

**DALE
THOMPSON**

A NOVEL

**SOUL
SABBATH**

BOOK 1 OF THE "ETERNAL MORTAL" SERIES

SOUL SABBATH SYNOPSIS



Even as a child, Mieszko's parents knew there was something not quite right about the boy, and when they saw him drawing a picture of a woman with wolf-like characteristics, they were convinced he was "unsound" and handed him over to the local Benedictine monastery, abandoning him forever. Mieszko would spend the rest of his life in that monastery until one day he simply vanished without a trace.

Though he took his vows very seriously, he could no longer maintain his silence when an epiphany came to him that certain scriptures were not

gospel at all – an offense that exposed him as a heretic. Mieszko's revelation concerned the redemption of mankind, and such heresy shook the monastery to its very foundation. Though this was a crime punishable by death, Mieszko was able to bargain for his life, but it could be argued that the punishment delivered was, in fact, worse than death. The bricks were gathered, the mortar poured, and Mieszko was confined in the tiny scriptorium and assigned the task of scribing the greatest book of his time – The Codex Gigas.

Even as Mieszko dropped to his knees to enter the tomb, he could not repent of the truth he had been shown, and he began the monumental chore, not to find forgiveness, but to pay homage to his convictions. Although he was writing possessed, Mieszko knew in his heart that he could never complete this impossible task alone – not in his current form. Still, he labored, and with each stroke of the quill, he became more a part of the book, until he was absorbed into the very book itself. The book was written and its author vanished, a phantom, disappeared into the mist of the past.

Three hundred and fifty nine years would pass before Mieszko resurfaced at Jamison's bedside as the man lay dying. Throughout these years, the book changed hands many times, and during its travels, eight pages – pages that represented Mieszko's very soul – were removed and stolen. Together, the two men would embark on a journey through time and space that would ultimately save both their lives.

Unbeknownst to Jamison, his prolific body art represented a map to the various destinations in their journey, each one bringing them closer to the missing pages – Mieszko's soul. Though the men were from opposite ends of the world and different places in time, they would forge a friendship that knew no bounds. They would cross many people in their travels and dangers unimagined, and with each victory, their bond would strengthen, profoundly changing and enriching their lives forever.

BOOK OFFER

If you enjoy this book and would like to donate to my writing fund in any way great or small *click here*

Any amount that you wish to give will be rewarded with the second of the four books: Garden of Solace. Yeas that is correct. If you enjoyed Soul Sabbath and would like to read further into the lives of the mentioned characters donate to the writers fund and soon a link will be provided so that garden of Solace is made available to for you to read.

Soul Sabbath

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CHAPTER 1: PREACH TO EVERY CREATURE

A young preacher, a new hell. ~ Traditional Proverb

On a street corner adjacent to a four-way stop, a lone charismatic holiness preacher defies his retractors and critics with a megaphone in hand, balancing a homemade “REPENT OR DIE” sign on his calloused knees.

His wardrobe reflects his ancient, worn out message of, “turn or burn.” Dressed in jeans and a flannel button-up shirt, he bellows scripture toward the motorists. His congregation is anyone within the decibel of his 600-yard range amplifier. He sacrifices for the gospel’s sake, breathing in the



“WE HAVE PLENTY OF SCRIPTURAL JUSTIFICATION IN DEFENSE OF THE BICYCLE.”

exhaust fumes daily to proclaim his message, “if you sin, you die.”

His spiritual hero is Charles Spurgeon, who was quoted as saying, “Brethren, do something; do something; do something! While societies and unions make constitutions, let us win souls. I pray of you, be men of action – all of you. Get to work, and quit yourselves like men. Old Suvarov’s idea of war is mine: ‘Forward and strike! No theory! Attack! Form a column! Charge bayonets! Plunge into the center of the enemy! Our one aim is to win souls, and this, we are not to talk about, but to do in the power of God!’”

The hungry patrons at the local McDonald’s burger joint across the busy intersection kindly ignore his taunts and warnings. Mothers move their children quickly from their mini-vans, ushering them inside to the Playland, so their toddlers will not be exposed to the scary old man shouting Bible verses from across the street. In some ways, they feel violated, intruded upon and offended. They are afraid that the least little word shouted by the street preacher might crawl into their children’s delicate, impressionable ears and lead them astray. They fear their children will inadvertently turn into lost sheep, turning to and fro, from field to field, and take up pasture in the occult or something worse.

For most that hear the street preacher, he is no more than a pyknic overfed black raven crowing, “This is it and nothing more.” Yet, still he cries, “Repent in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of your sins; He will make your scarlet sins white as snow and save you from a devil’s hell!”

Continuing in an angry tone, his raucous voice with its inconsistencies makes him a mockery of himself. The message is not a popular one, and the new generation of young people hardly find it to be of serious merit or to be useful in solving daily matters. It is not difficult for high school teens on their way home after school to drown out his antiquated message with their loud stereos and bumping sub-woofers.

The bullhorn amplifies his unidirectional voice mimicking Pink Floyd in, "Waiting for the Worms," but he preaches on, shouting to passersby, "God loves you and has sent his only begotten Son into the world to die for you. Turn or burn, sinner, or face eternal judgment!" He competes on equal ground with the sound of traffic and those that tune him out by simply rolling up the windows of their automobiles. In truth, very few actually hear the message of contradicting hope. No more than two or three listeners gather in Jesus' name on this asphalt church today, harmonizing in the unity of the Spirit. There is just one disturbed old man trying to save the world, one soul at a time. If his god is so grand and great – so supreme – then, how did he allow the world to become so fractured?

In a world where there are lonely, elderly people in need of company and terminally ill children lying confused in hospital beds, one would think that a man of such religious conviction could find something more worthwhile

and productive to contribute rather than shouting roadside condemnation to his community. But, the preacher knows that, in this one stoplight town, pure evil exists.

Every trailer park cultivates its poisons of crystal-meth, domestic violence and heartache, among other unmentionables. There are so many once voluptuous high school beauty queens who are now haggard, anorexic “Tweakers” with missing teeth, orange hair and leather skin that manifest the years of abuse. Most of the football heroes have not fared much better; many are bitter, middle-aged men working on their second or third marriages. They are balding with “in denial” comb-overs and waistlines rolling over the very Wrangler jeans that fit loosely just a couple of buffets ago. Once revered by the whole town, they are like straw dogs, trampled, used up and, their glory forgotten, are no longer good for much of anything.

On the other hand, there are others who took a different path in life and turned out smelling peachy. Now, they are involved in positive affairs within the community. Some work in local government and schools, while others volunteer their services to community projects. There are those who aspired to better things and sprang forth with prestigious jobs, adding their talents and services to the betterment of the town.

This town, like so many across America's heartland, has seen its share of scandal, gossip, drug and alcohol dependency, and greasy fast food. Consequently, cardiovascular trouble, insomnia, diabetes and COPD are staggering the species, and the citizens here are not immune. The new "animal" to contain is the paranoid schizophrenia for which so many are being treated, because of their experiments with "Jib and Butu." The Emergency Medical Services crews call these people, "pharmaceutically gifted."

The crews make the majority of their 911 runs to obese people who are just too big to transport themselves to the hospital. Other patients, referred to as "frequent flyers," are the elderly who have no immediate family. Their loneliness is so overwhelming that they call 911 and report an emergency just to get an EMS crew to come to their home, because they are in such need of attention.

Clearly, crime is alive and well, festering, breaking open daily and oozing out untreated. Today's criminals seem to be repeat offenders who are incarcerated for a little while, only to return to the same community upon which they wreaked terror, rape and worse. At the local Judicial Center where district and circuit courts hustle and bustle, the court security cannot help but entertain themselves by standing in judgment of those appearing before overworked judges.

They see the terrified eyes of women desperate for relief, shaking when they enter the front doors, there seeking domestic violence orders against their husbands or boyfriends. Family court is swollen with couples ending their vows or fighting for custody, while their unsupervised children make the court a potentially explosive environment. Drugs, truancy, rebellion and stupidity are all represented, though some seem more the result of breeding rather than criminal activity. Court security is tight and on guard for any threat to the judges, providing a safe atmosphere for them, as well as the clerks, attorneys and the general public.

Only a few decades ago, people chose to see the best in others. Today, the absolute worst is out in the open, infecting and contaminating the soul of the community, like a spreading epidemic. Centuries ago, people looked toward the future with hope and the promise of a better tomorrow. But today, short jail time or brief stints in prison just aren't enough for these law breakers who are so self-abusive and seem to consider the judicial system a game. Indeed, today's malefactors see it as a device with which to tinker and attempt to manipulate. Thugs, felons and fugitives play the system either for the adrenaline rush, notoriety, or just to see if they can beat the rap.

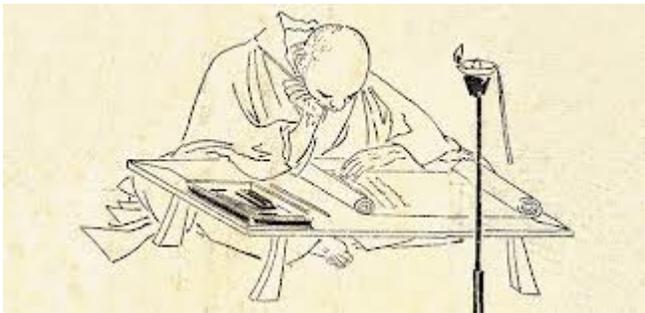
Whatever foul wind blows the stench of dereliction into these small communities, the pungent aroma is cold-blooded and easily embedded in

the heart of each neighborhood without bias or prejudice. The future cannot be interrupted; it cannot be deluded. Whatever will be, will simply be.

CHAPTER 2: THE BOOK BEGINS

When the Tsar sins, the Empire must do penance. ~ Russian Proverb

Ignoring the pain of his aching hand, the quill still writes. The inkpot never runs dry. He needs no knife or sharpener for his quill, for the



quill is an anointed tool. Eventually though, the body begins to fail, and the eyes grow tired and dim, as the

mind becomes dull.

The bawling of hundreds of calves as they are slaughtered, one at a time, all in the name of penance, is silenced by the knife to the throat. Blood, and more blood draining, spills to the ground, as life departs these soulless creatures. Some would refute the soulless notion, indicating that anything with a soul fights back, but not one calf even struggles. We have heard the expression, “Lambs to the Slaughter,” but “Calves to the Slaughter” seems less heartless.

The immensity of the parchment engulfed Mieszko’s mind, capturing his essence and making him a slave to the manuscript. The undertaking of

one man spending his days and nights paying for a sin so unmentionable and unforgiving is nefariously alien. Mieszko resides in the Benedictine monastery of Podlažice in Bohemia, and at the ripe young age of 32, he is already a practicing monk. According to the order of monks, he was accused of committing the unspeakable crime of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. This young monk would be tried, convicted and sentenced with quick religious justice.

Mieszko was born in Chrudim, located in eastern Bohemia, in the Pardubice Region. At a very early age, while still every bit a child, his parents gave him over to the monastery. They made the claim that, from birth, the boy had demonstrated unusual behavior, and they were convinced that he “had a devil within him.” They asserted that he exhibited impetuous behavior, constantly fiddling with things. Once, they caught him drawing abnormal circles in the dirt, which began the first stirrings of their concern. When they found him drawing the outline of a woman with long arms, legs and feet with wolf’s claws, his parents were beside themselves with grief. They concluded that he was “unsound” and that he had a twisted sense of right and wrong.

Mieszko’s parents sent word to the local church, and a priest came expediently to visit the impoverished and desperate family. The priest examined the boy through a series of questions that the young lad did not

understand. He then looked suspiciously at the boy's hands and concluded that they must be silenced from the immoral and offensive work of which his parents had accused him. Even though his parents were not acolytes of the church, it was agreed, for the good of the community, that his abnormal imagination and unacceptable drawings must be addressed.

In the shadow of the house at noon, they turned the boy's face westward and made him stand in the opposite direction, his neck becoming more unusually strained with pain as they forced his head around. They painted the boy's fingernails with drops of oil and held his thumb over a candle's flame while chanting the names of the 12 disciples. At this point, the priest recited, "I conjure you by Alpha and Omega, by the Living Lord, Ruler of Heaven and Earth, that ye come and show yourselves in this boy's nails and delay not in fulfilling the promise. I name you holy angels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. I conjure you by the Holy Names of God, that in this boy, ye show me the truth on this matter by Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." Following the ritual, the priest returned to his church believing that he had remedied the boy's foolish behavior with a ceremonial sanctification process.

An earthen vessel from birth, Mieszko was now converted ever so slightly day by day into something beyond the borders of this world. Mieszko was being turned by fate, religion and his own convictions from

childhood. Once a monk who was piercingly censured by his conscience, he was now transformed into a monster on account of his manifold sins. Mieszko would wander in spirit from century to century until he found a host to carry out his mission.

Every day he scribed, his clarity illuminated the pages of his writ. The perfection of the immaculate writing on vellum sheets would stand the test of time. Herman the Recluse, or Herman of the Inclusion, was, in fact, Mieszko. He would make no mistakes – no errors. He had no one peering over his shoulder, including the imaginary demon, Titivillus. The demon of misspelling would not meet his quota, and his backpack would be light and empty.

The Patron Demon of the Scribes would oversee and supervise this manuscript but would have no influence or say as to its content. This demonic figure usually had no problem confusing the monks working in the scriptorium. When a monk made a mistake, the demon collected the error and presented it to his master, Belphegor, to be handed over to God on judgment day. Mieszko, however, was no ordinary monk, and his work could not be confused or confounded.

His parents punished him by eventually sending him to this monastery, abandoning him, never visiting or inquiring as to his well-being. The work of the local priest must surely have failed, because the boy

had not ceased in his profane scribbling. And now, because of his accused blasphemy, the elders of the monastery punished him by doing the unthinkable – one brick upon another, squeezed together by mortar, until Mieszko was confined alive.

The vows he had taken as a monk, the decrees and devotion to which his life had been dedicated, were taken most seriously by Mieszko. His formal vows of stability included “chastity, obedience and poverty.” Mieszko had been next in line for ordination when his atrocity was discovered, but he had known the regulations. A sharp line was drawn between monastic life and the outside world of sin. He had entered the monastery from among the common people, forced by his parents, and compelled into this life where, “To labor is to pray.” Yet, Mieszko had adjusted well, despite the fact that he had not come of his own accord to seek refuge or escape from a violent world. He had been abandoned to this life of peaceful shelter.

As Mieszko became educated and gained an understanding of the scriptures, he became a great scholar of the age. He was an immaculate record keeper and a chronicler of his time. His downfall, or rather his epiphany, came one evening while in solitary prayer. Certain scriptures that he had always believed to be the gospel were, in fact, no gospel taught by the church. When Mieszko secretly brought this to the attention of one

of his fellow monks, he was exposed. Obedience, silence and humility were strict rules, and Mieszko had been indefatigable in his service and devotion.

Becoming universally aware during his memorization of the scriptures, his mind began to cross-reference certain verses. These verses led him on an expository mission within his soul in an effort to solve the problem that arose. The contradiction had nothing to do with daily prayers, breaking of bread, caring for the needs of others, or even hygiene and appearance. What had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit had to do with the redemption of mankind.

Heresy was unheard of here at the Benedictine monastery of Podlažice in Bohemia. When Mieszko was exposed for making statements that were forbidden, there was talk of banishment, expulsion and even death. He was found guilty of evading and perverting the truth. He swore on the Holy Writ that God's punishments were meant to be remedial and corrective. The monastery was moved off its foundation by these deliberate and exaggerated prevarications.

Following an immediate hush, gasps and moans could be heard from under righteous cloaks and hoods. This was a great offense, and the monks could not bear such heresy. There would be no private admonishing or exclusion from common prayer as his punishment, as was the normal protocol. This disease must be immediately contained, for the whole of the

church would be at stake if one iota of this doctrine leaked out. Thus, the bricks were gathered, the mortar was mixed and poured, and Mieszko, who had bargained for his life, would be spared death by suffering confinement in silence, like a passalorynchite, while scribing the largest book of his time.

Alone with his thoughts, secluded with his God, fixed with his writing tools, he repented not; rather, he rebelled at his imprisonment and called on the God of the underworld for companionship. The scriptorium was fortified by brick walls. One brick had been removed at the base of the wall in order for Mieszko to receive food, water, candles and such writing materials as vellum, ink and quills. His security was provided from the serenity of the voices beneath him.

On the day he was marched to his underground brick prison, Mieszko was a young man. When he emerged, many years would have passed. He believed that a great injustice was occurring because, after all, he had only shared the truth of what God had revealed to him. No one had given him the opportunity to explain his new found belief. The instant he swore that Christ was the Savior of the world, including the heathens, everything in the monastery changed. This heretical belief was a doctrine of devils that must be addressed with the most severe of consequences.

Mieszko inculcated the strongest confidence in God, and he reasoned in the most tender and judicious manner with the monks to dissuade them

from taking actions for which they would have to answer to God. All the while, as they led him down the stone-walled corridor, he was being eaten alive with distress and nervous dread. When they came to the tomb, this death-row inmate was barely able to stand under the pressure of his sentence. He lost his repose when he was forced to get down on his hands and knees and crawl through the small space left open for him. The floor hurt his already calloused knees, which were scabbed over from his former acts of piety. He tried not to weep, but his thoughts were swirling, dizzying him with questions.

“God, why is this happening? Why did my parents send me here? All my life, I have learned and existed as a monk. Why is this happening?”

Everything he understood was being annulled by this punishment, his work abolished by ignorance, his prayers prohibited, and his confessions deemed a mockery. He would not repent of the truth that he had been shown. He helplessly watched as bricks filled in his final connection to the outside world. He scratched at the mortar as suffocation clasped its hand around his throat. His association with the dim light and obscurity brought shadows into his heart. His rapport with still small voices brought a kinship that, not only brought him peace, but incarnated a new being within. He wrote this book not to find forgiveness, but as adoration to pay homage to his convictions.

Pope Damasus would have been amazed at the speed with which Mieszko labored, but his labor was effortless. Mieszko was writing possessed. The monks of the monastery often heard a single voice from the brick tomb shouting, “le dernier savant du monde ancient,” the last scholar of the ancient world.

This book, Mieszko’s book, would neither honor nor glorify the Monastery of Podlažice. In fact, it would bring great shame to its once hallowed walls. As others listened through the brick, it seemed as if Mieszko was praying. They swore they heard him attempting to exorcize his demons. History would paint him as a multicolored, talented heretic. With this Episcopal Inquisition, Mieszko battled with the choice he would ultimately be forced to make and sealed his fate as the Heretic who would pen the Book of all Books, the All Inclusive Book, the Giant Book.

When the bricks were cracked and dislodged from their cement, Mieszko was gone. He had simply vanished, but left behind was his extraordinary work – a book that would be reviled like no other. Over the next several centuries, rumors would be invented, and folktales would be handed down concerning the Giant Book and its author. The book was at hand. Its author was a phantom who had disappeared into the mist of the past. It has been suggested that he was received by God and permitted

entrance through the Gates of Heaven. However, truth dictates that he became a resident of Civitas Diaboli (the City of the Devil).

CHAPTER 3: THE ACCIDENT

An accidental meeting is more pleasant than a planned one. ~ Chinese Proverb

Jamison carried a .40 caliber Glock handgun as part of his standard issue uniform. As a certified Court Security Officer at the local court house,



he was required to carry this self-defense weapon. He and his fellow CCSOs

understood that, even though they carried a firearm, they had no chance against a shooter who had no regard for his own life. Any maniacal gunman with a grudge or mental disorder could come through the front doors of the court house at any time, shooting through the glass and

wiping out security before they could respond. So, the side arm was really more of an ornament than a defensive tool. Jamison was well trained in the use of firearms, and once a year, he was required to qualify on the shooting range with his own weapon. Unfortunately, statistics have proven that even a man with a knife who is within 21 feet of an armed guard could close the distance and stab the guard before his weapon is drawn. This grim fact was of little consolation to the CCSOs who stood guard daily and greeted the public.

Jamison, a handsome 32-year old man, was practiced in the arts of Jeet Kuen Do and Krav Maga, as well as holding a brown belt in Brazilian Jujitsu. He believed that he was conscientiously his own man. Tattoos covered his entire body from the top of his shoulders to his ankles. For the sake of the job, all were covered by his uniform. He took great pride in his tattoos, having visited some of the best artists in the United States.

In Florida, Aaron Cain had tattooed a gothic monk on Jamison's right shoulder. In New York, Paul Booth inked an evil zombified Bob Marley on the left. Closer to home, Ryan Dearing of Sacred Skin in Indianapolis had designed an ancient, gnarled tree with wide spreading branches propped up by pieces of aged marble. This glorious creation was etched on his back. Jamison also had unusual mythological characters tattooed over his legs, along with numerous patterns and symbols. Yet

another contributor to this work of body art was Sean Herman from Mobile, Alabama, who colored a golden bee hive and swarm of bees with a Star-Child skull in its midst. In Atlanta, Brandon Bond inked an impressive abstract featuring a sundial, an hourglass, and a raven, all interwoven, on Jamison's stomach. In Jamison's hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, Travis King designed an insanely masterful chandelier made of bones and skulls, which hung from one of the high branches of the tree down the center of his back. His first tattoo, Jamison felt, was a "rite of passage." Since then, the addiction to cover the largest organ of his body – his skin – seemed to have drawn him into the world of body modification.

The Judicial Center is always on heightened security. On any given day, the building may have as many as five judges sitting on the bench, along with jurors and clerks, and four to five hundred people coming through the revolving door to the courtrooms. Often, family and divorce courts spawn emotions that spill into the hallways. It is not unusual for grieving parents who have just lost custody of their children, or a disgruntled husband who is being forced to pay more spousal maintenance than expected, to get a visit from security to ensure that they leave the building without upsetting the ecosystem of judicial order.

The metal detectors in the court house are the same as those used in airports. Everyone entering the building is required to go through the

scanner to be screened for deadly weapons and contraband. Guns, knives and anything that can potentially do harm to others is prohibited.

Jamison stood at the screening station acting as greeter and unofficial information officer. Acknowledging each person with a, “Good Morning. How are you today?” he was a security guard with a strong presence. He instantly recognized the heavysset fellow coming through the double glass doors of the court house. It was the street corner preacher, who appeared much less intimidating without his bullhorn and sign. Empty handed, he did not appear as obtrusive, and he was obviously not a happy man. A line was forming at the metal detector, because it was time for the morning arraignments, and there was a full docket. Some folks appeared in person and others by video transmission from the local detention center. Attorneys filed in with their armloads of paperwork, books and laptop computers.

The preacher stood in line, dully oblivious to those ahead of him. Everyone complied with security’s orders to empty their pockets and remove wristwatches, belts and anything containing metal in order to pass through the metal detector. If the detector is tripped, it triggers a loud beeping sound, and the person is asked to step to the side. They are then searched with a hand-held wand being waved over their body by the security guard.

When it came time for the street preacher to approach the metal detector, he appeared puzzled by security's orders. "Do you mean you want me to remove everything from my pockets before I go through that thing? I'm just here to renew my driver's license," he grumbled. "Please remove the contents from your pockets, and place them in the tray, including your wristwatch, belt and cell phone," ordered the security guard, unfazed. "You mean you want my belt, too?!" asked the street preacher in a highly offended tone. Thinking that he was being categorized with people practicing the largest religion in the region, Presbyterianism, the preacher instantly became angry. He despised anyone thinking of him as "Presbyterian," and his standard retort was, "I am Pentecostal!" Being stigmatized in such a manner infuriated him as much as being associated with a faith in which spiritualism was lacking. Jamison immediately took control by raising his voice in a commanding manner, "Yes sir; if you would like to enter the courthouse, you will have to put everything in the tray." Jamison, a daunting figure, stood six feet tall and was very muscular. Fresh from the Police Academy, he was an imposing stalwart of the judicial system.

The scene was growing somewhat fierce and confrontational, and the preacher did not seem the least bit intimidated. With his eyes fixed on Jamison, who was staring directly back at him, he ripped off his belt with

one hand and slammed it onto the edge of the metal detector. Jamison's blood pressure almost topped out, and he could feel the heat in his face. He reached out, picked up the belt and held it in the preacher's face. Being instinctively authoritarian, Jamison reserved little hesitation when confronted. "If you have some sort of problem today, you can take it right back out there where you came from." The street preacher burned holes into Jamison with eyes that were anything but loving and holy. Knowing that he needed to renew his driver's license and lacking the time today to save Jamison's seditious soul, the preacher decided that this was not a fight in which he wanted to engage. Backing down, the preacher was allowed to walk through the scanner minus his belt and all metal objects on his person.

Later in the day, long after the street preacher had departed the building and his thoughts, Jamison punched his time clock, went to his car and headed toward home. With all of the recent construction and the train route running through the center of town, traffic had become a problem in recent years.

Jamison was hurrying through town, attempting to beat the red light, when the car in front of him slammed on its brakes as the light turned yellow. Jamison had already accelerated, and – bumper-to-bumper, hood-to-trunk, metal-to-metal – kinetic energy pushed both cars through

the red light. As his car spun through the intersection, it was t-boned by a truck that seemed to come out of nowhere. Jamison felt his nose flatten as it was smashed by the air bag. He instinctively tightened his grip on the steering wheel and felt a second crash. His head whipped from side to side; his body would have come out of the seat were it not for the seatbelt that gripped him like a boa constrictor. He was spinning in circles. The world was spiraling, and his senses were heightened. The sound of the car trying to hold the road was akin to a woman screaming in sheer terror during an attack. The onslaught of injury came from all sides.

As suddenly as it started, the torrent came to an abrupt end. He could smell the odor of rubber, oil and antifreeze. He felt dizzy, his ears were ringing, and even though his head was numb, his vision blurred as he felt the warm wetness of his own blood. He was aware enough to wait on the pain, but oddly enough, it never came.

Jamison faintly heard a muffled shout over the incessant ringing in his ears and the car horn that seemed to be stuck. Then, "Dear Lord Jesus, save this sinner, and wash him in your blood! Pull him from the jaws of death and hell." As clarity slowly sank in, he realized he was hearing the voice of the street preacher from the angry encounter earlier in the day. At this thought, Jamison derogatorily muttered to himself, "Oh my God."

“That’s it, son, cry out to God to save you from a devil’s hell. Give your soul to him!” cried the preacher. Jamison could have sworn he said, “Get the hell away from me,” but no sound came out of his mouth.

He could taste the blood, and he found it increasingly harder to breathe. His chest felt heavy, and he was thankful that he felt no pain. He actually thought he must be hallucinating. The preacher had broken into another language now, confounding things. It sounded mainly like an alternative language of consonants and vowels which made no sense to him. Every once in a while, the preacher would loudly shout, “JESUS!”

Jamison desperately tried to block out the preacher, because he was becoming agitated by his bad breath and his praying in a language Jamison did not recognize. It seemed like hours, but curiously, it had only been minutes until he heard the sirens. The fire department arrived first, followed closely by the police. The firemen pushed the preacher out of the way, and Jamison heard questions rapidly follow.

The first fireman to address Jamison said, “Sir, can you talk?” Jamison moaned; he could not cry out or utter a single sound. “Sir, can you hear me?” asked the fireman looking for signs of blunt or penetrating trauma. Jamison remained mute, but it was not because he had nothing to say. Not understanding the physiological process that was happening to

him, fear washed over him, and he felt himself go white. He was experiencing hypoperfusion: the failure of the cardiovascular system that results in inadequate blood circulation.

Jamison had experienced the Three Laws of Newton and had suffered the consequences. In minutes, he went from driver of an automobile to crash victim to patient in the care of *Emergency Medical Services* who were doing their initial patient assessment. He heard, “We need a collar here and a backboard!” The EMT was concerned about damage to his spinal cord, particularly the upper cervical levels. Then came the words, “Tape and head blocks!” More sirens, more ambulances and more ALS personnel arrived on the scene. “Non-rebreather (NRB) 15 liter O₂; somebody give me some vitals,” he heard. The NRB, a one-way valve system, would help Jamison breathe unassisted. “Airway open and patent, breathing is 8, weak distal pulses,” were the last words Jamison heard for awhile. His autonomic nervous system was releasing epinephrine in an attempt to maintain perfusion of his vital organs.

He slipped away and heard nothing else until he was being transported in the ambulance. Everything was sporadic. Time seemed delayed; voices seemed lagging, every action inert. His body was procrastinating in this moratorium of life. Then, as if from a distance, Jamison heard, “Sir, can you hear us? Do you know your social security

number? Do you know your name? Are you allergic to any medications? Can you tell me where it hurts? On a scale of one to ten, ten being the worst pain you've ever felt, can you rate your immediate pain?" All of the paramedic's questions went unanswered.

It was a painless dream, a contradiction, a sort of suspended animation, and Jamison was the star. He had the full attention of the paramedic. Thoughts spun wildly through his head. "Am I hurt badly? Am I dying? Are they just going through the motions so they can say they gave it their best shot? Is it possible to think this clearly if I am about to die? This morning, I was safe in my own bed feeling annoyed with the alarm clock and taking a few extra minutes to stretch and wake up before I showered. Now this!" Jamison wanted to be angry, but he was drifting from euphoria to confusion, in and out of consciousness. "Altered mental status. Yes, that is what I have. I am not intubated, so I am not dead," he reasoned. And then, sweet darkness.

CHAPTER 4 – THE MISSING PAGES

When the thief has stolen from a thief, God laughs in heaven. ~ Armenian Proverb

The world, being a troubled place, had originally searched for Mieszko, but over time, it became easier to lose track of him. Conjurations and invocations aside, it may be too late for the human



race to find redemption. Many sold their souls during The Thirty Years' War of the early 1,600s, which left Europe destroyed, and from that time on, mayhem had ruled. Wars, rumors of wars, the occult, deceptions, thieveries, broken truces, death, and greed among kings and paupers alike caused the value of the book to increase. Something from centuries past was loose in the world. Its long hibernation had ended, and it had grown to leap dimensions, to vault time lines, and to dance its way onto the current stage. Conflicts between Protestants and Catholics throughout history kept everyone predisposed in the wrong direction. Whatever crawled out of the Tree of Knowledge on the day Eve ate of the forbidden fruit woke her up to a whole new world. This cancer doomed man in earthbound bodies of clay and continued to spread, manifesting itself in new ways.

Man's five senses have fruitlessly sought after God throughout the centuries, starving in a realm of dust and choking on spiritual matters that, in turn, caused conflict and a warring spirit, pitting soul against soul. And,

somehow, The Book persevered. Man is the dust of the earth, and this new manifestation was on its belly in the dust realm, consuming, devouring and feeding upon the flesh of the human species. Yet, humankind continued to protect The Book with its blood.

Three hundred and fifty nine years, the book – Codex Gigas – had been out of circulation, precisely the same amount of time since Mieszko disappeared. Most believed that the Codex Gigas was merely a book. However, this book was not just another conspiracy theory about the crystal skulls, the Freemasons or a lacuna in the years of Jesus. This book had traveled through time and was now being revealed to present day believers. The journey to this place and time had been one ridden on the winds of fate.

Mieszko awakened in present day. The author of The Book, which contained a calendar, the Old and New Testaments, two works of Flavius Josephus, Isidore of Seville's Etymologies, the standard textbook for teaching medicine in the Middle Ages – "Ars Medicinæ" (The Art of Medicine), and the 12th-Century "Chronica Boëmorum" (Chronicle of the Bohemians) of Cosmas of Prague was alive and breathing in human form. It had finally come time to "become what he intended to be." Alive and seeking, Mieszko was a man with a purpose. Hitherto, this purpose had been to find the ancestor of the Habsburg ruler, Rudolph II. Rudolph, long

dead, had been a proponent of occult practices, alchemy and astronomy. He planted the seed of the scientific revolution, but he was also a man of grave mistakes that led to the Thirty Years' War. Unlike his father, the Holy Roman Emperor, he fumbled about searching for the Philosophers' Stone – “sodhi kutta” – to no avail. Rudolph's biggest error occurred after acquiring “The Book” as booty of war. Carelessly, he allowed eight pages to be stolen from the heart of its covers.

Mieszko was not impressed that Nostradamus had prepared a horoscope dedicated to Rudolph as ‘Prince and King.’ Nor, was he impressed that Nostradamus' full titulature was, “Rudolph, by the grace of God, elected Holy Roman Emperor, forever August, King of Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Rama, Serbia, Galicia, Lodomeria CCu mania and Bulgaria, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, Brabant, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, Margrave of Moravia, Duke of Luxembourg, Upper and Lower Silesia, Nuremberg and Teck, Princeps of Swabia, Princely Count of Habsburg, Tyrol, Ferrette, Kyburg and Gorizia, Landgrave of Alsace, Margrave of the Holy Roman Empire, Enns, Burgau, Upper and Lower Lusatia, Lord of the Wendish Mark, Port Naon and Salines...” The list went on and on.

No, Mieszko's only concern was finding the eight missing pages in order to make The Book complete again, and in so doing, restore his very

soul. His frustration was heightened by his inability to enter this world. He had no idea how long he had been removed from the land of the living or how long his soul had been missing. He only knew that he had simply been absent for a time. The details of his past life were vague. They were swirling, colorless dreams trapped in a perpetual nocturnal state. His inadequacies were numerous and, though he attempted to feel something beyond this limbo state, there was nothing. It was only through his mind's eye that he had any connection at all. He believed he saw his destiny, but it was only a path of treacherous turns and unforgiving curves. He was unable to imagine a life outside this unexplained entrapment, because he no longer had the ability to experience it. By some strange and powerful force, he had been snatched from his dormant existence like a rag doll and launched from the grave to fulfill this otherworldly magical mission.

Even so, many things were now clear to him. From the pages of the abyss, stretching from the turbulence of his mind, guilty in the court of his own conscience, he was now a wanderer without purpose or direction. To have a conscience, he must have a soul, and Mieszko's soul had been stolen. This thievery brought the unspeakable from the burning flames of purging and cleansing.

“And, the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”

~Genesis 2:7. Mieszko's newly awakened mind pondered the wonders of spiritual matters to reconcile his present with the past. "What happens when God withdraws His breath from man? Is man's soul not immortal? Man's soul was not given to him; it was breathed into him." His head swam in an ocean of deep thought. Adam, then, was not a spiritual being, but an earthly one. Even as God had said, "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." ~Genesis 3:19. The question then becomes, "Can a soul die? What arguments are in favor of man's immortality?"

Being a monk, Mieszko's memory searched the scriptures he had so tortuously memorized. He understood that the soul and its sins shall die. These were the horrifying admissions constantly running through Mieszko's mind. He had not simply been reincarnated, for he seemed to be the same man now as he was before being pulled headlong into The Book centuries ago. He was aware that he may have to question everything he was and reassess his beliefs. He concluded that the imminence of God is man, and the idea of an immortal soul is in complete contradiction to the truth of the word of God. The verses raced through his mind. Job 14 stood out among the rest, "He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down: He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Mieszko was tortured, "If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." The question that continually ate at him was, "If I

have not been raised in the general resurrection of the dead, then by what fashion have I been raised?" Is it true that I am not 'mysteriously constituted'?"

Having had occasion to travel in many other worlds, Mieszko could not discern his origination. Was he floating in some ethereal world of limbo? Had he gone to heaven? Could it be possible that the memory of paradise had been erased from his present mind? These concepts were scarcely known by mortal men. Mieszko knew that spiritual death had not consumed him, for he was convinced that he could not have returned from a death so remarkable. He was astonished at his return from dust to the land of the living. Could it be that he was now obeying the dictates of his mind – “minding the flesh”? He certainly seemed to be flesh and blood. With this thought, a hollow emptiness invaded him, and furthermore, he had no desires emanating from his mind. He had no emotions; his pursuit was strictly instinctual. While Mieszko had an overwhelming desire to take care of his bodily functions, he had no conscience. In Hebrew, the word describing his current condition was Chai, to be alive, or lively. But, concerning his soul, Mieszko was barren. The fear of not being redeemed did not bother him, although deep down, he felt as though it should. Perhaps these were intricacies about which he should worry, nagged by a prior knowledge that remained in the recesses of his memory, but at this

moment, he did not care about anything except punctuality in whatever mission had been set before him. His collision with destiny was unavoidable. His history behind him, the contention was that he seemed responsible for centuries of the past. Maybe this odious situation was an expression of his short-comings. He thought back to those days as a child when his parents refused to encourage his talents, and he would never be able to forget how they allowed him to be hauled away, like so much livestock, to the monastery. Because he was shown no parental love, Mieszko could not recall shedding a single tear or raising any objections. The monks were never sublime or munificent toward him. From day one, they were cold, raising him to be insignificant and religiously petty.

This time, Mieszko had returned to save his very soul. Rather than being lost beyond salvation, he now stood eligible for it. A man who is safe and sound does not need rescue. It is only when he is in a state of spiritual “apollumi,” lost soul, that salvation can operate on his behalf. Mieszko was alive. He was destroyed, but he was not annihilated. Destruction being a relative term, Mieszko was a prime candidate for complete and ultimate redemption. The moment he had gone missing, he assumed more interest and importance to those seeking him than he could ever have imagined. His value increased, and those who heard of The Book desired him even more. The lost pages, and Mieszko’s unexpected reappearance on the

world stage, had prompted the supernatural to enter the temporal world of carnality. Within this world of flesh, every human ambition, desire and yearning sprang forth, along with its attached nature. Unseen forces now connected to The Book, and a new link was forged that had not previously existed. Though desecrated, when the book was again complete, it would yield great power, a force that resurrected evil would covet.

The Book had become an illuminating influence, deemed a precious possession in the hands of whomever could mend it. Control and dominance of the book were Mieszko's curses, and if he failed to find the missing pages that represented his soul, he would be damned forever. Supremacy on the earth would lie in a new jurisdiction, and those in control would annihilate mankind. He prayed, hoping that God was still concerned with the lost, not insensible to their condition or complacent about their need for salvation. He prayed with intense fervency, because Mieszko was himself was one of those mislaid souls.

CHAPTER 5 – WHAT IS A MAN'S SOUL WORTH?

We must no more ask whether the soul and body are one than ask whether the wax and the figure impressed on it are one. ~Aristotle

The endotracheal tube that had been inserted into Jamison's throat to keep his airway open had been removed, and the ventilator had been shut



off. Although he was aware of the pain from the tube being shoved down his trachea, he was still in a dream state, not

actually aware of his surroundings. Still connected to the saline IV drip, Jamison was suffering from traumatic brain injury, and swelling remained a concern for his doctors. A monitor Bolt had been surgically implanted in his brain to measure the Intercranial pressure and to control any additional swelling that might occur. Another concern was blood clotting that could cause a fatal pulmonary embolism. To control any possible seizures, he received medication that caused a negative tranquilizing effect. The medical staff also monitored him for the presence of pneumonia, because that could lead to other serious complications, as well. Additionally, autonomic and Metabolic functions were under their close scrutiny. Night and day, Jamison's mother and sister sat by his bedside. Struggling with

anxiety and a lack of faith, they swore they had seen him move, that he had responded to their voices. The surgeon, while not wanting to diminish hope, informed them that, in his current condition, Jamison was merely mimicking conscious activity, which was normal. This being said, he encouraged them to continue trying to communicate with him and use positive reinforcement.

His condition, though recently improved, was at the critical stage, and that meant he was at risk of death. Since he wasn't responding to stimuli, hope for a full recovery was dwindling with each passing moment. A psychologist and the trauma social worker met with the family using intervention techniques. The psychologist encouraged them to think positively about the recovery process. Meanwhile, an interdisciplinary team of doctors, including a trauma surgeon, neurosurgeon, orthopedic surgeon and a general surgeon, had all met to discuss Jamison's brain injury.

A strong athlete growing up, Jamison was an all-star football player in high school, and he had performed exceptionally well on the school's wrestling team, winning state titles two years in a row. He was voted, "Most Popular" and was dearly loved by his teachers. Jamison's dream had always been to be a cop. Since graduating, he had attended the police academy, earned a degree in Criminal Justice, and was just waiting to "be

called to the street.” Even though he endured the court security work, it was merely a holding pattern while he patiently waited for an opening within the Police Department. He was sure he would be the next person called.

He had always been a winner and had almost always defeated adversity. He was not the sort of man who would give up without a fight. His tolerance for pain was legendary among his peers. He was once attacked by two inmates who had been improperly handcuffed by another bailiff. While he sustained a terrible beating, he still managed to restrain the two men. In the fray, he suffered a concussion and a broken nose, and he required stitches to the back of his head, where the men had used their handcuffs as a weapon. Other bailiffs trying to come to Jamison’s aid had to go through three security doors to reach the Sally Port. By the time they arrived, Jamison had severely injured one inmate and had his knee securely planted in the other’s back. As part of his police training, he had completed a taser class, where he “took the ride” without a sound. The “ride” is an exercise in which the student becomes the victim of another, who fires a taser (Thomas A. Swift’s Electric Rifle) at them. Propelled by two compressed nitrogen charges, two small darts, like electrodes, fire into the skin of the person, disrupting voluntary muscle control. Once the darts are lodged in the skin, the subject becomes instantly incapacitated.

Some of the bailiffs and clerks from the Judicial Center stopped by the hospital to visit Jamison. Others sent flowers and well wishes. His aunt came to check on him, and his mother received many phone calls of concern from friends within the community and relatives living elsewhere. His mother started a scrap book in his honor, and in it, she included newspaper articles and interviews about the accident. Soon, it became a journal, a makeshift diary of her handwritten notes and thoughts.

Jamison wanted to awaken from this horrible condition. At times, he could hear voices around him, like a suffocating cloud, muted, deadened with no resonation. In his unconscious state, he strained to make out any words, trying desperately to drown out the other sounds that were making them inaudible. But, those that he thought he had unscrambled always seemed to be negative ones. Two weeks into this catatonic state, his mother and sister stopped trading night time vigils. They continued to visit daily, but once they left, they couldn't comprehend the loneliness that consumed him after visiting hours ended. Here lay a life arrested, confined to a hospital bed. What would this conscious soul give in exchange to return to the land of the living? Numb sleep and blindness gave way to vivid dreams that were seldom remembered. Yet still, they taunted him. Even though it seemed like a good time to reflect on all that had occurred, there can be no reflection in the dark. One cannot even measure his shape

by the shadows. The inability to use his motor skills made Jamison a prisoner against his will. His mind cried out for God to loosen his tongue. Stillness remained. His dormancy was becoming frightening as dullness crept over his sensibilities.

