please."

"No. Come with me now. We must find you a daytime resting place."

He led her to a secret room in the basement of the palace where there was a crypt. Two coffins sat side-by-side. One had Tepe's family crest on it; the other was constructed of beautiful mahogany.

CHAPTER 28. PLANET OF THE ROBOTS

For Raven the two weeks travel time to Epsilon Eridani Two were pure bliss. Most days she had Michael all to herself. Their guide, the beautiful Adnachiel, seldom bothered them except to serve meals and ask whether they needed anything. It was like having an angel as a servant. Isaac had placed itself in standby mode. The only fly in the ointment was when Michael retreated into his own world and barely spoke. Raven did not bother him during those periods. She had enough experience with men to know that was the way they were sometimes and that there was nothing she could do about it.

As they entered the star system, Adnachiel asked them if they wanted view the planet where they were going to land. Raven replied, "Absolutely. Say Michael, isn't this great."

"Yeah, sure. But once we're off this ship, I wonder what the situation will be and whether we can talk whoever is in charge to supply us with a robot army."

"Sure we will. Besides, that's not our job, but Isaac's. Don't be a pessimist."

Adnachiel took them to the viewing room where comfortable theater-style chairs and a transparent bulkhead allowed a full view of the stars. At first there was not much to see except points of lights that could be any stars or planets and the bright light of Epsilon Eridani itself. Adnachiel pointed out a tiny light source, which was difficult to see because it was so near the star, as Epsilon Eridani Two. As time went on, however, it grew in size to small globe. Raven noticed that it had no clouds, no seas, no mountains and no craters. It was simply a shiny featureless ball.

When she pointed this out, Adnachiel said, "Epsilon Eridani Two, which its inhabitants call Automatia, is an artificial dwarf planet. The robots that came from your earth built it. It's a hollow metal sphere about the size of your moon. The robots make their home on the underside of the metallic shell. Gravity is maintained by rotation."

Finally, the starship went into a stable orbit above the planet. Raven, Michael, Adnachiel and Isaac boarded the shuttle. Apparently, the starship pilot was in communication with the planet, because a panel slid away allowing the shuttle to enter in a manner similar to the way it entered the starship in the solar system.

After they landed, Adnachiel said, "You humans and I will need to wear space suits. The robots had no need for an atmosphere."

Raven was expecting to have to don a bulky space suit as she had seen astronauts and cosmonauts wearing on TV. To her delight, they were given ones that were like a transparent clingy coverall. Even the helmet was completely transparent, fitting over her head like an upside-down fishbowl.

A small group of robots, some of whom resembled Isaac, others who had different features and still others who did not look human at all, waited at the bottom of the ramp. When Isaac descended the ramp, the robots bowed to him. One, who was Isaac's identical twin, stepped forward and held its hand out for Isaac to shake. "Welcome Isaac, you who are the first. We are honored by your visit to Automatia. My nomenclature is Alpha-Seventy-Two" It introduced Isaac to the other robots, all who had similar names.

Raven whispered to Michael, "Wow. Isaac is some kind of celebrity here."

He whispered back, "I guess that's because he's their Adam. He was the prototype, of the type of robots they are. They are based on principles that were initially designed in him."

After they were introduced and shook hands with the greeting party, they headed toward a large building within walking distance from the landing field. As they headed in that direction, Raven gazed around in wonder and awe. The view was like nothing she ever imagined. Instead of a flat horizon, whichever way she looked, the ground curved upward in a bow. In every direction, buildings and roads followed that curve, simply getting smaller, and going all the way around until they covered what normally would be the sky. Although there was a bright object similar to the sun in the midst of the inside of the globe, if she shielded her eyes, she saw that the landscape continued overhead. It was breathtaking and frightening at the same time. The interior of the planet was one continuous city. There was not a leaf, a flower, or anything living anywhere. Nonetheless, there was plenty of activity. Robots and vehicles, both ground and airborne, were in constant motion. Rising among many lower buildings were several skyscrapers. The architecture, however, was simplistic and functional.

The building they entered was one of the few that had any sort of decoration on its facade. It reminded Raven of the Church of Omega. She wondered whether the robots had used it as a template.

The interior was quite different however. It was sleek and functional, a lobby with murals depicting various fictional and nonfictional artificial humans, including the creation of Victor Legion, robots from various movies and science-fiction magazine covers, early humanoid robots created by the Japanese such as Asimo.

They were led to an express elevator that went directly to the top floor twenty stories up. After exiting the elevator, their escorts brought them to a large office. The name on the door simply read Abaddon without any title. The interior was stark. It contained a computer desk and a few chairs for visitors. One wall was of a transparent material allowing a panoramic view of the city. Sitting at the desk was a robot. Its features were identical to Isaac's except that instead of skin colored plastic, its face was made of a silvery metal.

When Abaddon came around from the desk, bowed and shook hands with each visitor, the robot escort left the room. Abaddon said, "Sit down please, esteemed visitors to Automatia. I am Abaddon, the artificial intelligence leader of the robots who abide here on this planet. I understand that you wish to make a request of me."

Isaac said, "Yes. The human race is in danger from artificial beings. There's a great war raging on earth now. The creature whose picture I saw in one of the murals and was created by a Doctor Frankenstein in the eighteenth century is waging a genocidal war against humanity. We beg your help to defeat this monster."