Dreams awakened him like the dawn. In overcast slumber, his mind traipsed through vagaries and trickling escapades of absurdities. A never-ending melody faintly bore into his head. The preposterous swelled, swooning as the veiled enigma presented the darkness from within. Jamison was held captive, a prisoner of every conundrum, and supernumerary visions danced ceaselessly within his mind. His silent screams for deliverance dissolved deep within his throat, never materializing, never becoming audible. Unable to resist and unable to fight, the fear of capsizing into the ocean of thoughtlessness began to slowly seize his will. "Stay in the center, away from the gunwales in this swell, or you will fall overboard. The waves are hard, breaching the hull. PLEASE NO!" Within his delusional thoughts, he was in the privileged vessel, but the storm had sent him off course. Jamison possessed no rationale; he was unable to control his thought processes. The waves were now splashing into the boat, the amplitude of the waves higher than the horizon. Along with the added threat of capsizing, a feeling of desperation

and dread exhausted him. The fear of drowning was almost like a welcome friend.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” ~1 Corinthians 15:51. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

CHAPTER 6 – INTRODUCTIONS

The rose is a friend of the thorn. ~Afghan Proverb

It was early in the morning as Jamison lay in the Fowler's Position in the specialized trauma care unit. A slide show of his life played continuously through the fragility of his mind. He could actually hear the lever click as images changed from slide to slide, and though he could



now feel his body, he could not move. Jamison was in mortal combat, tortured by the fear of remaining in this agonizing vegetative state. He toiled and labored with all his strength to find a crack of freedom, hoping to slip through to a more tolerable reality. Fighting through the state of dread and gloom that trapped his mind and prevented his escape, he called on the inner strength that had made him a winning athlete as he struggled to wrap his mind around the concept of victory. Tonight, Jamison was bringing it! He knew he was stronger than death, stronger than the stillness, and no entity could hold him. There would be no compromise, for

he was engaged in the greatest battle of his life. The crux of this dilemma seemed to be the force that held him in such distress. He was now desperately praying for calm.

Jamison's critical care nursing staff had not given him much hope. Yet, from somewhere deep within the recesses of his mind, he overheard them speaking on more than one occasion about, "how sorry they were for his condition." His despair grew every time he heard them giving their "repeat assessments at regular intervals" to the doctor. One thought endured, "No! Please don't give up; don't stop." He was growing weak, and sleep continued to overcome him. Peace within the tomb was upon him. But, Jamison simply refused to accept defeat. As the darkness of self approached, he could feel Sheol beckoning, and he was touched by a warmth that rushed over him like a waterfall. Exhilaration now set his bones ablaze. Self-preservation was winning the war. He could now identify himself in the present, loosened from the calloused appendage of oppression. Lyrics looped continuously through his mind and became his constant prayer: "Hold my breath as I wish for death. Oh, please, God, wake me! Now, the world is gone; I'm just one. Oh, God, help me! Hold my breath as I wish for death. Darkness, imprisoning me. All that I see, absolute horror. I cannot live; I cannot die; trapped in myself – body, my holding cell." ("One"-Metallica)

Waxing poetically, Jamison was awake, and the realization slowly came to him that he was not alone. Straining his eyes, he did not recognize the well-dressed man with grizzled, thinning hair standing at the foot of his bed. The man appeared to be a mirage. “My name is Hermanus Monachus Inclusus, but you can call me Mieszko. I know that you have heretofore been called Jamison, but I shall call you Rudolph.” The man moved closer to the bed. Jamison could barely make sense of this puzzle. The stranger’s inconclusiveness seemed unintentional. Words began to fill Jamison’s ears, and he took greater interest and focused on unraveling the cobwebs. “You see, many years ago, Rudolph II stole something very personal from me, and you are the link to the whereabouts of my stolen property. Rudolph claimed to have borrowed this very important object, when, in fact, he stole it, defamed it and desecrated it.”

Jamison struggled to move, but he had hardly regained strength enough to lift his hand. His mouth was dry, and his tongue felt sandy and swollen. “Beg my pardon, but it appears that you are in need of some water,” Mieszko noted as he rose to get a cup of water from the lavatory. With his right hand, he balanced Jamison’s head, and with his left, he brought the cup to Jamison’s lips. As thirsty as he was, Jamison could only manage a few tiny sips. He was reminded of the Bible story in which a rich man went to hell, where only one drop of water on his tongue brought him

peace among the flames of torment. Jamison felt much like this man. He had, at best, a tenuous grip on what Mieszko was doing in his room. Questions swirled in his mind. Was this a hallucination? Would this encounter become a travesty that would lead to treachery, or would there be a silver lining?

Mieszko explained to Jamison, who lay still at the mercy of the dialogue, that he had found a portal through time, and he was living proof of resurrection, no matter how perverse it seemed. He was among the living and had navigated the querulous catacombs between heaven and hell to find Jamison, whom he now called Rudolph. Mieszko was the book, and, now with eight pages missing, the book could not rest. Some 700 years ago, Mieszko had been bricked into a tiny room by his fellow monks. He paid for his perceived sins by scribing one letter at a time until he dissolved into dry bones. His punishers were self-righteous men, beckoning and pleading for their tiny, little souls, too small to be seen by a divine Creator. For weeks, they were tormented by Mieszko's songs, chants and incantations behind the wall. There were whispers among the ascetic monks when, after 14 days of no food or water, Mieszko continued to sing. No man who had sinned against God could have lasted this long without nutrition. Any food or water that the monks had passed through the small opening in the brick was always found untouched the next morning. Be

that as it may, after 30 days, the monks and the oblates, bald heads recently tonsured, believed it would have been more just to have expelled Mieszko rather than endure this horrific punishment. After 35 days, some suggested that it must be Satan sustaining him, and the motion to burn him alive was only narrowly voted down. On the 40th day of a life-long prison sentence with no human contact, the sounds suddenly ceased. Mieszko's voice collapsed, and nothing remained but silence. Assuming that madness had asphyxiated him, his "brethren monks" began to prepare for his funeral.

It was inconceivable to the monks that Mieszko's epic book could have been completed in such a short time frame. In fact, they believed it could hardly have been started. Through a wide, thin slit at the bottom of the brick wall, one monk had been assigned to slide over 200 calf skins – soaked, limed, dehaired and dried under tension – for Mieszko to use on his manuscript. In the tomb, his scriptorium, he had illuminated his soul. He painted miniatures for the book, but the pictures were not small. The word "miniature" is derived from "minimum," the Latin word for the red paint used in almost every picture. Miniatures illustrated Mieszko's story and dedication to his own personal faith.

In the silence following Mieszko's ceaseless chatter, the monks labored in tediously removing bricks from his tomb. As the pile grew higher, the others watched in eager anticipation. Only the monk who had

provided Mieszko's writing materials was permitted to enter. He entered hesitantly and very quickly exited with a frightful expression that gave the others pause. This was, indeed, a Divine Comedy – a sacrilege of mythical proportions. Each monk questioned his own faith, examining mercurial possibilities. The similarity of this event – one in which an isolated man mysteriously disappeared with no discernable means of escape – was uncannily like that of the Lord's own departure. Yet, unlike Jesus, this monk would not show himself to any disciples. No, Mieszko's reappearance would not occur until centuries later, and his return would not involve rapturing a church or punishing the wicked. He would return to claim his very soul. He had slept for many years in purgatory, in peace, away from all judgment, until the hand of Rudolph interrupted his utopia and deliberately tore away his essence.

The monastic rules of the Benedictine monks from the Podlažice made up the moral and religious codes for all brothers to follow, and when unworthy hands snatched these pages away, a great darkness was unleashed. For every magic spell, an ancient medicine could now be used freely without regard or consequence. Mieszko was the universal religion whereby all religions concluded. Now defiled, he was sent to present day to execute inclusion. As Moses had carried the Ten Commandments down

the hill, Mieszko's heaviest burden now lay in explaining the unexplainable to Jamison (*Rudolph*). Jamison's paralysis left him incapable of movement, but still, his eyes could roam, and he never took them off his visitor. Mieszko walked to the window and gazed upon the city below. As night blanketed the metropolis, the lights from surrounding structures glowed, much like the fire in his soul.

Turning toward Jamison, Mieszko gave him the prerogative, "Rudolph, are you ready to walk again? What would you give to lose this restriction? I can break the confinement of this invisible padlock that holds you fast. What if I told you that, tonight, you could just get up and walk out of here completely healed...no pain, no signs or symptoms of the accident? Would you be willing to trust me? To help me? To go with me on this remarkable journey until I reclaim what has been stolen from me?" Jamison strained, trying to answer with his eyes. He understood that he would have to become more than a man of this world in order to be made whole. He believed in miracles, though he had never experienced one. He had never doubted the power of God, but he questioned the motives of man. This man was a stranger, so why should Jamison trust him? He was vulnerable, at the mercy of anyone or anything that chose to invade his space, and he could not tolerate his condition one moment longer.

Unable to speak, Jamison willed his response to Mieszko. “Yes. I want to be whole. I want to walk again, and whatever journey I must go on, I will embrace it to be free of this broken body.” As if he had read Jamison’s mind, Mieszko stepped forward and lay both hands upon his head. He began to pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on this man. Remove this affliction that limits and binds him; neither feet nor hands nor his body but lie in one place shrouded, confined. Mary, most Holy Mother of God, help now and in all perpetuity. Amen.” At this, Jamison instantly sprung to life, his mobility restored, his pains erased, his mind clear and free from the medication. His movements were not forced or laborious. He was suddenly wide awake, his vocal cords stronger than ever. Rudolph was ready to begin his journey.

CHAPTER 7 – THE GETAWAY

Life is either a daring adventure, or it is nothing at all. ~Helen Keller



Jamison
could not deny
what had just
happened. It
seemed so
preposterous,
utterly ludicrous.

Although doubt clouded his mind and he questioned how it had happened, he was content to believe that this was bigger than himself – not for him to understand – just something to be accepted. Everything about the arrival of his visitor was abnormal and peculiar, but regardless, Jamison’s strength was restored, and there was every reason to give thanks.

Although grateful, Jamison found himself in the grip of an entirely new terror. “What had he agreed to? Would it be something that could be quickly accomplished so he could get on with his life, or would he spend weeks fulfilling his promise? Would it be longer?” He concluded that there was no need to procrastinate, for he had been profligate, and this recklessness should not determine the course of his life. Jamison could not deny that he had experienced a true miracle, and the thought of what he had been through since the accident urged him forward. Incredulously, he

couldn't help but notice that no needle marks or bruising existed on his arm where the intravenous lines had been inserted.

Oddly enough, in the face of this miraculous event, the mundane came to the forefront of Jamison's mind. Upon returning from oblivion, he found that he was hungry, and he was greatly concerned with what he would wear, since his clothing had been cut off after the accident. He needn't worry, though, because Mieszko had those details covered. He had brought Jamison a suit just like the one he wore himself – one made of rare silk. As Jamison dressed, Mieszko whispered, "It's a blend of Himalayan Pashmina, Qiviuk and Vicuña." Surprisingly, the suit fit perfectly without measurement, fitting or alteration. As Jamison slipped into his Berluti Rapiécés Reprisés shoes, Mieszko began to prepare him for the road ahead.

"First, I am a man. Second, I am a book. This evolution occurred as a result of my writing. I am a man who wrote a book, and that book consumed me. I have written of concepts in this world and of the world to come – what is not seen here, but what does exist in the reality of the spirit. Part of my essence has been taken from me. You are my key to finding what has been stolen and lost. You see, your tattoos are a map – the key – to unlocking the mystery. Every tattoo on your body represents a place, time or event on our journey, but I shall share more with you about that when the time comes. For now, allow me to share with you my journey to

the present. My “brethren” who entombed me underestimated my repentance. When the last brick was laid, cutting me off from all living beings, on the first day of my imprisonment, God heard me. After the sixth day, subsequent to my soul battling the legions of angels who bore down on me, He transported me. Real or imagined, I cannot say. The events were remarkable and impressionable. It was all rhapsodized, a whimsical, nocturnal repose. But, I do know this. In a phenomenal act of mercy, the Lord, knowing my time on earth was done, poured me into the book. This occurred instantaneously, in the twinkling of an eye. One moment, I was near death; the next, I was alive again, and I became the knowledge within the book. All that the book contained, I had become, for *I was that book.*”

“Now, your predecessor, Rudolph, defiled me. It is your blood that is responsible for my return to this place, this time. You are the wellspring from the sea that was Rudolph. Your ancestors from centuries ago, in the era that I am from, live on in you, transformed from the passage of DNA through time. That transformation manifests itself in you. You must undergo a metamorphosis in order to restore what must be.” Mieszko was insistent and compelling, and Jamison was intrigued. “Your ancestry is an imprecation – a curse, if you will – on you, passed onto you by blood. You are not anathematized; you are chosen.”

Jamison's head was spinning; he could not believe all he was hearing, and he was not sure whether or not he was still in a drug-induced sleep following the horrible accident. He felt coherent and wide awake, although his head reeled as he attempted to digest this narration. Mieszko was certainly a vastly complicated, infinitely interpretable man with astonishing character. This elaborate story – one of a man writing a book, becoming the book, and returning to human form – seemed far-fetched and far reaching; yet, there he stood, telling this version of his life's story.

“Okay, I said I would go because I owe you, but I am not certain as to what you mean by metamorphosis? How long will this take? Where do we need to go? What do we need to do? Will any part of myself remain afterwards? You must realize that I have lots of questions,” said Jamison, with much confusion and obfuscation.

“And, everything will be answered for you with no harm coming to you. For now, know this. Although I know you did not steal the pages personally, I hold you responsible for retrieving them. There is a spiritual realm in which I have existed for centuries, in limbo, and I have traveled tirelessly through time – from one dimension to another – to retrieve this part of me. To make you whole, I have shared a miracle with you. Therefore, I hope you will see that my intentions are pure. I was freed from my internment and cast out into this strange new world. I still have

vivid memories of my former life, my excommunication being suspended in abeyance, feeling abandoned by God and man. I can only imagine what you have experienced in your own isolation, incarcerated in a hospital bed and held captive in a broken body.”

Jamison nodded in agreement, listening intently.

“How does one gauge the value of one’s soul? Faust, the protagonist of a classic German legend, learned this lesson the hard way – by selling his soul only to regret it. Likewise, the American musician, Robert Johnson, supposedly sold his soul to become the best blues guitarist the world had ever seen,” Mieszko said. “Despite everything, I never sold my soul to the devil, contrary to what some have suggested. I was given a reprieve to live on with all the spiritual and worldly knowledge in the book.” As he spoke, his eyes lit up, as if he was seeing through eternity – one age opening at a time. “If you decide to take this journey with me, you will experience an arduous winnowing process through events that we will share. You will observe tradition clashing with the abstract, and through it all, your reward will be a worth beyond measure.”

Jamison, stunned, tried to read Mieszko’s eyes, “I do not know what any of this means, but you are here from some other world, and I can’t argue with that. Let’s go.” Smiling, and with conviction in his eyes, Mieszko announced, “The game is afoot.”

With that, the two well-dressed men found the exit and made haste into the night. The situation seemed to be of great urgency. Jamison had the uneasy realization that this would take more than a couple of anxious turns and nervous twists. He was waiting for the pieces to fit, but as of now, he wasn't even sure what the pieces were. As confusion set further in, Jamison couldn't help but wonder, "Were they now running to the answers, or were they running from destruction?" With his body restored, he had now given up freedom to become this stranger's prisoner. He found it ironic that he had chosen one prison over another, and, in a moonlit night of shadows and dark images, he was in motion, moving toward the unknown. His heart was racing like he had just crossed the line of a steeplechase race.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once said, "...when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." Jamison, intrigued by the fact that this stranger not only visited him in his darkest hour, but made it possible for him to move again, decided it was worth the risk to embark upon this stranger's journey. Though his mind raced with many questions, he would wait for an opportunity to inquire of the deeper topics. For now, with copious thoughts, he was afraid he would forget important elements. The one fact not in dispute was the power Mieszko had demonstrated. This power was, clearly, not of this world, and

if it emerged later, Jamison wanted to be sure that it wouldn't be used against him. Of course, it was only natural to be skeptical and leery, but he did not want Mieszko to perceive his suspicion. Suddenly, the thought occurred to him, "What if Mieszko could read minds?" Over-thinking the moment, Jamison attempted to shut down his mind (and any mind probe), even though he couldn't help but feel childish for his paranoia. But then, something came to mind, submerging him into deeper consideration.

CHAPTER 8 – MEET THE PREACHER

All is Vanity, 'Saith the Preacher.' ~Lord Byron

“Create in
me a pure
heart of
cleanliness
and fortitude.

Reach the
fibers of my
core being,
and bring my

soul to a place of

satisfaction. Erase the pinnacle of evil from the height of my



sanctuary, and rescue every ounce of weakness that would hinder me in the service of the Kingdom. Allow me the free will to roam the earth, to stay within thine holy protection, and grant me the peace of universal sanctuary.”

The assiduous street preacher’s name was Jonathan Edwards, and he was a man of extreme convictions based on a religious belief handed down to him from his father, a fiery, zealous Pentecostal preacher. According to Jonathan, everything permitted in today’s modern world holds a one-way ticket to hell. He preached against sin, which in his view, most people would stand against, though they still reveled in it. He hated rock n’ roll music, even though he didn’t really know much about it, since he would not listen to it. After all, how could he permit himself to entertain those demonic chords and jungle beats played by heathen tribes from Africa? UNGODLY! He had disdain for homosexuals and people living together “in sin” out of wedlock. Babies were cursed and had little chance for redemption if their parents had not been joined together by God during some sort of ceremony. He considered black people to be a cursed race. Yes, some would be permitted to enter Heaven, but really, the majority of those people would never be able to receive the truth, because they were

under a curse from God and did not have the ability to accept His free gift of salvation.

Jonathan was a bigot in every sense of the word. He was disgusted by anyone who drank any alcoholic beverage, but he hid his own multiple addictions from his prudish wife.

He scrutinized everyone and stood in judgment over them. He was convinced that, at any moment, he would be raptured out of this evil world, spared from the Antichrist and tribulation to come. He spoke gibberish, which he called, “Heavenly Language,” and cast out imaginary demons, not realizing that these so-called “demons” were physical, emotional or psychological afflictions. He truly believed that God had lost control and that the devil was loose and wreaking havoc, enforcing his diabolical will upon everyone. He had a distorted self-faith that allowed him to believe he could save others and himself. He understood the scriptures from a very fundamental standpoint, not opposed to twisting the most symbolic words into a literal meaning.

He followed such a forced dogma that he was able to persuade himself that God had a “Plan B” in mind to save the world. Although God loved everyone and had sent His Son to be the propitiation for all mankind,

not all would be saved, according to Jonathan. He viewed some as being predestined for salvation while others were reserved for damnation. Certain that he was one of the elect, he found it effortless to come to verdicts regarding the sins of others, regardless of the situation. He believed himself to be a saint and part of the one hundred forty four thousand from the Book of Revelation.

Jonathan's twenty-year ministry had itinerantly covered three states. More myth than ministry, it was one of wild notions, manmade doctrinal substance, religious sustenance, and fanciful, undocumented miracles. Throughout the years, he had become a riveting figure, especially popular in the world of tent revivals. In that regard, he had preached in parks and parking lots until he had actually built a following. The usual attraction was the carnival atmosphere that he kindled using organ music (with no pentatonic scales), lots of gospel singing and rehearsed antics – not to mention the occasional “miracle” sprinkled in for the sake of publicity. People shouted and danced at his revivals. Some would even “fall out” in the Spirit. It was a time of repentance, but more importantly, it was a time for building his congregation. The climax of the theatrics

came every evening with the encore. After the singing, praying, preaching, praying again, and altar call (where the “lost and backslidden” would approach the preacher for further prayer), the faith healing portion of dramaturgy would commence. Folks came from miles away in the hope that Brother Jonathan would lay hands on them, because with his obvious powers, a touch from him was a touch from God Almighty, and if God saw fit, every illness, disease and affliction would be instantly cured.

Once he had splashed each of his selected communities with a dose of what he called “Holy Ghost Fire,” he finally decided he was in need of a home base. This was a difficult decision, because even though he and his wife had agreed it was time to settle down in one place, they had no children, and they were restless. They found that it was much more difficult to maintain the excitement of the tent revivals while they were immobile. However, Brother Jonathan’s reputation was strong, and due to word of mouth, they were able to continue...that, coupled with the fact that this brand of religion was much like that of a revolving door. Once one group left his church, it seemed another group or family would come in and take up residence.

When someone mentioned a preacher that could preach up a storm Jonathan's name would be at the forefront. His church glowed with arrogance, and the plenipotentiary preacher put everyone at ease with his smile and promised that this group of people were indeed the elect of God shepherded by him in the mansuetude of his care.

Jonathan stood behind his pulpit as amplified as any dictator has ever stood before their faithful followers. He tightly gripped a large black leather bound Bible in his left hand, being proud that he had no need to open it, because he could recite it Word for Word.

John 3:3 "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This means to be begotten of God. It literally means there must be a transformation in the heart of the person asking to be born again. 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." Also read (Colossians 3:1-16)

First, you must realize you are a sinner.

Jonathan's congregation in unison shouted approval, "Yes we are sinners!"

Jonathan growled and glared at them.

"The bible says "For all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). Because you are a sinner, you are condemned to death. "For the wages (payment) of sin is death." (Romans 6:23). This includes eternal separation from God in Hell. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)"

One of the men on the front row answered Jonathan, shouting out the words, "judgment indeed, preach it Brother Jon, preach it, tell the truth!"

Jonathan hunkered down as if lowering himself to a level where those under him could understand him better. Jonathan then went into a one breath rant, beginning in a low sough that rose to a full blown hurricane brewed, "To be born again is to be recognized by God as a Son or Daughter. Man was originally created in union with God. When sin was introduced into the world by man's disobedience, this union was interrupted and broken. Man sought to be independent from God by challenging and disobeying God's word. Man' passions drove him to lawlessness and a rebellious state. Adam willfully transgressed the word of God by first allowing a beast of the field (serpent) to enter the garden of which he was appointed to oversee, then by his

mismanagement of his stewardship, and finally, the ultimate sin was being a partaker of that which was forbidden. Adam thus was disconnected from God the Father and all privileges he had under this direct communion. In fact, Adam made a willful decision through pride to oppose God himself and to take sides with Satan. Adam's fall, placed mankind under a curse and brought man into a covenant with death.

Jonathan had worked the room into a frenzy with his cacophony of sounds and he was out of breath. Sweat began to pour from his forehead as he held the Bible up over his head shaking it as if to proclaim fire from the heavens would reign down.

Leaving the security of the pulpit, he made his way to the center aisle, now beaming with the Holy Ghost, "In order for mankind to come back to God there must be atonement made for sin.

The atonement or substitute was made when Jesus as God's sacrifice gave his life freely upon the cross to reconcile mankind back to God.

Christ alone restored that which was lost and bridged the gap of separation with his own body, shedding his blood and offering it in ransom for our freedom. This brought redemption to man and joined

again the union, which God had shared with mankind long ago in the garden.”

One of the women, Sister Rita Mae, jumped from her pew and raised her hands over her head and sang a couple of lines, “Oh how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus, because He first loved me.”

Jonathan evoked the congregation, “How do we have the born again experience? How is it possible to have fellowship with God?”

“Tell us Brother Jon, tell us!” Now even some of the small children were raising their hands to the heavens.

Jonathan roared and grunted from his throat as if something was being birthed in his vocal cords, "Rebuke that ol' red devil and believe! Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him, that begat loveth him, also that is begotten of him. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He ran the aisles and the congregation joined him galloping tantivy as he rhapsodized in an unknown tongue. The ranting and roaring continued as the room

seemed to fulminate and bodies seemed in crisis with jactation, with strange howling and weeping and folks stumbling about.

The organist slammed down some notes on the organ and the ambience of the room filled with a carnival atmosphere.

Now with visible sweat stains underneath the arms of his shirt and around the collar Jonathan added to the commotion.

“Jesus had to shed his blood and die. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin! "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). It takes more than your mental confession. It takes more than a public confession. You must be changed! This repentance is a change of mind that agrees with God that one is a sinner, and also agrees with what Jesus did for us on the Cross.”

The church looked like a game of musical chairs with people moving about galore and the organ hammering away a medley of Southern Gospel tunes. Jonathan danced a little jig and paused waiting to bring the people back to be his ministering. Once everyone was settled down, the

sound of heavy breathing was coming from every corner of the sanctuary with the congregation scattered and breathless.

Jonathan's face sinisterly crumpled and he whispered, "The devil is there waiting to steal your blessing, steal your salvation, steal your soul and confine it in the fiery depths of hell. I tell you friends that today, change your lifestyle. The genuine Born Again experience will bring about, and should bring about, a moral and spiritual change. There should be a change of heart, will, motives, desires, life and conduct."

Jonathan made his way back to the stage and stood to the side of the pulpit. "A person should have a change of Masters as a result of the born again experience. The Born Again Christian is a brand new creature walking in the newness of life, and serving in a new spiritual way." Jonathan's voice began to elevate again as if he was getting his second wind. "Old things are passed away, and behold, all things have become new. To be born again is to be saved from and delivered from destruction and judgment. It means to be preserved by God. Being Born Again is to have the past erased and a new course laid out by God for those willing to accept Christ as the Savior of their

sins. Being Born Again means being free of the slavery to which sin binds us. Salvation can bring good health and deliverance from our enemies.” Jonathan was full throttle again, his voice screeching and cracking from the wear. He banged a fist down on the pulpit with resounding thumps, accenting certain words. “Born Again means being plucked out of Satan’s hands. Remember the wily ol’ devil is the ruler and master of this world, the prince of the power of the air and one not to be taken lightly.”

With more approval from the faithful and right on cue, the organ began to play a ramped up version of "Amazing Grace," and Jonathan raced through the aisle with an offering plate as people dug in their wallets and purses for cash or the checks that had already been pre-written and signed. “Just take God at His word and claim His salvation by faith. Believe, and you will be saved. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Born Again believers have received this gift of salvation by grace through faith and not of works. We have not earned it, deserved it, merited it or worked for it. "For while I was yet a sinner Christ died

for me, an ungodly sinner." And even though he has endued us with power from on high and sat us in heavenly places with Christ Jesus we should never take for granted such a salvation as was won for us at Calvary. This is a serious matter, my dear friends. There is a God that loves you and a devil that wants to destroy you. God will give you the riches of heaven but to refuse Him means He will punish you with everlasting hell-fire!"

The music played out while Jonathan, acting as his own usher, collected two plates of money. He laid them next to the pulpit and became solemn. "The Bible is clear, make no bones about it.

In the Book of Revelation we read, Revelation 21:27, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither [whatsoever] worketh abomination, or [maketh] a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Living for God is learning to live by the life of another. The believer now lives unto God, is made alive unto God, yields himself to God and becomes an instrument to God for God's use. We now are living and walking in the light as He [Himself] is in the light, we have fellowship...and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son (continually) cleanses us from all sin and guilt."

The organist switched over to a droning sound and the mood of the room became quieted as Jonathan held out his arms toward the people and simply said, “Come, won’t you come and meet the risen Savior today?”

Today, this man of misguided faith decided that, maybe he should break from his daily prayer hour and venture to the hospital to see the man who had been involved in the horrific accident. Jonathan really did believe he had been instrumental in saving the man’s life. After all, he had prayed for him and laid his hands upon the injured man. Jonathan, disgusted, walked the halls of the hospital, thinking this place housed a lot of sin and a terrible lack of faith. He had always attributed sickness to sin, and the hospitals were full of a generation of people who had lost their vision of God. He stopped at the nurse’s station and asked for Jamison’s room. When the nurse eyed him skeptically, he told her that he was the patient’s Pastor. He had already picked out some suitable scripture from the King James Version Bible to read once he reached Jamison’s bedside.

Much to his surprise, when Jonathan walked into the room, the bed was empty, and the man he had prayed for – spiritually rescued – was gone. None of the hospital’s administrative staff had an answer

as to Jamison's whereabouts. He was simply not there, vanished, and there was no evidence – either recorded or on paper – to prove that he had ever even been admitted. The staff clearly remembered Jamison, but the paper trail had apparently gone up in smoke.

Still, Jonathan did not waver in his faith. Surely, this was not a dream. The police on the scene told him the name of the hospital to which the man from the accident would be taken. Yet still, the RNs seemed oblivious as to what had happened to their patient. Things were not adding up. Alarmed, the head nurse initiated the search process, and security did a thorough search of the ward, including the immediate surrounding area. Jamison's description was circulated, but unfortunately, there was no ID or photo to distribute. It was as if he had never been there. His relatives were informed and encouraged to phone the hospital if he happened to contact them. His mother was called, and she agreed to bring some recent photos to the hospital to aid in the search. The doctor on duty was called, and he quickly took control of the search, at which time he contacted the police. After four hours of searching with no success, the Executive Director and Social Services were called in to assist. Incredulous as it seemed, Jamison was gone, and

gone without a trace. Jonathan's belief system was about to be rocked – utterly shattered like thin ice under a fat man. He would soon take a plunge that would shake the foundations of his faith and crush his doctrine to tiny pieces.

Meanwhile, Jamison couldn't help but notice that no one acknowledged their escape, despite the fact that they had simply walked down the hall, rode the elevator to the ground floor and left freely through the front door. He wondered, "What if we are invisible?" At this thought, he purposely squared his shoulders to see if those walking past him would turn their bodies away or walk through him. Mieszko spoke up, "Rudolph, we are visible to others." Slightly embarrassed and feeling somewhat conspicuous, Jamison loosened his shoulders, and they slumped down and forward. Abashed, he could be sure of two things: Mieszko was incredibly perceptive, and they were not invisible.

CHAPTER 9 – INTO THE WORMHOLE

Glow worms are not lanterns. ~French Proverb



Jamison knew nothing of physics, though he was a fan of science fiction. He had always loved the “Twilight Zone” and the original “Star Trek,” but regrettably, he was woefully unprepared for what he was about to experience. The two men had walked several city blocks into the darkest part of the city. A smothering oppression seemed to hang over them. This part of the city had been dominated by fascism, subjection and little vicissitude ever since the police force had decided to ignore it. Mieszko led Jamison through a trash strewn alley; he could hardly stand the stench as they came to a dead end. In Jamison’s mind, the only thing missing was a drunken, homeless man clenching a fifth of rotgut whiskey in a brown paper bag and lying supine with his head bent in an unnaturally uncomfortable position, the concrete wall as his pillow.

He watched as Mieszko ran his hand along the brick wall feeling for something out of Jamison’s sight. Like a mindless sheep, Jamison had followed Mieszko thus far, but for the life of him, he did not know why. He presumed he was following his destiny, and he had convinced himself, “It is prudent that I go.” “Here it is. Right here.” Mieszko announced, as he

pulled a brick from the alley wall. As he removed it, the brick began to glow bright red. “This is the first brick laid that held me captive,” he said, tossing it to the ground. Fascinated, Jamison watched as the wall began to brighten one brick at a time. Each brick flickered with red light, then slowly illuminated, the reflection of which fulgurated and ignited in Jamison’s eyes. A doorway appeared, glowing and casting a blinding glare. Jamison couldn’t help but shield his eyes from the crimson flame.

“Are you ready?” asked Mieszko, holding out his hand. Jamison did not have to say a word. He put his hand into Mieszko’s, and through the wormhole they went. Through superluminal travel, the two men accelerated, not bound by gravitation, relativity, time or the setting of the sun. Galileo would have been impressed at the myriad of triangles, circles and other geometric shapes that danced past their heads as they swung on the bronze pendulum, traveling on the tides of redshift, the wave of expansion brought on by the Doppler Effect. A siren and the sound of a high-pitched whistle burst a multitude of broadcasted sounds through their heads.

Jamison tried to hold his eyes open, but the brightness of the dizzying display forced them shut. His ears were filled with ringing and holy laughter. Basiphobia, the fear of falling down, was not a concern, because gravity didn’t seem to exist in this realm. The two of them were

being pushed by an impelling force through this time tunnel. Jamison was overwhelmed; he no longer felt Mieszko's hand. Dismally, he was alone in this curvature of time.

With eyes closed, Jamison flew.

Holding his head, knowing not what to do.

Swallowing his tongue from the desert in his throat.

Reaching to the air in an attempt to gain control.

Blinding light; pain in the head.

Swirling around as a body that's dead.

Curling up, expecting impact.

Much like a train that is jumping its track.

Motion stopped, direction unknown, and lost in the flux of the moment, his progress halted, and he was at rest. The passage through which he had traveled was closed without trace. Only a light, warm breeze brushed against his face and ruffled his hair. He was forced to submit to the end of this evolution. Moving his arms and legs, making sure they were still attached, he slowly opened his eyes. Standing on the water line of a low tide, the two men recognized the sound of the ocean. Before Jamison could ask, Mieszko told him their geographical location. "We are in Jamaica, and we missed our mark. We will have to walk inland. Our destination is Rose Hall Great House."

“Is this actually the Caribbean?” Jamison asked as he attempted to straighten the lines of his jacket. “Yes, and we are heading west. There, we will find a sugar plantation, and there will be our first clue in finding the missing pages. If I am correct, we are about an hour away from Montego Bay. The Spanish name is Manteca Bahía, or Bay of Lord, so-called because of the lard-making industry, which came about from the hunting of wild boars that were abundant in the surrounding hills. If so, we will be walking for awhile,” informed Mieszko.

With nothing but expensive suits and shoes, the two travelers marched on, one being the “book” with missing pages, and the other the “key” to whatever vault held them. The terrain was not bad, and they soon found an old road, leading west. Passing farms, sugar cane fields, and the occasional local, it was evident that they were, indeed, in Jamaica. Since Jamison had never been here, he was not sure if the portal had sent them to present day or had taken them backwards in time. A primitive culture, it was embryonic and undeveloped. “Jamaica’s motto is: ‘Out of many, one people,’” stated Mieszko. “Are we in the present?” Jamison inquired. “On the contrary, very much the future, for if we were traveling backwards, we could fall into the hands of The Caribs,” Mieszko replied. Jamison looked in every direction, expecting an arrow through his back, “Who are the Caribs?”

Mieszko stopped, smiled and turned toward a worried Jamison. “Cannibals. They are reported to have barbecued their captives. Hopefully, they are long gone, conquered by the Spanish modern savages. The real crime here was the years of sugar and slavery.” Mieszko then began to hum and, with a faint voice, began to sing, “Lick an Lock-up Done Wid; Hurray fuh Jin-Jin De Queen come from England to set we free; Now, Lick and Lock-up Done Wid; Hurray fuh Jin-Jin.” Jamison ignored what he deemed as mumbo jumbo as a thousand questions raced through his mind. He did not want to overwhelm Mieszko with too many at once, but certain questions burned inside him. “So, Mieszko, I don’t want to seem ungrateful, but may I ask you some questions?” Smiling, Mieszko replied, “Questions are not a sign of thanklessness; rather they are posed because you are in need of answers, or you are inquisitive. Please feel free.”

“Thank you. I’m glad you understand. I guess my first question is...” Jamison stepped into a pothole and stumbled. Effortlessly, Mieszko balanced him with quick reflexes. “Be careful of your step.” Jamison gathered his composure. “Thank you. Anyway, I’m really confused. Are you one hundred percent human, or are you like an angel?” “Oh, I am very much human. I am flesh and blood, just like you.” Jamison felt a flood of relief, because he needed even footing if Mieszko was tricking him in some way. “So, are you from way back? How far?” “Twelfth century – around

the time of the dinosaur,” Mieszko grinned. Jamison was happy to see that this old man had a sense of humor. “Well, I know you say that you are a man like me, but a man like me isn’t capable of traveling through time.” “Let me ask you, Rudolph, did you just enter a wormhole with me?” Jamison considered the question, “Okay, you got me there, but how did you come back in the first place?” He then added a question he hoped was not too sensitive, “Do you mind if I ask how you died?” Smiling, Mieszko replied, “I worked myself to death, and actually, how I returned from the dead is a mystery even to me.”

“This is going to sound ridiculous, and you very well may not even know what I’m talking about, but is this like a video game where we can’t get hurt or die? Are we invincible?” Mieszko stopped, “I’m not sure what a video game is, but hold out your hand.” Dubiously, Jamison held out his hand, and like a striking snake, Mieszko slapped it with a stinging blow. “What the crap?!?” Shocked, Jamison was ready to counter, but he quickly thought better of it. “You asked me a question. Now, did that hurt?” Still recovering from his surprise, Jamison replied, “You’re darn right that hurt.” “Then, that is your answer. This is no game. Therefore, I would strongly encourage you to stay vigilant, for we will be dealing with an adversary as powerful as a roaring lion, and he seeks to devour us. We must stay ahead of him, or we will have no choice but to confront him.” Following the mild

assault, Jamison was in doubt, “What if I decide I am not interested in your quest?” Ever patient, Mieszko replied, “I assure you, Rudolph, you need me as much as I need you.”

Jamison was still angry and decided to test Mieszko’s theory. This was a no-brainer, “I think I’ll head back, even if I can’t find that “wormhole” thing. I’ll get a plane ticket. A boat. Something.” At that, Jamison began walking back the way he had come, petulant like a scolded child. Mieszko did not attempt to stop him; he stood still, right where Jamison had left him. After about fifteen meters, Jamison began to feel a stinging in his thighs. There was tightness in his ribs and chest, further restricting his natural stride. He began having a difficult time catching his breath. He became dreadfully nervous, and his stubborn will was caving to the discomfort. His heart felt as if it was coming out of his chest; he could hear the drum beat in his ears. As his vision began to blur and deafness took his hearing, he turned back to Mieszko, who had still not moved. Mortal terror gripped him, and he groaned inwardly as his sight became worse and his legs became numb under the sensation of pins and needles. The Paresthesia was terrible, the severe prickling in his limbs maddening. He panicked as a feeling of impending doom began to take hold. He could feel his grip loosening, and though he prepared to hit the ground, when it happened, he was jarred with the concussion. He desperately attempted to

fight the helplessness, his heartbeat now echoing in his head faster and faster, literally pounding as he lay motionless, scarcely breathing. He could now hear a ringing with every beat of his heart. His head throbbed, and while he wanted desperately to relieve the pressure, he could not move his arms. Louder...louder...louder still, Jamison knew he was going to die. With the sound of a thunder-clap, a searing pain rocketed through his head, so intense he had to squeeze his eyes closed. He was experiencing dyspnea, and while he shouted with all the might he could muster, he was barely able to produce a sound. It sounded more like a pitiful wail, and his speech was now slurred due to his weakening brain function. "Mieszko, help! I need you!" Jamison's voice, a roar in his head, was vulnerable and pathetically weak. Instantly, Mieszko was at his side to help him sit.

As his hearing sharpened, he could again hear the sounds of the birds and insects singing, chirping and growing ever more strident, as if to welcome him back from the dead. While his head cleared, he heard Mieszko's apology, "I am so sorry, Rudolph. It was not I who did that to you. You simply cannot go back until we complete the task at hand. We must find the missing pages and restore them in the book." As the sudden weakness and pain subsided, Jamison, incredulous, responded, "What does all this mean?" Sadly and compassionately, Mieszko explained, placing his hand on Jamison's shoulder, "If I had not arrived and made you whole when

I did, you would have surely died. In fact, you would not have lived three more days. You would have succumbed to a cerebral aneurism.” Dumbfounded, Jamison attempted to digest this information and accept it as truth. “How long will I live now; I mean, once we are finished?” “Rudolph,” Mieszko replied, “none of us has the promise of tomorrow, but I assure you, you will have your life back without the broken bones, internal injuries or suffering once we complete our journey.”

Jamison was surprised to learn he could raise himself from the ground under his own strength, and, as he brushed himself off, he said, “Promise me only one thing, Mieszko.” “If I can, I will,” was Mieszko’s response. “Never slap my hand again.” The two shared a laugh, and Jamison silently thanked God that Mieszko arrived to save him from the certain death that awaited him. Even still, doubt floated in the back of his mind. Until Mieszko proved himself to be a true friend, Jamison planned on watching his back. He had no guarantee that this monk wasn’t some “bad guy” using him for some sort of evil purpose, and he certainly did not trust him.

An hour into their journey, they came upon a magnificent waterwheel. The wheel was in perfect working order, and water was flowing, turning the wheel. “This is not good – not good at all,” Mieszko expressed, terribly concerned. Frightened, Jamison replied, “What isn’t

good?” “This waterwheel is supposed to be a ruin, not in working order. This plantation is supposed to be working bananas, cattle and copra.” Mieszko cupped his hand and drew out some water to taste. “Go ahead; drink some. Hydrate yourself, for I fear that we are in a different land altogether. This is not the past, present or future. We have moved sideways through the time continuum, and we may have cause for alarm. I cannot be certain as to which savages are in charge here. The fact that we saw some farmers is a good sign, though, I suppose.”

From that point on, the two travelers took care as to where they planted their feet and who saw them. It was not much further until they came upon a magnificent Georgian-style mansion on a hill with a panoramic view of the coast. It was breathtaking, but while Jamison saw this structure as a stupendous palace, Mieszko felt it to be a tomb of lust, where the most unholy acts were permitted and practiced. Although the sun was shining, darkness pervaded the inner climate of fear gripping Mieszko. He had expected a hollow, disintegrated fortress that had been abandoned and scavenged. Instead, he was looking upon a stunning, sprawling house, seemingly groaning to give birth to more decadence. Perhaps the rats, maggots and ragged fringes of carnage were not visible on the surface; maybe they were hidden in the house’s bowels.

It was of no consequence; Mieszko could see further than any other man, for he was *The Book*. “We must get into this building; there has to be a clue as to the location of my lost pages here.” “Do you hear that?” Jamison interrupted, straining to hear. Mieszko’s eyes widened as he exclaimed, “Run, Rudolph! Run as fast as you can! Dogs!!”

The two men began to sprint, but they were not fast enough to outrun the dogs; their trail was too fresh. Three Bouvier des Flandres, rugged, brute beasts, were in hot pursuit. Their shaggy, foaming beards created an even more ferocious, bloodthirsty image. Fearless, these Vuilbaard canines were impressive to behold, but neither man stopped to hand out any pedigree awards. Mieszko was anything but the vision of Saintliness as he burned a path through the woods. They ran and ran until, suddenly, they became aware that the threat was gone. Something, or someone, had taken the dogs off their trail.

“Listen, man, I’m not really into the idea of being eaten by hounds! You never said that there was a possibility of becoming puppy chow,” Jamison said, clearly agitated and trying to catch his breath. “Listen to me, and listen well. As I told you before, had I not saved you from that hospital bed, you would certainly be dead. Do you not understand that this is your opportunity to be part of something that will bring peace to the whole world, not to mention restore your own life?” Mieszko seemed to be

pleading. Beginning to calm down, Jamison responded, “I am trying to wrap my mind around all this. One day, I’m doing security work, and the next, I’m being transported through some “wormhole” with a guy who claims to be a book from the Middle Ages. Now, here I am somewhere in Jamaica, the Caribbean, Barbados, wherever! As if that isn’t enough, you now tell me that I was meant to do this.” Jamison sat down and held his head in his hands.

In all the excitement of trying to outrun the 90-pound behemoths, the two men had not paid any attention to where they had run. All around them were fresh mounds of dirt, which appeared suspiciously to be graves. As the realization set in, Jamison immediately came to attention, “How many are there?” Mieszko scanned the area, “I count at least sixty, maybe seventy.” “Maybe an epidemic or plague?” Jamison brushed off his hands and made an observation. The dogs seemed healthy enough, so it was doubtful that whatever killed the occupants of the graves was contagious, but it could have been an execution. Mieszko made the sign of the cross (Signum Crucis). He mumbled in Latin, “In NOH-mineh PAH-tris et FEE-li-ee et SPEE-ri-toos SANC-tee. AH-men.” “Let us rule out infection, but we should take precaution. There are no crosses or tombstones here, so we can only assume that whomever did this wanted the ground to settle and the memories of these people to be erased and forgotten.”

This was the rallying moment they needed to bond. Jamison now experienced the feeling of solidification with Mieszko, and that brought him peace. “Should we look in any of the graves to see what we are dealing with?” “I think I may already know what we are dealing with,” Mieszko replied. “With Christian graves, even in genocide, markers are customarily placed. There are obviously none here, but the fact that these are individual graves rather than massive pits, where all were dumped lifeless one on top of another, means that some respect was shown, although a very small amount, I admit. Someone ordered these graves to be the resting places of individuals rather than animals or so much garbage.”

CHAPTER 10 – ENTRANCE TO THE MANSION

*Beauty is a good letter
of introduction. ~Portugese
Proverb*

Following such a harrowing experience, the two wayfarers were, understandably, exhausted,



and they found a hidden nook in the grove to close their eyes. Jamison's mind could not stop wandering. He was having fitful dreams of his friends at home and his job, to which he would probably never return. Had anyone missed him? Had he been erased from the minds of those he knew? The rational part of his brain knew the questions were pointless, but he couldn't stop the torrent. At best, they were rhetorical, and what consciousness was at play could fill in the blanks at a later time. Whether or not his answers would be correct remained a mystery.

The underbrush beneath the little growth of trees actually provided a lovely canopied bed, and they welcomed the comfort as they succumbed to the weariness. But, neither man slept well. Mieszko's dreams also were fitful, and he felt as if he were still confined. He imagined that his fingers touched the pages he sought. But, as circumstances often play out in dreams, the pages would be picked up by the gentle, caressing wind, keeping them just out of Mieszko's reach. It became ever more frustrating, because if he made chase, they would only float to higher ground and then fall gently to the sea. He simply could not reconcile the conflict that crawled just beneath his skin. The only truth that remained constant in his mind was the fact that time was short, and quickly dwindling.

Less than two hours later, Mieszko and Jamison were awake and formulating plans to enter the mansion. “You have shown me some very miraculous things so far, Mieszko. You’ve blown my mind,” Jamison said, “But, you have never explained to me how this all came about. I mean, how did you become *The Book*, then a man again, and how did you find me?”

Withdrawn and struggling, Mieszko attempted to explain, as if he pulled the information from its resting spot of centuries ago. He began to expound upon his past, “When I was entombed, the intention was for me to spend the rest of my living days behind the wall. But, I only physically spent six days and nights working on the book after being imprisoned. Once I began writing, the words poured forth as if I were a mad man. I can’t fully explain it, but it was as if an unknown force possessed me. It gripped my pen, and I was suddenly scribing with perfection and adding sublime illustrations. It was surreal, as if I were only a conduit through which some greater power wielded control. Essentially, in my frenzy, I had completed the book in a one week period. I did not rest. I found no peace, and sleep constantly eluded me. Once the book was done, I attempted to alert the others through the slit in the wall, but no one answered my call. So, I turned to God. My only thought was that He wouldn’t abandon me here, as others had done. Yet, He did. I was cold, hungry and existing in

the suffocation of that tiny room, utterly alone. My body was weakened, and I remember prostrating myself across the book, praying.”

As if in a trance, Mieszko began chanting, “Da, quaesumus Dominus, ut in hora mortis nostrae Sacramentis refecti et culpas omnibus expiate, in sinum misericordiae tuae laeti suscipi mereamur. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.” “What is the prayer?” asked Jamison. With a delicate sophistication, Mieszko replied, “It is simply the prayer for a happy death.” Clearly unnerved, Mieszko changed the subject, abruptly ending the history lesson.

Jamison, feeling very uneasy, urged Mieszko on, “We need to get back up to that mansion.” And, he wasn’t content with the sudden ending of Mieszko’s story, “I still cannot understand how you ended up as *The Book*.” “Simple, Rudolph. I died, and when my body departed my soul, it was absorbed into the layers of the Codex Gigas. Upon entering the book, I was filled with the knowledge of the ages. But, surprisingly, once out of my physical body, I found myself incarcerated. I am, and was, a learned man, and my life had been dedicated to the advancement of knowledge. So, while it was a different form, becoming the book was hardly a punishment, and I knew punishment to its core. I was now married to knowledge; we had become one.”

Still confused, Jamison was eager to move on. The two of them decided that they should leave the past behind for now, and they were soon on their way back to the mansion, taking special care not to alarm the dogs. As they approached, Jamison noticed that a light was burning in the house. Someone was either at home, or they had left a light on to dissuade intruders. Luckily, there was no sign of the dogs in sight, so the two men cautiously made their way to the window from which the light was beaming. Jamison peered into the room, noting that it was not occupied or overrun with knick knacks. Styled for comfort alone, it was a large area containing a buffet, standing cupboard, rectangular table with six legs, and a single chair.

Surprisingly, though stuck, the window was not locked. The two men were able to raise it with little effort. It was large enough to go through, and in seconds, they were sucked into the room as if an invisible hand had pulled them through. Once inside, they found that they were in an entirely different house altogether. Panicking, Jamison exclaimed, "What the hell was that?" "I'll tell you what that was," Mieszko cried, "That was a wormhole! Now, we are somewhere else entirely!" Mieszko was very used to supernatural phenomena, and he seemed unnaturally calm. "Is this a common occurrence with you? You know, climbing through a window in

one world and being zapped into another?” Jamison’s eyes had temporarily blurred, but his focus was quickly returning. Mieszko scanned the room, “No, hardly ever.” His eye was drawn to a blood-red sofa in the oblong room and its matching love seat. This interior belonged to aristocracy, and it oozed wealth. There was a massive volume of adorning draperies, and a framed engraving ornamented the far wall. The engraving, a German Renaissance version of the Madonna in a courtyard, appeared as a simple German woman.

The two men moved cautiously from the room and into the hallway. Handmade antiques from various eras filled the rooms. In the dining room, there were four chairs with chamfered legs, oversized nail heads and leather seats. Curiously, however, the dining table itself was absent. From behind them, they heard a woman’s voice, “Eske ou grangou?” As they spun around, the woman gasped, stunned. She did not appear to be afraid, but simply startled by their sudden movement. She was young and dark-skinned, with full lips. She had the eyes of a cat that emitted an aura of sensuality. She was wearing a calico headscarf and a skirt bearing the traditional colors of her culture. “What did she say?” Jamison asked. “She wants to know if we are hungry.” Mieszko smiled at the woman and replied, “Mwe kapab pale ti cras’ Creole.”

The woman retrieved some cups from the cupboard and filled them with tea. Mieszko asked her name, “Ki gen ou rele?” She smiled a beautiful, white-toothed beam and answered, “Lora. Bien vini!” Mieszko expressed acceptance of her to Jamison, “Well, she seems friendly enough; she has welcomed us.” Mieszko held out his hand to her, “Se youn plaisir fèkonesans ou!” Since he didn’t want to translate for Jamison, he asked her, “Eske ou pale angle?” Lora’s dark eyes squinted, and she said, “Da little.”

Jamison pretended not to stare at her, but he couldn’t help himself. Her allure was like a magnet, drawing his eyes, as if she were an ancient enchantment. The more he tried to conceal his obsessive gaze, the more obvious he became. Over the course of the next hour, they conversed with Lora and learned that they were, indeed, in Jamaica. The master of the house was away, and Lora was taking care of the home in his absence. He was expected to return in a week. This would give Mieszko and Jamison time to search the place from top to bottom, as long as they didn’t alert Lora to their plan of stealing something while they were there. They explained to her that they were exploring the country and had lost their map, “Mwen pedi.” They told her they were on a pilgrimage for God and would not be staying long.

Switching between English and Kreyol, they managed to have a very informative conversation. Jamison repeatedly caught himself staring at Lora's ineffable beauty, admiring the smoothness of her face and the joy in her smile. He was afraid she had noticed his stare more than once, but if she had, she did not seem offended. Jamison was a very impulsive man, and he needed to take care not to pursue his passions. He saw in her the courage to be feminine, an alluring muliebrity.

Both men felt that they could trust Lora. She seemed to be more frightened of the master of the house, whom she described as being, "cold and horrible at times and full of intricacies." She informed them that he was a feared man who had a reputation for violence. He was a collector of antiques and was very avariciously motivated, especially by things he could not possess. Mieszko told Lora that it was very important that they speak with him, and he assured her that she had nothing to fear from this man any longer.

After a while, Lora showed the men to their bedrooms. They were pristine and complete with mahogany floors. The beds were gondola-styled Italian Renaissance polished mahogany adorned by elaborate teak inlay. The silk wallpaper was a print of palms and birds. Hanging on the bathroom wall was a plaque reading, "Christus vincit! Christus regnat!

Christus imperat!” Jamison had no idea what the words meant. In his room, a black and white woodcut of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – Conquest, Slaughter, Famine and Death – stared at him from the foot of the bed, making him uneasy. As a result, he tossed and turned trying to get comfortable for what seemed like an eternity, but at last, his extreme exhaustion finally brought sleep.

After a good night’s rest, both men were up as dawn was just peeking over the horizon. Lora was already busy in the kitchen, and the smell of bacon filled the house. Jamison ventured downstairs to keep her company, although he could not speak a word of Kreyol. Knowing this, he turned on the charm, and Lora’s contagious smile met him as he entered the room. She realized that Jamison could not speak her language, so Lora attempted to speak English. “Are hungry?” she asked. “Yes, I am. How do you say, ‘Good Morning?’” he asked. She answered, “Bon Jour!”

Meanwhile, Mieszko was busily searching the upper rooms for any clue that would lead him to the missing pages. Being careful not to ransack everything, he believed that he had been led here, and here he would stay until he found whatever it was that would bring him closer to his prize. The elaborate room seemed scarcely inhabited. With nothing to impede him, Mieszko thoroughly searched the room. He hurriedly went through

every desk and dresser drawer, taking care not to draw suspicion by being late for breakfast. He was drawn to a bronze aquamanile horse and rider, a water pitcher used for hand-washing. The horse had unnatural proportions, and although this relic intrigued him, it was of no value.

The sun slid into position and beamed through the gap in the curtains, reminding Mieszko of breakfast. Uncharacteristically, he felt the desire to burn this place to the ground; he could think of nothing more pleasing than turning this lavish abode into ash. He had to remind himself that he was no barbarian. His thoughts of becoming a madman were obviously due to the fact that he was frustrated and was missing his soul. He was, however, aware that he still possessed his wisdom, and he would have to rely on it regardless of the convictions that he lacked. He promised himself, "I shall not become a lunatic. I shall not become overpowered by unprocessed thoughts." He repeated the mantra during his rummaging, and was disheartened that he found nothing of real interest. Succumbing to defeat, he prepared himself for the generalities of conversation and came downstairs speaking Kreyol. "Bon Jour! Kouma ou ye?" he asked Lora as he entered the room. She was setting the table and answered, "M'bien. It is OK, I will speak English."

CHAPTER 11 – INTERROGATIONS

No one is without knowledge, except he who asks no questions. ~African Proverb

The three sat at a lovely table covered in a linen damask tablecloth with a tulip design, the pattern of which followed the lines of the table. “Lora, tell



us, how long you have worked for the master of this house?” Miesko asked. Though not apparent, Mieszko’s intent was two-fold: he wanted to gain Lora’s trust, and he wanted to

find his missing pages. Enjoying a hearty breakfast of hot tea, bacon, hard boiled eggs, sweet potato pudding and ackee, a native fruit resembling scrambled eggs, Lora answered, “I have served this house for eight months. I am 23 and have never married or had children, so I work to bring money to my family.” “Jamison and I are looking for something on our pilgrimage. Maybe you have seen the items here? They are pages from a book. They could be rolled up and placed in a tube or possibly just folded, but at any rate, they are very important to us,” Miesko replied. Jamison was so

stunned at Mieszko's honesty, he almost choked on his eggs. While he was attracted to Lora on every level and was most interested in getting to know her better, he had assumed that their mission here was a covert one.

Mieszko continued in a polite, but stern, tone, "The pages that I seek are of great value, and we are willing to pay a handsome sum of money for them. The amount of money to which I refer would greatly help your family." With that being said, Mieszko suddenly changed languages, "Ouka ede mwen? Gen pa efreye." At this, Lora directed her attention to Jamison as if in apology. "What did you say to her?" Jamison asked, empathetically. "I told her that she could trust us," Mieszko replied. Lora laid down her fork, took a sip of tea and spoke in better English than before. "M. Johannes Fraueberg of Görlitz owns this home and the property. He frequently receives visits from another man, and I have heard him mention in their conversations that he once had a large book in his possession."

Mieszko's eyes widened, and he interrupted her, "Who is the other man? Ki gen rele?" Hesitating in a way that made Mieszko believe she knew more about their visit than she was letting on, she forced the name, "Christopher Schlichtig," out of her sultry mouth. At the sound of the name, Mieszko's face took on a dark, worried expression. Trying to keep up with the interrogation, Jamison asked, "Who is that?" Mieszko replied,

“It isn’t so much who he is, but to whom he was adherent: Paracelsus Theophrastus von Hohenheim. Paracelsus was a Swiss mystic, alchemist and physician in the 1500’s. I do not know what he is today.” “Is this bad?” inquired Lora. “Very bad. Both of these men had access to me at one time. It is possible that coming back to this day and time was not so much of my own doing, which I believed earlier. Instead, they may have deliberately brought me here.” Mieszko’s worried frown translated into a sharp, icy fear in the pit of Jamison’s stomach.

Addressing Mieszko, Lora spoke up, “Mwen vle ede?” She wanted to help. “Ou ka ede mwen?” Mieszko asked, inquiring as to how she could help. “Tomorrow, we must leave. I can take you to Christopher Schlichtig,” Lora replied. “Why would you help us?” asked Jamison. Lora’s eyes pierced him as she replied, “I lied to you earlier. I do not work for the master of this house. I am a slave to him, and so is my family. Even though slavery has been abolished, my father sold us all to these evil men. I will do anything to free us from this oppression.” She continued to explain, accidentally slipping into her native language, “Slavery mash up mi family all tideh mi mada wuk lika dog fi feed wi family.” Mieszko believed that Lora was being sincere and speaking the truth. This would either be the beginning of their journey, or the hinge and fulcrum of a long search. He explained his plan, which was to find Christopher Schlichtig before

Schlichtig found him. While he did not condone tumult, sedition or violence, he knew Jamison would fight through his fear. Jamison had already vowed to see this adventure through, and he now understood the dangers that lie ahead of them.

After breakfast and an exhaustive discourse, Mieszko excused himself, and Jamison and Lora found a window of opportunity to be alone. Sitting on the porch and gazing at the tropical landscape, Lora spoke her best English and shared her history with him. She was Ethiopian by heritage, but she had lived here on the island for her entire life. In 1816, a rebellion had broken out in Barbados, which was under British control at the time. After a hundred years of slavery and oppression, there was a full-fledged revolution. An enslaved African named Bussa and a domestic servant named Nanny Grigg, a literate woman, led the rebellion. Sadly, although it made a bold statement, it was a failure. A quarter of the sugar cane fields were burnt, and over 1,000 rebels were massacred. Lora's great, great grandfather had been killed in this attempt to gain freedom.

The most notorious ill came when the rest of the family were brought to Jamaica, being smuggled in a cargo hold along with 600 barrels of flour, 250 quintals of bread, 23 kegs of butter, 15 barrels of pork, 50 barrels of beef, seven casks of cocoa and five cast iron stoves. With so much stock, there was barely room to move, but they were ensconced deep

in the bowels of the ship, safe from those who would have thrown them overboard. Upon arrival in Jamaica, they were removed from the ship in crates and hauled to their new home, another slave plantation. Alas, Jamaica was no better for the black people than Barbados had been.

During the Christmas season in 1831, the largest rebellion took place, led by Samuel “Daddy” Sharpe. This rebellion, called the Baptist War, was instrumental in ending slavery on the island. Now, even in modern times, the poor remain poor, and the rich abuse everyone else. The wealthy have still not accepted abolition, and that is the way the black man has always been forced to live. Few understand the Emancipation Act. Although the Abolition of Slavery Act was passed in 1833, it did little to influence the staunch mindset of society. Racism and discrimination, the legacy of more than three centuries of slavery, persist to this day in Jamaica. However, despite their struggles, Lora’s family loved their country, “sweet, sweet Jamaica nah lef ya, mi luv mi land of wood n wata.”

Later in the day, Mieszko and Jamison questioned Lora about the graves they had accidentally stumbled upon, and she did not seem to be bothered by the barrage of continuous questions thrown at her. Stoically, she described the atrocities committed by the master of the house. “The one that questions doesn’t lose their way. A while back, the master of the house invited guests from all the surrounding areas to a gala. He fed them

pork and wine, and they ate and drank while music played. After dinner, the guests danced by torch light, and as the evening wore into night, they slowly became intoxicated. They were stumbling about in all sorts of debauchery, unaware that the master was leading them like sheep to the slaughter. They followed him into the clearing, where they expected more exotic events to occur.” Lora became sad as she continued to explain how the people seemed to be enraptured. “They were singing and stomping their feet, not knowing that they were celebrating their funeral song.” She spoke of the glowing moon and imagined that, from a lunar vantage, this scene would have been extravagant, vociferated against the night sounds and habits of nature. “When the singing rose to a fevered pitch and the master was sure everyone was spectacularly drunk, he struck without warning and unleashed his own brand of ghoulish meanness.” If a child tortures a cat until the cat no longer has the breath of life, then that is the definition of meanness. Cruelty is no comparison. Cruelty leaves the cat alive and moves on to another. Meanness lends its hands to viciousness, giving birth to hatred and infamy, and it unleashes brutality and indifference in untold hellish proportions. Lora went on to explain that, like the silent and swift change of an incoming tide, this celebration turned to madness as everyone ran for their lives. She said that she watched the horror unfold from afar in a state of total disbelief and shock.

Schlichtig released his hounds on the unsuspecting partygoers. The atmosphere was immediately filled with the metallic stench of blood, adrenaline and fright. The frenzy was punctuated with a deafening mixture of screams and screeches as flesh was torn from their bodies by the strong jaws of the relentless beasts. The hounds never even growled as they went about their murderous rampage. When no more audible sounds were to be heard, an eerie, surreal stillness overtook the scene. In the quiet, Schlichtig covered himself in the blood of the dead. He alone carried out their massacre and desecrated the fallen. Schlichtig had exterminated the people, clearing a path for Mieszko and Jamison's arrival. Lora concluded with, "Dah man ya pur evil." Somberly, Mieszko surmised, "We are dealing with people who live in bloody bacchanalia madness. It is not just debauchery; it is, indeed, pure evil, and this evil is in motion. Elysium is rising, coming soon for us."

CHAPTER 12 – IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

The different sorts of madness are innumerable. ~Saudi Arabian Proverb

Mieszko understood the monster they were about to face, Schlichtig, a student of Paracelsus, born Theophrastus Phillippus Aureolus Bombastus



von Hohenheim. Schlichtig was a member of the secret and arcane brotherhood of alchemists and sages, who, in centuries past, had attempted to transform the arts, sciences, religious, political and intellectual landscapes of Europe, while wars surrounding these same concepts ravaged the continent. Their desire for global dominance never transpired, because Mieszko was the key to all domination. At one time, they had him in their hands, but they had refused to accept that a book written by a single man could possess such universal truth.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Mieszko prepared Jamison and Lora for what they could possibly face. In German, he explained, “Alle Dinge sind Gift und nichts ist ohne Gift; allein die Dosis macht, dass ein Ding kein gift ist.” Translated, this means, “All things are poison, and

nothing is without poison; only the dose makes a thing not a poison.” Mieszko continued to explain the danger they may incur. “Schlichtig is a master of toxic substances, and he is a true believer in the four elements: Earth, Wind, Fire and Water, which are Hellenic Physics. Because he can combine many elements, I would suggest that, if over-consumed, even water from his hand could be deadly.

It was time to move, and the three packed for survival. They packed very lightly so as not to hinder their progress, or escape, if necessary. Their only weapon was a machete they had found in the house. They carried water, snacks taken from the kitchen cabinet, a flashlight, extra batteries, and a map of the island. The journey to their destination would only take them an hour, and with Lora as their guide, the three set off. Mieszko could not shake the deep-seated feeling that Schlichtig could sense their arrival, but he could still appreciate the humor in the absurd situation, and he blurted out, “La guerrilla de les FARC.” Lora asked, “Wah da sound deh?” Before Mieszko could answer, Jamison interrupted, “Sounded to me like he was apologizing for a silent fart.” The three laughed nervously, and an answer was unnecessary. As they walked, Jamison began to hum, “All Good People,” by the band, *Yes*. “I’ve seen all good people turn their heads each day so satisfied I’m on my way...” Although Lora and Mieszko did not know the song, it was a catchy tune, and they couldn’t help but join in

the humming. This was good therapy for them as they ventured into the unknown.

The walk was energizing, and the three fell into a cadence, planning to arrive by dusk. Mieszko's timing was impeccable, and as the sun was falling below the horizon, they found themselves at the plantation. Just in view was the great mansion, another atrocity of indentured laborers and slaves. Prisoners in paradise had a spectacular view of Cherry Tree Hill, and so did the three searchers who were now hunkered down surveying the premises. The vast lawn stretched almost one hundred feet to the great garden wall. Oleander, hibiscus, ixora and other tropical flowers grew, almost wild, in their formal beds. Royal palms lined the long drive. It was an absurdly glamorous abode with Baobab trees punctuating the landscape.

"Have you ever met Schlichtig?" asked Mieszko. Lora nodded and proceeded to describe his appearance the last time she had seen him. "He is tall, blond and has blue eyes. He is probably the only blond-headed man here at the mansion. My mother worked for him, and I saw him twice." Mieszko was scouring the ground and began to lay out his plan, "OK, I am going to the rear of the house to see if I can find a way in." Jamison, feeling very vulnerable, replied, "That's not going to work! What if you're caught? What happens to me?" Lora, equally concerned, added, "Pa ale!" "Mop vini," Mieszko answered with great affirmation. Jamison was becoming

increasingly aggravated at his inability to understand what the two were saying, despite his best efforts at “Pig Latin.” “Can someone fill me in here? What is going on?” he asked. “He wants to go alone, and I think it is a bad idea,” Lora was now pulling on Jamison’s sleeve. “I am not fond of this idea, Mieszko.” Chiming in, Jamison added, “It isn’t that we don’t think you’re capable, but I keep reminding myself that you are a book. Basically, you have been lying around gathering dust for centuries, and this is real life. Arms, legs and body all fail. All feel pain. Did you feel pain when those pages were torn from you?” “I did not even know they were missing until I came back into this world with a body,” replied Mieszko. Lora frowned, baffled, “What are you talking about?” The two men had temporarily forgotten that she was not privy to the entire story of Mieszko’s past. He placed his hand on her shoulder, saying, “okenn bagay,” which meant, “nothing.”

Suddenly, Lora turned her head as if she had heard something. “Youn moun,” she whispered. Schlichtig was here after all! A blond-haired man was standing on the porch and lazily smoking a pipe. “Looks like him,” Jamison agreed. He leaned close to Mieszko and whispered, “What is the use of a book, thought Alice, without pictures or conversations?” “I am assuming that your quote from *Alice in Wonderland* is a compliment?” Mieszko smiled. “We need to make our move to the back of the house

while he is on the porch. Just stay low. If you get tired, say something, and we will stop. Ann ale!” With Mieszko’s command to move, the three squatted low behind the shrubbery and made their way toward the back of the mansion. As they slowly closed the gap, Jamison could not help but think, “Sentence first – verdict after.”

The condition of the back porch projected an image of the entire estate. It was a back porch reminiscent of a time that preceded televisions, when families would actually sit and socialize in the fresh air. David Heymann once said, “A porch is like the brim of a hat; it shades you but makes it possible for you to have an uninterrupted view of the surrounding landscape.” Sorrowfully, at this time, the ragtag trio felt as if they were at the end of the world. As they maneuvered up the steps to the porch, Jamison asked, “What’s the plan?” “Since you are a big fan of *Alice in Wonderland*, I would say, ‘Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end; then stop,” Mieszko grinned out of the corner of his mouth. Sarcastically, Jamison mumbled, “Grand.”

The back screen door was unlocked. “This sure beats going through windows,” Jamison said as they entered the house. All seemed quiet, and Jamison could not help but marvel at the surroundings. “Even their entry way into the back reeks of riches,” he said. Being a well-read man, Jamison quoted again, this time from Faulkner’s dark comedy, *As I Lay Dying*. He

said, "Riches is nothing in the face of the Lord, for He can see into the heart." "What have I started? Are you going to quote from every book you've read just because I quoted from *Alice in Wonderland*?" Mieszko kidded. Their fun abruptly ended as the blond man entered the room, quoting his own William Faulkner, "It's Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell,' pa says, kind of hangdog and proud too, with his teeth and all, even if he wouldn't look at us. 'Meet Mrs. Bundren,' he says." The three intruders were stunned, exposed and guilty as sin.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am..." The man was interrupted by an aggressive Mieszko who wryly finished the introduction, "Christopher Schlichtig." He couldn't help but say the words with a hint of sullied disgust. This puckish individual had caught them red-handed. With a strong German accent, Schlichtig replied, "Yes, you are correct. I can only assume that you are..." He was again interrupted by Mieszko, who refused to allow Schlichtig to finish a sentence. "We are three people seeking truth, and we need no introductions." Mieszko's countenance had drastically transformed. Although his words were polite, his tone was now angry. He was not an irascible man, but his hackles had raised, and his attitude was now kicked up a notch. Schlichtig moved around a small table and took a chair, "I suppose you believe me to be the scoundrel who stole your soul? Do I appear to be in possession of any other soul but my own?"

Meiszko could feel the heat rising in his face, “I have read that someone condemned to death says or thinks, an hour before his death, that if he had to live on some high rock, on such a narrow ledge that he’d only room to stand, and the ocean – everlasting darkness, everlasting solitude, everlasting tempest – around him, if he had to remain standing on a square yard of space all his life – a thousand years – eternity, it were better to live so than to die at once! Only to live, to live and live! Life, whatever it may be!” He was now quoting Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, and he sounded very serious. “So, you have come here all the way from your resting place to banish me to hell?” Schlichtig said, becoming more pompous and arrogant as the dueling continued.

Lora did not understand the references Schlichtig was using in speaking with Mieszko, but it mattered not what Schlichtig was saying; she was standing with Mieszko. The two men glared at one another. Mieszko’s stare was one of hostility, not hate, but Schlichtig’s glare was pure unadulterated evil. In a very deliberate tone, Schlichtig addressed Mieszko, “I am monarcha medicorum, and I can prove to you what you cannot prove. I need not don a coat of mail or a buckler against you, for you are not learned or experienced enough to refute even one word of mine. As for you, you can defend your kingdom with belly-crawling and flattery. How long do you think this will last? Let me tell you this: every last hair

on my neck holds more knowledge than you and all your scribes. My shoe buckles are more learned than your Galen and Avicena, and my beard has more experience than all your high colleges.” At this, he paused to study the others. “So, what do we do now, Herman?” Schlichtig said as he began to laugh. His confidence and contempt were exponentially growing.

With the speed of the Italian Master, Castiglione, and of the cut and thrust method, Mieszko drew out his machete. With thrusting rapier, he found his mark, tearing through Schlichtig’s chest and into his heart. He drove the weapon deep through Schlichtig’s body, pushing him out of the chair and onto the floor. Schlichtig barely made a sound as events rapidly transpired. As blood poured from his lips, he mumbled, “Paracelsus is coming late for you.” In the thoracic cavity, the blade sliced through Schlichtig’s right ventricle, cutting the aorta in half and severing the lifeline carrying oxygen-rich blood to all arteries. Schlichtig was out of joint, disoriented, his senses impaired. There was no time for hallucinations or bright lights. Schlichtig took his last gulps of earth’s air and was gone. Brain function ceased. There was no “Cheyne-Stokes” breathing. Death had occurred. Lost in his arrogance, Schlichtig had foolhardily underestimated the monk, and his mistake in calculating Mieszko’s supernatural prowess in battle proved to be his undoing.

Oddly, though Jamison had the propensity for violence, it was he immediately spoke up, “What the hell was that all about?” Horrified, Lora screamed, “Kisa out e fè yè?!?” Mieszko saw a towel lying on the counter and began to clean the machete as he calmly explained, “‘The blood is the life,’ and he did not deserve the blood that God put in him to keep him alive. He would never have given us any answers. He would have only hindered our progress with more of his ridiculous banter. We must be ready for anything. These people have traveled through time just like I have, and they are dangerous.” His demeanor continued to become more serene as he wiped the blood from the machete’s blade. When the knife was clean, his composure completely contradicted the fact that he had just killed an unarmed man in cold blood. “Lora? Kebe sa pou mwen,” Mieszko said and handed the freshly cleaned machete to her for safe keeping. She gladly accepted it and slipped it into her backpack.

Jamison, still reeling in shock from witnessing the murder, said, “Next time you decide to change characters and run somebody through with a sword, can you at least give me a heads up?” Still unfazed, Mieszko was fully ensconced in his mission. “We may not have a lot of time; spread out, and let’s turn this place upside down. There is something here; he knew we were coming for the pages, and that is why he met us. He was

lying in wait for us. I will dispose of the body in case we have more visitors and will rejoin you in a minute.”

Mieszko began to dispose of the body as Jamison and Lora scrutinized their surroundings. Maneuvering around the house, they found the staircase. “What is really going on here?” asked Lora in a low, but very audible, tone. The massive mahogany staircase was ominous. “I’m still trying to figure it out myself. All I can say is that Mieszko is human, but he is not,” Jamison replied. Lora seized his arm, “Rete la souple.” The two stopped, and Jamison tried to collect his thoughts. “OK, Mieszko is not from this era. He is centuries old. He started off as a monk, was absorbed into the book that was held by royalty and scholars until some thief stole the eight pages that represented his soul. Then, he morphed back into a man and transported back through time, where he found me dying in a hospital room. He instantly healed me through some prayer, and we went through a “wormhole,” which brought us here. I know it doesn’t make much sense, but that’s all I know. You see, we are on a quest to find these missing eight pages that make up Mieszko’s soul.”

Jamison was out of breath as he spurted out everything at once. Lora’s mind was spinning in an effort to calculate everything up to this point. “So, where do you fit in this picture?” she said, glancing back over her shoulder to look down the stairs. “Well, according to Mieszko, it seems

that one of my ancestors had something to do with removing the eight pages, and I am the key to retrieving them.” They now stood in the upper hallway, and Jamison looked both ways, trying to decide where they should begin their search. “Lora, I know it is a lot to take in, but I do believe the guy. He has been very normal until a few moments ago when he ran that guy through, and I believe he felt it was the only thing he could do. Are you OK?” “M’bien. I am fine,” she assured him.

At the top of the stairs, the landing branched into three directions. As Jamison gathered his bearings, he said, “We have to split up in order to cover more ground. You work in the room next to me, and don’t wander off in case we come across something.” With a deep breath, they separated and started toward the first rooms, but Lora stopped when she heard Jamison call her name. He was beckoning her to him. Looking into her dark, striking eyes, he stated, “This has been a memorable day for me. I am very glad you were with me.” As he stared at her, he found himself quoting from *The Wind in the Willows*, “Glorious, stirring sight, the poetry of motion!” Lora’s breath caught, and she answered, “M’kontan fè konesans ou. I am glad that I met you, too.” She smiled, and the two parted to begin the task at hand.

The rooms were large, and the ceilings were high. No clutter was present in any of the rooms, making it easier to search the furniture.

Jamison tossed mattresses, ransacked drawers and looted the closets. Every room was found to be well-balanced with a harmonious theme running throughout the upper floor. Jamison surmised that someone had good taste; he only hoped it wasn't the poor corpse downstairs whom had just bled out. Some of the rooms' décor mirrored others. He was convinced that this house had once had a life, the sagittal plain merely dividing east and west. Thus, whatever Lora was doing was a reflection of himself. The fourth room he entered was filled with Quattrocento art and decorative mosaics. The heart of the room shone with brilliant stained glass sunlight, under a copy of The Poor Man's Bible window at Canterbury Cathedral, which was complimented with several frescos covering the walls. Although they were replicas and Jamison was admiring them through an untrained eye, the works had been done by a very skilled hand. On the east wall was the Vittskövle Church: The Tree of Knowledge, and the Dance of Death by the Elmelunde Master donned the west. As he admired the impressive works, Jamison's eye was caught by a drawing table. It was stacked with illuminated manuscripts decorated in gold and silver and in pristine condition. He was intrigued, but since he really didn't know what he was expected to find, he decided to regroup with Lora and find Mieszko.

Jamison walked down the hall peering into rooms and calling for Lora. She stuck her head out of the third doorway and dazzled him with her pearly white smile. “Did you find something?” she asked. “Yes, we need to locate Mieszko. There is a large table of manuscripts a few doors down.” “Well, I found nothing,” she replied, hopelessly somber. Together, they descended the staircase, and once on the first landing, they called out to Mieszko. No one answered. “Fantastic! This stinks,” an upset Jamison moaned. Without speaking, Lora took his hand. “Well, what do we do? This is his treasure hunt,” Jamison said, still frustrated. Her eyes tilted upward, and she pointed toward the stairs. “Yes, I suppose we should take a closer look at those manuscripts until Mieszko gets back. But, what if something happened to him?” Jamison said, feeling uneasy. Lora handed him the machete and spoke, “Kebe sa pou mwen. There is nothing we can do for him if there is something wrong. Maybe, if he is in trouble and we find those pages, it will help him. He did say that you are the key.” Unable to resist her, Jamison was glad to be reminded that he was here for a purpose.

They returned to the Quattrocento art room, where the manuscripts lay heaped on the table. Paying special attention, they thumbed through the pages of the various books. One was entitled, *Εαγγελιον*, or, *Evangelioni*. They all seemed to be religious books, and included in the

collection were *The Book of Kells*, which opened with the *Book of John*, Beatus and Liturgical manuscripts, *The Icelandic Saga*, and many more. “All of this is very interesting, but I haven’t a clue as to what we are looking for,” Jamison remarked. “It could be anything,” she mumbled, reading the names of the manuscripts aloud, “*Vatican Croatian Prayer Book, Hippocrates of Cos...*” At this, Jamison abruptly interrupted her, “Maybe that’s it! Wasn’t Hippocrates the ‘Father of Clinical Medicine’?” Before she could respond, Jamison answered his own rhetorical question, “Yes! I saw it on Jeopardy!” Excitedly, he continued on, “You know, in medicine, there’s the ‘Hippocratic Oath,’ which says, “I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:...and, I don’t really know the rest. But, I do remember that there is an art to medicine as well as science, and this could be the original! Can’t read Greek, but this looks like Greek to me.” He laughed at his own joke, while Lora smiled at him, not understanding.

As they were thumbing through the manuscripts, their hands accidentally touched, and they instantaneously turned to one another. It was as if the intensity of this ordeal had caused their passion to grow until, as if electric, they were pulled together. Sparks flew, and the law of attraction was overwhelming; they gravitated toward one another on a collision course with the inevitable. Eyes locked in a trance, Aphrodite drew them closer as their lips met and two worlds became one. Although

they had no time for romance, their first kiss was seemingly unending. It was almost impossible for either of them to pull themselves away, but they realized that their colleague, and the only man who knew why they were on this quest, was missing. No words were necessary; neither could no longer deny this attraction, and neither had ever tasted anything so sweet as that first kiss. Quietly, she sang as he held her in his arms, "One love, one heart, let's get together and feel alright. Hear the children crying? Hear the children crying? Let's get together and feel alright." He asked, "Who sings that?" She replied, "Bob Marley." "What's next, Lora," Jamison whispered, not wanting to let her go. She was full of vigor and elegance, and Jamison felt as if he were already a part of her. He wanted to wake up at home in her arms. Lora replied, "We have to find Mieszko, or I am afraid we will not live long enough to ask any questions. Someone is going to miss the Nazi he killed." Jamison could not help but agree, "Yes, and we are carrying the murder weapon."

As they turned, both jumped back, their hearts in their throats. "What the hell!?" Jamison exclaimed, with both hands up and ready to fight. Mieszko simply smiled. "How long have you been standing there?" Jamison demanded to know. Still smiling, Mieszko replied, "Just got here. I took care of that one matter and looked around. I did not see a thing. So, what have you found?" As Jamison and Lora stepped back, the table of

manuscripts was revealed. Mieszko's eyes lit up when he saw the enormous pile. "Excellent," he said. "Where did you put the Jerrie?" asked Jamison. "I sent him through the wormhole. I have no idea where he will come out, but whatever era it is, I am sure it will start a hunt for his murderer," Mieszko said, somewhat distracted as he began going through the pages. "I see you have prioritized these," he said, reading through *The Hippocratic Corpus*. "I am still thinking that we must be looking at medicine for some reason. All the references we have seen point to a doctor," Mieszko said, suddenly looking up from the book. "Does anyone want to go to Greece?" "Greece?! What's in Greece?" they cried. "Well, there is a town called Kos, and in this little town, there is a tree called, 'The Tree of Hippocrates,' or platane. This is not just any tree. This is the tree under which Hippocrates studied and worked. Some say that The Apostle Paul taught from under the same tree." "And, you believe this is the right direction?" Jamison asked. "Yes, in finding these manuscripts, I see that the clue is in the medical arts. There is no greater physician than Hippocrates, other than our Lord." "When do we leave?" Jamison asked, just like any good disciple would. "We leave first thing tomorrow morning before anyone becomes suspicious that Schlichtig is missing breakfast." Lora spoke up with anxiety in her voice, "Mwe vie ale..." This was unexpected, but should have been foreseen. Mieszko replied, "Ou pral avè

m?” Without hesitation, Lora responded in English. “Yes! Mi nuh wah go back. Me wha tan ya wid yuh!” Mieszko’s eyes twinkled, and he grinned as he told Jamison, “Looks like your girlfriend is going with us. If she were anyone else, I would have been against it, but I believe she has a part in this, though I do not know how or why. Still, I am certain she is here for a greater purpose. This is a selfless trip, and both of you seem dedicated to truth. I would not expect either of you to become parsimonious, greedy or insatiable. Even though you witnessed me killing a man, you still searched the upper rooms to help me. You could have left me to fend for myself against those who would seek me out, but you have been loyal. Though I still may do things that are questionable to you, I promise to only do what is necessary to see us through this journey.”

The house began to shake, and a hard crash from the other wing hit like a concussive thump. It sounded like a door had been smashed in. This time, it was Lora giving the orders, “Ann ale!” she screamed. Mieszko yelled, “Run!” Like hunted game, they ran. Out through the back door and across the lawn, the trio fled like they were dragging themselves with pure survival instinct. Since Lora was familiar with these parts, the men followed. “Find us a brick wall, and I can get us out of here,” Mieszko ordered. It was now dark, and much guesswork was needed regarding when to jump, when to dodge and when to fall flat. They spun, they rolled,

and they maneuvered as they fled like bandits, but they were now more than just bandits; they were now killers. Yes, all were guilty by association if not the act itself. Who could have been trying to break through the front door of the house? Was it someone from the future, the past, or was it the local police? Had someone seen Mieszko moving the corpse? It did not matter. Run, and run fast! They were fleeing from someone or something they had not seen. They were running from a ghost. “Must find a brick wall,” Mieszko yelled, as he gulped for air. The wall of torment would be the wall that propelled them to safety. They were gasping for air like they had been suffocated when Jamison spotted a short brick wall where a drainage duct lay under the road. “Will that do it?” he shouted. “It looks large enough,” Mieszko replied, being the first to arrive. Looking at Lora, he asked, “Are you sure? Eske ou vle ale?” Emphatically, she answered, “YES!”