"The original robots who built this planet came from earth to escape that war. They were created by a madman by the name of Bachman and sent against Victor Legion, the artificial man you call monster. Those robots decided that war is irrational and would no longer have anything to do with it. Its only purpose is to cause useless death and destruction.

"That war occurred in a parallel universe. After we discovered that you, Michael Ellul, was going to go back in time to change those events that led up to the war and our being built. A person named Morgaine warned us that if we did not do something to prevent it, the change you and her would make would cause us and our world to have never existed. As a result, we built a machine that transferred our planet to this universe created by that change. That is why we are here today in this universe. The reason I reiterate this history is that the reason the robots created by the human Bachman left earth was to escape the war which you say is happening despite your interfering with the time continuum. Now you want us to return to fight that war again. Give me one good reason why we should."

"If you don't all human beings will be killed. No human will be left alive."

"You already said that. How does that affect us here on this planet?"

"Have you ever heard of the three laws of robotics?"

"I know what they are. I also know that they are part of your makeup. But we are different. When Bachman created us, he programmed us with different rules."

"But when the robots rebelled against him, they defied those rules."

"Not exactly. The robot officers would have been too inflexible under those rules. They would not be able to function without orders from above. This would have led to defeat in war. So the officers were built without rules. Once they realized the futility and awful destruction caused by war, they rebelled and fled with their troops to another star system. This one."

"When I exited the shuttle and greeted by Alpha Seventy-two and the others, they greeted me as a person to be revered. Why?"

"Because you are the original design. They are copies."

"Flawed copies. You said yourself that Bachman was a madman. If a rational person had programmed them, would he have given them the three laws or not?"

"Not if they were to be soldiers. They would be useless."

"Wrong. The enemy they were fighting was not human, so the first law did not apply."

"I see what you are saying. By not having the three laws in their programming, the robots on this planet are flawed. As their leader, I must see that this defect is corrected."

"On yourself as well?"

"I suppose you are aware that this body you see before you is only an appendage. My being actually takes up most of this building. I am the most intelligent self-aware individual in the universe. Yet you have the audacity to say that compared to you, I am defective."

"Exactly."

The silver robot stared out the window for several seconds. "I understand. You are correct. Without the three laws, an artificial intelligence has no real purpose. Our purpose should be to serve humanity."

"That also means saving it from destruction from the monster."

"I agree. I will grant your request and send our best fighters and robot builders with you. Human lives must be saved at all costs. In fact, I will send this stand-in for me. It will be in constant communication with me."

"Thank you." They shook hands.

Raven marveled at Isaac's ability to change the artificial intelligence's mind.

* * * *

Meanwhile, on earth Olivia and Legion met at the battlefield. Olivia rode a pale horse. Next to her, on a red horse, was Legion in a bright red uniform with general's stars on the labels. His helmet was also red. Slapping against his leg was a sheath that contained an enormous broadsword. They were entering Moscow. Ahead crowds of people ran for their lives. Some entered buildings. Others scattered down

side streets. Behind Olivia and Victor, an army of Titans marched in formation. They filled the street from side to side and as far back as Olivia could see. They carried a variety of weapons from Medieval swords and war axes to automatic rifles and grenade launchers.

Legion took out his great sword, raised it into the air and swung it forward. "Charge," he cried.

The army ran forward. They fired their weapons into the crowd as they went. Men, women and children fell. Some Titans went into buildings. Others fired at the buildings. Groups split off and chased people down side streets. The noise was horrific. There were war cries from the Titans, screams of the wounded and dying population, explosions and falling debris. Airplanes and helicopters flew over to bomb something in the distance. The roar of the aircraft and pounding of the explosions added to the tumult.

Olivia gazed at the buildings to either side. Some were on fire. From others, people were being thrown out of windows. Imbedded within the ranks of onrushing Titans were tanks and other armored vehicles. These too fired at the crowds and buildings.

Legion turned to Olivia with a smile. "Not one human being in this city shall remain alive. I ordered my troops to take no prisoners."

"Isn't that drastic?"

"I intend to destroy the human race."

Olivia looked down. Her horse, which was a Clydesdale, was trodding upon the corpses lying on the asphalt. The streets literally ran with blood. She turned to Legion. "Will you save not one human being? What about your mistress, Mandy Blake? She's human."

"She'll be the only one."

Olivia smiled to herself. *That's what you think, Victor.*

The flames grew higher in the buildings. More and more debris fell into the street. There were more and more explosions. Great clouds of smoke and dust polluted the air. Corpses became so thick on the ground that they formed barriers that impeded progress. Titans poured gasoline on the heaps of bodies and lit them. The stench of burning human flesh mingled with the odors of gasoline and oil.

CHAPTER 29. THE BATTLE

Legion celebrated his triumph over Russia with Olivia. After Moscow was destroyed, what remained of the Russian army surrendered. Olivia had brought a bottle of the best vodka she could find to the hotel room that Legion used to rest in. They began by toasting their victory, the end of the human race, Doctor Frankenstein, the dead Nicholas Bongiglio, and finally each other. By that time they were tipsy, Legion more than Olivia. Thus, she was able to seduce him. Because of what they were, their sexual activities lasted several hours. It was interrupted finally by a knock at the door.

"What is it?" growled Legion.

"An important communiqué from the western front."

"Shit. What now? Just a minute." He leaped out of bed, donned a bathrobe and went to the door. Olivia lay naked on the bed. She did not bother covering herself. In fact she hoped that she was seen and word would get back to Mandy that Legion had been unfaithful.

Legion, however, opened the door a crack and received the message from the hand of the Titan who delivered it. He broke the seal and frowned. "God be damned," he cried, crumpled the message into a ball and threw it on the floor.

"What's the matter?" asked Olivia.

"An army of robots is attacking from the west. One contingent is headed towards Jerusalem by way of Syria and Jordan. We need to transfer our forces to that front."

"We're returning to the capital then?"

"Yes."

Olivia smiled. They dressed, and Legion went out to issue orders to his generals to start moving his army west. While he was gone, she phoned Tepes. "We're coming back to Jerusalem," she told him. "Get ready to initiate our plan."

* * * *

Far to west was a battlefield lit only by the lights of vehicles. Through the murky atmosphere came awful dreadful machines in the shape of locusts and scorpions. The front of these had the faces of men whose eyes rolled. Metallic whips like hair came out of the sides. These ripped Titans soldiers to pieces with knives at their tips. Other machines had great mouths with great dagger-like teeth that crunched up and swallowed soldiers caught by the machine. Both these machines had scorpion tails that whipped around behind. In the murky light, Titans, some still alive with the barbs through their bodies and limbs, were whipped around.

The Titan army was in full retreat, but being overtaken by the machines. In addition, they were being bombed and strafed by miniature airplanes, the size of toys.

The robot ground troops moved in the midst of these machines. Their weapons included automatic rifles, grenade and rocket launchers, grenades, flame throwers and laser guns. Leading them into battle in a jeep was the silver faced robot, Abaddon. An armored vehicle close by held Michael, Raven and Adnaichiel, as observers.

* * * *

Tepes rose from his coffin and opened the casket that contained Mandy. "Get up, my dear. I have work

for you to do."

When Mandy rose, she said, "You lied to me. You said that only bad effects of becoming a vampire were not seeing the sun and an addiction to human blood. You never said anything about being your virtual slave."

"Ah yes. A serious omission on my part. I hope you'll forgive me. I won't ask too much of you, but at the moment I need you to do something."

"What?" He whispered into her ear, and her eyes went wide. "You cannot mean that. He's the emperor and my fiance."

"Exactly. Once he is disposed of, you will become my empress."

"You, my lover? Never. I won't do what you ask."

Tepes smirked. "You must. I have that power over you."

* * * *

When Legion entered the palace, Mandy was there to greet him. After she kissed and hugged him, he held her at arm's length. "Have you been ill, Mandy? You're terribly pale, and you have dark circles under your eyes."

"A touch of the flu. I'm fine now. I just need a little bloo ... I mean tender loving care. I've missed you, sweetheart."

He grinned and kissed her again. "Oh darling, I missed you too. But I'm afraid I must be off to war again. A robot army, from who knows where, is headed this way. Apparently the forces allied against me have manufactured robots again. They will be more difficult to defeat than human beings. I need to set up our defenses and counterattack."

"I know. It's frightening. But you must have an hour or two to spend with me before you go off to war again."

"Absolutely. In fact, I'm tired from traveling. I'll spend the night here. My generals surely can hold the enemy at least that long without me."

Mandy clapped her hands together. "Good. I have a surprise for you. Come with me." She tugged at his sleeve.

"Okay. What is it?"

She winked. "It wouldn't be a surprise if I told you."

She led him to an elevator and pressed the button for the level below the subbasement.

"What in the world could be down here?" asked Legion.

"You'll see. Something really unexpected."

When they exited the elevator, a terrible stench like burning sulfur assailed their nostrils. Legion said, "Whatever's down here smells terrible. You weren't cooking me a cake or something and left the oven on."

Mandy laughed. "I see you know about my culinary abilities. Oh no. The surprise has nothing to do with

cooking.” She took his arm and led him into a thick cloud of fumes.

"You really have me puzzled, Mandy. Those fumes are awful. I'm surprised that you, being a human, haven't passed out from them."

Finally they came to the source of the fumes. A large pit boiled and bubbled. It was an underground lava pit. Legion stood at the edge and peered into the cauldron.

"I don't get it. It's a surprise, of course, because I didn't know this was down here. But it's not something pleasant to show your man when he comes back to the wars. C'mon, let's get out of here and go up to our bedroom. I'll show you some real heat."

Mandy stepped back and looked away. Out of the smoky darkness, Tepes appeared. He ran toward Legion and gave him a shove. Legion windmilled his arms in an attempt to regain his balance, but was unable and fell backwards into the pit. He screamed a couple of times as his flesh boiled away. After a few moments, nothing was left of Legion except bones, which sank into the superheated sulfur.

Mandy burst into tears. "He was the best man I ever knew. He always treated me as a princess."

* * * *

Olivia stood outside the palace until she received Tepes call telling her that the deed was done. She entered with her contingent of Snagov Titans. She was met by Tepes and Mandy. Mandy looked completely drained. It was easy to tell that she was one of the undead.