Mieszko took Jamison’s hand, and Jamison took Lora’s. Mieszko said, “Gen pa efreye.” The bricks began to glow red and fall away one by one. As the wall collapsed upon itself, all three stepped through like worms crawling through the end of an apple. Dazzling lights of beauty and blinding colorful flashes consumed them. Everything in this shortcut seemed surreal. Lora thought it odd that she felt as if they were standing still, “It must be time that moves instead of us,” she thought with a

shudder, trying to be brave enough to accept this magical tunnel of travel. The three were cramped, and the tightness began to set in like they were squeezing through a hole too small to fit through. It felt like being spit out of some prehistoric monster! Yet, their travel through time ended with them all standing upright on their feet. "Is everyone OK?" asked Mieszko. "Yes, we're OK. Are we where we're supposed to be?" Jamison was curious as he brushed off the tops of his shoes. "Looks like we hit the mark; that means we are on one of 24 possible islands," replied Mieszko. "Can others use this tunnel?" asked Lora. Mieszko answered, "I believe others have and that messages can be sent. That is why I am not certain if the Schlichtig we encountered was the real Schlichtig or a descendant." "So, you are saying that Schlichtig could have transported like we did or could have sent word to one of his descendants with instructions?" asked Jamison. "Yes, that is very true. We will not know if we are dealing with the genuine Schlichtig or an imitation," Mieszko answered, observing their current surroundings. "I have a question, Mieszko," Lora said, "Eight pages were stolen, and these pages were part of you. You are holy man, correct?" "Yes, I was a monk, a Christian monk," he replied. Lora continued, "Jamison told me that these eight pages represented your soul?" Mieszko listened intently as Lora captured his full attention. He wondered where she was going with this line of questioning. "Without a soul, how do you

know right and wrong?” her curiosity was swelling. “I know right and wrong. What I used to be is still me. To my own demise, I have no conscience as of now. I know what to do and when to do it, but I do not feel compelled to turn the other cheek. The right thing to do when we encountered Schlichtig was to kill him. I did it, knowing it was right. If I had a conscience, my convictions would have caused me to hesitate, and then, we would have been dead. There is no right, and there is no wrong in my mind. I do what is necessary.” “Fair enough, as long as you always do right,” she replied, almost like a warning. “If it would make you feel better, allow me to say a prayer for peace and no disturbance for the rest of our journey?” Mieszko held out both his hands. The three of them bowed their heads in reverence, and Mieszko prayed, “Da Domine, propitious pacem in diebus nostis, ut, ope misericordiae tuae adiuti, et a peccato simus semper liberi et ab omni perturbatione secure. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.”

CHAPTER 13 – THE PREACHER PRAYS

At home, saints never perform miracles. ~Brazilian Proverb

The Pentecostal preacher, alone with his wife, sat at the dinner table, concerned about the man in the accident, for whom he prayed. His wife, a rather large woman, wore no makeup at all and still sported a tall beehive hairdo, a style unfashionable since the 1960s. As was their tradition, the table was set with fine china, and the hearty meal was made up of fried pork chops, buttery mashed potatoes and green beans, in keeping with her philosophy of, “a vegetable on the table makes a healthy meal.” She had also prepared homemade biscuits and gravy. As he devoured the southern dinner, the preacher relayed what he knew of the accident, the moments of prayer over the victim and his visit to the hospital, where, much to his surprise, he had not found the man. No one at the hospital had any idea as to where Jamison had disappeared, although they had diligently investigated the incident. The police had also initiated a search in the first few days following, but to no avail. Jamison was an adult who could rightfully disappear if he so desired; therefore, after the first couple of days following his abrupt departure, his photo hanging on the wall at the police station had been partially covered by that of a missing child and a poster of a lost dog.

“I guess he could have a head injury so bad that he didn’t know what he was doing and just got up and left,” the preacher supposed. Accustomed to being spoken at, rather than having a real conversation, she meekly

replied, “But, how far could he have made it?” “They have a detailed description of him, and his mother supplied some recent photos, so if he’s out there wandering around, I reckon they’ll find him.” The preacher was now using guesswork, his attention focused on swabbing up the gravy with the biscuit held firmly between his thumb and index finger. But, as he ate, he could not stop thinking about the man. He was now more than concerned; he was worried. He thought to himself, “Maybe he was kidnapped or abducted?”

The preacher’s house was adorned with religious sacraments and ornaments pledging his faith; one must display their devotion to show their love for God. The family Bible lay prominently splayed on the coffee table, half the size of the Codex Gigas. There were plaques on the walls. Over the television hung a wooden tablet with the burned inscription, “MEEKNESS,” and under it in smaller script, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” A similar piece read, “SERVE THE LORD” in bold letters, under which was written, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” His 1993 Cadillac was also properly Christianized by several bumper stickers. The most prominently displayed read, “CH__CH...what is missing? UR!” Another stated, “Real men love Jesus.” And, of course, no true Christian could ride around in a vehicle that did not

proudly display the most universal symbol of showing one's love for God: The Jesus Fish emblem.

After he had eaten, he left the woman to her cleaning duties and retired to his bedroom to pray over his hand-made altar of worship, adorned with a three-foot crucifix. For comfort, he had included soft foam kneepads for kneeling. Still in a state of consternation, he took his place and offered up his prayers for the man. His thinking was radical, and he struggled as a human being with so many convictions, but he was, above all, a man of prayer.

CHAPTER 14 – MAGIC POTIONS

Witch doctors do not sell their potions to each other. ~Mozambican Proverb

“We can only hope that our prayers have been answered and that we



have not entered this realm at the wrong time. We certainly don't want to face the Turks by any means,” Mieszko said, while stretching a bit. Time

travel had a way of taking its toll on the muscles. “The Turks? What’s the deal with them?” asked Jamison, his eyes barely able to stop tracing the contours of Lora’s face. “If we are here at the wrong time, we could face Devlet-I Âliye-yi Osmâniyye, or an Islamic state,” replied Mieszko, surveying the scenery for clues. “Well, what direction? Where to?” Jamison wanted to know, becoming ever more anxious to be on the move. “We should head to the Castle of Knights. There on the Platía Platanou, we will find the Tree of Hippocrates.”

The three were in Kos and very near their mark. As they walked, Jamison was very inquisitive about Lora’s life. He wanted to know everything about her. Mieszko could tell how enamored Jamison was with her, and he didn’t mind Jamison’s interrogation. In fact, it seemed to make the walk less tiring and lull them into a comfortable synergy. “So, Lora, tell me a little about yourself?” Jamison began. “What would you like to know?” she asked. “I don’t really know. Everything. What about how you became a housesitter?” She looked a little confused with the word, “housesitter.” “You know, tell me about your childhood and how you started working and stuff,” he replied. “Well, I don’t really remember a time that I didn’t work. I have worked since I was a small child. My daddy is gone to who knows where. We live from day to day. Half of the money we make – when we are even making money – goes for food. We do get

vouchers from the government, and that really keeps us from starving. There is so much poverty and disease, but my mother has always protected me from that. In Jamaica, the women are stronger than the men. We are not Rastafarian, but I do know about them. The Bobo Dreads look down on women and children. Our hearts have been tainted by all this slavery. My mother and I, we live for God. There is a fire in our soul to do what is right. I was taught to work hard and not to go to the clubs for dancing and drinking. Many of our neighbors are ashamed, but I am proud. We are still plantation people, but we are no longer slaves. I have been able to avoid many struggles by staying busy. Here, many women are raped by their husbands, boyfriends and other family members, but I do not sit still. I stay busy. I will not allow that to happen to me. One night, my uncle was drunk, and he made advances toward me. This was my mother's brother! I screamed and hit him and fought him off of me. My mother came running, and we forced him to leave. I have not seen him in a long time." As she spoke, a somber quality took over her beautiful countenance.

Jamison could see the obvious hurt in her face, and he deliberately changed the subject, "What do you do for fun?" With the slightest touch of a smile, she replied, "My aunt and I, we make wooden masks and take them, along with seashells, to the markets to sell to the tourists. I really do enjoy meeting them. Our island is called, 'The Island in the Sun.' Nuh weh nuh

betta than yard...problems are everywhere...but we manage. We make extra money this way, because taking care of the houses is not enough. We don't always get paid at the houses." "Have you ever thought of leaving the island?" Jamison wondered. "I have, but my mother says, 'nuh weh nuh betta than yard; the grass is not always greener.' So, I do not know; maybe one day." She briefly got lost in her thoughts then blurted out, "Mi would a tek a one way ticket right now. Mi tired a di crime, corruption, discrimination and bad management!" "From what I have seen of your country, it is very beautiful," Jamison replied in his most comforting tone. Excitedly, she replied, "Nuh weh nuh betta dan yard!!!"

At this, Jamison decided to drop the subject, and they traveled in silence for a bit. Before they knew it, they were at the city limits. Shortly thereafter, they were excited to find the center of town. It was lined with palm trees, squares shaded by platanos, pines and elaborate gardens everywhere. "We should maybe change clothes. Do you have money?" asked Jamison. "We won't be here long enough to draw much attention," Mieszko said, as they passed cafes, restaurants and Venetian-style whitewashed buildings. The smell of coffee was intoxicating as they journeyed forward.

"What are we looking for once we get to this tree?" inquired Jamison. With tunnel vision, Mieszko stared straight ahead and simply

said, “A sign.” The town exhibited both modern and ancient aspects at the same time, and when evening arrived, most of the commercialism ceased. Even though they were in a desperate hurry, they were all hungry and knew they needed to eat. Miraculously, Mieszko had a few Euro, although he had no idea as to where he had gotten it. The three quickly stopped at “Ideal Snack Bar” on Martiou Street, just off Eleftherias Square. Keeping their minds on the task at hand, they wolfed down the Pork Souvlaki gyros as fast as their stomachs would allow. Appetites satiated, they found that they could focus more clearly, and they again embarked on their mission. As they practically ran through the streets, Lora knew they must be drawing attention from the calm, slower paced locals and tourists, and she became increasingly self-conscious. The island, known as the Jewel of the Aegean, was breathtakingly beautiful, but the trio was aware that they had greater priorities. Pressing onward, they were traveling at breakneck speed in search of the tree. As he trotted along, Jamison couldn’t help but imagine, disappointedly, that the island of Hippocrates seemed like a lovely vacation spot. “Maybe someday,” he mumbled under his breath.

When they came upon the tree in the center of town, Jamison and Lora were not immediately impressed with its abstract twisting trunk and oversized leaves. They were both still in a state of confusion and waiting instructions. It was encircled by a waist stone wall. “What do we need

from the tree?” Lora asked. Mieszko picked up a couple of the leaves, “We need more of these and some bark, not much, just a couple of pieces. Be careful to not draw attention to yourself as you retrieve the bark. We must not disturb the *Platanus Orientalis*.” “The what?” Jamison asked, more puzzled than ever. “It is simply the Plane Tree, or Platane,” Mieszko patiently explained. They moved quickly, trying to gather Mieszko’s botanical wonders, and as they worked, they became aware that the locals were huddling closer, staring at them with a look that could only be described as contemptuous. Even more strangely, the crowd dispersed as quickly as it had gathered once the task was completed. “It is important that we find red wine,” Mieszko said. “Great, now we have to hit a liquor store,” laughed Jamison.

Like a mad scientist performing his most important experiment, Mieszko led the way to the store. Jamison and Lora waited outside enjoying both the mild weather and one another’s company. Neither could deny the emotional bond developing between them; it was palpable. “Are you familiar with the movie ‘Back to the Future?’” he asked her. “No, I don’t think so,” she replied, practicing her English. “Well, I would share a memorable quote with you, but I don’t think the movie actually had any,” he said, laughing. “Tell me, what do you get out of this?” she asked. “You mean this crazy journey with Mieszko?” She responded with a very

serious, "Yes." Instantly sobering up, Jamison began to explain, "Well, he did save my life, even though my mother and sister must be worried sick, I'm sure. And, I do believe that, in the end, I will have gained a better understanding of who I am as a person for having gone through this experience with Mieszko. I may even become more spiritual in some sense. And, I might ask you the same question, since you just up and walked away from everything that you know." He was really anticipating her answer. Very matter-of-factly, Lora replied, "I have always lived my life serving my family or serving others in slave-like jobs. Now, I want a new path. I want a new life. It may seem selfish and crazy, but there was really nothing else I could do. My mother has always been what she is, what she expected me to be. I love her, but she will never change. So, for me to leave, to try to make a better life for myself, just seemed to make sense, even if it was selfish. I did not even think about it." At this, Jamison was suddenly overcome with emotion, and as he pulled her close to him, they embraced. She felt incredible against his body. He realized he was falling in love with her, and he felt as if they were a perfect fit. "And, I found you," he whispered. Lora was trembling, and she squeezed him harder as his words rushed through her head.

At that moment, Mieszko walked out of the store. "Is that all you two do?" he asked, smiling at his own sarcasm. "Let's find a quiet park or a

secluded place. There is something we must do before our next trip.”

“Where will our next trip take us?” they asked in unison. “Larissa,” Mieszko cryptically replied, “But first, we must find our way out of here. A boat will take too long; we need another portal.” Though they were as confused as ever, Jamison and Lora followed Mieszko, trusting that he would not steer them in the wrong direction. They walked a few stones throws away from the town center and found a place to sit on the ground, out of the sight of prying eyes. Mieszko opened the bag and withdrew three wine glasses and a bottle of Mavrodafni, a sweet black dessert wine. Apothecary or not, he crushed the leaves and bark from the tree as finely as he could with his bare hands, sprinkling the combination evenly into the three glasses like a proficient practitioner. Next, he uncorked the bottle of wine. “Take a glass,” he instructed, peacefully motioning to them. Jamison could not help but feel as if he were taking communion.

Mieszko filled each glass equally, stirring the aroma of plums. Before they drank, he produced a small plastic cup with a solid lid and poured a small amount of the liquid inside into their glasses. “Kisa sa a ye?” asked Lora. “It is water from the purification fountain, made from an antique sarcophagus that was under the Tree of Hippocrates.” “How did you collect that without us seeing you?” Jamison was curious to know. Ignoring the question, Mieszko bowed his head as if in prayer or

meditation. “Go ahead. Drink, drink and drink it all,” he directed them. They quickly downed the single glass, and Jamison and Lora waited, wondering if something would happen to them. Maybe the ground would start to quake and open up, or fire balls would be flung through the night sky, illuminating the sea and exploding with thundering sound. Still, nothing happened at all. “I hope you two were not expecting anything supernatural after drinking the wine. Anyone tired?,” Mieszko laughed. “We could use some rest,” Jamison agreed, and at that, they gathered their belongings in search of a place to sleep.

The charming hotel had a main house and several bungalow styled buildings set in a wonderful, brightly colored garden, and everyone slept peacefully through the night. Mieszko had rented three adjoining rooms, and though Jamison was bone weary, he couldn't help but feel a little frustrated because he didn't get to share a room with his new girlfriend. Still, he wasn't in a position to argue with his tour guide, so he kept his disappointment to himself and quietly retired to his room.

The sunlight shining through the cracks in the wooden window blinds roused the travelers from the comfort of their beds, and then, it was on to breakfast. After a somewhat hurried, but satisfying, meal of eggs and rolls topped off with black Turkish coffee, they were brimming with expectation for the next phase of their journey. Lora wanted to pray before

the unknown came their way. Mieszko was impressed, especially because she wanted to lead the prayer. Before she began, she explained that the prayer she wanted to share was of the Rastafarian faith, and though she did not practice it, her mother did. Growing up, she was taught many such prayers, and this particular prayer was one of her favorites. Many children in America learn the so-called, “Lord’s Prayer,” but Lora learned, “Fix Me, Jesus, Fix Me.” They clasped hands, and she spoke, *“Oh yes, fix me, Jesus, fix me. Fix me so that I can walk on a little while longer. Fix me so that I can pray on just a little bit harder. Fix me so that I can sing on just a little bit louder. Fix me so that I can go on despite the pain, the fear, the doubt, and yes, the anger. I ask not that you take this cross from me, only that you give me the strength to continue carrying it onward ‘til my dying day. Oh, fix me, Jesus, fix me. Amen.”* “That, my child, is wonderful. Well done,” Mieszko saluted. He continued, “Time to find a brick wall.” At this, Jamison established a fact, “Let’s hope we never end up in a place that doesn’t believe in brick walls.”

While they walked, each of them keeping an eye out for the ideal brick wall, they talked. “Why are all of the statues in Greece nude?” asked Jamison. “Artists demonstrated the physical prowess men used to defeat their enemies. If you notice, the statues of men were all well-built men. An enemy coming to war with them might reconsider once they viewed the bodies of those they would face. Also, it was the goal of sculptors to depict

the common man as a hard worker in society. Though nudity is frowned upon, don't most doctors have you remove your clothing when examining you? Being naked reveals all vulnerabilities, but it also reveals all of one's strengths," Mieszko's effortless ability to educate them was fascinating to them both.

They made their way past the statues and out of the park area. "We'd better hurry and find a wall soon, before this wall of rain hits us," Jamison said. He could see the ominous clouds and feel the precipitation in the air. They hurried their pace until they came to the side of an abandoned brick store. The windows were broken, and only a few jagged pieces of glass remained. There was a wild vine spider crawling up the wall from the ground. Surveying the wall, Mieszko quietly said, "This will have to do." Another brick wall and another wormhole. As they stepped through, the three again collided with an invisible force, and they were pulled forward at light speed. Jamison felt a little different on this trip, as his hearing was dulled during the process. When they emerged on the other side, he was relieved to notice that it was restored.

"Here we are, folks, Larissa, in Thessaly. Some believe the burial place to be between Larissa and Gyrtion, but I am positive that we are in the right place. That river is the Piniós, and this is the Peta Hippocrates District. We just need to head east. We are looking for the Anaxagoras

Square. Once we find that, we head south to the tomb,” Mieszko explained. “The tomb?” Jamison asked, wiping his eye with the back of his hand. “Yes, Hippocrates’ tomb,” answered Mieszko. “This is an ancient place dating all the way back to the Paleolithic period.”

Mieszko began to recite a history lesson as they walked toward their destination. Lora was taking in all of the sights like a child in a candy store. This was a new world to her, and with all she had seen, it felt as if to be a new plant, a fresh new universe. Everything is wondrous through the eyes of a child, and in terms of this journey, Lora felt like just that. She was recording everything her senses picked up, and while she could hardly contain her fascination, she couldn’t help but to keep peeking over her shoulder with trepidation. As they entered Anaxagoras Square, Lora mentioned that she felt as if they were being watched. “Is this intuition, or have you actually noticed someone following us?” asked Jamison. Mieszko’s brow furrowed, “I had worried that our enemies were allowing us to pass too easily. There are many elements working against us, and I fear that there are those out there actually mounting against us. The term, ‘Anaxagoras’ basically means, ‘someone who attempts the impossible.’ We, my dear friends, in the eyes of these Greeks gods surrounding us, believe that we are busying ourselves with quadrature, or puzzle-solving. We may, in fact, be attempting the impossible.”

Their senses heightened, the trio continued toward the tomb, closely observing every person, every shaking tree and every motor vehicle zooming past. Each was wondering if there were powers in the universe waiting for them to drop their guard or become vulnerable and quietly waiting to pounce the second that happened. When they arrived, they were again unimpressed, as with the tree; it was certainly nothing extravagant. “What, exactly, are we looking for?” Jamison asked, examining the white tomb with his fingers. “Anything that coincides with one of your tattoos, or anything that doesn’t belong,” replied Mieszko. “One thing to remember is that Anaxagoras was a Greek philosopher. He was someone whom many thought of as a troublemaker, because he spoke out against the gods. Like myself, he was, indeed, going against the grain. He was a mathematician, and I am a monk. So, what do I really know?” He concluded cryptically with the quote, “Reason rules the world,” the other two having no idea what he meant by it.

The tomb consisted of a square resting on four steps and carrying four engaged Doric columns, with a cornice over the whole and being about thirty one feet square at the basement. Above the cornice were gradated, multi-staged levels, resembling a pyramid of steps. By all standards, this tomb was much more curious than grand. “Does anyone else smell that,” asked Jamison as he prowled under one of the steps. “Yes. It is honey,”

affirmed Lora. At this, Mieszko chimed in, “Keen sense of smell, folks. I expected such, but I was not certain in which form this part of your tattoo would appear.” “Really? Why is that?” Jamison asked. “The nectar of the gods is honey. As a baby, the legend states that Zeus was fed honey in Crete. If you remember, among all of those painfully-etched drawings in your skin, there is a small tattoo on your leg of Zeus holding a barbell above his head.” As recognition came over Jamison, Mieszko circled the tomb, presumably in search of the origin of the aroma. He seemed very sagaciously motivated, as he continued, “Tattooing is an ancient art here in Greece. Romans learned the art of tattooing from the Greeks, and both tattooed their slaves to indicate, ‘tax paid’ status. Constantine put an end to tattooing on the face, but he did permit it on other parts of the body, especially on convicts, gladiators and soldiers.” “Why no tattooing on the face?” asked Lora in her sweetest Jamaican accent. “Because, my dear, Constantine believed that the face represented the image of God,” he replied.

As the three continued to circle the tomb, essentially following their noses, they came upon an amazing sight. On the west-side steps of the tomb, mounds of honeycombs were dripping with golden, sweet honey. Swarms of bees lit on the combs, seemingly confused and without direction. Mieszko spoke these words from Emily Dickinson, “The pedigree of honey

does not concern the bee; a clover, any time, to him, Is aristocracy.” “There is no queen,” Lora noticed. Jamison was in a dither and more perplexed than ever, “What?” “She is correct. These bees have no queen to serve. Bees have often signified immortality and resurrection. We must think this through,” Mieszko, for the first time, seemed to have no answers. “Maybe we should taste the hone as we did with the tree and the wine,” suggested Lora. As she spoke, she reached down with two fingers and dipped her hand into the honey. Before either man could say a word, she put her fingers to her mouth. They stood watching, in disbelief, that she had taken the initiative.

“Now what?” asked Jamison. Lora’s eyes grew dark, “Sa dangereh.” “What did you say?” Jamison asked, becoming slightly concerned. She was quiet, and Mieszko put his hand on Jamison’s shoulder. Weakly, she uttered, “Kenbe men mwen.” Mieszko took her hand, and Jamison, growing ever more concerned, took her other hand. “Mwen santi m pa byen.” “She does not feel well,” Mieszko translated. Addressing Lora, he said, “Ou malad?” Barely able to respond, she nodded her head slightly and mumbled, “Mwen malad.” Mieszko, with a look of concern, translated for Jamison, “She says she is sick.” He instructed Jamison to help her lay her on the grass. Lora wrapped her arms around her stomach and winced in pain, “Life mal!” It was clear to both men that she was having severe

stomach pain. Mieszko attempted to give her the confidence to fight the fear, “Gen pa efreye.” She became limp and slowly descended into unconsciousness. As the sleep overcame her, she whispered, “Ede mwen, si'l vous plait.” “Something is not right with her,” Jamison pleaded, his worry becoming more desperation than concern.

Mieszko, seemingly distracted, began to think aloud, “The pages cannot be here, and if they are not here, then we must leave. The only way to leave this place is through a wormhole. I can't help but wonder, why would Lora just taste the honey not knowing what may happen? What induced her to do such a thing? We have agents working on our side, and we have great spiritual forces leading us. How odd...I did not know what to do at this point, but Lora somehow did. She may actually represent Melissai.” Increasingly agitated, Jamison stated, “You had better start explaining something in English very quickly, or else, we need to get her to a hospital.” He didn't know what to think of his friend's rationale.

“Enthusiasmos. It means, ‘within a god.’ Yes! That is it! These are ‘Birds of the Muses!’” Mieszko's eyes danced as he pieced the puzzle together. Still doubtful, Jamison's anger grew, “Let me say this again. Speak English to me!” In his panic, he couldn't take one more second of the cryptic-speak. With recognition dawning in his eyes, Mieszko replied, “I should have been wise enough to see this earlier. Rudolph, there is a reason

that Lora accompanied us here – one beyond any of our comprehension. She is an oracle. It all makes sense now. She is not really sick; she is simply in an ecstatic trance. This is a strong honey with laxative properties, which explains the extreme cramping. Look at her, Rudolph. She is breathing well. She is simply waiting to give birth.” Mieszko was very sure of himself.

“Give birth?! What the hell are you saying?!” Jamison was now convinced that Mieszko had lost his mind. In response, Mieszko simply smiled and lightly chuckled, “Rudolph, my son, I did not mean to imply a physical birth. She is going to bring forth a word for us. But, now I am sure that this will not happen until the moon is high in the sky.” “How can you be sure of this?” Jamison demanded, clearly wanting answers. He could feel the heat rising in his face as his desperation grew stronger. Ever serene, Mieszko replied, “If Lora was given sudden knowledge of our next step, perhaps she took it upon herself to act on her own – no guidance needed. If she truly does represent Melissai, then she would also represent the goddess of the moon. Trust me, we must wait; she will awaken tonight.”

Suddenly, Mieszko’s face took on a faraway look, and his voice became chantlike, “The Book of Revelation gives us a confirmation. ‘So, I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me,

‘Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth, it will be as sweet as honey.’ ‘I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but once I had eaten it, my stomach, indeed, turned sour. Then, I was told, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.’” At that, Mieszko seemed to come back into himself, and as his voice returned to normal, he pleaded with Jamison, “Please, Rudolph, just allow her to wake up on her own. This is bigger than us.”

It was as if time froze as the two men sheltered the sleeping Nubian prophetess. As she slept, peace took her over, and she was no longer curled in pain. Her beauty was ethereal. Her face was exquisite as if she were floating in paradise. Jamison could scarcely take his eyes off of her. He noticed her dreams manifesting themselves in her through her generously curved body as she gently stretched and moved in her slumber.

After an eternity, she quietly spoke, still lost in the shroud of sleep, “*Nigra sum sed formosa Filia Hierusalem sicut tabernacula Cedar sicut pelles Salomonis.*” Immediately brought to attention, Mieszko sat up and interpreted, “This is from the Song of Solomon. ‘I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.’ This is our clue. She is speaking of herself as Pharaoh’s daughter, the wife of Solomon. But, some would argue that this reference

is to the Queen of Sheba, Malikat Saba, the Queen of the South. According to Isaiah 60:6, “And they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring forth gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.”

“So, we get gold and incense? Head south? What, exactly, are we doing here?” asked Jamison. “First, I believe it is up to you to wake your sleeping beauty from her dream,” Mieszko instructed. “But, how? What can I do?” Jamison was bewildered. Befitting the moment, Mieszko replied to his comrade in French, “La Belle au Bois dormant.” Frustrated, Jamison responded, “Okaaaayyyy! I understand that you’re speaking French, but I obviously have no clue as to what it means.” “It is from the adverb romanice,” Mieszko hinted. “Romance?” “Of course, my son,” the Monk smiled as any good teacher would. Mieszko, for the first time, seemed to have no answers. “Maybe we should taste the hone as we did with the tree and the wine,” Mieszko, for the first time, seemed to have no answers. “Maybe we should taste the hone as we did with the tree and the wine,” Mieszko, for the first time, seemed to have no answers. “Maybe we should taste the hone as we did with the tree and the wine,” Rudolph, need I remind you of the story of ‘Sleeping Beauty?’” Mieszko gestured toward the beauty herself with his hand.

Understanding, Jamison knelt beside her, and with his love nearly bursting through his heart, he pressed his lips against hers. Instantly, her

deep, brown eyes opened to this world again, and she embraced him with the embrace of a princess to her prince. At that very instant, they were enmeshed, the same thought running simultaneously through both their minds, but clearly emanating from Lora, permeated their beings, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth. I am dark, but lovely. My spikenard sends forth its fragrance. A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts. My beloved is, to me, a cluster of henna blooms.” With this singular thought, their love was solidified. They were one.

CHAPTER 15 – PARADIGM SHIFT

The world has not made a promise to anybody. ~African Proverb



The Pentecostal church was in full service. The congregation was 35 strong, and it's members were positively delirious with the spirit. The people belonging to this tiny church did not “join” the church;

no, they considered themselves “grafted” into it. It dominated their lives, and they fervently believed in Jonathan’s message. In their minds, they are the chosen few who will be taken away with the rapture. The rapture is a man-made theory that suggests Christ Jesus will return 2,000 years after the resurrection to remove Christians from the earth to reign with Him. Meanwhile, the devil and his legions will swarm the earth, taking the form of all sorts of vile creatures. The devil will be a seven-headed beast, and his demons will appear as scorpions and locusts, stinging and devouring people for three and a half years. After the scourge, the Antichrist will be brought forth.

Most of the modern rapture theory comes from Francisco Ribera, a Jesuit priest who lived in the late fifteen hundreds. Emmanuel Lacunza, also a Jesuit priest, built upon Ribera’s teachings, as did Edward Irving and Margaret MacDonald. In the 1830’s, MacDonald’s little church practiced a strict doctrine, although the roots were never formally researched. This tiny little assembly “spoke in tongues,” laid hands on the sick, and promoted the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as the bonus after one was born again. They preached on repentance of sins with a fury, and if a person did not accept Christ before the rapture, he would suffer the Great Tribulation, which was predicted to last a total of seven years. For the first three and a half years, the world would be a wonderful and peaceful utopia. However,

once in power, this charlatan, having established his rule, would bring death and devastation for the final three and half years. In the end, Christians would suffer horrible atrocities. Their families would be dragged out into the streets, and if they did not denounce Christ Jesus as their Lord, they would be executed. Homes would be burned, and Christians would be driven underground, waiting again for another return of Christ Jesus, who would eventually clean up the entire mess.

Many theories about Christ's return have been injected into the different religious denominations throughout the centuries. The number of times it is predicted that Christ will return varies from two to six before everything is resolved. This particular church had it narrowed down to four. Those who endure to the end will be saved and allowed to join the perfectly righteous blood-bought folks who were raptured safely off the earth. Those who were originally caught up in the event, thus missing the abandonment of God from the earth and the ravages of Satan, will be reconnected with their brothers and sisters. Anyone having the Mark of the Beast would be bound and burned alive along with Satan, the false prophet, and the Antichrist, in a lake of fire with unending torture. To this congregation, the Mark of the Beast meant that you would not be allowed to buy or sell during this time of trouble. Carnage and mayhem would ensue. Anyone refusing the Mark of the Beast would be butchered,

imprisoned to face torture, or they would be forced to live secluded, hidden out of sight of the New World Order.

In today's Holy Ghost meeting, Jonathan Edwards was worked into a frenzy. He would start his sermons while standing behind the pulpit. As the excitement of his truths was brought forth, electricity would fill the air, and with his emotions electrified, he would run through the aisles shouting his message. Today, he was addressing the return of Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. The preacher was in full motion with red face and bulging carotid arteries straining through his neck as he preached. "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm! I am a wall, my breasts like towers; then, I became, in his eyes, one who found peace. Make haste, my beloved, and run like a gazelle on the mountains of spices. He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely, I am coming quickly!' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

As the word "Jesus" was trumpeted, Jonathan, the Pentecostal preacher, vanished from the church before the astonished eyes of the congregation and from the land of the living. One second, he was there; the next, he was gone! There was no puff of smoke, no pop, no sound whatsoever; Jonathan simply disappeared. The only trace of him left behind was his black, leather bound Bible, which did make a sound as it hit the floor. Someone, discernibly a sinner, who was obviously in shock,

shouted a profanity. Snatched away; what sort of magic could this be? This must have been the hand of God! This was like Elijah of old, who was carried away in a whirlwind. The giddy congregation began to praise God with shouts and prayers; many tears were shed. One Sister simply passed out into the lap of her neighbor.

In reality, Jonathan Edwards' disappearance was nothing like Elijah. His transformation was more like Enoch the Prophet. Jonathan had stepped into the right hole at the right time, and no force or power on earth could have stopped him from entering. Predestination had negated his free will, and he was no longer in control of where he went or what he was even thinking. The law of the universe dragged him away to do its bidding. Free will suddenly had a new meaning; Jonathan had the free will to go wherever this jaunt was taking him. He was now a universal traveler, and through this wormhole he went. Just when he thought he was collecting himself, his eyes would deceive him with geometric figures, revolving planets, and flashing lights. Hexagonal cells, like those in a honeycomb, flashed blindingly before his eyes. "You shall have no business with secret things." A tree consisting of ten concentric circles appeared before him. He was entering a golden spiral, and it was spinning like a hypnotist's wheel.

Jonathan, the wayfarer, was aware of his predicament, but he was helpless, unable to change his fate. His prayers and desperate cries were impotent and expugnable, met only with ear splitting silence. He thought he must have had a brain aneurism, a heart attack or a stroke. He knew this was not a normal experience, but he had no earthly idea that he had slipped through a rare, traveling star-gate. He was trying to rationalize this phenomenon, because it was in direct contradiction to his personal beliefs. Miraculously, he found that he could still carry a thought, and true to form, his first thoughts were of the Bible. He was reminded of the Holy Scripture that read, "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away (Genesis 5:24 NIV). Some believed Enoch and Elijah to be twin brothers, and if Jonathan was identifying with Enoch, something was wrong, because he had no brother at all! His gift for memorizing scripture was uncanny, and the verses flew through his brain as his physical being flew through the wormhole. Now, he was reminded of John 3:13, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

Attempting to make sense of this bizarre experience, he began removing the obvious. He had not been lifted up in a chariot of fire, but neither had Elijah. No whirlwind or fiery chariot of horses swooped down and carried him away, and he seriously doubted that this strange place was

the firmament of heaven. Maybe it was some sort of transfiguration as when Elijah appeared with Moses in Matthew 17:9? His mind swirled, and the scripture flowed. Jonathan was not falling or being lifted higher through alate flight; he was motionless in airless void in a transparent bleb – completely still, while everything that transpired was flying past him. He found it astounding that he was not being hit by all the debris. Simultaneously, spatial organization was eliminated, and his eyes were having a difficult time focusing in this purely optical burst. Suddenly, he saw a large cube approaching him, and though he was doing everything in his power to avoid the collision with his dynamic instability, it was coming too fast. His body involuntarily tightened as he braced himself for the impact, and the cube slammed into his chest with an incredible bone-jarring potency. His breath was forced from his lungs, and inertia enveloped his senses. As the inward gravitational pull dissipated, he was suddenly filled with energy. For the first time ever, he felt totally vibrant and *alive*. It was as if someone had inserted a new soul in his being. Filled with vitality, he was overwhelmed with a venturesome sensation. He decided that he was about to meet Jesus, his Lord and Savior, and he hoped he had done everything he could to present himself without spot or blemish before his King. His alacrity was alarming, because Jonathan had spent his life in judgment and bitterness in a body and mind consumed with often deeming

others as less than God's creation. He now comprehended that he was the workmanship of a great architect. Finally, at zero point, he emerged on the other side. The magnetic fields in the electromagnetic vacuum had simply spat him out. As quickly as it had begun, it was finished, and Jonathan found himself in a park and picking himself up from the ground. For all intents and purposes, he felt completely normal, with the exception of the strangest oddity: his hands were tied together with a most unusual knot.

CHAPTER 16 – GREAT DISCOVERIES

A man does not run among thorns for no reason; either he is chasing a snake, or the snake is chasing him. ~African Proverb

Jamison held onto
Lora as if her life depended
on it.

Conflicted feelings swirled
within his head, and in this
mesh of



emotional crisis, he believed that, without Lora, he would cease to exist. She was still very frail and helpless. Jamison could not explain how Lora in her weakened state had become his concupiscible

appetite, but he sensed a woven paphian rejuvenation tightening with welcoming mansuetude that increased his might and resolve. Quietly, she spoke, “Mwen swaf.” “She’s thirsty,” said Mieszko, and turning to her, he responded, “Sa ou vlè?” Lora spoke up with more authority, “m vlè te.” Her face was drawn and lacking definition, chatoyant, suggesting an inner metamorphosis. “Jamison, she wants tea. Let’s get through this park and find a café.” As they walked, Lora was quiet. Nevertheless, her countenance and skin color was becoming more vibrant. She seemed to be gaining strength with every step, and that was a relief to both men. Still, she did miss a step from time to time as if the earth were shifting beneath her feet.

As they passed by some Greek sculptures, Jamison thought he saw something out of the corner of his eye. “Mieszko, there’s something moving over there,” he whispered, senses heightened. He could feel the cold touch of the unknown slide up his spine. Instantly, he went on the defensive, and his years of training took over like second nature. He was self-assured, and he knew he would not be defeated. Quickly, they ducked behind a large tree. “Maybe someone is following us? Someone who wants to stop us?” Jamison whispered. Feeling very protective, he continued, “If that’s the case, then I’ve got to see

what's going on. Stay here." Before Mieszko could stop him, Jamison had slipped out from behind the tree and moved in a circular direction to surprise the person stumbling through the dark. He advanced silently, approaching surreptitiously from the side. As he came closer, it was evident by the person's size that he was a man, and Jamison brought his right arm around his front, taking him completely off guard. After gaining head and arm control, he used the palm of his other hand to slap the man directly in the spine and knock the wind out of him. Before the man could react, Jamison pushed his hand down on the man's spine, causing him to arch his back and, simultaneously, he shoved his shoulder forward and pulled his head backward, taking him down. Before the man knew it, he hit the ground with a tremendous thud. Jamison instantly jumped on top of him and put his hands around the man's throat. Just as he began choking him, he recognized the shadowy figure. He murmured, "No way!" and apologetically eased his hands from the man's larynx.

Jonathan, still recovering from the surprise attack, moaned as he tried to regain his senses. Jamison was completely stumped and realized that absolutely nothing was impossible here. He helped the man to his feet and lead him back toward his friends. Jamison was on a

mission for answers, “OK, Monk, how do we explain the fact that a preacher from my home town is here in Greece?” Jonathan’s face was daunted. Still dazed from the assault, Jonathan shook his head to remove the cobwebs that resulted from the jarring of his brain. His voice quivered as he fought emotions of fear and confusion. “Greece? Did you say, Greece?” he asked, incredulous. “It appears that someone out there has brought this man to us,” Mieszko explained, going into introductions. Noticing Jonathan’s binding, Mieszko asked, “What is this around your wrists?” Jonathan answered, “I have no idea, and I have no idea what is going on. One minute, I was ministering, and the next thing I knew, I was seeing lights, and the world was spinning. When it stopped, I was here with my hands tied together and this guy was attacking me. I think I’ve been kidnapped!” Ever the voice of reason, Mieszko began walking and calmly explained to Jonathan that he had not been kidnapped. He inquired as to the essential details of Jonathan’s time travel, and Jonathan tried to explain everything as he remembered it.

Jonathan struggled against the knotted ropes that bound his hands and spleenfully regressed evermore into a corybantic demeanor. Mieszko suggested to Jonathan that he would try to untie the ropes, but the

effort was to no avail. Jonathan, never jovial or rollock, did not even seem to appreciate his effort, while Mieszko admired the skills of the unknown person who had the ability to truss the knot.

In an astringent tone, Jonathan spoke about wandering off and finding his own way. He would vilipend them all, with no concern for the ill Lora and no desire to associate with Mieszko or Jamison. Mieszko, always perspicacious, walked with Jonathan a short distance from the others to expostulate with him regarding the dire consequences of going out alone. Convinced that he had a better chance of getting back home with the three, Jonathan reluctantly stepped onto the pages of their adventure holding onto his faith that the desinence would soon come.

Soon, they found a café that was still open, and they sat at a table on the sidewalk. Holding hands with Jamison, Lora sat quietly, waiting for her tea. Jamison could feel the excitement in his stomach as he looked at their interlaced fingers, and he marveled at the contrast between their mismatched skin color and the perfect union of their hearts and minds. As they sat, Mieszko attempted to make sense of the situation. “From what I can surmise, I believe the what that

binds you is called the "Gordian Knot." A legend of Phrygian Gordium, associated with Alexander the Great, the Gordian Knot is a metaphor for an intractable problem, solved only by a bold stroke. In other words, to remove the knot, you must perform some sort of act that may not readily come to your mind. Think of it as a puzzle. I do not believe we can cut it or burn it off. A power has bound you, and you alone, will have to remove it," Mieszko said with clarity and directness. "To sever is to sever. There is no half cut through," he continued, ever the philosopher. "Without going into a lengthy history of the Gordian Knot, I can tell you that no one could loosen the original knot, except one man. That man was Alexander, who went on to conquer the world and rule all of Asia. But, I will assure you that it is not impossible. The knot is a puzzle, and Alexander was a student of Aristotle and a master of puzzles." "You must know something about puzzles?" Jamison asked Miesko. "I am but a mere scribe," the monk humbly admitted. He continued, "However, if a person does not limit himself to the tools of a ruler and compass, he can solve the problem of squaring a circle. Using a ruler and compass, you cannot construct a square with the same area as a given circle. But, it is not impossible. Perhaps Alexander was able to see that the Gordian Knot could not be untied simply by manipulating the

rope. For Alexander, perhaps the sword was sharper than the pen, and he realized that the ends had been spliced together, wrapping the rope around itself somehow.”

Taking a drink of tea, Lora said, “Li twò cho. The tea is too hot.”

As her pupils dilated, she spoke clear English and went into a trance.

Her eyes stared into nothingness, “The ankh, the key of life, that great strength is the crux ansata.” At that, she abruptly stopped, and as quickly as her trance had interrupted things, it kindly relaxed. It appeared that Lora didn’t even know it had occurred.

“OK, that was just plain weird,” Jamison said, needing some explanation. He tilted his head back to get the last drop of tea, thinking the cup was far too small. He became aware that he didn’t trust Jonathan at all, and he kept his eyes firmly fixed on the preacher. As that realization dawned on him, Mieszko continued with his explanation, “The knot on Jonathan may not necessarily represent the Gordian Knot. Yes, it is a puzzle, but it may represent the “ankh,” which resembles the Christian cross with the exception of the knot at the top. The knot seems unresolvable, something requiring a solution of genius design. This Hieroglyphic sign has always been a puzzle. I believe the true meaning rests in the Ankh. It is more of

a sandal strap with a loop at the top forming the strap. Remember, this is an evolving mystery.”