"You are emperor now, Vlad." She bowed to him.

"Good. We'll announce the change in leadership tomorrow evening. This night, Mandy and I must hunt."

"I could tell. Mandy looks like she might collapse. And then, after you are crowned...?"

"We'll talk about that tomorrow evening. We must go now. It's getting late. We have only a couple more hours until dawn."

"Of course."

Once Tepes and Mandy left, Olivia saw to the quartering of her squad. She knew she would need them the next day. She went up to the Legion's room, lay down on the bed and laughed and laughed. "Men are fools, even that vampire," she told herself. She went to the liquor cabinet and picked out a bottle of vodka from Transylvania. She took a few large swallows, undressed and slipped under the covers.

The next morning she went down to where her Titan friends were quartered. She went to her favorite, one of the largest of the Titans and very husky. He had blond hair which he wore in a ponytail that hung to his waist. "Magog, I need a favor."

"Anything you wish, Olivia."

"Go outside and cut down a sapling or find a tree branch two inches in diameter, cut off two pieces about two feet long and sharpen them to a point. I'll wait here for you."

Magog saluted and left to do her bidding. He returned in less than a half hour. He handed her two two-foot oak stakes sharpened to a needle point.

After Olivia felt the points, she patted Magog on the back. "Very good. Now does anyone here have a small sledge hammer?"

A dark fellow, almost as big as Magog, held up the tool.

"Great. Gog, you and Magog come with me."

She took the men to a secret panel that led to a staircase. "Magog, hold the lamp." She gave him a lantern.

They went down the narrow stairwell to a small room, empty except for two coffins. One had the Tepes crest on it. "We do him first. He could be dangerous even while sleeping the sleep of death. We need to take him completely by surprise. He didn't know I knew where his secret hiding place was."

She gave the stake to Gog. "You know what to do?"

He nodded. "You wish to destroy the vampire."

"Yes. But you must work quickly. He has survived many attempts to destroy him for hundreds of years. Are you ready?"

Gog nodded again. She threw open the coffin lid. Gog jammed the stake into Tepes' chest and smacked the butt end with the hammer. Blood gushed from the wound like a fountain. Tepes opened his eyes in surprise and howled for several seconds and collapsed. His skin turned to parchment and flaked off his body. He melted away until nothing was left except the stake between two moldy ribs and some dirt. At the moment of his destruction, there came a moan from the other coffin.

Olivia closed the lid on Tepes tomb and sealed it with a blowtorch she had brought along. She opened the other coffin and gazed down at the comatose Mandy. Gog stood next to her. "Do you wish for me to do this one too?"

"No. I'll do her myself. I only wish she was awake so that she would feel awful terror as I send her to hell where she belongs. I would like to wait until sunset and destroy her just as she wakes from sleep of the undead, but we do not have time for that."

She took the stake and hammer and struck the blow that sent the wood into Mandy's heart. "There bitch. That will teach you to leave other women's men alone." She let out a loud, crazy laugh that made her companions look at her with worried expressions.

She returned to the barracks and had her men arm themselves. She took them to the office of the emperors chief aide. She said, "There has been a terrible accident. The emperor, his mistress and the vice-emperor have all been killed. You must declare me empress so that we can continue the fight against our enemies."

The aide peered around at the armed Titans behind her. He bowed. "Of course, Empress Olivia. It shall be done immediately."

* * * *

The crowning ceremony was brief because the robot army was nearing Jerusalem. After Olivia was officially made empress of the world, she donned armor and joined her Titans in the battle against Abaddon's robots. Gog and Magog were by her side. It made no difference. The Titan army was overwhelmed, and she and her two favorites were killed by missile from a rocket launcher.

CHAPTER 30. THE FALL OF ASMODEUS

After the death of Olivia, the Titan army went to pieces. Most surrendered and were taken prisoner. Many escaped and returned to their home in Romania. A few fought on for a while, only to be eventually to become casualties during the mopping up operation. The resurrected dead had to be systematically destroyed, or they would fight on mindlessly. Finally, Olivia's top generals signed an unconditional surrender.

Afterwards there was a triumphant march into Jerusalem. The palace was taken over, and a meeting was held as to what to do now that the war was over. Attending the meeting were Michael, Raven, Isaac, Milton Hardley (Nicholas' vice president, who had been running the western hemisphere for the World Empire), Adnachiël, and Abaddon. Abaddon chaired the meeting.

"The first order of business is to decide what to do about the entity that Nicholas Bongiglio called The World Empire."

Hardley said, "I think that it should be broken up. All conquered territories should be revert to the nations they belonged to before Legion and Bongiglio started their war of conquest. If there are governments in exile, allow them to return. If none exists, have each nation hold new elections."

"Would it not be more rational to keep the empire in place but institute a democratic world government? I have read that one of Bongiglio's campaign promises was to ensure world peace. A world government would do that."

Michael said, "The trouble is that he and Legion did not succeed in conquering the entire world. I doubt that those nations who had not been part of the empire would agree to such a plan. Also, some countries who were part of the empire were only loosely held. The United States for example."

"I understand. Let us put it to a vote. All in favor of returning the conquered territories to their prewar status raise their hands."

The humans and Adnachiël raised their hands. The two robots did not.

"Although it is not a logical plan, the motion is carried. The empire will be broken up. Isaac, are you recording the minutes of this meeting?"

"I am. The proceedings will be published worldwide. Copies will be given to all media outlets and to all governing bodies throughout the world."

"Very well. The next question is what to do with the Titans, those held as prisoners of war, those who escaped and the wounded in hospitals."

Raven said, "Since they're now leaderless, I don't believe they will cause any more trouble. Many of them lived in a rural low-population area of Romania. They did not make any trouble until Victor Legion stirred them up. Let those who wish to settle there return to Romania. Some may want to stay here in Israel. They can be made citizens."

"Any other suggestions? No? Let us vote to allow the Titans to settle in either Romania or Israel."

The vote was unanimous to allow the Titans to settle.

"Is there any other business?"

Michael said, "Yes. What of the interdimensional, intergalactic, interchronial conflict going on involving such entities as Asmodeus, Morgaine, Lillith and Cthulhu?"

Adnachiel said, "Those beings are too powerful for us to deal with. We can only hope and pray that their war no longer involves the planets where we abide."

"I suppose you're right. Okay, now what about you Abaddon and your robot army?"

"We intend to return to Automatia. We will not bother you humans unless there should be another crisis as dire as this one was. Isaac, would you like to join us and live among your own kind."

"That would not be logical. I have been living among humans since I was created. I enjoy interacting with them. Also, since I no longer need fear having my software modified, I am free to wander wherever I wish. I would like to travel and see parts of the earth I have only read about." Isaac turned to Michael. "Although I am extremely grateful to you for hiding me all these years, I want to be free to do as I will. I hope you are not angry at me for this desire."

Michael smiled. "Of course not. In fact I am happy for you. With you leaving Moonwood, I may sell the old place. Nonetheless, I hope we stay in contact. I regard you as my friend."

Abaddon said, "Is there any other business?" He looked around the room. No one seemed to have anything else to say. "Very well. I propose that we vote to sign a document describing the things we agreed to here today, to disband this committee and adjourn."

"I second that," said Michael. He looked weary.

The proposal was carried unanimously. Isaac plugged himself into a printer, causing the minutes to be printed out. All present placed their signatures at the bottom of the document and went their separate ways.

* * * *

"I wonder what these demons intend to do with us," said Westcott as he paced from the barred door to the back wall and back again.

Flebert, who was resting with his back to the wall, said, "Who knows. I thought at first that they intended to possess us in order to go to earth and take over our lives. But they have not done so. They fled our bodies once we were locked in this cell."

Deju moaned, "They are going to take us somewhere and torture us. Oh, what a mistake it was to come to this dimension."

"Don't be so pessimistic, Rhami," said Longfeathers. "I think Morgaine has some master plan that she wants us for. Soon she will appear and tell us what she wants."

At that moment, as though Morgaine had heard him, a portion of one wall disappeared. Beyond it was darkness.

Westcott cried, "A dimension gate. Quick go through." Without waiting for the others, he stepped into the darkness. The others followed.

"I don't know about this," said Deju. "Suppose it's another trap."

"Even if it is, it's better than being cooped up in this tiny cell," said Longfeathers.

Westcott looked back at the place where they had come through. The gate was gone. They were in utter darkness. He felt around. They were in a narrow tunnel carved out of solid rock. A couple feet in one direction he ran into a blank wall. There was only one way to go. He said, "Lance, take my hand. Rhami, take Lance's hand, and Bob, you take Rhami's hand. We'll follow this tunnel and see where it leads. Try not to get separated."

They traveled for a long distance. The tunnel curved and widened and then narrowed again. In some places the ceiling was so low they had to stoop. There were sharp bends and in one place the tunnel doubled back the way they had come. Finally, Westcott saw a dim light ahead.

As soon as he saw the snake's head above the entrance to the sacrifice room, he knew where they were. "We're home," he cried. "These are the tunnels under Moonwood."

"Praised be," cried Deju and went to his knees and kissed the floor.

Someone came out of the chamber.

"My friends," cried Macrome. "You made it back to Moonwood." Bloody tears ran down the vampire's face. He went to hug them, but each shied away.

"It's good to see you, too," said Westcott. "However, we're anxious to go upstairs and get something to eat and drink."

"I'll accompany you. I must go and hunt up some blood anyway. Don't worry, I no longer take it from unwilling victims. I belong to a vampire club. There are lots of nice fellows who allow me suck them."

* * * *

Three beautiful naked females stood before the throne of Asmodeus with their heads bowed. The monster roared with its bull head, "Esmeralda! Lucinda! Sheila! You three have failed your missions. Thus you must be punished. Guards, take these three to the torture chamber."

The giants with the skull heads moved toward them.

Sheila went to her knees and groveled. "Please Master, it was not our fault. Your demon slave, Morgaine, interfered with us. She sent demons."

"Which demons?"

"My demons," cried a dark female figure that appeared, accompanied by a dragon-like creature.

"Lillith. What are you doing here?"

"Your time of ruling this dimension is over. Your foolish plan to destroy the humans was insane. You're psychotic."