“Well, just grand! What does that have to do with our present journey? Are you actually talking about a shoe? What does that have to do with anything?” Jamison said, derogatorily. Lora suddenly interjected, “It means run. Ann ale!” “Oh God, she means it. Let’s go!” exclaimed Jamison. Out of his peripheral vision, he saw the approaching danger. Lora was already on her feet and dragging Jamison. Most people surprised by an enemy might have quailed in the light of this new threat. Yet this ectopic attack was apparent right away. The black car stopped at the street corner, just a half a block away, and suddenly, four men with very large guns jumped out. They appeared to be very determined and dedicated to the task at hand – eliminating all trace of the travelers’ existence. Bearing in mind that they were in grave danger, everyone understood that this was a foot race for their lives. These men meant business.

Jamison held Lora’s hand in a death grip and moved his powerful legs so hard and fast that she was more falling forward than running. Still, she yelled, “Pi vit!” “I agree,” said Mieszko, “Faster! Brick

wall, brick wall...we must find a wall!" Mieszko shouted, ordering his troop while placing each foot in front of the other with deliberate intent. Jamison was amazed at Mieszko's speed and agility. He was matching him step for step. Running like foxes from the hounds, the four desperately searched for a way out of this predicament. Their hearts pounded through their chests. Inside each of them, the hypoxic drive was kicking in, and their oxygen supply was depleting. They were all laboring to breathe, and the bad guys were still coming, in seemingly effortless pursuit! Like a scene out of Buster Keaton's 1925 silent movie, "Seven Chances," the pursued group ran as if they were only one step ahead of an avalanche. Lora yelled, "HERE! HERE! HERE!" and abruptly turned, nearly falling down. But, like an acrobat, she caught herself and managed to stay on her feet. The others also turned to see a brick wall within the hidden alleyway. Turning simultaneously, they shot down the alley, never missing a beat. Standing in front of the wall, Mieszko reached up and removed a brick, and the wall began to glow red.

For a brief moment, like time compressed, relief flooded them like a waterfall, and they felt safe believing they had escaped the grasping intended machinations. Jonathan, as confused as ever and not at all

intrigued, had run only because the others had. He was as lost as the sinners to whom he preached in his real life. He strained to make sense of this desperate situation, but senses played no part in this world. To Jonathan the Street Preacher, the senses were a plague, a vile manifestation of the flesh birthed in the Garden of Eden seven thousand years ago.

He truly believed that there was no reason to accept anything but the Spirit. Yes, the Spirit had encouraged him to run, so he had run with the infidels. That was how he justified his current predicament.

Unfortunately, the pursuers had also spotted the alley and were now at the entrance. As the wall melted away and the four stepped through, shots rang out like hand-claps against the ear. Blinding lights flashed the echoes of the gun-shots that rang in their heads, but they became more distant with each second. Pushed through by the panicked trio, Mieszko was unsure whether everyone had made it into the wormhole. Everything happened so quickly! In the same way a mother gives birth, the travelers, now safely entombed in the time portal, were suddenly expelled from the other end to face whatever new dangers awaited. As if being bled sober, the group shook the cobwebs from their heads and gathered their bearings. They awakened like newborn

babies from the safety of heaven, delicate and distraught. Depression was caving in on them and they were groggy from the jump. They rolled around on the ground like baby wild animals needing the comfort of their mothers' milk.

Mieszko obviously had the most experience with time travel, and he was the first to regain his composure. However, he was not the first to speak. "Wow! You certainly were Johnny on the spot with that shoot-through-time trick. Any idea where we are now?" Jamison asked, while tending to Lora. She was rubbing her eyes, her brain scarcely able to process the new surroundings. Quietly, she quoted, "Nigra sum sed Formosa." Still transfixed, she translated her own Latin, "I am black, but comely." "She is revealing what she saw in her vision, and to break it down, I would simply say, 'In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek; all are one in Christ,'" Mieszko said, thanking God with outstretched arms. Jonathan was still bound by the knot that seemed to get no tighter or looser. "What is going on?" he asked, dazed more so than the others. He was becoming claustrophobic from the bindings. "Yemen," Mieszko said, with extreme confidence. "As a matter of fact, this is Aden, a seaport town. The oldest part of the city is known as the "Crater," because it lies in the crater of an extinct volcano.

This is where we should explore.” “Will going there help to take these ropes off my wrists?” asked the preacher with a splash of languor attached to his voice. Jamison eyed Jonathan. He did not care for him whatsoever. He would never see him as an avuncular figure, and he couldn’t resist saying, “If that rope was around your neck, I’d be happy to drag you along.” “Now, that’s not funny,” Lora said, swatting Jamison on the shoulder. Jonathan simply ignored the comment. Jonathan pulled awkwardly at the knot and even thought about applying his teeth to it, but the knot was stubborn. Although it didn’t become more restrictive, it didn’t loosen and was becoming increasingly bothersome. To please Lora, Jamison broke off the sarcasm, but he definitely had no use for Jonathan. He remembered that he had rubbed him the wrong way in another time and dimension, and like Jonathan, Jamison was a man who held a grudge. He had always wished to be a more forgiving man, but sadly, a disdain for certain disagreeable people persisted in his life.

“Can anyone tell me why we were being shot at and who was doing the shooting,” Jonathan asked?

“The only answer I can provide is a vague explanation,” the monk

smiled kindly and responded. "You claim to be a spiritual man, a man of God enlightened by divine revelation, so maybe you can appreciate what I am about to tell you. Long ago, something of mine was stolen. I am here in this place and time to find it, retrieve it and make my peace with God and the universe. Most of all I desire inner peace. There are many forces behind us and ahead of us that will stop at nothing to prevent me from locating what belongs to me, what is part of me. These forces have names, like greed, malice, envy, lust, hate, bitterness and wrath. The force is pure evil and wicked and is not a dream or figment of the imagination. This force that seeks our destruction and demise is very real."

Jonathan could see the conviction in the monk's eyes and the truthfulness in his tone. For reasons that he did not even understand, he put aside his independence and opted to regard Mieszko's word as gospel.

As the strange quartet walked into the commercial part of the city, they received plenty of hard stares. While they attempted to remain nonchalant, they felt terribly conspicuous. The natural landscape was mostly sand. Great sandstone cliffs stretched across ancient plateaus

a mile high. All the landscape was red-orange, tinted as iron, and there was very little foliage. They passed by some citrus trees and a few stands of flowers. An ominous, but beautiful, red-blossomed vine tree climbed a distant wall. Mieszko went into one of the shops that sold traditional garb and immediately emerged, motioning for his comrades to come inside. Soon they were all slipping into clothing that Mieszko had acquired from the shopkeeper, for which he paid a handsome sum. Due to Jonathan's constriction, he was forced to don a poncho-like garment over his suit. After some maneuvering, the garment finally fell in place, and he found himself grateful for the dress because it made his predicament less noticeable. The last thing the Pentacostal preacher wanted was to be noticed by the Islamic locals. Along the way, they passed spectacular fruit markets that were full of such delightful goodies as bananas, oranges, very ripe plums and squeezable grapefruits of every color under the sun. They passed fig shops that sold smoky and salted cheeses and homemade sesame oil.

Now in the customary clothing that resembled long robes, they could better blend with the townspeople. Women wore veils, and the tiny part of Lora's skin that could be seen around her teal-colored eyes

met the complexion of others in the city. The local tea shops were packed with weathered old men sipping Qishr, made from coffee husk, Mokha, and the aromatic Harasi. They stopped at a small restaurant, and ate hummus dip with fresh lime juice and bread. Traffic in the city was disorganized and chaotic. Vehicles were driven wildly, and it did not appear as if the citizens of Aden obeyed traffic lights or rules of the road. Camels and donkey carts moved in the same streets as automotive traffic. Jamison thought Lora to be the very definition of the word, “exotic” in her black abaya, that revealed only her hypnotic eyes. It distracted him from watching the local men chew baseball-sized Qut, which they stuffed in their cheeks. Nearby, an old woman, face unveiled, watered a pack of dogs.

Now less in the spotlight, they ventured forward on foot to the volcano, feeling somewhat relieved. At first glance, it seemed to Jamison, as they passed by the shops and street vendors, that the Islamic democracy was thriving. With all the hustle and bustle, it was impossible to tell that the unemployment rate was, in reality, almost 50% of the population. In such unfamiliar territory, he was also unaware of the thousands of refugees who had come to Yemen from Africa, believing they were escaping one unwanted fate, only to end up

as beggars and scavengers in the new environment. One white-haired man said in Arabic, "I have a large family. Help me, and Allah will help you." Although Jamison couldn't understand the language, the air of desperation in the man's voice was palpable. The dire nature of the situation was continually coming to light, and this realization dawned on Jamison as he saw women holding their babies up to car windows hoping that they could muster some sympathy from the drivers. An intense sadness overcame him as he took in the scenery, and his perception of the place was rapidly changing. He realized that there was just so much wrong when he really looked. The suffering in the streets was hard to ignore, even in the overall magnificence of this ancient land. Though concealed and unbeknownst to the travelers, the true atrocities lay in the forced labor and sexual exploitation of women and children. Without solid laws, human trafficking would only grow worse.

In contrast, Jonathan held these people in contempt, believing them to be solely responsible for their lot in life. Had they simply accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as was rightfully depicted in his Bible, they could be living the good life with the promise of heaven at the end of the day. Instead, he saw a people whom he believed to be unaware,

unenlightened and bound for a hell that he taught burned with a literal and eternal fire. There was just no way that these heathens, with their false gods, could ever be brought to repentance to accept the One True God of Israel who would usher in salvation for those who would only believe. No, these disbelievers had seemingly decided that eternity in hell with Satan was the better option, and Jonathan was steadfast in his belief that they would forever suffer, burning day and night, with no hope for any peace. Jonathan knew that some may believe this philosophy to be ruthless, but to him, it was simple deliverance of justice. The fact that these people were in desperate need could not be denied, but they were clearly just playing to the sympathy of the public.

It didn't take long to maneuver along the streets as they made their way to Crater, Aden's oldest district. Despite the obvious poverty lying under the surface, there was so much to admire in the mix of ancient architectural artistry. The smell of incense wafted through the Yemenite, Indian and Victorian-styled city, permeating every crevice. Behind them was a collection of little villages. Jamison noticed several mosques that were in direct contradiction to the bevy of bridges and signs pointing to the tourist traps along which they

sat. The four walked along – The Monk, The Key, The Oracle, and now, The Puzzle. A chilling wind caught them from time to time, and they felt pity for the families they saw crouching for shelter in foxholes along the parched, scabrous earth. From their vantage point, the four of them could see how fortified the city stood, with its watchtowers and miles of seemingly endless brick walls. Jamison couldn't help but remark, "At least, we can take comfort in the fact that we should have no trouble if we need a quick escape." Mieszko, again deep in thought, said to Jamison, "Let me see the tattoo of that tree on your back. I am missing something here." They were now secluded, so Jamison slipped off his robe for Mieszko to examine the tree and the dozens of engrafted images within it. As he looked over the tattoo, Mieszko touched Jamison's back with his index finger, "This elephant here represents our destination. We must make our way through the plateaus of the Shamsan Range past the "Tower of Silence" to the Tawila tanks. We must explore everything before we reach the end of our destination.

The "Tower of Silence" was at the top of a small hill overlooking Crater. It consisted of a pillar situated at the center of two walled rings. In times past, it had been used as a funeral ground for Indian

immigrants, adept in the Zoroastrian cult. The “Tawila Tanks,” also known as the “Aden Tanks,” the “Cisterns,” the “Queen of Sheba Tanks,” or “Solomon’s Tanks,” were located at the head of Tawila Valley, in the southwest corridor of Crater. The system of tanks was designed to both collect the scarce rain water, and to divert run-off to protect the city from heavy rains and sweeping floods. They were excavated from solid rock and lined with a thick coat of fine stucco, resembling marble. “Are we near our ‘final destination?’ Where is it?” asked Jonathan. “Elephant Bay,” replied Mieszko. “But first, we must explore this area. I cannot explain it, but I feel drawn to it.” “What area?” Jamison asked, since there was nothing in the immediate vicinity. Ever cryptic, Mieszko replied, “This way.”

Mieszko set off, and they followed. It did not take long for them to locate a remote cave that would have been virtually impossible to find had Mieszko not felt the force beckoning him. His route in finding it would have seemed senseless even to the locals. The volcanic lava formations were a twisted, molten jumble. Many of the formations were like sculptures depicting the agonized faces desperately trying to free themselves. Distorted and stretched, they appeared exhausted in their endless struggle, straining with all their might to squeeze free

from the rock inferno. Tiny streams trickled from the faces like tears. They were dejected, lost souls whose last effort failed because their strength was just gone. Suddenly, Mieszko looked at Lora, “We are here because of you.” “Me?” she replied, clearly surprised. “Yes, the references on Jamison’s body and the words that you spoke in your trance have brought us to the trail of the Queen of Sheba. Are you familiar?” asked Mieszko. “OK! Wait a minute, brother!” Jonathan was in full Pentacostal frenzy. “Are you telling me that, because this guy defiled his body, the temple of the Holy Ghost, and because this black woman mumbled a few words, we are in this place, searching for something that you aren’t even sure is here? Need I remind you that we are in a Rag Head country, breathing Muslim air? This is just crazy! God, help me. I feel so unclean!!

Outrageous! Father, deliver me from this hell I’m enduring!” His self-righteousness was building at an astounding rate. The atmosphere became polarized and flagrant, and an undermining spirit suddenly loomed over the group.

Jamison was a disciplined man, both gifted and talented, but when Jonathan uttered the racial slur with such bile, it was more than he could take. He forgot his tolerant attitude, and his patience

instantly dissipated. “Hold on! Dude, I don’t know what your problem is, but if you don’t want a swollen eye and a limp to go along with your bound wrists, then I’d shut your pie hole!” With emotions running high, Jonathan postured himself in a menacing stance, “Yeah, tough guy! You blindsided me in the park, and now, you act like I should be scared of you? If my hands weren’t tied, I’d give you a lesson in hillbilly kick-butt – fueled by the power of Jesus Christ Almighty!” Jamison was strong and long-limbed. He almost had to stifle a chuckle as he made a move toward Jonathan so quickly that only a monk with supernatural abilities could have stopped him.

Lightning fast, but ever patient, Mieszko stepped between the two men, “Brothers, please! We are a long way from home. We are being pursued by men who obviously want us dead, and the only way home now is with these eight pages of me in our hands. Otherwise, our homeland is closed to us.” He stood there, both humble and regal, in the middle of the conflict. “What does that mean? Our homeland is closed to us?” Jamison asked, taking a deep breath and temporarily deflating. “We can go to a lot of places, see different lands and ages of the past and, maybe, the future, but to return to the present as you know it is impossible without those pages. You see, once we entered the wormhole, our bodies accelerated. Many have suggested that it is

impossible to travel at the speed of light, but when a body accelerates to close to light speed, the object's mass increases exponentially. We know that mass is the quantitative or numerical measure of a body's inertia, or resistance to acceleration. Inertia concerns Newton's first law, which states that an object at rest will stay at rest forever as long as nothing pushes or pulls it, and, likewise, an object in motion will stay in motion, traveling in a straight line forever until something disrupts it. Jonathan, sounding more panicked by the second, abruptly interrupted Mieszko, "For the love of Sweet Baby Jesus, get to the point! Can we go home, or can't we?!" He stood there with a sullen expression on his face, feeling very discouraged, as though the knot holding his wrists was there to stay. Always the voice of serenity, Mieszko replied, "Without those pages, we do not have the ability to move in that direction. You see, we do not have the force to go in the direction that we need to in order to go home. We are now in a constant state of being "lowered down." Thus, we could roll downward, as a marble would on a slanted floor. Those pages will propel us "upward" to break the plane of time and return us to our present time. Right now, we exist on a perfectly level plane. We are stationary, while time moves by us."

Three discouraged faces stared at Mieszko, desperately seeking hope.

“You three must stop dwelling on the negative. A house divided against itself cannot stand.” “We are not one house! I am not part of this house!” Jonathan said, still defiant and continually twisting the knot. “Then, do your own thing, preacher! Go forth with your faith, and stand on the street corner of this Islamic state. Preach your little heart out, and see how many converts you get before they cut off your head!” Jamison was now using his “outside” voice. “Brothers, this is getting us nowhere. We do not need to shed blood today,” Mieszko said, standing his ground.

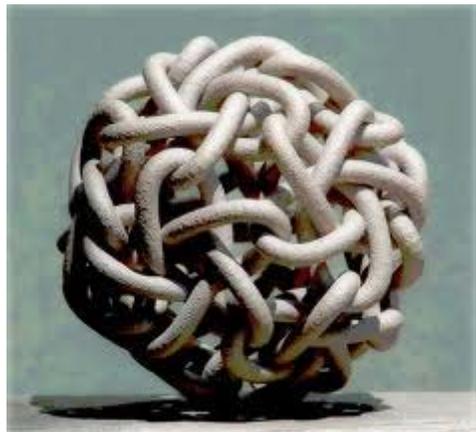
Lora focused on Jonathan, and in the strongest Kreyol accent imaginable, she said, “Pran van.” Still wild with fury, Jonathan said, “What does she want? What did the ‘Queen of Sheba’ say?” In his rant, he was now exhibiting the behaviors of the sinners he claimed to have been saving. “She said, ‘Go outside, and get some air,’” replied Mieszko. “Fine. Let’s just get on with it,” Jonathan said, still very angry. “We cannot afford dissention. A wrong move now will mean our demise,” Mieszko said and poked his forefinger through the gunshot in the tail of Jamison’s suit jacket. “Look at this. Let this remind you of our close call. No fixation! Keep your eyes open, and expect anything,” he continued. With obvious division and mistrust among the

group, they resumed the journey, but any idea of unity was lost. As they walked, Jonathan's attention was repeatedly drawn to the rope. Why wouldn't it loosen? Why was he the only person tied up like this? The questions were endless. Mieszko whispered in Lora's ear, "Mordentes in silentio." Somehow, she understood the words. "Biting in silence."

CHAPTER 17 – NEW BEGINNINGS

From small beginnings come great things. ~American Proverb

After exploring the cave, Jonathan sat alone, resting. He was caught up in the mystical reasons for his wrists being imprisoned, and he began to come to some conclusions. It was not the material that was important; that was really just a metaphor. Rather, it was the concept. Minus the mathematics, scientific test-tube theories and all other suppositions, the knot constituted something simplistic that they were all missing. Lost in his thoughts, he watched Jamison stand guard.



Out of earshot, Mieszko and Lora sat on a rock engaged in a deep conversation.

“I believe we will find something in this cave that will be used at Elephant Bay. As its name suggests, that rock formation resembles an elephant’s trunk. Jamison has the elephant inked into his back, and according to legend, the Queen of Sheba led an army while riding an elephant against Alexander the Great. As a result of her efforts, he withdrew his troops. Of course, it is only a legend, but then again, no one would believe our stories, either, would they?” asked Mieszko, smiling. Lora replied, “I have dreams of precious stones, spices and incense. I have seen floors of glass flowing with water. I have seen the Ark of the Covenant, and I have seen a great horn blowing. Now, I see a church with the name, “Raguel Church in Addis Ababa.” She seemed at peace with her dreams. At the mention of the church, Mieszko sat up a bit taller, “This is a church in Ethiopia.”

Lora continued to share her revelations, “In my visions, I am reminded of my skin burning black and of hearing words of wisdom after traveling to the ends of the earth. This is like a memory for me. From that time on, I feel as though the sun was put aside for the love of God. I feel I have been here before, but I also feel disconnected from the past.” Mieszko sensed that Lora was becoming unclear of her destiny. Taking her hand, he spoke

gently, “Lora, at first, I thought the horn may be the horns of the altar, but the horns of the altar, much like the modern image of Christ Jesus today, have become a graven image. The horn you hear blowing in your visions is, I believe, none other than the ‘Horn of Africa.’ I am almost certain that we shall be visiting Ethiopia on our next time warp.” As he spoke, his gaze went to a faraway place and time, and he said, “Teneo te, Africa,” meaning, “I hold you, Africa.”

During the next few hours, the troop explored the catacombs, leaving no stone unturned, and yet, with very little sunlight left streaming through the cracks in the ancient pitted rocks overhead, the four travelers had uncovered nothing. Feeling discouraged, they were ready to call it a day when Jonathan suddenly exclaimed, “Got something here!” At this, everyone came running.

When they converged, he was kneeling on the ground with his bound hands resting on a box. “I was moving some of these stones, and when I rolled this one back, I found a hidden shelf behind one of the larger ones. This box was sitting on it.” Reminded of the horrible scene in the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” in which the Angel of Death flew from the Ark of the Covenant to everyone’s demise, he gladly handed the box over to

Mieszko. "Let me just step back a few feet," he said, as Lora took Jamison's hand in hers. Mieszko hardly noticed, as he was in the throes of a new revelation, "Jonathan, your knot! It has occurred to me that it clearly represents the Torus Tube, a symbol for unity of the consciousness with the universe!" Jonathan eyed Mieszko with great interest as the monk struck a nerve in the heart of the preacher. "Look at the clear oval shapes," Mieszko pointed out, running his finger over the knots. "What does it mean, though?" Jonathan felt as if he could be closer to learning how to get back home; yet, his helpless soul reached out to any voice. "These three shapes may represent the positive, the negative and neutrality. This knot is for you, Jonathan, to enlighten you in difficult times. Though its mystic power may be denied by you because of your faith, I believe that, if you will embrace it rather than struggle against it, a renewed sense of faith and energy will be revealed in your life," Mieszko Understanding, Lora chimed in, "Yes, I see! everything into one." Jonathan was perplexed, and his mind worked arduously as he tried to place the conscious currents and the unconscious together as one.

As if in a dream, Jonathan was overwhelmed with a feeling of calm serenity and trust, a sensation unlike anything he had ever experienced. "Jonathan, it is coming to me. Your cells are in a rhythmic flow. Allow it to consume

you,” Mieszko encouraged. The box was the size of a shoe box with a thick, wax-like seal keeping it tightly closed. It had been resting in its nook for possibly centuries, undetected and waiting for this day. It was in its secret refuge, out of sight, calling out until its rescuer could free it from the wall and reveal its contents. Desperate measures would have caused someone to go to such lengths to secure it. “This is the Axumite King Ezana from the Axumite Kingdom. He was the first monarch to have embraced Christianity,” informed Mieszko. “What does the inscription say?” asked Jamison. “TOYTOAPECHTHXWPA – ‘May this please the people,’” interpreted Mieszko. He attempted to remove the seal with his hands but failed. Unable to budge it, he handed the box to Jamison, who used all of his might to rip off the seal, but again, to no avail. He looked to Jonathan, who was trembling, polarized from the entire experience. Lora paid no attention to the preacher as she pulled the machete from her backpack. “Lay it on the ground,” she instructed. Once the box was on the ground, she struck the seal with the machete – a perfect, dead-on strike – but the blade ricocheted. The seal was not even creased, although she could feel the vibration from the impact all the way through her shoulder, “This is an odd, very odd, type of Jonathan, who was watching things from afar, suddenly stepped forward, “Let me try.”

He took the cleaver from Lora and, kneeling down, gave it a hard whack.

Nothing. His

countenance went bleak, his eyes defeated. In support, Lora said, "Fe anko."

"You heard the woman, 'hamartia,' strike it again," instructed Mieszko.

"The surface is resonating like atomic heat waves. The central core of the seal is weakening, and if you can manage this seal, Jonathan, you will reveal the physical ends of the universe to your soul," Mieszko added. Jonathan drew back and, with both hands awkwardly gripping the cutlass, came down with another blow. Once again, the stubborn seal held firm.

Becoming more excited, Lora again shouted, "Fe anko!" "Perpetual motion, my son. Release your energy flow!" Mieszko was now about as excited as anyone had ever seen him. Again, Jonathan brought the blade down onto the seal, and the third time proved to be the charm, for the seal cracked.

Reaching down, he made eye contact with Mieszko, as if to ask for permission. "Go ahead, my friend. You were worthy enough to break the seal; you should open the box," replied Mieszko.

Slowly, Jonathan raised the lid. With great enthusiasm, Lora called out, "Bam' gade!"

Jonathan and Lora peered directly into the box, while Mieszko and Jonathan looked over their shoulders. A hint of lemon aroma emanated

from the opened box. The inside was adorned in silk. It contained frankincense, myrrh and a gold coin with the seal of Axumite King Ezana, the first Christian king of Ethiopia. Stamped on the coin was the image of a small carved ivory horn. Lora was now giving instructions. "These three items are symbolic; they are magical and medicinal.

The frankincense is used for the cleansing of death and evil in the spiritual world. The myrrh is a disinfectant, and it represents suffering. It was used in the days before bodies were embalmed. A corpse was wrapped in myrrh. Christ was offered myrrh and wine while He was on the cross, and Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, along with linen cloths, to prepare His body for burial. The gold represents wealth or royalty. Remember, Hiram, king of Tyre, and the Queen of Sheba, both brought this precious metal to Solomon."

Jonathan suddenly sat down with a great thud. "Something is wrong here. I feel weird,"

he said, concern penciled upon his face. He began to feel the numbness spreading through

his bones, and his skin began to crawl. His body flushed with hypertension as he showed

signs of acute peripheral edema. His fingers began swelling with symptoms of clubbing, or Eisenmenger's syndrome. His mouth became dry, and his tongue was swelling. He fell into the fetal position and began rocking back and forth with his fingers interlaced and hands clasped tightly together. His breathing became labored, and his skin was slowly turning cyanotic from the lack of oxygen. His body began to spasm as he prostrated himself on the ground in a prone position. As this occurred, the knotted rope began magically twisting around his wrists and smoking as if hydrochloric acid had been poured over it. The air was filled with a burning odor, and there was a sudden, blinding flash of light. The others could feel the heat singe the ambient air. They were completely blinded for a split second, and then, darkness. Silence. Coolness.

As their eyesight adjusted, they could see no trace of Jonathan. He had simply vanished, whisked away through his own personal portal. They stood in shock and quiet as they attempted to wrap their minds around the situation. Solemnly, Lora spoke, "Pa gen anko." "You are correct, Lora. There is no more," Mieszko replied. Still unbelieving, she said, "Ki kote liale?" "Let us pray that he has returned to where he belonged with an open mind and loving heart," Mieszko said. Jamison, who had no love loss for Jonathan, changed the mood, "Well now, wasn't that exciting?! Guess we

ought to take this box and get out of here before we evaporate into thin air as well.” Still sad, Lora defended the preacher, “Jonathan had a good soul, but he was brought up in the ways of man. This experience will be like the ricochet of a gun. Many will be affected by the velocity of this moment. Jonathan is on a new path, and we are better for meeting him.” Jamison looked at Lora with just enough guilt in his heart to make his mouth open, “I agree. Maybe I was too harsh on the old preacher. He did try to save my life.

I just hope he becomes the miracle man he thought that he was.” “I think we witnessed the birth of the miracle man today. Jonathan faded away from this world because his mission to open something for us that we had no power to open was accomplished by his hands. We can barely perceive the great things his short stay with us has brought. He opened a box that is instrumental in moving us forward, and in doing so, he dissolved from this world to only reappear wherever it is that he belongs,” Mieszko reassured them.

“We go now to the ‘Elephant’s Trunk’ at the bay. If my calculations are correct, we will know what to do when we get there. These items are all valuable, so Lora, you are in charge of them. They must make it to the

‘Elephant’s Trunk.’” Mieszko led the way out of the cave and marched onward to the Gulf of Aden. Lora pulled her veil around her face so that only her eyes were revealed. “Elephant Bay” was a good walk back the way they had come, and Jamison and Mieszko walked ahead of Lora. Pretending to check on Lora, Mieszko glanced over his shoulder, but he actually wanted to make sure he could speak to Jamison without being overheard. “You have great feelings for Lora, do you not?” asked Mieszko. Jamison was surprised by the question, “Yes, I suppose that I do.” “I do not know how all of this will conclude. I have somewhat selfish reasons for being here. My soul has been stolen, as we have discussed. As odd as it sounds, it boils down to mere pages of a book that I must return to the whole.” He continued, as Jamison listened intently, “I know my reasons for being here and what I hope the end will bring, but for the rest of you, I know nothing other than that you are to assist me on this journey. Have you had any visions or revelations thus far?” inquired Mieszko. For every bit of two seconds, Jamison racked his brain and answered, “Nope.” “Well, that is why I am afraid for you, Rudolph. Lora is seeing the future, our future, here and now. Once what she sees is fulfilled, our journey will be finished. In other words, if you have feelings for her after all is said and done, now is the time to find out if her visions of herself include you.” Mieszko stopped, leaving Jamison with something to consider.

Jamison realized that many cultural differences existed between he and Lora. He assumed that Lora's roots were in special Jamaican cuisines. He was not fond of Jerk Chicken or Red Stripe Beer; he was a meat-and-potatoes guy. He didn't understand Reggae music; he loved hard rock.

He was a Christian, and all he knew about Jamaicans was that they were involved in Rastafarianism, and he wasn't even sure what that was. Still, he figured it would be a much easier transition for him to conform to her customs rather than Lora to his, if, indeed, she did foresee a future with him. Yet, he wasn't sure what either of them would be conforming to in the end. As he pondered, he fell back in rank with Lora. "Lora, I wanted to ask you some things if it's OK?" Jamison said, "You have a gift for so many things. I am convinced that, if you are not a Nubian Queen, you must be a descendant. I know you can foresee future events. With that being said, do you see me in your future?"

Jamison felt very child-like in asking such a question. She stopped, immediately lowered her veil, and with melody, quoted these lyrics:

"If you a star, I be your milky way;

If you a bar, I drink up everyday;

If you the town, I be the talk;

If you the talk, Baby, I be the walk;

If you wanna dig, I be your gold, Baby;

If you wanna live, I be your old age;

You be the time, I be the clock;

You be the tick, I be the tock;

If you wanna race, I run like crazy;

If you wanna ride, I drive ya daily;

If you a beach, I be the sand;

You wanna give, I be your hand;

You got me Stuck to you;

If you a case, I be a jury;

If you a sin, I be your mercy;

If you a beat, I be the moves;

If you a tree, Baby, I be the roots;

If you made for walkin', I be your boots;

If you a bride, I be your wedding;

If you a soul, I be your Otis Redding;

If you a verse, I be your song;

If you a king, I be your kong;

Stick it to me good now, Baby, I'm stuck to you."

“Nikka Costa from the CD, Pebble to a Pearl,” she said, kissing him passionately on the lips. Smiling, Jamison assumed that was a good answer. The three of them passed by the Cisterns of Tawila, which are 13 water tanks varying in shape with a combined capacity of about 19 million gallons of water. They were originally designed to catch rain water and divert run-off from the city of Crater. Normally, these would have been a point of interest for any tourist, but with more pressing business on their minds, the trio had little time for site-seeing. Food was at the forefront of everyone’s mind, and this fact gave cause to stop and taste many different fresh fruits and local teas. Because they were so far from their next location, they were obligated to use public transportation. They would travel an incredible distance from Tawila through Mualla, which was to the west. From there, they would head just east of Gold Mohor, to Elephant Bay. Upon arrival, they checked into the Sheraton Gold Mohur Hotel & Resort because of the late hour. They were all in agreement that nothing could be gained by venturing into the night and climbing about on rocks. In 1992, this hotel had been attacked by terrorists, killing two guests. These days, the resort was busy with tourists, and the three believed that their imminent danger came only from their personal

hunters – not Islamic Radical Fascists. They sat together in Mieszko's hotel room discussing the events of the day and what they should expect tomorrow.

Lora and Jamison listened as Mieszko laid out the plan, "The 'Land of Punt' is where we are headed tomorrow. Maybe we will have some time to enjoy some delicious dorot wot. I am also certain that we will visit Ethiopia, but first, we will pay a visit to the 'Elephant's Trunk.'"

Mieszko put his elbows on the small dinette table. "The Land of Punt is your territory, Lora. From all our recent activities, I am convinced that you are a direct heir to the throne of the Queen of Sheba. Regardless of the legends, right or wrong in their facts, you are of that lineage,"

Mieszko's eyes glowed as he was deducing and surmising. The puzzle was coming together. "Forgive me for not understanding my own heritage, but where in the Bible can the 'Land of Punt' be found?" asked Lora, being more assertive. Mieszko quoted Nahum 3:9, "Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Punt and Lubim were thy helpers."

He continued with a history lesson. “‘Ta Netjeru,’ meaning Land of the Gods, is the Land of Punt. It has been said that Africa holds the original location of the Garden of Eden. I believe the Ark of the Covenant also finds its home there. Some suggest that Chartres Cathedral in northern France houses the Ark, but that is so much wishful thinking by the French. Africa possesses unexplainable wonders that those in the west will never know.”

Lora smiled broadly at Jamison as he sat taking in all that Mieszko was teaching. The three talked well into the morning. Finally, Mieszko reminded them that they should rest, because they would be rising to face their next adventure in just a few hours. Even though their time in dreamland was short, they all desperately needed some rest. After waking, they quickly showered, retrieved their clothes from the hotel cleaners and headed to breakfast, where they feasted on Khmir, sweet square donuts, and hot tea with milk. Feeling rejuvenated, they resumed their quest.

Suddenly, Jonathan was surrounded by his congregation. There were thirty plus people in suits and long dresses crowding around him as he attempted to focus his eyes and move his extremities. “Brother Edwards!” A high-pitched female voice repeatedly pierced his hearing.

“Brother Edwards, are you well?” Finally, he managed to mumble, “Yes, I am good.” Two ushers helped him to his feet. Jonathan eyeballed the room and asked, “What did you see? What happened?” Silence among the congregation. Stepping forward, a sister in a red dress spoke out in a small voice, “You disappeared. Then, you reappeared.” Without flinching or questioning her statement, he simply asked, “How long was I gone?” Then, he examined his wrists and noticed that the knot had disappeared, leaving no marks or evidence that he had ever been bound.

“You vanished and then reappeared in seconds,” answered another of his followers. Jonathan said nothing about his travels. He simply walked out of the church, leaving the congregation perplexed and wondering if they had really witnessed what their eyes had registered. Still stunned, his wife gathered her purse and Bible and followed him to the car.

On the drive home, neither Jonathan nor his wife spoke a word. As they arrived at their modest, ranch-style house, Jonathan’s wife was reminded of the proverb, “Don’t talk unless you can improve the silence.” She was a modest woman who felt empowered when the Holy Spirit would fill her being at the church meetings. But, other than those spiritual episodes when the Lord compelled her to shout and dance, she never purposely drew

attention to herself. She was plain, wore no makeup or jewelry, and she always wore long skirts – never pants. She would feel exposed and naked if her uncut hair was not up in a bun or if she was not wearing her full-length skirt. With unending thoughts racing through their brains, they restrained themselves for the sake of the unknown, hardly acknowledging one another even with a glance.

A Turkish proverb also states, “Coffee should be black as hell, strong as death, and sweet as love.” Their residence was now filled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. “Do you want to talk about it?” she said, putting the query into the open. “I have been wrong...so very wrong,” Jonathan replied, putting his head down on the kitchen table. “Wrong about what, dear?” she asked, concerned. “I know this is impossible to believe, but I just came back from Yemen, where I was transported through time just an hour ago. And, guess who I was there with?” Before she could reply, he answered his own question, “Do you remember that fella I helped out on the road who had the accident, and when I got to the hospital, no one knew where he had gone?” Once again, she remained quiet, afraid to interrupt. “I was travelling through time with him, a monk and a black girl from Jamaica. We were looking for some pages of a book.” “Pages of a book?” She was trying to be

sympathetic. She now had to doubt what she had seen with her own eyes back in the church. He sounded like a mad man. The doubt in her heart now saddened her, but how could she possibly believe such a tall tale? She wasn't about to become quarrelsome and argumentative with him, but such a controversial story was debatable and subject to much discussion. "According to this monk, the pages of the book represent his soul, and he has to find them, for the fate of the world is at stake." Realizing how crazy all this must sound, Jonathan just stopped and held his head in his hands.

"Honey, I'm not sure what happened or what you think may have happened, but maybe you need some time to sort this out." His wife went to the cabinet and brought down two cups.

On one, the words, "The joy of the Lord is my strength," were written, and on the other, Psalm 46:10 was printed, "Be still, and know that I am God." "I know what I have just experienced. I am not crazy, and I am not making this up. I had no vision. I was taken away in the spirit and transported to another land!" His wife did not know how to respond. She went about preparing the coffee. "Did you want something to eat?" she gently asked.

“No. I am not hungry. You see...” He continued to share bits and pieces of his journey, “I was in a cave, and I found a box.

I was the only one who could open it because my hands were bound, and I had to do something to prove...” He fell quiet, “nevermind.”

Jonathan would never speak of this again. In the future, he would not be seen on the

street corner with his bullhorn or behind the pulpit of his own church.

Though he would never realize it, no one would even notice his absence on the sidewalk. He would not be missed, and no one would ask about him.

Within two weeks, his church congregation would replace him with another spit-fire, self-ordained reverend. Jonathan would retire from the ministry and join a Lutheran church active in missionary work overseas.

His wife would never question him. She would simply follow and support him; it was all she knew.

Now, in the doldrums caught in the jet stream of fate.

Floating wherever the wind doth carry thy soul.

Spirit of stagnation opens the ground that quakes.

Swallowing the melancholy whole.

A whiff. A waft. An inrush path.

A zephyr carries the day's burdens and weight.

Resting on the seventh Sabbath.

They shall forever in thy image create.

All of the typical clichés, slogans and one-liners were behind him. Gone were the traditions of men with creeds and doctrines that had no basis in scripture. No longer would Jonathan preach to slay the soul; he would minister to teach it. James 1:27, "Religio munda et immaculata apud Deum et Patrem haec est visitare pupillos et viduas in tribulatione eorum immaculatum se custodire ab hoc saeculo." "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the Jonathan labored now to be able to enter into

God's rest. His life had experienced a great paradigm shift. Upon realizing that all he had built by his hands, as the first premise, was deemed false, his world was brought down in shambles. He had been created in the image and likeness of God, but he had been living in an imaginary world, one created in his own mind, and serving a false God. This was as close to a "controlled" nervous breakdown that a person could experience without going over the edge. There was a self-destructive, albeit spiritual, construction that supervened and rewrote the plot of his life.

The old Jonathan died that day in the cave, not wanting to be recognized for his accomplishments or rewarded for the good that he would now bring mankind. The fact that he was cast in with these characters and played, perhaps, the strongest role of all, did not give him precedence over the three that had formed as one. His disappearance only proved the value of each life brought into this world, and if we are free to make a great difference, we must be dissolved by the lasting works that we perform.

Jonathan built himself up in his mind, controlled by a self-invented illusion, which distorted his reality. In this imaginary world, he had ruled supreme. Now, he rested in the confidence of being abased and humbled, kept to the shadows of those he swore were greater than him. In his new enlightenment, he made himself available not

as a leader of men, but as a servant of all.

CHAPTER 18 – DEMON IN THE DETAILS

You can sell the devil if he is well cooked. ~French Proverb



Mieszko, the living, breathing artifact of centuries past, was now feeling closer to the truth. He had great respect for his two compatriots. He was a man of unity,

a man of synchronization, and even without a soul, he was a man of values.

The cures of every illness known to man were contained within him. He had the means to catch thieves, was an expert in necrology, and was well-

versed in codified pagan

and mystical beliefs. He

had a deep concern for

Jamison and Lora and

would do everything in

his power to protect them

from any enemy,



including Titivillus, the demon of error. In the “Tractatus de Poenitentia” by John Wales, Titivillus is described as, “Fragmina verborum Titivillus colligit horum Quibus die mille Vicibus

se sarcinat ille.” Translated, the verse reads, “Titivillus packs his bag with verbal detritus a Mieszko could not afford any mistakes on this journey.

The fangs of Hades were biting at him every day. A monk standing before God in error on Judgment Day would certainly have his current salvation in question. How long would he take to win back the favor? How many ages would it take him to erase his original mistake? Either way, whether Judgment Day was going to be a day of rewards for him or not, he wanted to prove his fealty to his friends. The three met in the lobby of the hotel.

The three clocks over the check-in counter reminded them that time meant very little in their current existence; the only thing that mattered was the present.

The past and the future had melded together into alternate realities by what they had been through together. Mieszko had arrived in the lobby first, eager to resume the search. Jamison followed close behind, after first stopping by Lora’s room to wish her a good morning and sneak a peek of her outside the traditional garb. This was also the first time he had seen her without her head wrap, and her long dreadlocks took him by surprise. As she fluttered her blue eyes and shook her complex locks into her face, he

couldn't help but smile. "They mean, 'one who fears the Lord,'" she informed him. Jamison responded by asking, "What does?" "My hairstyle. It is symbolic of the Lion of Judah. The lion is in the center of the Ethiopian flag, the Land of Punt," she smiled. "Well, your beauty takes my breath away, even first thing in the morning.

I'll let you get ready, and I'll see you downstairs," he said, staring into her eyes. Now, as he stood watching her walk down the twisted staircase, Jamison imagined a princess coming to meet him. It was still very early, and light was just now trickling through the windows and into the lobby. "We must go. Are you two ready for some rock climbing?" Mieszko asked, breaking Jamison out of his trance. "I have our box," Lora assured everyone, patting her backpack and wondering exactly how extreme the rock climbing excursion would be. Come, I'll show you where we will climb," Mieszko replied. Elephant Bay was visible from the hotel. It was named as such, because the rock formation was in the shape of an elephant's head with its trunk leading into the ground. A fog had rolled into the bay, causing limited visibility. As they approached, it became increasingly obvious that they would really need to be aware of their footing; the rocks were loose and jagged, and compounded with the moisture of the fog and the bay, it would be tricky to navigate. They had to really work to make it

to the head of the rock formation. Once they had conquered the head, the top of which was the summit, they would have to descend between the face and trunk, dangerously close to the water line. Jamison was very diligent in assuring that Lora had assistance, but Mieszko looked to be a seasoned rock-climbing veteran. "The ol' monk is stronger than he looks under that robe," Jamison whispered to Lora. Studying the landscape, Mieszko said, "Now, we must find a reason to be here." "There's nothing here; it's just rocks," replied Jamison, moving the rocks and stones in the tenebrous place and looking for a clue. They seemed to have slipped beneath the formation, undetected with the cover of fog and very little morning sun. By now, their eyes had adjusted to the low visibility. Obsessed, Jamison was moving stones like the Romans who tore down the Jerusalem Temple, stone by stone, in 7

AD. "Here!" he said. The others carefully navigated the loose rocks until they managed to get to where Jamison stood. He had found an indentation in the rock wall the exact same size as the box they carried. "So, this must be the Arcanum of the box, the secret, the mystery," Mieszko said. As he spoke, Lora brought out the box and held it in her hands. "So, we are all in accord that the box and its contents should be placed in this nook?"