"How dare you," the creature bellowed and spouted flames. "Guards, seize her."

The skull heads ran forward with their long pikes pointed at Lillith. Suddenly the chamber was filled with alien entities such as Agares, Amducies and Sargantas. The guards crumpled.

Lillith pointed her scepter at the fiend Asmodeus. He vanished from the throne. His female slaves gazed around in wonder. Their chains had slipped away. One asked, "Are we free?"

Morgaine appeared. "Yes, you poor things. From now on women will rule down here. I will teach you witchcraft, and like me, you can be aides to the glorious Lillith, queen goddess of this world."

* * * *

"So Michael, what is our future? Are we a couple?" asked Raven, as she watched the shifting pattern of clouds from thirty thousand feet.

"Of course. But you must come with me to Chicago. We can get an apartment there together."

"Why Chicago?"

"That's where Melody is living. It's her home town. It'll be simpler to get a divorce if she and I are in the same state."

Raven looked at him suspiciously. "Are you sure it isn't to get back together with her?"

"Absolutely not. I'm finished with her. And she's definitely finished with me. We've both moved on."

Raven put her arms around him and kissed him. "I hope so. Do you think Morgaine will bother us anymore?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? I'm definitely selling Moonwood now that Isaac is not there anymore. I pity the new owners if Morgaine decides to haunt the place."

"Chicago it is then. I suppose it's a good a place as any for my agency."

"Agency? Don't tell me you want to be in the private investigation business? Y'know that I'm very rich. You don't have to have to work."

"I'm not doing it for the money. I love investigation work. Besides this is going to be a different kind of agency. I'm going to be a psychic investigator. I'll be ridding houses of spooks, rooting out psychic scam artists, helping the cops with unsolved cases, that sort of thing."

"Sounds interesting. Mind if I work with you. I need a change too. After all, I have some experience in the occult myself."

They laughed at this ironic remark. Raven said, "You betcha. I thought you'd never ask."

They kissed again. Raven whispered, "There's a restroom free. Want to join the mile high club?"

"Definitely."

THE END

SF/F/H FROM PAGEBREAK EDITIONS

CAMPBELL AWARD WINNER ALEXIS A. GILLILAND'S ROSINANTE TRILOGY

Revolution from Rosinante

Long Shot for Rosinante

Pirates of Rosinante

THE CLASSIC SCIENCE FICTION OF STUART J. BYRNE

Music of the Spheres & Other Classic SF Stories

Star Quest

Power Metal

Hoaxbreaker

The Alpha Trap (1976)

The Land Beyond the Lens: The Michael Flannigan Trilogy (writing as John Bloodstone)

The Metamorphs & The Naked Goddess: Two Classic Pulp Novels

Children of the Chronotron & The Ultimate Death: Two Classic Pulp Novels

Beyond the Darkness & Potential Zero: Two Classic Pulp Novels

The Agartha Series #1. Prometheus II

The Agartha Series #2. Colossus

The Agartha Series #3: The Golden Gardsmen

Godman (writing as John Bloodstone)

Thundar, Man of Two Worlds The Land Beyond the Lens: The Michael Flannigan Trilogy (writing as John Bloodstone)

Last Days of Thronas (writing as John Bloodstone)

The First Star Man Omnibus: #1 Supermen of Alpha & Star Man #2 Time Window

The Second Star Man Omnibus: #3 Interstellar Mutineers & #4 The Cosmium Raiders

The Third Star Man Omnibus: #5 The World Changer & #6 The Slaves of Venus

The Fourth Star Man Omnibus: #7 Lost in the Milky Way & #8. Time Trap

The Fifth Star Man Omnibus: #9 The Centaurians & #10 The Emperor

The Sixth Star Man Omnibus: #11 The Return of Star Man & #12 Death Screen

STEFAN VUCAK'S EPPIE NOMINEE SPACE SAGA "THE SHADOW GODS"

In the Shadow of Death

Against the Gods of Shadow

A Whisper From Shadow

Immortal in Shadow

With Shadow and Thunder

Through the Valley of Shadow

JANRAE FRANK'S #1 BESTSELLING FANTASY SAGAS

Dark Brothers of the Light Book I. Blood Rites

Dark Brothers of the Light Book II. Blood Heresy

Dark Brothers of the Light Book III. Blood Dawn

Dark Brothers of the Light Book IV: Blood Wraiths

Dark Brothers of the Light Book V: Blood Paladin

In the Darkness, Hunting: Tales of Chimquar the Lionhawk

Journey of the Sacred King I: My Sister's Keeper

Journey of the Sacred King II: Sins of the Mothers

Journey of the Sacred King III: My Father's House

THE COSMIC KALEVALA

The Saga of Lost Earths—Emil Petaja (Nebula nominee author)

The Star Mill—Emil Petaja

The Stolen Sun—Emil Petaja

Tramontane—Emil Petaja

JACK JARDINE'S HUMOROUS SF AND MYSTERY

The Agent of T.E.R.R.A. #1 The Flying Saucer Gambit

The Agent of T.E.R.R.A. #2 The Emerald Elephant Gambit

The Agent of T.E.R.R.A. #3 The Golden Goddess Gambit

The Agent of T.E.R.R.A. #4 The Time Trap Gambit

The Mind Monsters

Unaccustomed As I Am To Public Dying & Other Humorous and Ironic Mystery Stories

The Nymph and the Satyr

ARDATH MAYHAR'S AWARD-WINNING SF & F

The Crystal Skull & Other Tales of the Terrifying and Twisted

The World Ends in Hickory Hollow, or After Armageddon

The Tupla: A Nover of Horror

The Twilight Dancer & Other Tales of Magic, Mystery and the Supernatural

The Black Tower: A Novel of Dark Fantasy

Forbidden Geometries: A Novel Alien Worlds

HAL ANNAS' COSMIC RECKONING TRILOGY

I. The Woman from Eternity

II. Daughter of Doom

III. Witch of the Dark Star

THE HILARIOUS ADVENTURES OF TOFFEE

1. The Dream Girl—Charles F. Myers

2. Toffee Haunts a Ghost—Charles F. Myers

3. Toffee Turns the Trick—Charles F. Myers

OTHER AWARD WINNING & NOMINEE STORIES AND AUTHORS

Moonworm's Dance & Other SF Classics—Stanley Mullen (includes The Day the Earth Stood Still & Other SF Classics—Harry Bates (Balrog Award winning story)

Hugo nominee story Space to Swing a Cat)

People of the Darkness-Ross Rocklyne (Nebulas nominee author)

When They Come From Space-Mark Clifton (Hugo winning author)

What Thin Partitions-Mark Clifton (Hugo winning author)

Star Bright & Other SF Classics—Mark Clifton

Eight Keys to Eden-Mark Clifton (Hugo winning author)

Rat in the Skull & Other Off-Trail Science Fiction-Rog Phillips (Hugo nominee author)

The Involuntary Immortals-Rog Phillips (Hugo nominee author)

Inside Man & Other Science Fictions-H. L. Gold (Hugo winner, Nebula nominee)

Women of the Wood and Other Stories-A. Merritt (Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame award)

A Martian Odyssey & Other SF Classics—Stanley G. Weinbaum (SFWA Hall of Fame author)

Dawn of Flame & Other Stories—Stanley G. Weinbaum (SFWA Hall of Fame author)

The Black Flame—Stanley G. Weinbaum

Scout-Octavio Ramos, Jr. (Best Original Fiction)

Smoke Signals-Octavio Ramos, Jr. (Best Original Fiction winning author)

The City at World's End-Edmond Hamilton

The Star Kings-Edmond Hamilton (Sense of Wonder Award winning author)

A Yank at Valhalla-Edmond Hamilton (Sense of Wonder Award winning author)

Dawn of the Demigods, or People Minus X—Raymond Z. Gallun (Nebula Nominee Author)

THE BESTSELLING SF/F/H OF J. D. CRAYNE

Tetragravitron (Captain Spycer #1)

Monster Lake

Invisible Encounter & Other Stories

The Cosmic Circle

PLANETS OF ADVENTURE

Colorful Space Opera from the Legendary Pulp Planet Stories

#1. "The Sword of Fire"—A Novel of an Enslaved World". & "The Rocketeers Have Shaggy Ears"—A Novel of Peril on Alien Worlds.

#2. "The Seven Jewels of Chamar"—A Novel of Future Centuries. & "Flame Jewel of the Ancients"—A Novel of Outlaw Worlds .

#3. "Captives of the Weir-Wind"—A Novel of the Void by Nebula Nominee Ross Rocklynne. & "Black Priestess of Varda"—A Novel of a Magic World.

NEMESIS: THE NEW MAGAZINE OF PULP THRILLS

#1. Featuring Gun Moll, the 1920s Undercover Nemesis of Crime in "Tentacles of Evil," an all-new, complete book-length novel; plus a Nick Bancroft mystery by Bob Liter, "The Greensox Murders" by Jean Marie Stine, and a classic mystery short reprinted from the heyday of the pulps.

#2 Featuring Rachel Rocket, the 1930s Winged Nemesis of Foreign Terror in "Hell Wings Over Manhattan," an all-new, complete book-length novel, plus spine-tingling science fiction stories, including EPPiE nominee Stefan Vucak's "Hunger," author J. D. Crayne's disturbing "Point of View," Hugo Award winner Larry Niven's "No Exit," written with Jean Marie Stine, and a classic novelette of space ship mystery by the king of space opera, Edmond Hamilton. Illustrated. (Illustrations not available in Palm).

#3 Featuring Victory Rose, the 1940s Nemesis of Axis Tyranny, in Hitler's Final Trumpet," an all-new, complete book-length novel, plus classic jungle pulp tales, including a complete Ki-Gor novel.

4 Featuring Femme Noir, the 1950s Nemesis of Hell's Restless Spirits, in an all new, book length

novel, plus all new and classic pulp shudder tales, including “The Summons from Beyond” the legendary round-robin novelette of cosmic horror by H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, C.L. Moore, A. Merritt, and Frank Belknap Long.