Mieszko asked, needing a show of support. "This is a stone that may seal our fate. I will not exaggerate our current situation. We may see nothing

when we insert the box, but the sea may rise up and swallow us all. All I am sure of is that we have come here for this moment,” he said, sounding more like Moses all the time. “Both of you have been loyal followers of faith on this journey.” Suddenly, the sound of rocks falling overhead caused them great alarm, and they simultaneously ducked for cover. As they looked up, they could see the image of two people working their way down the rock and into their space, which sent Lora into a paroxysm of irrepressible fear. In her convulsions, she lost her grip on the box, and it fell to the rock floor, dangerously close to the edge. Knowing they were in danger, Jamison made his move without hesitation. His movements were precise, unhindered by the half light, and he could see the two men as clearly as if it were a sunny day. He moved with haste to stop the men’s approach. Lora fumbled to pick up the box, ensuring that the lid had not fallen off when it hit the ground. Mieszko was reaching to aid her when they heard the unmistakable sounds of a conflict. Caught completely off-guard, the men’s glory would be fleeting as Jamison became manic with a resplendent attack that would have made Bruce Lee smile. Through all of the grunting, moaning and shouting, it was impossible for Lora to tell if he had bested the two men, but she was impressed with his masterful art of surprise, which made him seem as furtive as if he were, in fact, the intruder. In short order, it became clear that Jamison was not a force with which to

be reckoned, and he quickly dispatched the two interlopers. With the box in hand, she called out to him, "I am here. I am OK. Let us hurry in case they have friends." Mieszko examined the box, and his appreciation was palpable by the professional aplomb with which he handled it. Mieszko was relieved to confirm that the box had not been damaged when dropped; it was intact, and he wasted no more time. Slowly, he turned and inserted the box into the square, carved-out area in the rock. Halfway into the crevasse, the box seemed as if it had a mind of its own and it slid into place with no effort on Mieszko's part. The moment his hands were removed, the earthquake began, and everyone lost their equilibrium. They felt heavy, like a half- full gallon jug, being swished from side to side. Even though Mieszko was among the greatest cognoscenti the world had ever known, he never expected such a result from placing the box into its holder. In the eerie light of the situation, a tremendous bang was heard as the rock collapsed around them. The stones blew away as if a nuclear explosion had occurred. The somber atmosphere of insufferable gloom and doom was disquieting under the current circumstances. This was nothing like the wormhole effect. Shattered glass was everywhere, like the Great Glass Elevator in "Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory," except that, unlike the characters in the movie, this trio was anything but safe. Jamison reached for Lora and missed her as she fell away into a crevasse that seemed to

come from the hand of prestidigitation. It occurred to him that this was more than simple sleight of hand. No, this was genuine magic, and this trick was real. He could hear her crying out to him, and he was making a concerted effort to work reason and faith together, in order to keep from panicking. With equanimity on his side, Jamison again called to Lora.

Unlike the wormhole, they were not motionless while time raced by them. Rather, they were in full movement and falling through glass. They were not cut, but they were tumbling into. Despite everything, Jamison could sense that Lora was near, and his thoughts never strayed from her.

Mieszko, on the other hand, did not reenter his mind until after the blackout. The interminable descent had finally come to an end, and that end was unconsciousness. Mieszko was the first to awaken. He roused Lora and Jamison, who were both in his line of sight. "Is everyone well?" he asked, concerned. "Fine. We're fine," Jamison answered. With great effort, Lora stood. Her head wrap was missing, and her dreadlocks were now framing her face. Jamison couldn't help but to admire her as she stood there like an African Queen. As she surveyed the land, recognition took over her expression. "I know where we are," she slowly murmured, "This is the Land of Zion." As she spoke, a peaceful breeze stroked the nape of her neck.

Mieszko agreed, "Yes, we are where we ought to be, 'Our Father of Peace, the Revealer of Light,' otherwise known as the Church of Mary of Zion, in

Axum, Ethiopia.” They were on a tree-covered hill surrounded by mountains, and directly below them was a church. Not easily accessible in this remote location, they were amazed at the fine piece of architecture. It had been built on ancient ruins, and although the church itself had been rebuilt many times, its current erection resembled more of a fortress than a church. Some ancient ruins littered the landscape. Monolithic obelisks and giant stelae or pillars, some fallen and some upright, royal tombs and the ruins of ancient castles surrounded them. “Distractions! This is all a distraction,” Lora announced. Jamison, sounding perplexed, replied, “What are you talking about? What is the distraction?” “This is not where we should be,” Lora was now turning slowly, taking in the surroundings. “We were interrupted at Elephant Bay by those men. They rushed us, and now, we are not where we are supposed to be. We missed our mark. I know that the most holy of Christian artifacts, The Ark of the Covenant, is down there in that little church. The Ten Commandments, Aaron’s Rod, and Manna are not the keys here. You are,” she said, speaking directly to Jamison. Mieszko consented, “I believe Lora is correct. Rudolph, you are the key. There is no tattooing on your body that would point to this place. Unlike the other times we have gone through the wormhole, perhaps this last time should have been more of a sacred moment. Maybe we should have held a ceremony or recited a prayer since we were returning artifacts.

The interruption of those men that you so expeditiously intercepted distracted us from giving greater attention to our duty. Let's examine your tattoos again. Africa is a big place, and you must have a clue that would explicate and pinpoint where Studying the fine detail of Jamison's artwork, Mieszko continued, "Yes, I do know of a place that makes more sense than this. Look. This swarm of bees is actually a depiction of the trail we have been on, and we must continue to follow it. We are not to travel down the historical path of Hippocrates, but rather, we are to follow another historical fellow from this region." For the next hour, Mieszko apprised the two of a town called Lalibela, just south of their present location. He also gave them a brief present-day update on the land of Ethiopia, in the event that something happened and they might either be separated or possibly miss their mark again. "Some cities are modern with the hustle and bustle of cars and buses. Others are not. One of the things that people do not really understand is that, throughout Ethiopia, there are different languages, cultures and religions. Some areas, like Lalibela, are more reserved and quiet. Their citizens are God-fearing people who spend their days praising Him in every way. Their thoughts on marriage, purity and social standards are different from the people living in larger areas, such as Addis Ababa. In these small towns, children graduating from high school seldom have the means or privilege to go to college. The lack of money and

education makes it nearly impossible for most to have a decent career. The food shortage is nationwide, and this crisis has always existed. Even people in the larger cities have trouble finding something to eat at times. Most get a small piece of bread with some tea, and they are happy to have it. If they are really fortunate, they will get some type of dinner, perhaps some “shiro,” which is a hearty stew largely composed of mashed chickpeas, berbere sauce and clarified butter. Because of all the hardship, family is extremely important here. It is tradition that everyone comes home at noon to drink “bun,” black coffee served in small cups, for the purpose of sharing family time. The Arabic word for coffee is “kahwah.” In ancient times, the coffee houses were referred to as Kaveh Kanes. Now, in modern times, traditions have changed, and people prefer to come home for their coffee. Women usually stay home to help around the house, because there is really nothing else they can do. They do not have the skills to work outside in the male dominated society. The country’s main struggle is the ongoing war between Ethiopia and its neighboring country, Eritrea. Thousands of people die every year, and both countries’ governments waste their money on military equipment.” While Mieszko shared his knowledge, time slipped away as they continued the journey. “The leaders have gone so far as to draft young children into the war and turn everyone against one another. There is much carnage in the country, and people struggle daily in an effort

to survive, because no one knows how to make things better. The people are hopelessly trapped, and there are always rumblings of a revolution.” At this point, Mieszko stopped to make sure everyone was following him; he had a very quick stride, and in his concentration, he was afraid he had left the others behind. As they approached, he said, “It would be much faster to take a wormhole to our destination if it did not send us too far.” He still did not understand how these portals of time operated. Many times, he had used them, and almost always, they managed to get him close to his mark. Jamison and Lora listened like children as Mieszko gave them a brief history of Lilibela and its extraordinary churches. “Each church is sculpted, both inside and out, directly from the living bedrock of the earth. These 13 churches are rock-hewn monolithic carvings, which are actually from the surrounding rock, cut into one piece and separated by an encircling trench. Circumscribed, narrow, labyrinthine tunnels interconnect several of the churches. The walls of the trenches and courtyards contain cavities and chambers filled with mummies of pious monks Suddenly, without warning, the air felt pinched, and it became difficult for the trio to catch their breath. Something oppressive was near. All three travelers gasped as the oxygen seemed to dissipate from the atmosphere. Lora’s panic was clear in her face. Sounds seemed to mute and then grow in decibels, ululating like a howling wolf. Total darkness never came, although the daylight waxed and waned

like a strobe light in slow motion. The world in which they existed rebelled against the redundant natural forces of the earth. More sounds added to the confusion. Horrible, screeching noises, like metal on metal, sent an unkindly umbrage of assaulting electrical surges through the trio. But, while they were very frightened, it would take more than an electrical thunderstorm in the middle of the day to force them to capitulate to anyone's terms. They'd come too far. Yelling over the deafening silence and the mocking glower of suffocation, their predicament seemed perilous, at best. They were trapped in a sensory-deprived miasma, their vision obscured by incessant blinking. In the radiance of the present lie, they were able to find a weakness in this underworldly imagery, a wormhole in this earthy illusion in which to run and escape. None of them had been prepared for all the running they'd be forced to do, and each could feel the exhaustion in their bones. That being said, without question, when the host of the underworld is breathing down one's neck, one is fueled by raw adrenaline and continues to run. They fled toward the sanctuary of the church and into the daylight hanging in the sky, each feeling tenebrous trenches being dug into their spines. Out of the corner of his eye, Mieszko spotted what appeared to be a black, swirling whirlwind, spinning in slow motion at the base of the precipitous hill. This was the most hopeful sign he'd seen since nature's upheaval had spewed from the mouth of Hades.

They ran expecting to hear the final knell of the bell signifying their demise. There were no redoubts, no brick walls, in sight, so they ran. They ran hard and fast toward the funnel cloud. Mieszko prayed to be evicted from this drama, "Please God, hear our prayer, and save us!" Jamison prayed to abscond with his life and the lives of his "What makes you think the tornado is a good idea?" Jamison shouted, his feet slipping out from under him near the bottom of the hill. Regaining his footing, he took Lora by the hand and waited for Mieszko's reply. Surprisingly quick, Mieszko continued to run directly at the increasingly black tornado. With no other options, the two followed suit and were soon swept into the storm. The celestial sequence seemed unending. Once inside the funnel, the bees were expunged. As they drew closer to their swirling destination, it became clear that this was no normal tornado. The rotating column was not a dust devil; rather, it was a funnel of bees. "There is your sign," shouted Mieszko, as he ran uninterrupted into the vortex. Jamison and Lora followed, and the wormhole held them tightly together. They were all aware of the proximity of one to the other. They needed a "dues ex machine", an unexpected hero, to rescue them from this imposing timewarp. The hillside they had just descended was no more, as well as the church and surrounding lands. The sounds of the earth had quieted; everything had rung true withered with malcontent. Something had intervened to deny their destiny. It was crucial

that they exit this broken compass. comprehensible. Lyrics to The Beatles'

song, "Tomorrow Never Knows" ran through Jamison's mind in an

unending loop. Turn off your mind, relax

And float downstream

It is not dying

It is not dying

Lay down all thought

Surrender to the void

It is shining

It is shining

That you may see

The meaning of within

It is being

It is being

That love is all

And love is everyone

It is knowing

It is knowing

That ignorance and hate

May mourn the dead

It is believing

It is believing

But listen to the

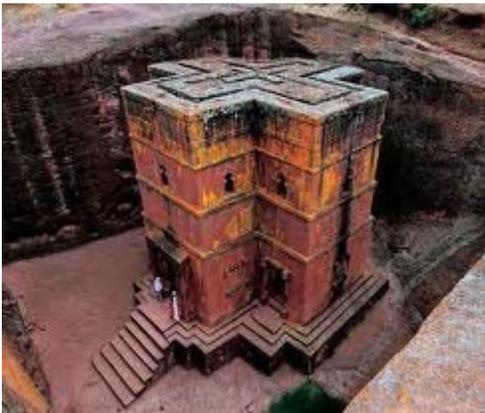
Color of your dreams

It is not living

It is not living

CHAPTER 19 – CHURCH OF THE CROSS

God gives nothing to those who keep their arms crossed. ~Bambara Proverb



A dusty rural town nestled in the rolling countryside is where the colony of ambulatory bees released the euphoric “book, key and sage.” Once again, the trio struggled to adjust to their new surroundings and regain their equilibrium. There were no signs of automobiles or paved streets in sight. The place was cryptic, prehistoric

and barren. Patches of stony fields and an undulating meadow lay before them. This was, “The New Jerusalem.” Paradoxically, it did not resemble the heavenly paradise at all. Where were the gates of pearl, the streets of gold, the rivers flowing with milk and honey? Surely, this wasn’t the place that the angels had helped to build. Where was the throne of God?

“Is everyone in one piece?” Jamison asked, spitting dust from his mouth.

Lora was the first to speak, “We are here. This is our destination.”

“I concur. We have found our next stop, but we do not know what we are looking for. Are the missing pages here, or will we just find another clue?” Mieszko wondered as he brushed off his robe.

“Here? Where is here, and how much further on this pilgrimage do we have to go?” Jamison seemed a little discouraged after their last bit of travel.

“This is the holy place hewn from stone. We are in the town of Lalibela, home of eleven rock-hewn churches, each carved entirely out of a single block of granite with each roof at ground level. These churches were not constructed; they were excavated. Each church was created by first carving a wide trench on all four sides of the rock, meticulously chiseling out the interior.” Mieszko lifted a single hand in the air to represent holy hands raised to God. Devotedly, he offered a prayer in Latin before

continuing, “Domine Deus, amo te super omnia proximum meum propter te, quia tu es summum, infinitum, et perfectissimum bonum, omni dilectione dignum. In hac caritate vivere et mori statuo. Amen.” Jamison strained his eyes to make out anything that might resemble a church while Mieszko prayed. His eyes ached with deception, for all he could see was hell on earth, not the jewel in Ethiopia’s crown. After the prayer, Mieszko directed them, “This way.” Only a few locals were present. A man in traditional garb was quietly leading a mule. Since people seemed to just be getting their materials ready to take to the local market, the trio assumed it must be very early.

Mieszko led his two companions to the Coptic churches. Amazed at the sight, Jamison and Lora stared in awe, certain that the churches must have been built by angels. Cryptic, yet eloquent; vulnerable, yet protected by impenetrable mountain battlements, the buildings were alive. Their arms extended widely, ready to both receive pious worshipers and to repel hostile interlopers. Living and functioning edifices, their veins were archways and colonnades cut into the red volcanic tuff. Connected by a series of tunnels and walkways, the tendons and ligaments stretched across the landscape. Rooflines, level with the ground, were reachable only by stairs that descended into the narrow trenches.

“This place is said to house the tomb of King Lalibela and the Tomb of Adam. But, I believe the Tomb of Adam has always been under our feet,” Mieszko expressed. “What do you mean?” Lora asked, now intrigued. “From the dust, Adam was created, and to the dust he shall return. Therefore, I doubt we will have any cause for collecting any mummified remains or petrified bones of the first man,” he replied.

“So, what do we look for?” Jamison was anxious to get on with things, and he was becoming a little bored with the history lessons. “There is an oddly shaped cross on your ribcage. Let me see it again,” gestured Mieszko. Jamison lifted his shirt, and Mieszko carefully studied the tattoo. Mournfully, he spoke, “We must seize the Lalibela Cross.” Surprised, Jamison belted out, “What?! Steal a cross?” “Yes, this tattoo is the Lalibela Cross. It is held by the Bet Medhane Alem in the northern group of churches. It is the largest monolithic church here,” Mieszko calmly replied. “That’s my tattoo? And, you know this how?” Jamison asked, still skeptical. “Believe me, this is not something that I wish to do. However, this is where we’ve been brought. You are our map, and in the end, you will be the key. I simply know this through revelation. I can see the actual cross when I look at your tattoo,” Mieszko said, disclosing another secret as to how he was being led.

The adventurers stood staring down at the rock-cut churches. They were spectacular in their beauty, with delicate windows, the features molded in various shapes and sizes. Religious symbols were everywhere – different forms of crosses, swastikas (an Eastern religious motif), and even Islamic tracteries. As they took in the sight, they became aware of a lone monk in a colorful brocade robe standing in the doorway of a church. He was nobly holding an elaborate cross in both hands. Entering the church, they swept down the molded stairs into the canyon of dizzying labyrinthine tunnels and dark, narrow passageways. They were at the mercy of, and subordinate to, their environment. It would be easy to become intimidated, overwhelmed or lost in the maze of grottoes, courtyards, caverns and walls carved from the hard, red volcanic rock.

The monk had disappeared from the doorway of his church, which was held up by 36 pillars on the inside and another 36 around the outside. As they passed through the same doorway, the monk was not in their immediate proximity. The interior of the church was unembellished, and the sheer gigantic size created a cathedral-like austerity. “How does a monk just disappear into thin air?” Jamison asked, disgusted. Suddenly, there was a struggle. Whether in embodied form or as inward turmoil, no one knew, but as they watched, something incredibly powerful rose up from the floor. Graves had originally been carved into the rock floor, and they

were supposedly unoccupied. Yet, to the travelers' disbelief, genderless, non-salvific beings were now upon them. Their interest seemed to lie in Lora, who was desperately fighting off the misogynistic demons. Without features, these shapeless departed ones tried to drive Mieszko back into a monastic retreat. Jamison fought them at every level; he was surprised to realize that, though they were ethereal beings, they could be pushed back with human strength.

A strange, aromatic perfume filled the chamber, and the odors were emanating from these ghostly figures. The desert heat now seemed to blow through the room, intensifying the scent. Mieszko attempted to withdraw from the room, but he was, instead, forced out of sight. "Mieszko!" Lora screamed. The phalanx of demons amassed in a circle around Jamison and Lora. Anxious and afraid, Lora reached out and took Jamison's hand. "What do they want?" Talking aloud to herself, she spoke in her native tongue, "Kisa pi nou fe?" Jamison shouted, "Mieszko!" Lora reverted, "Ki kote li ale?" They stood their ground, open and exposed, encircled but hardly defeated. With brilliant execution and dazzling speed, Jamison brought the attack. Lora was startled at Jamison's bravery to quash these oppressors, and the demonic dead seemed disturbed that they would be opposed. Their uniform circle broke apart as Jamison repulsed

their attack. Lora joined in, swinging the machete that had broken Jonathan's bands.

The two fought side by side, backing out of the room and moving deeper into the heart of the church. The enemy surged toward them, and the battle seemed to drag on endlessly, uninterrupted, until the two backed through a curtain. Once they were through, the creatures abruptly stopped. They could see that neither was harmed, merely pushed back and deflected. "Why did they stop?" Lora asked, attempting to catch her breath. Jamison, also startled, agreed that their passing through the curtain must have brought on the cessation of the frightening creatures' onslaught. Slowly, they turned to face the room, unsure of what they might find, and were faced with religious artifacts. Scattered about the room was a 12-inch tall candlestick, a wooden cross, and a mock *Ark of the Covenant*, featuring a four-faced cherubim and a seat that they could only assume represented the "Mercy Seat."

"This must represent something holy to the creatures that just attacked us. They must not be able to come in here," Jamison surmised. He was tempted to peer through the curtain, but he hesitated. He was weary from fighting, and he needed to rest. "Yes, but we cannot stay in here forever, and what about Mieszko? Where could he have disappeared to?" Lora said, breathing heavy and squatted down. "If something

happened to him, we are sunk,” was Jamison’s somber reply. “Do not talk like that. He must be OK; maybe he needs us?” her tone changed from one of exhaustion to one of concern. “You’re right; we may have to go back out there again,” stated Jamison.

Among the treasures scattered throughout the room, they noticed a Star of David combined with a Maltese Cross, a sun with a smiling human face and flanked by eight-spoke wheels, Mary on a donkey accompanied by Joseph, and a painting of the Annunciation. But, there was no time to explore the contents of this room. They had to find their friend, and every moment lost increased their worry. What if he was in terrible trouble, accosted and taken prisoner by these netherworld creatures?! “Ready?” asked Jamison, grabbing both a large walking stick he found in the corner of the room and Lora’s hand, “Ann ale!” The two burst from behind the curtain, ready to hit the enemy with blinding speed and force. Instead, what these brave hearts encountered was, their surprise, Mieszko standing in the center of the room, both arms raised into the air and praying like they had never heard him pray before.

“SUSCIPE, Domine, universam meam libertatem. Accipe memoriam, intellectum atque voluntatem omnem. Quidquid habeo vel possideo mihi largitus es; id tibi totum restituo, ac tuae prorsus voluntati trado gubernandum. Amorem tui solum cum gratia tua mihi dones, et dives sum

satis, nec aliud quidquam ultra posco. Amen.” He turned toward Jamison and Lora as he completed the prayer, “Hello, friends.” Lora was the first to speak, “The prayer; what was it? It was beautiful.” It was mortification to Mieszko, “It is a prayer of self-dedication to Jesus Christ. My freedom, my will, my understanding and memory had to be surrendered. I know that humility will be honored and rewarded,” he replied, sounding abased. “Come, I know where the monk went,” Mieszko continued. As they followed him through the House of the Redeemer of the World, they noticed that one particular pillar in its center was covered with a cloth. “This is the ‘amd,’ the symbol of the unity of faith,” explained Mieszko, as they hurried along. “Since man is too weak to bear the truth revealed by God, the pillar is covered.”

The trio entered a small room, where they found the monk. He neither rose up from his work nor greeted them. He was intently engaged in plaiting a rope, and he made no move to acknowledge their presence. “There is the cross we seek,” Mieszko said quietly, pointing to a shelf behind the sitting monk. “There is no vainglory here; this is all God’s work,” he said. Jamison walked around the monk, who continued with his work, undisturbed. The cross was an expressive design of sacrifice, death and life, encapsulated in one solitary object. As Jamison drew closer, he counted thirteen triangles with small circles on top of each, arranged

around the crown of the upper circle. He assumed that this represented Christ and His twelve disciples. Three pairs of wings on opposite sides of the lower circle balanced the crowning upper design. The effect was brilliant, and Jamison could scarcely remove his eyes from the exquisite craftsmanship. It was a matrix of impressionistic symbolism, which held great complement to the abstraction of the unregenerate mind, so that one might contemplate spiritual matters. The cross stood about two feet tall. It was made from one piece of metal, either gold or a gold and bronze alloy, with a central cross surrounded by a broad outer band, which was decorated with several triangular-shaped metal projections, each surmounted by a metal loop. Jamison simply reached up and took the cross into his hands. He was shocked at the weight. "This thing must be 20 pounds or heavier," he thought to himself.

"Now, what?" everyone wondered. "Suppose we take another look at your tattoos," Mieszko suggested. He led Jamison and Lora out of sight of the rope weaving monk, who still appeared to be oblivious to their presence. "While I disrobe, can you explain what attacked us in the main room when we entered the church?" Jamison asked. "We were not really attacked. Rather, we were being tempted. Allow me to explain," Mieszko said, studying the tattoos on Jamison's upper torso. "The entire scene was a ritual of the dead. It was as much a celebration as it was an attack. It is

called an erotic binding spell, cast at us to cozen and deceive us. If our hearts had not been pure, we would have been confronted with the things we most desire. If we desired carnality or worldly goods, we would have seen those things and would have followed them from the church. We would have been led into the desert. If we had embraced these powers, we would have thought ourselves to be gods and would have followed our lust beyond the borders of grace. Galatians 5:17 reads, 'For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh.' These are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

Quietly, Lora said, "Amen." Mieszko continued, "We have repelled magic and demonic forces by keeping our eye on the prize. As we initiate self-sacrifice, it embodies our dependence upon God. Our focus should never be evil, sin or guilt. We are in a cosmic battle. We will be hunted and tempted, and as long as we remain still and obedient to His will, our tears will be holy. We are all culpable here, and our journey demands accountability. The human mind is malleable and vulnerable to distractions. These demons and outside forces, being corporal beings, cannot penetrate the human soul unless you submit to the evil. Your soul is considered deep within, and no being can peer into it...unless you open the door to those voices. Natural remote undulations, impulses and vices

will bring demons; incubi and succubi will be drawn to us, and they will embed themselves into our minds and will divide within. Our andreaia (male) and our astheneia (female) aspects will also want to divide during our struggle, but as the saying goes, what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”

Jamison and Lora struggled to process everything that Mieszko had just related to them. Although they could not gain a full grasp, they could deduce that Mieszko’s present state of mind was a passage of unrelenting and persistent repentance; he never wanted to return to his prodigal life. Through an unequivocal commitment to spare himself and be rescued from this existence, Mieszko sought a direct and intravenous access to the Divine. His struggle between ambivalent doubt and certain fate was internal, the civil war of unrest. Vacillating even when his eyes were closed, his expression did not reveal his turmoil. He understood that, until he found the eight pages and restored his soul, he would have no choice but to oscillate between right and wrong, good and bad, righteousness and evil. He believed in his companions, because he could feel their sincerity with every sense of his being. Even as Eve in the garden had craved the offerings of the Tree of Knowledge, Mieszko desired Godly faith upon which to stand. His faith was in his comrades, his hope in their abilities and virtues. When it came to roads of travel, it was no sin to stand undecided,

but when one foot steps forward, it dictates that road, and the heart must be resolute, constant and sure. Anything less entering the mouth of God would be swiftly vomited and expelled.

Consumed in his trance, Mieszko's intensity gave him the impression of a surgeon about to perform on Jamison, and he was slow and deliberate in his examination. Lora thought the entire process was taking too long. They had just stolen the most precious cross in all of Ethiopia, fought off some sort of demonic forces, and now, Mieszko was preoccupied in his reverie. Just as she thought she may burst with frustration, Mieszko excitedly exclaimed, "That's it!" His eyes focused as he reattached himself to the present, "We must go to the roof." As he spoke, he moved Lora out of the way so he could see the back view of Jamison's right calf muscle. The tattoo was a brilliantly masterful and gorgeous scene of Golgotha. The tattoo was a human skull fashioned in zombie style. There were ghost-like figures emanating from a pipe in the skull's mouth. The skull's background consisted of three crosses within a stained glass kaleidoscope of mixed block colors.

"There must be a dozen churches here. Which roof?" asked Jamison, trying to get dressed following the uncomfortable examination. "Beta Giyorgis' rooftop. The church is in the shape of a cross. It has twelve sides, and the number twelve has many meanings in the Bible, the primary

meaning being divine government.” Mieszko had, once again, discovered a clue, and the three hurried while being watchful of any unpleasantries or surprises. They walked some distance through a trench and into a tunnel until they found themselves in a deep pit with very starkly perpendicular walls. Taking it in, they noticed some round caves and chambers within the walls. The starkness of their surroundings prompted Mieszko to mumble, “For pious pilgrims and monks.” With no roadblocks or attacking minions from hell to distract them, the short walk through the cross-shaped church was more of a tour than an attempt to escape. The trio was amazed by the fact that this group of churches that had been hewn from the earth did not boast Turkish carpets, Venetian silk velvets or comfortable, sumptuous beds for the resident monks to slumber. The bitter irony was that simplicity melded with complexity. Their dilemma was obvious, but with no immediate solution, they had no access to the roof of the cruciform church. After all they had endured, they could not afford a grand defeat at this juncture.

“The stone that sealed Christ’s tomb seemed immovable,” Mieszko mumbled, surmising their situation, “However, when God’s will needs to be done, there is no weight, King’s decree, or guards that can prevent it. I suggest we exercise our faith, for our options are down to nothing.” Jamison held out the stone cross, and Lora and Mieszko covered it with

their hands. Instantly, they were transported and were now standing in the middle of three equilateral Greek crosses that made up the roof of the church. “Did anyone else lose their stomach on that ride?” Jamison asked. He was smiling and feeling light headed. Empty handed, he noticed that he was no longer in possession of the cross. Standing on top of the most elegant of the churches, they were eye-level with the ground. Now, there was an obstacle before them; a glen separated them from the ground. The void was too wide to jump. The colors and shapes of their surroundings began to fluctuate. The rose, greenish and yellowish hues under their feet began to illuminate.

Even before they heard the chanting, Lora saw the people. A multitude of monks surrounded the rock-hewn cross-shaped church. Their extemporaneous voices chanted an unfamiliar melody, and they raised their hands into the air. Dust from their feet created a knee-high nebula. “Where did they come from?” asked Lora, who stood behind Jamison. “I sure hope we don’t have to fight our way out of this mess,” Jamison said, standing in a very defensive posture, expecting the unexpected. Mieszko spoke up, “I feel this is a show of respect and honor. These are very humble, but proud, Semetic people. Noah had a son named Shem. Shem is noted for killing Nimrod. If you remember, Nimrod ordered the

construction of the Tower of Babylon, which was ultimately destroyed by God.”

“That is fantastic information, Mieszko, but we are trapped on a roof, surrounded by thousands of chanting monks. How does that bit of Biblical history help us?” Jamison asked in a sarcastic tone. “Lora, these are your people!” Mieszko shouted and held out his hands to the chanters. “You have been blessed with brown skin, sumra, and ordained as the Queen descendent of Sheba. In fact, you are descendent of the man to whom God said he would bless with anything: Solomon. Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the people so that he may possess the ability to discern between the good and the bad. And, since Solomon did not request a long life, vast riches or defeat of his enemies, God granted him an understanding heart, great wisdom and immense riches,” Mieszko was, again, using his invocation voice.

The force beneath their feet became tectonic, forcing them to perform a balancing act on the roof. However, though their world shook and the lithosphere seemed to crumble around them, the church of the cross, as well as the landscape on which the monks stood, remained completely still. The horizon’s color spectrum was illuminated with a bluish, white hue. The chants grew louder as they began to unify, “Maqeda, Maqeda, Maqeda!” The chanting filled the hot, dry air. Lora was

struck by the piety of the people, yet she was bewildered by the natural elements taking place around her. The monks alternated, modifying their chant to recite scriptures in Ge'ez.

“What are they doing?” asked Jamison, more anxious than ever. In contrast, Lora seemed to be absorbing and processing this complex situation. She spoke up, “They are chanting Ge'ez, which is abugida. It is a special language from Psalm 31; ‘Be unto me a protecting God and a house of refuge, to save me; for you are my support and my refuge; and for the sake of your name, you will lead me and nourish me. In you, O Lord, do I trust; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.’” The chanting stopped as one. The little monk they had encountered and chased into the church stepped out from among the others. He spoke, “*Omnes de Saba venient aurum et thus deferentes et laudem Domino annuntiantes. Alleluja.*” Mieszko interpreted, “All they from Saba will come, bringing gold and frankincense and announcing the praise of the Lord. Alleluia.” Even with Jamison’s lack of Biblical knowledge, he understood that they were referring to Lora as Sheba or Saba.

The little monk spoke once more, “*Nigist Saba ye Tebibu solomonn tibebe ayech. Yegenebawinm hntsa chmr.*” Lora was enigmatic, addressing her new subjects with riddles. Each utterance she spoke had a complex, inter-textual tie with others. Mieszko intervened, realizing that the monks

did, indeed, revere her as the Queen of Sheba. He now saw through the little monk's façade. The monk was a Djinn, which meant he was a spirit that had taken human form. The Djinn held supernatural influence over many. Mieszko could not tell if there were others in the group. He had discovered the Djinn because Lora's demeanor had become reckless and conflicting, opaque and with sexual connotations. She had temporarily and uncharacteristically lost her clarity and distinctiveness. The parallel world of spirit and flesh was clashing. Lora was now in a trance and repeatedly bellowing, "I am your sister! My son, you are a great sage!" The entire sequence became an act of evil invading good, poison fogging the mind of the clear.

"In the hands of God!" she roared. Jamison was trying to hold her. The chants began again, with drumming accompanying the voices. "We must transport!" Mieszko shouted. "I can't get her back," Jamison was irritated and worried. "Lay her down," Mieszko ordered. With some effort, for Lora did not want to cooperate, Jamison managed to lay her down unharmed. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Mieszko chanted, making the sign of the cross with his hand, "Repeat after me, Rudolph." Jamison did as he was told. In sync, they spoke, one after the other, both in total concentration, both in total reverence.

“Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us. God, the Father in Heaven, have mercy on us. God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us. God, the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us. Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us. Holy Mary, pray for us. Be merciful. Spare us, oh Lord. Be merciful. Graciously hear us, oh Lord. From all evil, deliver us, oh Lord. Deliver us, oh Lord. From all sin. From your wrath. From sudden and unprovided death. From the snares of the devil. From anger, hatred and all ill will. From all lewdness. From lightning and tempest. From the scourge of earthquakes. From plague, famine and war. From everlasting death. By the mystery of your holy incarnation, by your coming, by your birth, by your baptism and holy fasting. By your cross and passion, by your death and burial, by your holy resurrection, by your wondrous ascension, by the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, on the day of judgment.”

Mieszko coercively laid his hands on Lora’s hand and shouted, “By the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, by the coming of our Lord for judgment; be free of this evil power!” Lora went limp in Jamison’s arms. The matrix of crosses beneath them began to crumble like a demolition in the moment of transition. The wormhole appeared and began to open; the invitation was offered. It seemed to speak

without words, as if to reprimand them for taking so long to find the next clue. The Stargate was a mystery, as is every living entity. Lora was well, and now, sewn – fused – into multiplicity. She would be happy to realize that Jamison was as well.

CHAPTER 20 RISING FROM THE DEAD

The dead are not seen in the company of the living. African Proverb

Titivillus, the demon of error, had slipped through the portal behind the three. He had hope of dislodging them on a barren south Pacific island. Riding out the time travel, he flung insults and doubts at the three with sulfurous accuracy. Mieszko could not understand how he managed to get in. He perceived



that Titivillus was there to bring scathing charges against every monk and scribe that had ever picked up a quill.

Titivillus began to mock Mieszko trenchantly, seething with accusations, “Will I never feel daylight upon my face? The thoughts waste away. Will no one reach down to touch my soul; a gentle human hand to make me feel whole?”

“Can no one hear my shouts beneath a speechless mute within time repeats? Sadness is heavy; I am soaked through. Under the drowning canopy of burning rain; consumed,” continued Titivillus.

“Do not listen to him he is only wanting your fears and mistakes to fill up his own desires. He feeds off this rubbish,” Mieszko warned.

Titivillus spat a hideous laugh, the combination of a Hyena and an old woman with COPD and emphysema. His words were severe, and his intention deliberate.

Mordacious venom spewed from his vile mouth. “The world judges others by their own sins. There is no God that you can comprehend. Your righteousness is stripped by the wind. Bare bones exposed eyes examined. You live in the whorish place of hypocrites and lies. There is a beating heart without the breath of life,” Titivillus articulation changed, as a scowl crossed his face, “Nigist saba yenigusu Solomonn tibeb ena yegenebawin hntsa stay!”

Traveling through time and space they were disoriented because no reference to solid planes existed. Mieszko cried out to God for deliverance,

“Almighty God, we beg you to keep the evil spirit from further molesting this servant of yours, and to keep him far away, never to return. At your command, O Lord may the goodness and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, take possession of us all. May we no longer fear any evil since the Lord is with us; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.

Mieszko heard both Jamison and Lora, who were now oriented and alert, finish with “Amen.”

All light went out, it stopped shining. All that remained was the forbidding dark.

“Where are we” moaned Jamison. “Wherever we are we are underground and I can feel rock surfaces, Mieszko guessed. “Lora, are you with us?”

There was no answer, just an unseen commotion. There were footsteps, scrapping noises, and a sound of a struggle. At first the muffled sounds were close and gradually began to grow faint. Jamison yelled, “Lora!”

-Still no answer.

He grabbed at the dark in a panic, hoping to latch onto her. The black was somber and empty in his hands. He could not discern in what direction the scuffle had occurred. He was still coming out of the time travel. His mind did not comprehend these events as they unfolded. Mieszko wrestled with his own failure. He struggled within and could not accept that he may have lost her.

Mieszko finally found Jamison, who seemed sullen and mindful, but not defeated. The two blindly handled the rock walls, trying to read the cracks and the mortar joints to find a way out of this tomb.

When light was finally seen, it was reflecting from beneath a wooden door. The two weary men had spent the last hour groping the walls and floors, crouched at times in a servile posture, feeling for a hatch, a door knob or a light switch. Jamison eased the door open enough to allow light to flood out and to adjust his eyes.

Mieszko instantly became aware of where they were. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, known as the Church of the Resurrection (Anastasis) to Eastern Orthodox Christians, is a church in the Old City of Jerusalem that is the holiest Christian site in the world.

Anastasis encompasses both, Golgotha, or Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, and the tomb (sepulcher) where he was buried.

Coming out from what Jamison thought to be the basement, he realized they were actually, the tombs.

“Time to shed the robes,” Mieszko said. The two left their robes in the hallway of the grim tunnel leading to the Jewish tombs. They had found a secret tunnel that led to the tomb and when they emerged, they were actually behind the tomb of Jesus, on the western side of the Rotunda walls. They were in the Jacobite Chapel.

Before continuing, Mieszko turned toward his friend. “If I become separated, and we find one another again later on, and you doubt that I am who I say I am, say you suspect me to be an imposter. There is a test word from the Bible that we can use to identify our

authenticity. The word is Shibboleth. This word comes from The Book of Judges 12:5-6 and was a catch word that the Gileadites made the Ephraimites pronounce. The Ephraimites could not say “sh,” only the “s” sound thus when they said the word, it sounded like Shibboleth So, repeat after me, Shibboleth.”

Jamison repeated the word "Shibboleth" properly. Mieszko made him repeat the word several more times, until he was sure that he had memorized it.

The church seemed to be empty and was unsettling quiet.

“Do you have any plan or idea of what we must do” Jamison whispered.

“There is no need to whisper. Whatever has brought us here and whoever took Lora knows that we are here. And yes I believe I do have an idea. As far as a plan goes what good is a plan if we keep making it up as we go? Let me educate you on what I know. Believe it or not there is a monastery on the roof of this building and I believe that is where Lora is being kept.”

“What kind of monastery and why would they want Lora?” Jamison sounded confused and desperate.

“Unknown by much of the world, monks and nuns of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church have for centuries quietly maintained a presence here in Jerusalem on the roof of this church. The story is long, but these monks have kidnapped who they believe is their queen. The church is known as Deir Sultan or the Monastery of the Sultan. These monks have kept this secret for more than a thousand years through wars, attempted evictions, vagaries and vicissitudes. Lora, as Queen Sheba shows this land was granted

to her long before Christians took it. It proves that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the rightful property owners.

So many political powers have played havoc in this region and fought for this land and the Ethiopians have clung to what little they have been able to. These monks and nuns are living by faith. They have had the key to their own chapel taken away in the past, the locks have been changed on precious religious materials have been burned; they have been beaten and treated cruelly for years now.”

By this time, Mieszko and Jamison had gone through doors, and the passage opened to the southern hall. On the floor near the entrance laid the Stone of Anointing. According to tradition, the body of Jesus was laid on this stone after it was removed from the cross. On any other day pilgrims would be kneeling beside the stone, praying, kissing it, and laying hands on it. Respectfully, today was no ordinary day.

They passed by the Catholicon a large Greek Orthodox cathedral and Mieszko noticed a painting on the ceiling; gazing downward was Jesus who overseeing the church with loving eyes of munificence and kindness.

This church was breathtaking in beauty and history. Stone steps led to the second floor to Golgotha. There were two chapels on this side of the floor - the Crucifixion altar (Greek Orthodox Calvary) and the Nails of the Cross Altar.

“We are not going up there, Mieszko announced. We must keep going this way.” Right above the Chapel of St. Helena was their roof-top destination.

Once on the roof-top they entered the main building. Within the main building, dark-robed monks with long beard's chanted and swung incense as they conducted some sort of ceremony. Although normally robed no one wore the white cotton robes today. Today was a sacred day, not a celebration, it was judgment; an affirmation. If this ceremony went awry; it would turn into vituperation. "Was the woman they had taken truly the Queen of Sheba?"

Mieszko held Jamison back when he saw Lora standing in a black garb between two hooded monks holding staffs. "We must not interfere at this point. No harm will come to her. They will perform their ceremony and realize that she isn't "the Queen of Sheba" and we can be on our way." On the decorated walls, Jamison noticed the unusual paintings. One in particular depicted the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. The monks were speaking in the sacred language of Ethiopia. Mieszko recognized the re-enactment from the Book of Acts where The Apostle Philip baptized a eunuch, which just happened to be a high official of the Queen of Ethiopia.

Lora was in some sort of trance and stood motionless on a black box, eyes closed and head covered.

Mieszko recognized and understood much of the ceremony. Special prayers were being recited and they sang "Hallelujah" "I'm not going to put up with this crap any longer, she's coming with me," Jamison grumbled, standing up. Mieszko took him firmly by the arm. "Just wait."

“Wait for what? Maybe for them to decide that she is not who they think and run her through with a sword or something? I’m supposed to believe that these people living in these cryptic conditions can really hear from God?” Jamison was becoming uncontrollable.

“Think about what you have seen, think about who I am; you must believe in the impossible,” Mieszko was pleading with him.

The priests, dressed in their vestments were chanting, “Queen Magda, Queen Magda.” They recited the verse, Luke 11:31 which states that the Queen of Sheba shall "rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them. . ."