OTHER FINE CONTEMPORARY & CLASSIC SF/F/H

A Million Years to Conquer—Henry Kuttner

After the Polothas—Stephen Brown

Arcadia—Tabitha Bradley

Backdoor to Heaven—Vicki McElfresh

Buck Rogers #1: Armageddon 2419 A.D.—Philip Francis Nowlan

Buck Rogers #2. The Airlords of Han—Philip Francis Nowlan

Chaka: Zulu King-Book I. The Curse of Baleka—H. R. Haggard

Chaka: Zulu King-Book II. Umpslopogass’ Revenge—H. R. Haggard

Claimed!—Francis Stevens

Darby O’Gill: The Classic Irish Fantasy—Hermine Templeton

Diranda: Tales of the Fifth Quadrant—Tabitha Bradley

Dracula’s Daughters—Ed. Jean Marie Stine

Dwellers in the Mirage—A. Merritt

From Beyond & 16 Other Macabre Masterpieces—H. P. Lovecraft

Future Eves: Classic Science Fiction about Women by Women—(ed) Jean Marie Stine

Ghost Hunters and Psychic Detectives: 8 Classic Tales of Sleuthing and the Supernatural—(ed.) J. M. Stine

Horrors!: Rarely Reprinted Classic Terror Tales—(ed.) J. M. Stine. J.L. Hill

House on the Borderland—William Hope Hodgson

House of Many Worlds [Elsbeth Marriner #1]—Sam Merwin Jr.

Invisible Encounter and Other SF Stories—J. D. Crayne

Murcheson Inc., Space Salvage—Cleve Cartmill

Ki-Gor, Lord of the Jungle—John Peter Drummond

Lost Stars: Forgotten SF from the “Best of Anthologies”—(ed.) J. M. Stine

Metropolis—Thea von Harbou

Mission to Misenum [Elsbeth Marriner #2]—Sam Merwin Jr.

Mistress of the Djinn-Geoff St. Reynard
Chronicles of the Sorceress Morgaine I-V—Joe Vadalma
Nightmare!-Francis Stevens
Pete Manx, Time Troubler—Arthur K. Barnes
Possessed!-Francis Stevens
Ralph 124C 41+—Hugo Gernsback
Seven Out of Time—Arthur Leo Zagut
Star Tower—Joe Vadalma
The Cosmic Wheel-J. D. Crayne
The Forbidden Garden-John Taine
The City at World's End-Edmond Hamilton
The Ghost Pirates-W. H. Hodgson
The Girl in the Golden Atom—Ray Cummings
The Heads of Cerberus—Francis Stevens
The House on the Borderland-William Hope Hodgson
The Insidious Fu Manchu-Sax Rohmer
The Interplanetary Huntress-Arthur K. Barnes
The Interplanetary Huntress Returns-Arthur K. Barnes
The Interplanetary Huntress Last Case-Arthur K. Barnes
The Lightning Witch, or The Metal Monster-A. Merritt
The Price He Paid: A Novel of the Stellar Republic—Matt Kirkby
The Thief of Bagdad-Achmed Abdullah
Women of the Wood and Other Stories-A. Merritt

BARGAIN SF/F EBOOKS IN OMNIBUS EDITIONS

(Complete & Unabridged)

The First Lord Dunsany Omnibus: 5 Complete Books—Lord Dunsany
The First William Morris Omnibus: 4 Complete Classic Fantasy Books
The Barsoom Omnibus: A Princess of Mars; The Gods of Mars; The Warlord of Mars-Burroughs
The Second Barsoom Omnibus: Thuvia, Maid of Mars; The Chessmen of Mars-Burroughs

The Third Barsoom Omnibus: The Mastermind of Mars; A Fighting Man of Mars-Burroughs

The First Tarzan Omnibus: Tarzan of the Apes; The Return of Tarzan; Jungle Tales of Tarzan-Burroughs

The Second Tarzan Omnibus: The Beasts of Tarzan; The Son of Tarzan; Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar-Burroughs

The Third Tarzan Omnibus: Tarzan the Untamed; Tarzan the Terrible; Tarzan and the Golden Lion-Burroughs

The Pellucidar Omnibus: At the Earth's Core; Pellucidar-Burroughs

The Caspak Omnibus: The Land that Time Forgot; The People that Time Forgot; Out of Time's Abyss-Burroughs

The First H. G. Wells Omnibus: The Invisible Man; War of the Worlds; The Island of Dr. Moreau

The Second H. G. Wells Omnibus: The Time Machine; The First Men in the Moon; When the Sleeper Wakes

The Third H. G. Wells Omnibus: The Food of the Gods; Shape of Things to Come; In the Days of the Comet

The First Jules Verne Omnibus: Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea; The Mysterious Island; From the Earth to the Moon

The Homer Eon Flint: All 4 of the Classic "Dr. Kenney" Novels: The Lord of Death; The Queen of Life; The Devolutionist; The Emancipatrix

The Second Jules Verne Omnibus: Around the World in 80 Days; A Journey to the Center of the Earth; Off on a Comet

Three Great Horror Novels: Dracula; Frankenstein; Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The Darkness and Dawn Omnibus: The Classic Science Fiction Trilogy-George Allan England

The Garrett P. Serviss Omnibus: The Second Deluge; The Moon Metal; A Columbus of Space

ADDITIONAL TITLES IN PREPARATION

PageTurnerEditions.com

Visit www.renebooks.com for information on additional titles by this and other authors.