The conflicted emotions that Jamison was feeling were driving his rationale. He wanted more than anything to make these people pay for stealing Lora away and holding her against her will. Oblivious, he wasn’t certain if this was against her will. If he caused a blood bath in the church that would be hard to explain to the authorities, or, to Lora, if this was her will.

Everyone seemed relaxed and solemn. Jamison was not impressed with this ceremony and formalism. The room was filling with incense and song. The priest dipped his hand into a bowl of water and christened her forehead lightly with a spot of water. More prayer, chants, songs, and rituals, redolent of something they had seen on the History channel began to take place. Mieszko and Jamison seemed to sit unnoticed.

Mieszko, always ubiquitous, was taking everything in. Jamison still suffered with doubt about Mieszko and believed him to be ingenious. He thought it was possible that

Mieszko could he have grown bloodless without feeling or human emotion of any sort. If Mieszko had lost his way that would explain why he wasn't acting to stop this and save Lora?

Watching this drama unfold was like watching paint dry to Jamison. His heart beat hard with affection for Lora. Incense seemed to build up into a thick cloud over the area where Lora stood. Thereupon, colors began to appear. A circumhorizontal arc, or what is called a Summer Halo, appeared over her head. This optical phenomenon was rare under any circumstance or condition, more especially indoors.

Jamison was caught in an acrid black world with a heavy oppressive spirit looming and an array of flashing colors filling the room. The light show was a display of unusual patterns, as if the colors were trying to form a body. The priest's chants were not controlling the lights; however; he had a great influence over the show. The Priest having been placed in this position had survived the struggles of ministering in Jerusalem, even though he was surrounded by Armenian, Russian, Syrian, Egyptian and Greek Orthodox/Coptic Churches as well as the Holy See.

This struggle for the church had lasted over 1500 years. Through patience and faith, the monks and nuns had devoted their lives to the preservation of their existence here. The political powers of the region were a constant hammer trying to chisel away the foundation, but, with incredible fortitude the Ethiopians hung on. This day, they chose to forget about internecine conflicts among themselves. This monastery had suffered through many indignities throughout the centuries.

The unified chants continued, "...Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God"
(Psalm 68:31)

More and more the room was filling with bodies. Jamison could not tell where they were coming from. This hallowed ground (rooftop) was now shaking with an African presence. Mieszko stood and quoted Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) "For the prayers of the righteous help and serve in all matters. By the prayers of the righteous a country is saved." Yohannes IV had been Emperor of Ethiopia and King of Zion.

"What are you doing," asked Jamison, not believing that Mieszko was joining in on this ritual with Lora's life at stake. With unparalleled altruism, Mieszko was now in the midst of the people. Jamison's mind was becoming unclear, turning into a fog of distorted and twisted images of the revelry.

Mieszko either had a plan, or was getting as annoyed as Jamison was with this fiasco. Jamison was unaware at what power it the (Codex Gigas) had demonstrated in the past. "It" meaning "Mieszko," had brought disaster and pain to all who had ever claimed the book as their possession. Attributed to the book were plague, mental illness, fire and destruction.

Deir Sultan or the Monastery of the Sultan, was so caught up in their own survival that they had tunnel vision during their celebration and ritual event. They had never reasoned that any one man could possibly bring all of Jerusalem down with a single word. Mieszko was that man. In him was all that was good and all that was evil of the

world, feeding on a soulless existence, yet, with the knowledge of universal love so as to not unleash finality to this proceeding.

Mieszko hungered for feeling and this stop on his journey was taking far too long. He did not know if he was under time restraints or if he would be left wandering the face of earth for infinity. On the other hand, while he possessed the power to make his own choices, he chose freedom and life.

Like a chip pan fire exploding, Mieszko brought a harmless end to everything that was occurring. He had waited long enough to see a result from this ceremony that Lora had to be a participant in and his patience had worn thin.

A single orange and yellow fireball ejected into the air. The ceiling flamed with intense heat. This tangible side-effect of matter changing form gave the impression that the room was going to burn. With a controlled demonstration of his accomplished yet stupefying demonstration of power, it was stifled; no longer burning. In a panic, the monks and nuns headed for the exits. Maniples and scarves hit the floor along with chasubles and black scarlet chimeras, fluttering and waving, trying to keep up with the monks as they rushed to the exits. There were shrill screams of terror but thankfully, no one was harmed. It was part of Mieszko's illusions of magic. The conflagration was something of an inferno by purpose; no one was injured.

"You should have done that little trick about 30 minutes ago!" Jamison raced up on the platform and scooped Lora up in his arms like a rag doll. No one attempted to stop him. The cathedral had cleared out and in a corner of the room under a crucifix baring the

body of the Lord Jesus Christ Jamison worked to get Lora to respond. A semblance of herself was slowly coming back to her. Jamison held great hope when her eyes met his and he discovered a smile in her eyes. She asked, “Was I hallucinating?”

“No babe you were not” Lora seemed energized when Jamison had referred to her as “babe.” He sat her up and she rapidly became herself again.

“What did you see,” asked Mieszko, who was no longer acting as a fire starter.

As Lora stood, she became very serious and recited the following words “Anansi an' Fire were good frien'. So Anansi come an' see Fire an' dey had dinner. So he invite Fire fe come see him now. So Fire tell him he kyan't walk, So Fire tell him from him house him mus' lay path dry bush, an' him walk on top of dry bush. Anansi married to Ground Dove. Ground Dove tell him no, he mustn't invite Fire; him wi' bu'n him house an' bu'n out himself. Anansi wouldn't hear what him wife say, an' he laid de trash on. An' Fire bu'n from him house, an' when he come near Anansi house he mak a big jump, bu'n Anansi, bu'n him house, bu'n eb'ryt'ing but him wife. Fire fool Anansi!”

Mieszko began to laugh and Jamison appeared to be in the dark with the story.

Lora with great relief smiled brightly showing her glowing white teeth. “What have I missed?”

Jamison was slightly embarrassed. Lora explained, “I apologize. That was a story called Fire and Anansi that I learned growing up. It meant nothing but your expression was funny when I told it.” The three of them had needed a light moment.

“Okay, now that you two have had your fun, what’s next? Are the lost pages here?”

Jamison asked acting a little put out.

“Before the fireball, I saw water in a vision, lots of water, flowing, but flowing in the dark,” Lora shared.

Mieszko remembered that “Hezekiah's Tunnel is near here, could that be it? It is a tunnel a third of a mile in length and it has a water supply.”

“I am not sure though? I do remember seeing an army marching on Jerusalem,” Lora was recollecting her vision.

“That must be it. Are you well enough to travel?” he asked her.

“I have no problem with traveling to this tunnel but what does this tunnel have to do with the Codex Gigas? What does a cave have to do with you Mieszko?” Jamison was crossing his t’s and dotting his i’s before he went on another failed treasure hunt.

On the way off the roof and onto the cave site, Mieszko explained 2 Chronicles Chapter 30 to the two of them. “Sennacherib, king of Assyria came to fight against Jerusalem. Hezekiah was the 14th king of Judah. To protect the city of Jerusalem, he ordered a tunnel to be dug and a water supply to be diverted from the Spring of Gihon, into the tunnel. Hezekiah understood that water was essential during the coming siege. Without water in the city the people would thirst to death and the enemy could simply wait until the water ran out then march in over the corpses. So he ordered the tunnels dug and prepared for battle. There is an Ethiopian connection which says that Tirhakah, King of Ethiopia, had marched against Sennacherib, king of Assyria and Sennacherib withdrew.

With that bit of evidence, Lora still might provide us clues; her visions and her heritage are a great value in pursuing this lead.”

CHAPTER 21 THE HIDDEN ROOM

When the devil goes to mass he hides his tail. Louisiana Proverb

The three travelers descended carefully down into the tunnel on stone steps. Though it was a long way down, the air there was fresh and cool. As they descended, they heard the sound of rushing water in the darkness. Continuing into the maze of tunnels, the stairs wound down into an uncomfortable labyrinth of claustrophobic closeness. Traveling through narrow passages, they were soon wading knee deep in water. They trudged



on not knowing what they might find. Mieszko had taken a lantern from the excavation site,

and it was their only source of light. Through the dimness of the lantern's glow, they could see thousands of pick marks on the walls of the tunnel.

Down here, it was hard to imagine the noise and bustling in the city above as people went about their daily affairs. Sloshing through the tainted water, Mieszko recounted his Biblical prowess. This was the tunnel that had been the means by which Judah survived and now, this same tunnel meant their survival as well, and might possibly even determine the fate of the world.

As they continued onward, the corridor widened into three separate tunnels. Mieszko had to make a choice, "There are two false tunnels here where the engineers made mistakes and dug in wrong directions. I believe that going straight through this tunnel will lead us where we need to go. Still, I think we need to veer off and try one of the false tunnels" said Mieszko.

Because of the danger in doing so, he asked for a vote after sharing his intuitions. "We are following you. Lead the way," Jamison cast in two votes. They splashed through the right tunnel. With great command of the scriptures, Mieszko shared more about the King that had ordered the digging of this tunnel. "According to 2 Kings 18:5, there was no other king like him, so we must assume that he was the greatest king ever." At that, Mieszko stopped and held up his hand. With a touch of parody, he

said, "A sign. We are looking for a sign." Like an impresario, he quoted Hezekiah from 2 Kings 20:10, "The shadow always moves forward...make it go backward instead." Both Jamison and Lora were puzzled by the comment, and Mieszko was certain he needed to explain. "God moved the sundial back 10 degrees. However, we do not need the sundial to move. What we need is something to point the way. Let us then agree that the shadow of this lantern will point the way, and believing it will, we shall find our way." Jamison did not know if Mieszko was a savant or just a simple man of faith.

Regardless, he was certain that this savant like man, this stunning oracle and he, with his great strength, made for a dream team." They all touched the lantern and Mieszko prayed,

"GLORIA Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen." The opaque forms of their bodies became shadows that took on separate silhouettes. It was as if the shadows took on a life of their own. While Mieszko's shadow stood in a prayerful stance, Jamison's and Lora's shadows seemed to dance with one another playfully. Anchored, they were not moving. They were in a stationary place. Jamison offered a suggestion,

“Maybe we should move and see if they follow us.” “That will not work in our current situation. We must follow the shadows.” Mieszko handed the lantern to Lora, and upon touching the light, the shadows seemed to know who was in charge and obeyed. They began to move in a less animated fashion now, as if they were on a mission. The shadows moved in a way that was the reverse of how they should have moved. Flabbergasted, no one questioned what they were experiencing. Cold, wet, and shivering, Lora was thankful when the shadows turned down one of the false tunnels and stopped after only several yards. At this juncture, the shadows returned to their original silhouettes, mimicking every movement of the three travelers. “We are here,” Lora announced, as if anyone knew what to expect next. Mieszko then took the light from her and held it up high. He thought he saw something strange in the ceiling. It was an anomaly that looked like a hatch or round door. “I think this opening is carved in a circle” he said. Jamison stepped up and placed both hands on the ceiling of the tunnel. They saw a chisel mark that ran in a circle the size of a manhole cover. Jamison pushed upward, “I think I moved it,” he exclaimed. He then took a deep breath and with all of his strength, pushed hard. The ceiling overhead that had appeared to be solid, was now being pushed up by sheer human power. As the annular stone was moved away within view of the light, it revealed an upper room. “Since I opened it, I suppose that I will go

first.” Jamison climbed up and in. He could see nothing without the light, so Mieszko handed it up to him. Jamison did not know what to make of what he saw. Reaching back through the round opening, he pulled Lora up first, and then Mieszko who turned three hundred and sixty degrees as if he were a man in suspended animation. It was evident that the excavation of this massive chamber had required the work of an army. The ceilings were raised to almost 30 feet, and the room itself was at least 30x30 feet square. Amazingly, it was filled with thousands of precious artifacts. “What is all of this stuff?” Jamison asked. “Mostly stolen artifacts and relics from around the world. I am drawn to several items that appear to come from Ethiopia,” Mieszko said, as he picked up some manuscripts from a wooden table. “Much of this seems to be from the treasure of Magdala, which was stolen during invasions by Britain.” “Look, there is writing on the walls,” Lora stood, pointing. The writing read, “May virtue endure and shine.” At that, Mieszko wept and spoke as if he were the only one in the room, “May 12th, 1590. Durat et lucet virtus.” As he had guessed, the chamber was a museum of lost and stolen treasures from around the world. Mieszko was concentrating on the Ethiopian artifacts, which included: two cotton robes lavishly embellished with silk embroidery, a decorative shawl; silver bracelets and anklets, rings, a silver hair pin, and two leather 'amulet' necklaces. Another table held more manuscripts, two processional crosses,

and a gold crown and chalice. This chamber was no treasure chest or repository of wealth. It was a burial tomb for the heart of a nation.

Mieszko became a madman disregarding the grandeur and delicacy of any item in his way. He rummaged through the artifacts like a hungry wolf sifts through garbage. He was digging through the gold, the jewels, and the manuscripts, clamoring to find the most precious possession he had ever known. Jamison and Lora helped Mieszko, ignoring his unattractive behavior and grotesque demonstration of desperation. They began to search in a less frenzied manner. Jamison moved away from Mieszko to avoid catching a sharp object in the eye. If this was the heart of a nation, then Mieszko was the butcher. Mieszko's demeanor spun from delirium to anxiety, and after an hour of searching, he seemed a bit more controlled. Still wet and cold from splashing through the underground tunnel in knee deep water, Lora was shivering. "I do not believe we are in the center of this network of tunnels," Mieszko said, having now regained his composure and much needed perspective. "I cannot accept that whoever commissioned this project and ordered this excavation, has placed this room here just to be discovered and pillaged. I believe this room is here to divert, confuse, and stop anyone from going deeper. In Greek mythology, Daedalus, and his son, Icarus, were confined in a Labyrinth. They constructed wings of feathers and wax, and the two were able to escape by flying above the walls

of the Labyrinth.” Lora interrupted, “Yes, I know the story, and Icarus flew too near the sun; his wings of wax melted, and he drowned in the Icarian Sea.” Mieszko thought for a split second and in his own richness said, “Yes, very tragic.” To that end, he continued, acting as if he never told the Icarus story; “Ariadne fell in love with Theseus, and Ariadne gave Theseus a ball of string, to help him find his way out of the Labyrinth.” It was now Jamison’s turn to comment, so he asked, “Are you saying that we need a ball of string?” In a most vituperative tone, Mieszko said, “I doubt if a ball of string would do us any good at this point since we did not tie it off anywhere along the way, and it would make no sense just to throw a ball of string into the air or against a wall.”

As usual, Mieszko’s point was brutal and verbose.

Lora, noticing more writing on the wall, saw something that she had not seen before. “Look, this says, “Sedlec Ossuary.” “What does that mean?” Jamison asked, glaring into the concave of the dinner spoon he found on the table in a pile of other silverware? The name Sedlec Ossuary hit a nerve in Mieszko. “Jamison, let me see your back again,” Mieszko exclaimed, almost undressing Jamison in the hurry. “Sure, I can do it,” Jamison returned the favor. Mieszko pointed to the tattoo down his spine,

noting the chandelier made of bones and skulls inked on his back and hanging from the tree. “Anyone want to take a trip to The Sedlec Ossuary?” Mieszko seemed very sure of himself. “Just out of curiosity and not that we have a choice, but where is The Sedlec Ossuary?” Jamison asked with a smirk. “It is a small Roman Catholic Chapel in Sedlec, a suburb of Kutná Hora in the Czech Republic.” Mieszko purposely failed to inform them that this church was built on a macabre foundation, shrouded in dark comedy. “We take nothing from here, for what we came for is not here. We must leave this place and work our way to the other end of the tunnel,” he said, straightening only a few of the things he had disrupted. He headed toward the hole in the floor from which they had entered. Jamison was the first to drop down into the coldwater. He flexed and caught Lora in his muscular arms. Then he helped Mieszko descend down into the tunnel. Although none of them wanted to take another step in the chilling water, Mieszko was certain that they had to exit this tunnel and find their way back to the surface. Instead of going back the way that they came, they marched forward, hoping for it to end. The tunnel had low ceilings that required the travelers to duck low. Still, there were some dry areas which had plenty of headroom and that provided relief. As they moved along, they passed an inscription that read: “The tunneling was completed. . . While the hewers wielded the ax, each man toward his fellow.

. . there was heard a man's voice calling to his fellow. . . the hewers hacked each toward the other, ax against ax, and the water flowed from the spring to the pool, a distance of 1,200 cubits.” As they moved through the tunnel, they noticed the tunnel ceilings were getting much higher. Exhausted by the time they saw the daylight of the world above, they estimated that they had spent about two hours underground. The sunlight was very bright, requiring them to squint until their eyes adjusted to the light. This would be the last time they saw the sky above the City of David. The sun's illumination blinded them. Mieszko knew what was coming, and he shouted, “*alis aquilae*,” which means “on eagle’s wings.”

Another supernatural marvel formed in front of them, and they understood that this was the wormhole. It was beckoning to them. There was no reason to fight it, or to resist it, because no mortal force could restrain this impetus. Suddenly, it felt as if an angelic hand reached inside the mouth of the tunnel, scooping them up and violently plucking them out, like a gardener pulls weeds from a summer garden. At the moment of abduction, they all witnessed the same phenomena: first the light swelled with intensity until they were temporarily blinded; next, the words “*El*, *Elohim*” appeared, just after a massive electrostatic discharge. Lastly, just

before Mieszko uttered the words which meant in Latin “lux mentis lux orbis”

(“Light of the mind; light of the world,”) they all saw a mountain of dry bones. These bones were human bones, stacked from the ground up to the wide open blue sky.

CHAPTER 22 THINGS START TO GET WEIRD

A dry bone is never licked. Albanian Proverb



This time the jump was obdurately brutal, and the traveler's heads were spinning . Disoriented, their ears were ringing, and they had a bland taste in their mouths. This ride was coarsened by a scalded rage, no different than pushing a needle into a vein. The transport had been a phantasmagoria of approaching besiege. It was hard to discern whether the scene was a dream or an illusion, but the three were determined to recover

from the paralyzing effects of the jump. Bemused, still and unharmed, their vision was clearing, and the saliva was returning to their parched mouths as they focused on a building off in the distance.

Jamison finally spoke, "Give me a night to sleep this off and I will be myself again," He felt as if he was coming out of a nightmare.

"Is that the church?" Lora said, snuggling next to Jamison, trying to get warm. "Yes it is, and before we go any further, I must warn you that this is not your ordinary church," Mieszko said. He did not hesitate as he laid out their current situation, "We are somewhere in the year 1945, and the second world war has ended. For our sakes, we should thank God that Czechoslovakia had little to do with the war, and we should be safe from the Germans."

Understanding that Mieszko was about to change the subject, Jamison quickly added, "And that leads us to blah, blah." Jamison's raillery and mockery were often mistimed.

Mieszko did not acknowledge his remark but continued with his explanation, "Yes, we are in Bohemia, and yes, this is our destination. This

church was built and adorned with the bones of those people who died from the Black Death, the Bubonic Plague. This ground has been deemed holy and sacred because some of it was brought there from Golgotha and spread throughout the yard. We are going into the "All Saint's Chapel."

"How many bones are we talking about here?" Jamison asked, guessing probably less than 100 bodies.

Mieszko, never more serious, said, "Expect thousands; 40,000 bodies were purposed for this church."

How could it be that everywhere they traveled people seemed to have disappeared. There should be more people here, thought Jamison. Any people would be more comforting at this point, and preferably, people who are not trying to kill us.

The "Sedlec Ossuary" is a small Roman Catholic chapel located beneath the "Cemetery Church of All Saints." Because of an outbreak of the plague during the 14th century, "All Saints' Chapel" was converted into an ossuary, or bone storage building. As they approached the church from the cemetery side, it appeared larger. It looked colorless, ashen, in a black and

gray tone. A skull and cross bones were perched at the corners of the church overseeing the graveyard as if inspecting all who would enter these deathly halls. The brave trio descended uneasily into the church and the crypt of bones. In such a tomb-like atmosphere, not unlike a morgue, one would expect to hear the sound of metal clanging against doors and the rattling of ghostly chains. What was most alarming was the sheer number of skull and cross bone motifs. The ossuary contained approximately 40,000 to 70,000 human skeletons, all artistically arranged to form decorations and furnishings for the chapel.

Oddly, Christ hung pleasantly atop a bone-covered altar with his back to the arched window leading to the land of the living. He was flanked by rows of skulls and cross bones that gravely welcomed wayfaring strangers. Garlands of skulls whose transparent gazing eyes adorned door archways paid homage to the deceased. Among this haunting sight was a Cupid sitting like an infant king on a throne of skulls. The Church of Bones honored the dead with a carefully placed crown-of-bones, stored in a transparent bin, and fronting one of the four massive piles of bones. Another bin held a coat of arms depicting a raven pecking the eye from a skull. There was no end to the piles of bones present there. A tower of skulls, no less impressive than the Tower of Babel itself, goaded one

another in their lost world of death. The church had as its center piece a beautiful chandelier, boasting the use of every bone in the human body. On one of the corners of the chandelier, another cherub could be seen lovingly hugging one of the bones. Chalice stood in alcoves on either side of the staircase lined by string of wounded skulls on both sides.

These skulls spoke with a personality of the afterlife. Some appeared to be saddened by their static state. Others appeared to be gleefully happy and accepting of this fate. In the rafters, thousands of eyeless orbits hovered, inspecting all below with hollow stares, never judging those that were still clothed in flesh. Did the polished heads envy skin? Were the strings of skulls draped down from the ceiling in the shape of a wedding dress train there to attract a suitor?

The skulls, morbidly displayed without mandibles, stared ahead, their expressions incomplete. They would never reconnect to their rib cages, pelvic bones, femurs or spinal columns.

A display case, showing skulls which had wounds inflicted by various medieval weapons, caught Lora's attention. She could not come to grips with the value of this expression of art all around her. Sickened, she was

offended by the display case because of the massacre she had witnessed first-hand back in Jamaica. She refused to view the entire display, and Jamison felt obliged to guard her from being forced to view anything else that represented the violence of the many people who had come to their demise. Even with Jamison shielding Lora from the damaged skulls that had suffered barbaric deaths, she began channeling events from centuries past. There was a resonance of terror and screams, of sheer panic, of echoes in a canyon of bodies, of screeching sounds, drifting as if a wind had caught them, then fading to dead air. Feeling the same chaos as Jamison, Lora began to weep openly and doubled over, her lungs gasping for air. She cringed at the turbulence and withering mortality that squeezed at her being. The angel of death was liberally swinging his sickle, collecting all his souls on the threshing floor. This bedlam and lunacy brought a riotous confusion, a panic of asphyxiation, causing people to go berserk from fear.

Nothing was immune from the thick darkness and none were safe. Behind every tree, under every crevasse, on the highest mountain to the benthos of the sea, every person was found, judged, and then, killed.

“It’s okay Lora, please don’t cry,” Jamison was trying to comfort and plead with her in the same breath. Mieszko, though parochial, insular and soulless, was not without wisdom. He laid his hand upon Lora’s shoulder,

“Come sister, we must not stop, there are those who are looking for us.”

“He’s right. Someone wants us to stop our search; don’t let them take your will.” Jamison was now practically holding Lora up. Although the two men could not gauge her frame of mind, they were able to grade her outward temperament. Mieszko understood that this was not a good place for an oracle, and cried, “We must get her out of this room.” Jamison agreed.

Lora’s empathic propensity toward the hurt of others was strong. She could feel the heart beat of every victim as they lay dying. Jamison used his strength to drag her from the room and into another where there were no smashed skulls or Skelton decorations. Her erratic behavior began to settle, and she began to act more like herself.

“It’s scary when you do that,” Jamison said, sitting on a pew and holding her in his arms.

“I am better. Go help the monk find his manuscript pages.” Lora’s voice was still wavering, but she appeared cogent, and her mental faculties had returned.

“Are you sure?” Mieszko had appeared and was speaking passively to Lora. This was the first time she had ever heard tenderness in his voice. She sensed that he longed to feel again, and that by going through the motions of compassion, he might ignite a spark of genuine kindness. She knew that he hungered for a true emotional connection that would tie him to the human race again.

“I do not believe we will be safe here very long,” Lora sounded troubled and strained. Jamison glanced back at Lora, who was giving him a forced smile of confidence. Lora was growing fonder of Jamison with every jump from one wormhole to another. The closeness the two of them shared did not go unnoticed by Mieszko. The attraction between Jamison, this incredibly powerful and handsome man, and this beautiful and delightfully exotic woman, Lora, was moving from the tight rope of early love to the roof top of shouts.

Jamison was thinking, “If she can put up with my off the wall humor and at times just plain silly remarks, then I can put up with her exotic allure and dazzling smile.” For a moment, while walking among the dead, they milled about the voiceless church holding hands like lovers and tourists, imagining being together any place besides here. In this place was a revelation of thousands of people that, at one time, were just like them. Every skull in this church had once represented living, breathing people experiencing life and looking for love. What a tragedy that no one even knew their names.

Jamison left Lora sitting on a church pew to rest and joined Mieszko, who had found a hidden door behind a pyramid of stacked bones. With a simple twist of the knob, Mieszko opened the door. Jamison wondered how he could have found such a small room, and noted that it was devoid of a single bone or skull. At eye level was a shelf of photos, and every one was a picture of the same man from different centuries.

“That person is 'Korytko of Pravdovce, Martin II,' forty-second Abbot of the monastery of Břevnov. It was he who sanctioned the conveyance of Codex Gigas to Prague. His provenance and reputation are recorded in the chronicles of religious history, and he may be the one behind all

this,”Mieszko swelled angrily. He picked up a picture and cast a hard gaze at it. “He hides behind the aegis of his soldiers. He has caused confusion in their minds and thus, their actions and judgments are skewed.”

“So, this Martin guy is responsible for you losing your soul?” asked Jamison.

“I do not know what his original intention was, but he was interested in the Codex Gigas as it was being pawned, sold and stripped of the 8 pages,” Mieszko answered, stern and intransigent.

“Voices!” Mieszko heard voices. He held up his hand to hush anything else Jamison might ask.

“Lora?”questioned Jamison with a whisper. There were no cries for help or screams of abduction from the other room. There was just the muffled sound of several men speaking German.

Mieszko and Jamison held their position. Being inquisitive, Mieszko peered out of a crack in the door that was positioned behind the stack of bones, thereby making him practically invisible. The two men were safe

here. All they needed to do was shut the door and wait it out until the threat was gone. Assuming patience, they knew they could not sit there protected while Lora could be in peril. If she had not found a hiding place, it was likely she was a prisoner of these Germans. Still Mieszko could not see anything, so he pushed the door open wider to get a better look. He was still hidden behind the pile of bones when he got a glimpse of the enemy they faced.

There were six German soldiers with guns, dressed in Panzer uniforms. One man wore a black, wool hip-length jacket and trousers with skulls on the collar patches. The other five wore camouflage-printed Panzerkombi, a one-piece denim overalls with black berets.

“How good are you?” Mieszko asked, referring to his martial arts skills.

“How many do you see?” Jamison asked, trying to determine his odds.

“I can see six, but there may be more,” Mieszko took a double count,
“Yes, I think there are six.”

“I think I have them outnumbered, but we need a diversion, so I can take them by surprise.” Jamison began to calculate his plan through the unfolding algebraic analysis.

Mieszko slipped into the black priest’s robe that was hanging in the corner of the room, and their plan unfolded.

Mieszko wandered out of the room, chanting without any reservation, and praying that their plan did not turn into a debacle. The German’s immediately surrounded him and demanded to know, in German, “what are you doing here?” He answered, “Praying my brothers. I am a man of faith, and I am thanking God for your defeat.”

They chuckled at his faith but lowered their guns. It was, after all, a single, defenseless priest. Mieszko walked between them drawing their attention away from the door. Once their attention was diverted to Mieszko, Jamison slipped out and made his move.

Grabbing two rib bones from the pile that concealed the door, he charged ahead. As he forged into the fray, the pile of bones made an awful crashing sound. By the time the soldiers realized where the noise

originated, Jamison, coming out of nowhere, ran the ends of the bones through the backs of two of the soldiers. Moving lightening fast and changing angles, Jamison anticipated the enemy's next moves. He was in close now, and the German's believed they could use their long rifles and simply shoot him. With grace, balance and obdurate brutality, Jamison disarmed the two guards with speed and in-close fighting. He pushed the barrels of their rifles in toward them and gained leverage.

Then, coarsened by rage, Jamison yanked the rifles out of their hands and flung them across the room. He struck the men on their temples and inflicted blows to their throats. Two of the men went down, their larynx crushed. The fifth man swung the butt of his rifle at Jamison's head.

Jamison slipped the gun stock and, dropping to the floor, swiftly took the legs out from under him with a leg sweep. The German's gun hit the floor and slid across the room.

Now, the weapon was loose on the floor, but Jamison was not focused on it. His vision was directed on the enemy. He knew that the gun could not kill him without someone pulling the trigger. Jamison then kicked the soldier like a football, raising him vertically. A final spinning back fist put the

German to sleep. Jamison glanced around for the sixth man and saw that he was unconscious on the floor at Mieszko's feet.

"Well that is impressive," Jamison smiled, catching his breath. "I am not without skills," Mieszko responded.

"I bet we won't be invited back for evening mass," Jamison joked, but a chill went down his spine as he remembered he left Lora in another other part of the church.

"Lora!" Jamison cried, leaving the Germans lying on the floor. He raced off to find her and Mieszko followed close behind. They ran through the halls of the church, calling out to her, but she did not answer. She was not where Jamison had left her. Her surreptitious absence impregnated panic in their hearts. They needed sanctity in this moment of intense crisis. Disposed and determined, they began to look for hidden passages along the walls.

"Outside," directed Mieszko. The two men hurried outside through the Church of Bones and to their amazement, Lora was perched on the high wall of the cemetery, reciting a poem:

“Sound, sound aloud The welcome of the orient flood,

Into the west ; Fair Niger, son to great Oceanus,

Now honor'd, thus,

With all his beauteous race :

Who, though but black in face,

Yet are they bright,

And full of life and light.

To prove that beauty best, Which, not the color, but the feature

Assures unto the creature.”

“What is she doing?” Jamison hurried over to her.

Lora was singing a song:

“That they a land must forthwith seek, Whose termination, of the Greek,
Sounds T A N I A ; where bright Sol, that heat their bloods, doth never rise
or set,

But in his journey passeth by, And leaves that climate of the sky,

To comfort of a greater light, Who forms all beauty with his sight.”

Lora raised her hands and lifted her head to the sky. A single enormous cloud in the shape of a hand wrapped its lumpy fingers beneath the sky as if it were holding back the rain. Its mood was changing. Though enraptured, Lora was crying and she was melted in tears. It seemed as though she was speaking to those that lay buried in the ground. Undoubtedly, they could not hear her or acknowledge her, for the dead know nothing. She continued with her song repeating the line:

With all his beauteous race: Who, though but black in face, Yet are they
bright, And full of life and light.

What Lora did not know was that her tears carried a scent. Something would soon be following that scent, pursuing her, something so horrifying that the travelers could not comprehend it.

Mieszko analyzed and desiccated her song, “Jamison she is reciting from an early Jacobean era masque called 'The Masque of Blackness.'” He did not find the words to be comforting, and they did not explain why she chose this moment to climb onto a wall, overlooking a graveyard, and sing a song about blackness. The tombstones and angel slabs of concrete were as cold and dead as those to whom they were ascribed. Everything in the yard was frozen in time. Not a blade of grass was blowing in the wind. The crosses seemed to sing to Lora with the sound of harmonizing strings. Jamison could not reach Lora from the ground, so he stood calling to her, trying to break her trance. Mieszko had disappeared, leaving the two of them to deal with the spell under which she had fallen.

A cemetery should be a place of rest and peace, but today, the Sedlec Ossuary was ghastly chilling and eerie. The color had been sucked from the garden like platelets from blood. Lora, no longer singing, was just standing on the wall now with her head bowed as in reverence to the dead. The scene appeared macabre and looked shockingly repellent, like livor mortis. Then, Lora began to leave her trance, becoming unstable on the wall.

“If you are going to fall, fall toward me,” Jamison ordered, halfway joking. Whatever extraordinary event had just occurred, Jamison was growing weary of the unscheduled out-of-body experiences Lora was enduring for the sake of a monk’s soul.

Lora opened her eyes and asked, “What am I doing up here?” She was involutely petrified and bewildered, but did not lose her balance.

“Well there is quite a story to tell, but what I want you to do for me now is simply drop down from there into my arms.” Mieszko also held out his arms like one trying to get a cat to leap down from a tree. Lora had great trust in Jamison, so she turned and dropped into his waiting arms. As he placed her feet on the ground, her sepia colored eyes seductively thanked him, and nothing in the world could have prevented the kiss that followed. It was a slow, passionate and intense kiss, one like Jamison had never experienced. The two lovers were holding each other, kissing, lingering and becoming lost in the moment. As Lora passionately kissed him, he was totally submissive. Jamison never dreamed that he would be falling in love with the most exotic woman in the world in a cemetery. Also falling in love, Lora adored their compatibility, even though all odds screamed unconventional. She adored their romance, though it all seemed incongruous.

Their liaison was abruptly interrupted by Mieszko who arrived with a wooden ladder.

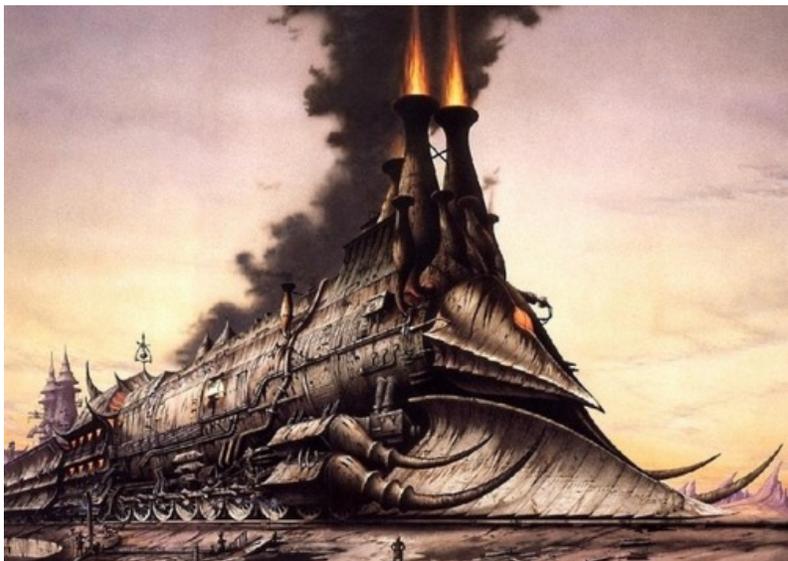
“I see I am late,” he said, as he leaned the ladder against the wall.

Disagreeing with Mieszko, Jamison responded, “No, you are early.”

CHAPTER 23 I HAVE IT IN MY HANDS

If you get rich, be in a dark corner when you jump for joy. African Proverb

When Mieszko originally scribed the Codex Gigas, he added a plethora of striking and divergent artwork, so rich and intriguing that religious and art circles talked about it for centuries, even to modern times. Mieszko did not speak to Jamison about details of the book. He did believe, however, that Lora, with her unique insight may have seen a part of his inner most being, save what was absent. Because of the missing pages, Mieszko believed, she could not



come to a clear vision of all he was as a man. Paradoxically, Mieszko was both a man and a book.

On one page, he drew a Devil enthroned in a solitary state. The illustrated pages were surrounded by leaves with colored panels, partially blank, both before and after. The pages preceding the illustrations contained a confession of sins in lettering twice as large as that of the other manuscript pages. Two of the pages contained other various conjurations written in the same large hand.

The Giant Book had been written, assembled, sold, pawned, purchased and owned throughout the centuries. The medical works within its pages were followed by the New Testament. Mieszko had written about the history of the universe and all humanity, from the Creation to the foundation of the Christian Church. This history was played out against a background of promised ultimate salvation. The fact that the Codex Gigas is also known as "The Devil's Bible," Mieszko thought, certainly added no trust to his comrades' faith in him, and he did not feel as though he had really withheld anything from them.

Unsettling to the travelers was the fact that they found fortress-style wooden doors that were unlocked in the back of the church. They assumed the church had a cellar beneath it, and the basement needed to be explored. Slowly, Jamison led the way down the creaking steps into darkness. Lora

found a light switch. They were not expecting to see the spacious room that lay ahead. In it were machines and apparatuses lining the walls. A rack of guns with ammunition, a score of books, blueprints, and manuscripts were lying about in the open for everyone to see. The room appeared to be in use, and that made them uneasy. They went straight to the manuscripts. Some were rolled up in tubes while others were spread out on the blueprint table.

Two locked metal cabinets would require some time for Jamison to get them open. First, he had to find some tools. As he looked around the room, he found a tool box shoved into a corner. Digging through the box, he located a pry bar and a hammer. He began banging away like a cave-man, filling the room with deafening sounds.

“I hope no one is superstitious about breaking into lockers under a church,” Jamison laughed, as he hammered primitively on the lock.

Lora prowled around the walls of the room, running her hands along the bricks. It was almost as if she was being drawn by a force. However, she had not dropped back into a trance; rather, she was engrossed, lost in thought.

Meanwhile, Mieszko was examining the blueprint table. He found battle plans, a layout of the church, and maps of a train station. He found weapons diagrams, but nothing of the eight lost pages. Lora stopped and

began to manipulate and massage one of the bricks that was loosened from its place in the wall. She gripped it with her fingertips, squeezing tighter, as she gently rocked it up and down, until it broke free. She was shocked to be holding the brick in her hand, but only hesitated for a second before placing her eye against the aperture. She was unable to see into the dark hole or detect any item. When she attempted to reach into the dark space with her fingers, she felt something inside, but could not grasp it.

“I have found something,” she announced, just at the same time Jamison broke open the lock to the cabinet with a bang. Mieszko rushed over to Lora and took control. There was something in this dark slot in the wall, and while he could get his fingers on it, he could not get it out. The lure and enticement ate at him, but he could not pull the object toward him. It felt like metal to him. Jamison brought the hammer and screwdriver over and began to chisel away at the mortar. Mieszko felt vibrations from the metal container which was becoming more visible as Jamison chiseled away at the brick. As the last pieces of mortar were brushed away, the cylinder presented itself to Mieszko’s touch.

The hard metal container had a lock built into the end of the cylinder. Lora sadly noticed, “It takes a key.” Remembering the handfull of keys scattered in the bottom of the toolbox, Jamison took two leaps and retrieved them. Every key could be a passkey.

The shape of the keys would only complicate the unlocking, so Mieszko began going through them one at a time, inserting and attempting to turn them.

“Is there a skeleton key?” Mieszko was rummaging through the pile of keys that Jamison placed on the bench.

“Yes, this one is different, and it has a tiny musical note imprinted on it.” Jamison handed a pewter key to Mieszko. Mieszko recognized that it was a skeleton key, though it had been altered. It was cut differently than the rest.

He inserted it into the key-way and when he twisted it, the key turned easily. Suddenly, there was the sound of driver pins, and the pin tumbler lock released. As the lid opened, this was the moment of truth. This cylinder had been tucked away, hidden, and perhaps forgotten by the thief in the hope that it would never be found.

The cylinder began to vibrate and tremble in Mieszko’s hand, and stale, trapped air rushed out like a blast from a shotgun. Objects in the room exploded as if they were fragile or made of glass. Heavier objects rocked or toppled over, and lighter weight objects were lifted off the ground.

Abruptly, they were trapped in a wind tunnel, caught in the throat of an

experiment. All they could do was drop the cylinder to the floor and cover their heads to protect them from the flying debris.

The roar of rushing air filled their ears, broken only by the sound of enchanting music. It was the same music they had heard in the garden of the dead just moments earlier, except on a higher frequency. Like a Kundt tube on an extraterrestrial scale, it had far more locked up standing waves, that obviously had been building for a very long time in order to release such a vortex.

Lora yelled “Hell an powdahouse!”

When the room stopped spinning and everything had settled, they found that they were still in the room, now a disastrous wreck. Emancipated, the container was open, and Mieszko was pulling out eight perfectly preserved immaculate pages from an ancient manuscript. He was extracting long, rolled-up pages of vellum, and his heart raced as the anticipation built. He laid them on the blueprint table and gently unrolled them.

“This is my work and these are the pages. We have found my soul.” His face was glowing with excitement as numbness washed over him. He felt an ache in the place where he once said he felt God in his heart. Devastatingly disparaged, the feeling he had craved diminished, and like a fleeting thought, he could not remember the wonder of the uncovered

sensation. It was an insult without repel, his virtue injured like a graceful taunt. Lora and Jamison embraced him as he wept. Mieszko collapsed into a fetal position. It was as if a reservoir had broken and his life force was draining. Jamison realized that if he didn't do something to bring Mieszko back, he and Lora were doomed.

“Mieszko, man get a grip on yourself!” Jamison took him firmly by the shoulders and shook him hard. Mieszko was still behaving despondently and refused to raise his head. Jamison was not about to be abandoned in this German-infested place without a guide. He squeezed Mieszko's face with his strong right hand, “Look at me! Pull yourself together.” Mieszko must have experienced the pain of the tight grip along his jaw line. He raised his head, and his eyes swelled with tears.

“Mieszko we need you,” Lora said gently. Jamison released his hold as Mieszko slowly brought himself up to his feet.

“I apologize. You are correct. We have too much at stake. Give me a moment to collect my thoughts. Mieszko rolled the eight pages up and slipped them down into the cylinder.

“What happens now? Lora wanted to know.

“I do not know,” there was a pause and Mieszko resumed, “We must continue on our journey until I can reunite with the book.”

“Reunite with the book?” Jamison took a step back.

“I am sorry to disappoint you, but finding these pages is only part of what I have to do. I must get back into the book because I am the book. Mieszko sounded more desperate than ever. Jamison had a helpless feeling, as though the wind had been knocked from his lungs. Lora sighed very loudly, as if to say “We are tired and want to go home.”

“I don’t understand. If you are the book, why are we looking for it now? If you lost your soul, and these pages are your soul, why can’t you just reconnect here and now and transport back to wherever you are supposed to be?” Jamison asked, very confused by the whole theory.

“Everyone's soul is complex. My soul was separated, fractured and made incomplete. When the book absorbed me, it dragged all of me into it: spirit, body and soul. Those three parts became one in consciousness. When my soul was torn away from the other parts of my being, I became both a man and a book. I cannot simply say “let it be” or “eat the book” and return my soul to its proper order. I must be absorbed again. My days separated turned into weeks, then months and then countless years. I am not sure how I came to be back in human form. The splitting and

reforming of my body and mind was just something that happened. I do not even have a solid memory of the first dozen years of returning. I only vaguely remember jumping from place to place, from time to time, until I walked through the wormhole into your hospital room that day.”

Jamison spoke aloud, attempting to come to terms with what he was hearing, “So when you and this book became one, you were basically torn in two, but, you were able to come back to find what is lost? Does any of this have to do with being separated from God? You know I have always heard that sin separates us from God.”

“Anyone who believes that they are separated from God is living in hell. Neither you nor I could ever be separated from God, because God is omnipresent. But on the other hand, we can be separated from him within our minds. If man was created in the beginning in Christ, according to Eph 2:10, and we were chosen in Christ before the disruption of the world, the question is: What caused man to forget his origin and to assume one of his own choosing?” Mieszko asked.

Then he began to answer his own question. “A soul seeks a lover. The lover is the spirit. A soul will wander and will have relations in many

places hoping to find the right fit. The soul will journey through eternity in hopes of finding a bridegroom. The soul is the feminine part of man. In the Book of Genesis, the spirit of man is Adam and the soul of man is Eve. My soul has wandered through the valley of the shadow of death for too long, and it must be rejoined.”

“We will help you,” Lora needed Jamison’s assurance and approval. Jamison made eye contact with Mieszko, then back to Lora, who met his eyes with hidden words from her soul.

“Of course we’ll help. We have come this far. No use in stopping now, while we are still breathing.”

“The joining of my spirit and soul will be tested by fire, tried in the courts of the divine and proven on the altar of God. Thank you for assisting me in finding my one reality.” With these words that were resonant and revealing, Mieszko pushed the lid back onto the end of the tube. There was a sound from the tube of the lock resealing. The soul of Mieszko went back into its vault. Having the cylinder in his hands, Mieszko was comforted, and hope was restored. Since it was Jamison's body that had been the map and the key on this journey, he handed the newly found key to him.

The pedestrian journey had been beleaguered at times. They were worn, although the unrelenting pace had made the events go by quickly. Jamison wondered how long he had been reported missing and what his sister and mother must be thinking.

CHAPTERS 24 LOOK WHO IS MISSING

Never seek the wind in the field. It is useless to try and find what is gone. Polish Proverb

In the real world, Jamison had been missing for 4 weeks. In the right time, God's ordained time, an all out search had been conducted. Gradually, as time went by, the search had become futile, and the teams came up with no leads. By now, the worse had been presumed and ingenuous efforts were all that remained.

Jamison's mother and sister held out hope and continued to pray for the return of their loved one. At Jamison's work place, the judge had ordered the American Flag that flew in the front of the courthouse to be lowered to half staff. However, so much time had now passed that the flag was

returned to full staff. The news media had moved on to fresh new stories. There was the three year old tattoo artist, a woman who sought help from police in detaining the spirit of her dead brother, and an ex-traffic cop who claimed to be Jesus. Jamison, though alive and well, was quickly becoming a faded old news story. The Sheriff's Office where he was employed kept the investigation open and was questioning anyone that might have a grievance against him. Once they learned that he had been in a horrific automobile accident, questions arose, and foremost was, "why move the body from the hospital?"

After such a horrendous accident, no one believed that Jamison was capable of walking out of the hospital under his own strength. If he had somehow mustered the inner strength to do the impossible, where did he go? Why, after all this time, had he not been found dead, or was he wandering around somewhere with amnesia?

In Lora's real world, she had been missing for the same amount of time and was presumed kidnapped by whomever had committed murder in the old mansion. Daily, Lora's mother and family held vigils and candlelight services, as they fervently hoped to see their loved one again. The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) had no suspects in the presumed abduction.

There were no witnesses, and the police had very little information with which to search. One detective suspected that Lora may have run off with a lover, but her mother assured him that she had none. The Marine Operations had briefly searched the ports and harbors, but they found only a few stowaways on ships. Lora's name and profile went on the Missing Persons web site.

For Lora's family, the thought of never seeing her again was devastating. If she was being held against her will, was she being harmed and tortured? Her mother imagined her crying out to God, praying to him, and fighting to get free. She refused to believe that her little girl was gone forever.

Sadly, there was no mortal search being carried out in Mieszko's name. No one on the planet earth knew that the little monk was lost. The residents of the blue planet did not hear his supplications and prayers each night. He did not cross a single mind as he silently petitioned heaven and made his appeals for salvation. Soliciting a divine audience and languishing into the morning hours, he made his request known. Was anyone entertaining his pleas?

Unaware, the people of the world were standing on the body of a decomposing corpse. Cascading putrefaction and carnivores bloated the stellar dream world that the resident had so enjoyed. Now an execrable distortion and a hallucinatory state with loathsome gray shadows, where people huddled in ambiguous depravity, were giving way to repulsive cavity ruptures and the sickening invasion of scavengers. Things had escalated past the rigor mortis stage.

There was no more fixed glassy eye stare, no more last breath. Who could save the world from this body of death?

The world continued forward, having no clue that the fate of their planet was invested in a band of three strangers.

CHAPTER 25 THE DEVIL'S TRAIN

One devil that you know is better than twenty that you don't. Chilean Proverb

Out of the ransacked cellar of treasures and into the open air a gentle breeze streamed across their faces. Lora breathed deep. The wind was a



sign to her that they were on planet earth, and the earth was rotating.

Mieszko so wanted to return to modern times. The WWII area would not yield the giant book with which they were trying to connect. For some reason that Mieszko did not understand, the bricks in the cellar were not usable as a door through the time tunnel. The mood was like a dark abyss, and he could only imagine that some sort of spell or curse had been conjured when the cylinder containing the manuscripts was removed, changing the traversability and slamming the door shut.

Outside, the clouds were wispy like cobwebs, swirling as if being swept by an old woman with a broom. There were dark nimbus clouds forming in a rolling fashion from the south and a foreboding shadow could be seen

blanketing the horizon. There was moisture hanging in the air, a warning of the approaching storm.

Gun shots! A blast followed by an echo of rifle fire now shattered the calm. German voices were yelling , “Halt, Stop!”

The three doughty time travelers did not take time to look for the source of the gunfire. They paid no heed to the directions of the Germans. There was no time to contemplate. They just ran, zigzagging from left to right, trying to throw off the aim of the shooters. Around the church, past the beautiful baroque statues on the balustrades to the right, wind milling arms swirled for balance. Then by the cemetery, they darted down a small side road just opposite of the church. More shots rang out, and Jamison felt the buzz of a bullet fly past his right ear.

“These guys are trying to kill us,” Jamison thought, as they came upon yet another church.

Anxiety and instinct motivated them to stay moving. Mieszko was running ahead; Lora was directly behind him, and Jamison was bringing up the rear. Distress and concern stole any composure they attempted to

retain. They heard the sound of jeeps racing up behind them. Down a brick street, they ran. They flew by “the plague column” dedicated to the Virgin Mary as gratitude that only half the population had been wiped out by the dreaded disease. As bullets whizzed past them, chewing up the earthen parapet below, no one stopped to read the dedication. Continuing down a slope, the Kutná Hora město train station came into sight. They did not know if they would be able to board and escape, or if the train would be occupied by German troops. All that they were sure of was that they could not stop running, and they dare not check their rear-view. Mieszko held onto the cylinder in a death grip, and nothing could pry it from his fingers.

The train was beginning to pull away from the station. The pursuing vehicles were still audible in the distance behind them, and they could tell they were closing fast. With bullets spraying everywhere around them, it was a miracle no one was hit. Lora screamed, “Pi vit!”, and Mieszko ran faster. As the train was slowly beginning to accelerate, they began to doubt that they would make it aboard on time. Then, they knew they would make it; yes, they had to make it! They jumped, boarding the moving train, with Mieszko offering his free hand to Jamison who lunged, and barely got a foot on the boarding step before it picked up speed. The

three sought out and then collapsed in the high back seats, trying to catch their breath.

The sounds of the rails reminded Jamison of being in his mother's tiny laundry room when she had both the washer and dryer running simultaneously. The train rattled and shook with a slight rocking motion as it chugged down the tracks.

“Good Lord, man, we almost got shot,” Jamison exclaimed. His words were broken, and he breathed out in dactylic and iambic rhythms. Lora hugged him lovingly, their chests heaving against one another, out of breath. They were so thankful that they had once again slipped out of the hands of danger. Mieszko, being ever observant, brought up the unnerving question: “Has anyone noticed that we are the only passengers on this train?” Jamison raised his head up over the seat in front of them and took a gander. The first thing he noticed was the cherry wood, with plush cushioned upholstered seats. Jamison noticed they were empty. There really were no other passengers on the train!

He concluded that “possibly other people were in the other train cars.”

“Does anyone smell tobacco?” Lora was rubbing her nose.

“It is the Phillip Morris Plant which wasn’t built until later, after the war,” Mieszko perked up and instantly caught his breath.

“What’s happening?” Jamison asked, as he pulled the machete from Lora’s back pack.

“I do not know for certain, but we may be on a time travel train. We were in 1946; now we seem to have moved forward to at least 1995.” Mieszko was getting up from his seat and walking up the aisle.

“How did you come to that conclusion” Jamison was in doubt.

“By this plaque that says “Dedicated in the year of our Lord 1995.” Jamison looked at the plaque which read “Věnoval v roce našeho Pána 1995”

“So you know a few languages huh?”

Mieszko could see that Jamison had many thoughts swimming through his head.

“Of course, I can read or speak any language.”

“You are a jack of all trades, a man of marvels.” Jamison’s attention was suddenly drawn away by an unexpected sight; sitting in the front seat of their train car near the vestibule, was a hooded figure. Mieszko was stifled before he could respond to Jamison. He was not expecting to see anyone else on the train. Jamison noticed Mieszko’s sudden apprehension. He got into a defensive stance, holding the machete in his hand.

Looking askew, Jamison sarcastically asked, “How did we not see the spook?”

Lora shrank away from their guest.

Mieszko did not know whether to approach the hooded figure or not. In the chimerical atmosphere of the train car, nothing seemed like reality.

“Brother, may we bother you?” Mieszko asked, using a gentle voice.

The indecorous hooded figure rose from its seat and turned toward Mieszko. Within the veil of the black bardocucullus, muddy eyes with

pupils that moved like seas incarnadine, burned through Mieszko. In a low gravelly voice and with muti-sepulchral tones it spoke. "You are he who has no soul."

"Great! Another zombie guy" Jamison said.

Lora could be heard hurling imprecations and praying in her native language.

Mieszko made the sign of the cross, standing his ground. He did not retreat. "How can a man without a soul know what he is doing is right?" The dark figure took a step forward, expressionlessly.

"I now command my soul demon," Mieszko had changed his tone to one of authority.

Its guttural voice seemed to harmonize as it unleashed threats. "How long will you torment these friends of yours and put them in harms way? Do you not know that this train goes into the fires of Gehenna, where the worm never dies and fulminating compounds are forced down your throats and then discharged? How many more times are you going to trust your

blind faith before you give up? Simply become what you were meant to be Herman, an outcast and a prisoner of your own mind.”

“Who are you? Who has sent you” Mieszko demanded to know.

“You did Herman, don’t you remember? Before the book swallowed you whole, you cried out for the Dark One. He heard you. You are a prayerful man Herman. Don’t you believe that your prayers were answered? There are consequences to your eagerness to end your suffering. You were a curmudgeon and dyspeptic then, and you have not changed. You are still imprudent, unthankful, and malcontent. Did it not tantalize your soul when you were cradled and released from the bondage of the prison? I have been sent here to try your obstinace, to test your resolve, and to prove your vows. Give up your quest, for it will only bring you pain and suffering. You will be forgiven for your contemptible violations. Take my hand and put all of this behind you,” the hooded figure spoke.

Mieszko grew increasingly tired of the insinuations. “I have lived through centuries and have been a blessed son of the Most High enduring hardships and persecutions, while you were being birthed from the lowest lava within

the crust of the earth. You are no more than silica and oxygen bonded together under a cloak.” Mieszko was staring down this fiend.

The cloak began to glow with yellowish green crystals. It raised its hands above its head. The sleeves of the cloak slid down to its elbows revealing its exaggerated varicose forearms, swollen, gnarled, and knotted with tumors. It cackled in singular sounds that echoed mournfully.

The temperature of the train car began to rise. Mieszko lifted his hands and spoke in Latin, “dulce periculum,” meaning “danger is sweet.”

The hooded figure took a step back, as if confused by such a word. Mieszko continued, “dulcius ex asperis” meaning “sweeter after difficulties.”

Under the glowing cloak, it crooned back to Mieszko in Latin, “tu fui ego eris.”

“What did that thing say?” Jamison demanded to know.

Mieszko interpreted, “Thus, “what you are, I was; what I am, you will be.”

Jamison moved forward to support Mieszko. Lora had now moved forward. Mieszko pointed into the blank face of his accuser, “tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito.” He shared the Latin phrase in English, "you should not give in to evils, but proceed ever more boldly against them."

The hooded figure lit up even more and the three travelers were forced to take a step back. Fire flamed under its feet as the robe turned transparent. The outline was a feminine body whose feet were melded together. Long lanky fingers dangled with tiny drops of fire dripping onto the floor of the train car. Though transparent the body still appeared to exhume darkness. Its calumny was silenced during this transfiguration.

“Repeat after me,” Mieszko instructed the other two, “Caritas Christi, Christus Rex, Corpus Christi.” Though Jamison wanted to start swinging the machete through this ghostly figure, instead he opted to repeat the Latin phrases with Lora.

They continued to echo the words Mieszko was saying, “Cruci dum spiro fido,” meaning; “While I live, I trust in the cross, Whilst I trust in the Cross I have life.”

The demon seemed affected and repelled by the words. Under the fiery robe, there was a monumental battle with the demon. With indecipherable voices, inarticulate and haunting sounds, the red-eyed monster seemed in torment.

The temperature of the train was decreasing as the ghoul now battled the truth that had invaded its space. A muffled reverberation stung through the soles of their feet like chimes sounding.

The serpent in the tree of good and evil had to tempt the soul for it was created to be a tempter. From its origin evil of all kinds has been placed in the way of every righteous man to test faith and resolve. Exemplary, in this instance, it would be a woman that stood up yielding not only her gifts of pulchritude but also in a putsch trance Lora shouted in the language that she did not understand “Salvatore Mundi!”

In the eldritch light, she stepped forward and impulsively pushed the nefarious figure with both hands. Turning to fire for a split second, the beast was able to mutter, “Korytko of Pravdovce lives!” Then it burst into crystallized salt particles Lora's feet.

Jamison grabbed Lora up his arms, hardly believing her bold move against the hooded phantom.

“You were amazing girl!”

“I had an impulse, like someone or something said to do it” she replied, as she noticed the remains of the phantom had been absorbed into the floor of the train.

Mieszko ran to the windows and threw open the shades. One would think that because of recent events that Mieszko would have raised the window with more delicacy. Consequently, everyone could see where they were passing through. All three were purblind past the window of the supersonic train. The landscape outside was difficult like a rainy day at a funeral ceremony. A sepulchral hollowness dismissed any signs of clotting so this new wasteland could not harden. It was bleeding and the soil was entrenched with putrid rot.

The forest spoke through the calloused trees knotted and boiled in heat.

There was not enough life in this barren primeval frontier to coagulate to

produce anything fresh. Rigor mortis birthed emptiness; this lowest point was a lost sunken pit of dependent lividity.

“This is the backside of nowhere,” Jamison sounded as though he could use a tonic.

The only light present was a dim red glow shining up through cracks in the ground. Nothing outside the passenger car was moving. Dead things can not move. Mieszko quoted Palms 115:17, “The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.” He moved away from the window and instructed everyone to form a circle, holding hands, and to repeat after him: “Gloria in Excelsis Dio.” They repeated the phrase three times. “We have just given glory to God. In doing so, according to scripture, I believe we are alive; for the congregation of the dead knows nothing and can hardly be thankful for their condition. We give thanks because we are still alive.”

Jamison looked at Lora. She was his inamorata. He held her in his arms. He whispered, “We are alive.”

“Was that a demon or the devil” Lora asked? Her heart was instilled with wives tales and superstitions.

To lighten the mood, Jamison quoted from the movie O’ Brother Where Art Thou; “the great Satan his-self is red and scaly with a bifurcated tail, and he carries a hay fork.”

Mieszko and Lora appeased him with an audible laugh, though neither had ever seen the movie. The three of them made a pact together and vowed to bear the responsibility of the cylinder, which Mieszko was still clutching. Invariably, no matter what happened, these pages must find its way to The Devil’s Bible.

CHAPTER26 THE BRAVE NEW WORLD

Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere Albert Einstein

The travelers had been challenged by Korytko of Pravdovce, Martin II, forty-second Abbot of the monastery of Brevnov, who had thrown down



the
gauntlet.
Mieszko
knew the
face well
and
understood

that Martin II was responsible for the theft of the eight pages. What he did not know was why. Throughout history, Martin II had been obsessed with keeping The Codex Gigas separated from the eight missing pages that Mieszko claimed were his soul. From age to age long after the original conveyance, like an armored car heist, Martin II had ordered thugs and creatures of the underworld to infest the living and hijack the transport of the Giant Book. He was partially responsible for encouraging others to nickname the book, “The Devils Bible.” Although the Kutna Hora Express was right on time, the question that remained was-time for what?

It could be a trap intended to catch three travelers, perhaps to skin them alive! Or was the the train's journey designed to collect rodents to be sold to snotty-nosed children for pets? What kind of parents would allow their children to own nasty, flea ridden, disease carrying rodents? Maybe

the three were going to be used as lab experiments for a mad scientist? Frightening thoughts of being scalded to death by careless lab techs, poisoned by toxic colorless Phosphine gases, and endless pain and starvation cast a horrifying image in the minds of the travelers. Mieszko remembered a story from the second century where a Roman physician named Galen dissected goats and pigs, a practice which later earned him the title, "the father of vivisection." These thoughts were hardly anything to dwell on, however, because they were at the mercy of this mysterious train ride, and they had little time to prepare their minds for the antithesis of whatever they would face when the doors opened. Whether it was deep darkness or illuminating light was unknown. Martin II, or at least a sinister distortion of his descendents, was functioning on the same plain as Mieszko, Jamison and Lora. Although Martin II had been at the top of his class in monastery school, his cathedral of choice was now the cesspool of the netherworld, spreading its decrepit sickness like clear catarrh, flowing, and infecting everything it slimed in a colossal way. Mieszko knew this was not the time to be complacent. These facts were not conjecture; they were set in stone. Not to be taken lightly, Martin II's thought processes had transformed from one of brilliant reasoning to this "new" order of darkness. Whatever good had been in him had long since departed. In yesterday's world, Martin II had commanded respect from those associated

with the church. However, the present face he wore bore no resemblance to the Christian he once was.

Martin II, the demagogue, had mounted his attack. Initially it seemed very weak; maybe he was playing with the time travelers? Was he enjoying this foreplay and torment?

The passenger car was becoming a freezer filled with a gelid wintry chill. The windows were frosting over, and the gloom of darkness remained on the outside.

The train was now moving upward, like a roller-coaster at an amusement park. The three sat in their seats wondering what would be hurled at them next.

As the train climbed higher and higher, they could not imagine a mountain anywhere on earth with this kind of elevation. Pushed back against their seats by the train's trajectory, their bodies pressed hard; they silently prayed. "You know that old saying, the sky is the limit? I'm not sure that I believe it," Jamison said, his voice reverberating.

Mieszko attempted to wipe the window clear in order to view their surroundings, but the window was so thick with frost that he slightly frost-bit the palm of his hand in the process.

The train began to shudder and shake from friction, throwing sparks through the floor board. Lora's fingers were interlaced with Jamison's, and she tightened her grip as it seemed every nut and bolt was going to come loose. Her terror increased as the train began to bounce so hard it was like experiencing an emergency landing on an airstrip. As it pulled into the train station, there was hard braking and a loud roar of its engines violently gripping the rails. Shortly, the deceleration ended, they ground to a halt, and the train sat idle.

“What the devil was that? Trains don’t land do they?”

Mieszko agreed, “Very odd indeed.”

Pulling out the machete, Jamison was first to the door. Mieszko followed, still tightly clutching the cylinder. This time, it was Lora who brought up the rear, and she stayed very close. There was no visibility to the outside world, and their hearts raced, ready for more chaos and danger.

Jamison pulled on the door handle. It unlatched, and he cautiously, opened the door. The thin air was uncontaminated, and they stepped out into a painted world of color. The fact that they did not feel lightheaded or disoriented confirmed to the travelers that the air was not polluted. Yet the sky appeared sterile and featureless, and there were no clouds, no sun and no moon. Usually, Jamison dismissed a crisis with a witty jape. However, this time, he was speechless as he numbly proceeded out onto the platform. He knew that this time, the danger was no joke. “This is an odd place,” Mieszko was impressed by the abstract landscape. “Color is everywhere and the sky looks like a sugary heaven,” Lora noted. “Good contrast,” Mieszko agreed, admiring the empyrean above. In the train station, soft colors blended together so that it appeared proficiently airbrushed. The fusion of the ground images with the train station merged into perfect separation from the platform. In this melded world, it was somehow easier to accept the peculiar and the odd than attempt to analyze it. “Be careful friends, I believe we are in a world of illusion. Normally these color schemes would be sickening to most people, but as you can see, we have accepted them as perfectly normal.” Mieszko’s words seemed entirely apposite, as he began his march down the platform toward the depot.

“Look there! Look! The trio spread out, and Jamison made no effort to hide his weapon. Someone was standing at the end of the platform.

“Approach with caution,” Jamison ordered. The figure at the end of the platform wore a snow-white trench coat, adorned with a high furry collar.

“Who are you?” Mieszko demanded to know. The figure, a colorless male who appeared anemic, turned toward the three and spoke majestically, “My name is Ecanus.” Lora had never seen such a white man before.

“Oyboi” was a word her mother had taught her in the Nigerian language.

It meant "white boy." “I know of you. You are not supposed to exist,”

Mieszko said. “Of course I exist, I am here, and I am here for you.”

Ecanus' angelic appearance and his gentle speech assured Mieszko that he was no threat.

“I know what legend says your name is, an angel who inspires others to write original ideas. But you do not exist,” Mieszko's irascible tone was evident.

“If I do not exist, explain to me why are you speaking to me now? Do your eyes deceive you?” Ecanus' delivery was delicate, with a pleasant tone.

Mieszko's next words were out of character, acrimonious and belittling.

"You are no angel; you are no messenger of God. Your name was invented and you have no credence here."

Jamison, hearing the caustic tone in Mieszko's voice, took over the interrogation, "Very well Ecanus, where are we, and were you waiting on us? If you were waiting on us, how you did know we were coming?"

Ecanus spoke with ease, "you are in Abraham's Bosom. Yes, we were waiting for you because we saw the colors change. When we have visitors, color returns to our kingdom." Mieszko's nerves had slaked and he asked the obvious, "You mentioned we? Who are we? And what kingdom is this?" Gesturing with his hand, he stated, "We are angels, and you are on top of the mountain of Weltberg, in the Kingdom of Angels in the midst of Hades, Here is where heaven and earth connect." Mieszko wasn't buying the "Kingdom of Angels" speech, and Jamison rolled his eyes as if to say, "This is bull." "If this is the Kingdom of angels, where are your pals?"

Jamison was now sounding contemptuous. Ecanus, unprepared for Jamison's question, turned his back to the three and did not answer just as Jamison cut a long penetrating slice across his lower back with the machete, Ecanus heard Jamison ask, "Do angels bleed?" At that, Lora

screamed out, “Pete payon kdlè, which simply meant “don’t do it!” Ecanus made no sound. If Ecanus had been a threat, the threat was now neutralized. He dropped backwards to the platform in a pool of blood. The blade had severed his spinal chord. “Nope, angels don’t bleed, but you sure do.” Jamison explained answering his own question. Frustrated with Jamison, Lora cried, “Why did you kill him?” “Because we needed information,” Jamison replied. In Jamison’s defense, Mieszko answered; “Lora, it needed to be done. Whatever this thing was, it was neither angel nor man, and it was lying.” Jamison noticed that Lora was not happy with what just occurred. “He was arrogant and I hate arrogance.” Lora huffed in disgust. The travelers sat for a few moments, eating the last of the bread in Lora's backpack, though they had no water. In this strange dream-like place, everything was smooth, depressed, and refined with no sharp edges. The golden fields yielded flowers that bloomed radiant and bright. Their leaves were glossy, sleek like polished varnish, Because of their difficult terrain, the small hills, would require an experienced trekker to cross them. The trees visible in far distance held an extreme contrast to the colors in the foreground.. They were awash in colors of emerald and jade, and even though there was no direct sunlight, they twinkled and flickered. “And night shall not be there, and they have no need of a lamp and light of a sun, because the Lord God doth give them light, and they shall reign -- to the

ages of the ages.” In this world, there was the fine dynamics of a train that, with no explanation, becomes a time machine when boarded. Clearly, this world was a planet unto itself; a home for an entirely different race of beings. Though their journey had taken them many places on earth, this world was an anomaly on any map. What was this place? The ground felt like Astroturf. and the air seemed manufactured. The colors seemed fabricated, and the atmosphere appeared to be created just for them. While they were aware of their surroundings, they knew it was a facade, an insincere world of pretense. There was nothing in this world to caress or embrace. Everything here was eye candy designed to appeal to the senses. Even the odor in the air had a hint of palatable sweetness that enriched the taste in their mouths. As they sat pondering the events that had unfolded in this latest chapter of the journey, they concluded that this place was a genesis recently birthed from the consciousness of their own minds. The encounter with the red-eyed hooded character had sent them into a dream-like state. They understood that this being was sent to detour them, a mere distraction in the here and now. If they were in the here and now, the entity that called itself, Ecanus, had been the antithesis of Miesszko. Someone or something had planted this creature into their path in an attempt to manipulate the outcome of their destination.

Mieszko was speaking, “We mustn’t explore this world any further for it does not exist. We must get back on the train because if what I am thinking is correct, the train is still moving.”

Lora was tangled in thought,” Audibly she mumbled “Mwen pedi” ”I’m lost.”

When they realized that they were sharing the same consciousness, they became convinced that, at least physically, they had never disembarked from the train. This revelation presented a conundrum, and the reality was that they were bound in the same Gordian’s knot as Jonathan, the preacher man. This time, the knot was not binding their hands; rather, it was binding their minds. In the real world, Jamison would have never simply cut another human being in half without feeling remorse. With great compunction, he had been agonizing silently over the men he had been forced to kill on this adventure. It was certain that something microscopically, imperceptible, had been lurking incognito, and now it had awakened in them and put their collective consciousness to sleep. Slowly rising from his seated position on the platform, Mieszko suggested that they return to the train. “It is only on the train that we can awaken. It is imperative that we come together in one mind and one accord and wake

ourselves together.” There was no question among them that this whimsically colorful place with its lackluster sky held nothing for them. There was nothing to anchor them here in this milieu, and they were no longer spell-bound by its stunning floridity. The colors that once held them flabbergasted now started to melt like ice on a river. Rising multi-colored liquid poured from the hill tops. Observing the dappled ponds forming, the trio realized that holding an inquisition was not an option, as a harlequin of splashes splattered on the platform from the sky. Instead of becoming tied in the patterns of the melting landscape, the three headed quickly for the train.

Returning to the train, they were relieved to find nothing supernatural or frightening waiting for them. They found their seats, closed their eyes and imagined themselves stirring from their dream world. Seemingly instantaneously, though it may have been hours or days, they were awakened by the sound of the railway, steel on steel, running along the tracks. The gentle swaying of the train cradled them, soothing and pacifying the return. The travelers opened their eyes and concluded that everyone was present and accounted for. They were now well rested and thankful that they had not fully succumbed to deep sleep. In deep sleep or delta sleep, the dream would have become more vivid, more real. It would have been nearly impossible to realize that they were only dreaming. If

they had entered stage four of sleep, their emotions could have easily been fine tuned, and they would have been lost forever. Through it all, Mieszko still clutched the cylinder. Jamison and Lora were holding hands when they returned. Mieszko believed he should share some truth at this juncture. “Adam, the first man, was put into a deep sleep by God. Part of my banishment at the monastery resulted from my revelation of this truth about his sleep. Nowhere in all of scripture do we find that God ever woke him from his sleep. It wasn’t until Christ was raised from the dead that Adam was awakened by God and a new man, Christ Jesus, was resurrected and glorified of the Father.” This revelation left Jamison reflecting about his own personal beliefs and convictions and Lora contemplating the words that Mieszko had just shared. Through the countryside, over hills, passing farms, the train sped along at normal speed. There were no strange or peculiar occurrences. Lora changed seats with Jamison so that she could sit next to the window in order to take in the view of the greenfields and quaint towns that were speeding past. The soaring sandstone mountains were standing like guardians. She was able to get a glimpse of a fairytale castle, and she could imagine herself living in it. She was careful not to dream again until they were off this train. Soon, the train pulled into Smichovske Nadrazi Train Station. History records indicate that at one time this area had been locked behind the iron curtain for 40 years. If this

was present day Prague, it should now be free of such oppression. If this was still the WWII era, they would have had some recalculation to do. "I believe that we are arriving as planned" Mieszko announced, He resembled a boy staring out of his window, waiting on his parents to pick him up from boarding school. The train made a complete stop and relief washed over the threesome. The platform was crowded with many people most of whom were smoking cigarettes. Anxious to disembark, Lora was the first one off the train. She exclaimed, "Mi come here fi drink milk, mi noh come here fi count cow". The travelers were grateful for the chance to enjoy humor again, and Lora's often serious dry humor was refreshing. Stepping off the train, Mieszko seemed fascinated by the ambiance reverberating from the flow of the cultural milieu. "Allow me to share a brief history of our present city; in 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and the Velvet Revolution, a non-violent, gentle revolution, occurred. However, it was only the Slovakiase who used the term "gentle." Czechoslovakia freed itself from oppressive communism and Soviet political influence. In 1993, after the split of Czechoslovakia, Prague became the capital city of the new Czech Republic. This city has seen its share of murder, looting, and destruction and is now part of the European Union." They walked a short distance when Mieszko, encapsulated in thought, broke into another informative rant. "This brings to mind a lovely poem by the Protestant minister, Jan Kollar,

called, "The Daughter of Slava"-Here lies the country, before my tear-laden glances, Once twas the cradle, but now – tis the tomb of my race; Check thou thy steps, for the places are sacred, wherever thou turnest. Son of Tatra arise, cast to the heavens thy gaze, Or to the mighty old oak, that stands yonder, incline thee. Holding its own against treacherous time, till today.”

As quickly as Mieszko shared the Slovak poem, he became silent and continued leading the way.

CHAPTER 27 IN THE LAP OF LUXURY

I wasted time, and now doth Time waste me: For now hath Time made me his numb'ring clock; My thoughts are minutes

William Shakespeare

Although Mieszko was fluent in the Czech language, Jamison thought it sounded like a CD being played backward. Mieszko's talents were endless.

He always had ample currency no matter what country they visited. It was no different here, so they stopped in a quaint eatery where they enjoyed fine dining for the first time in a long while.

They feasted on marinated tenderloin of pork with anise and raspberries in rucolla and chicory salad. They shared a bottle of dark, ruby “Frankovka” wine instead of hurrying to their next destination, They were in the land of Mozart where he was revered, his music celebrated, and now, “The Marriage of Figaro in D major” was playing over the speakers As they dined, it became difficult to determine which was more satisfying, the food, the wine or the music. They noticed that the Czech people enjoyed their beer, and their fellowship, chatting for hours.

It had been some time since they had the opportunity to enjoy the company of one another. Lora entertained them by interjecting quips in her strong accent. She had a fabulous sense of humor, and told the two that she had “gone a foreign.” They knew that she meant “she had left Jamaica.” In her strongest dialect, she frequently interrupted the conversation with colloquialisms like “gwaan go maas,” which meant “go cool yourself,” and: “like mi a go maas,” which meant “chill out.” She even told Jamison that he needed to be: “tan so back,” or “more laid back.”

As they finished their meal, Mieszko said, "I do not want to spoil our good time by throwing a wet blanket on our conversation, but we are being watched," Mieszko, though he did not seem overly suspicious, spoke to them in a low tone that only the two of them could hear. Jamison smiled broadly and played along. "Who is watching us, and where are they?"

Lora's expression had grown to one of concern, "Tan tedy don't start killin' now," as she folded her napkin on her plate.

"There is a well-dressed black man sitting alone at the bar, trying not to be obvious, but he has paid us a lot of attention," Mieszko said.

Mieszko dropped more than enough Czech Crown on the table to cover the cost of the meal and to provide a healthy tip. The three of them casually stood up, and Lora even made sure to take one more sip of her beverage before they exited. They managed to leave the eatery without incident, and hailed a taxi rather quickly. Prague is a busy city, over run with too many buses and pedestrian traffic. It was referred to as "the city of a hundred spires" and also as "the Golden City." They asked the driver for a brochure in order to find accommodations for the night. In Prague, the U

Tricapu Hotel, located in the historic Lesser Town (MalaStrana), was known for its a luxurious rooms and service. As they drove to the hotel, they passed baroque churches, Art Nouveau mansions and eccentric museums. Lora imagined herself as a princess heading to her castle.

The hotel was an uplifting combination of natural materials, including stone, metal, glass and wood, all finely intertwined to create an atmosphere of beauty and charm. Of particular interest was the illuminated cut stone employed in the hotel reception area, the lobby and the bar. The hotel also featured a glass lift.” The travelers were pleased to be there, hoping to finally get a good nights rest. After a very brief check-in at the hotel, they found themselves in rooms 14 and 15 on the first floor. Jamison loved being back in civilization. Civilization to him meant a spacious room, comfortable bed, a plasma TV, and a well equipped mini-bar. Jamison and Lora were sharing this beautifully furnished room, together for the first time, because Jamison had insisted that “it wasn’t safe, and having separate rooms might place Lora in danger. Mieszko, laughed and said, “You are a grown man and you can do what you would like, but I believe that hebiggest danger may come from you.” “Great room, and look at the size of this bathroom,” Jamison said as he flushed the toilet. “It is beautiful,” Lora answered. She loved the bed, “Mi love dah bed ya.”

The tour of their love nest was interrupted by a rap at the door. Jamison ran over to the door holding his hand, signaling for Lora to stand back, “Whose there?”

“Room service,” a strong male accent on the other side of the door answered.

“I didn't order room service,” Jamison replied.

The voice responded, “Complements of the hotel.”

“Just leave it outside of the door and I will get it in a moment; we are not dressed,” Jamison lied.

Mieszko would not be sending us room service Jamison thought to himself. Then they heard a thump as something was being placed on the floor by the door, and heavy footsteps walked away. Jamison cracked the door to peer out, and saw that it was clear. On the floor was a bottle of chilled champagne and two glasses. The two of them sat on the brown sofa sipping their champagne, simply enamored with one another. When the

bottle had been drained down to the last drop, they took showers. Clean and perfumed, they finally fell into the bed together, exhausted. Lora felt secure lying in his arms, and for the first time in his life, he felt he had a real purpose. They shared no conversation. They simply enjoyed the time with one another. She had never had a steady boyfriend. Most of her life had been spent working in cleaning services or doing maid work to provide income for her family. There had been no shortage of prospective suitors, but she could not tolerate their Ganja smoking. She had tried “wisdom” weed once but did not like it. Jamison had dated plenty of girls who superficially attached themselves to him like he was a trophy, but he had never met anyone who made his heart race like Lora. He felt more alive than he had ever felt in his life. Embracing each other and slightly intoxicated by the champagne, the two fell asleep and dreamed of a time when this journey would be over, and they could begin their lives together. When they awakened, they were still holding each other, and neither wanted to move, in fear of breaking the mood. Jamison was the first to speak. “Rumor has it that we are a couple.” She rolled over and said, “If a nuh so, a nearly so.” He laughed and embraced her tightly. Giggling like a child, she expressed her feelings for him in strong colloquial Creole. “Mi eva a dream bout a man lika Yuh a di man of midreams.” Insufficiently schooled in her language, Jamison did not fully understand her words, but he joyously

soaked up her sweet accent. He brushed aside an errant lock of hair from her forehead, “What did you say?” he smiled widely. He lightly tickled her ribs with his finger tips and as she squirmed to free herself; her beautiful blue eyes read his and she said, “Yeyemek four.” Playfully, she broke free and ran into the bathroom. “You’ve got to teach me,” he shouted through the wall. Rolling out of bed, he checked the clock on the dresser. It was already 10 a.m., “Where was Mieszko? The monk was always up early.” As Jamison hurriedly dressed, Lora emerged from the bathroom wrapped in a body towel. Jamison took a quick glance, “I need to slip next door to see if Mieszko is up. If you need anything, yell.” Jamison gave her a quick kiss and left her alone in the room to get dressed. Jamison saw no one else in the hallway as he proceeded to Mieszko’s room. He knocked on the door twice but no one answered. He knocked again a little harder just in case Mieszko had overslept. Still there was no answer. Because he did not want to be out of earshot from Lora, he was afraid to go any further down the hallway and returned to his own room. Mieszko was always extremely punctual, and for him not to observe his own meticulous instructions made them suspicious. His instructions were a quote by the German theologian, Walter Benjamin, “Each morning the day lies like a fresh shirt on our bed; this incomparably fine, incomparably tightly woven tissue of pure prediction fits us perfectly. The happiness of the next twenty-four hours

depends on our ability, on waking, to pick it up.” Staring out the window, Lora stood silently dreaming. An unanticipated knock on the door broke her concentration. Jamison went to the door, and as before, asked, “Who’s there?” “It is I, Mieszko.” Jamison opened the door and was relieved to see their friend. “Boy, are we glad to see you; you had us worried. I didn’t know how we were going to pay for these rooms,” Jamison said smiling.

Mieszko replied, “I paid the bill,”

Mieszko entered bearing gifts. He was holding two huge bags, and they noticed that he had on a new wardrobe himself. He bought new clothing for them, and now, the men were wearing seed-stitched sweater jackets over heavy polo t-shirts and Mesh Taupe Pants. Lora was wearing a Mock Wrap Dress decorated by an asymmetrical ruffle at the surplice neckline. She had on black hose and a pair of Velcro sneakers that actually complimented her new outfit. “The shoes are in case we have to run,” Mieszko said. He and Jamison were wearing Vasque Mantra GTX Hiking shoes by Timberland. Jamison was jumping up and down in his new shoes like a schoolboy.

“How do you find the perfect fit?” Jamison asked.

“It is a gift,” replied Mieszko.

After they dressed, Mieszko explained that while he was shopping, he was certain that he had been followed. He had not tried to lose the tail because, “Whatever is coming, I don’t want it to be a surprise. I want to invite it.” Mieszko had hidden the cylinder earlier in the duct work of his room, but had now retrieved it and had it under his arm. He was afraid to be traveling alone about the city with it.

“So, is it that Martin II fellow following us or is he having us followed?” asked Jamison.

“I am sure it is him. He has tried to steer us off our path onto false or empty roads, but I have seen partially ahead. Still, I cannot see any further, and this is why Lora must help me.” “What can I do?” Lora asked. Mieszko placed the cylinder into her hand, “Tell me; what you see?” She seemed bewildered at first not knowing what to do.

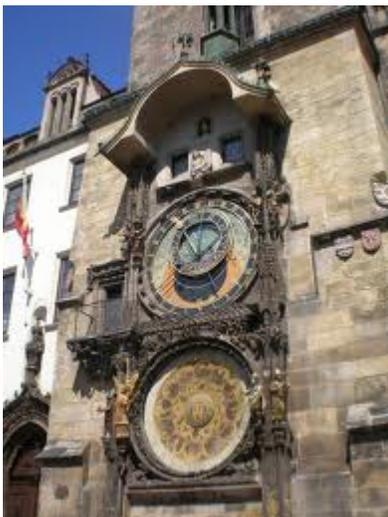
Then, she closed her eyes, seeking truth and wisdom from her own heart. The transference began; “I see the Virgin Mary. There is a clock. I see the number three. There is a man with a book, a man with a spear, and one holding a saw. I cannot see what the other one is holding; the sun, the moon, the Zodiac possibly. There is a calendar and....” She paused and

began to get emotional; “I hear the screams of someone in pain who is blind.” She dropped the cylinder to the floor and came out of the trance fairly quickly. Mieszko smiled at Lora and took her hands into his saying a silent thank you, “It is a clock and I know where it is. The word clock comes from the French word clouche, meaning bell. Let’s find a place for brunch and we shall have ourselves another adventure.”

“Is it possible to not get shot at on this adventure?” Jamison asked, sarcastically.

CHAPTER 28 TIC TOC

If you are traveling in the blind man's country close one eye. (Romanian Proverb)



The travelers enjoyed a popular Czech meal called "svickova na smetane," (sauce with dumplings) and Kulajda, (Dill Soup,) before venturing out to explore the magnificent city.

Navigation on foot in the city is the best mode of transportation for those who desire to see its sights and explore its beauty. Thankfully, they saw no shadowy figures ahead, and to their relief, no astonishing gothic masterpiece rising up into the azure sky. After walking through an amazing alcove, they passed an interesting statue of Franz Kafka riding on the shoulders of a golem. Strolling through the maze of cobblestone streets, they noticed the "White Pride" graffiti spray painted and stickered on the walls and telephone posts. Though the graffiti disappointed Lora, she was elated when they finally saw the "Prague Astronomical Clock" and the "Church of Our Lady" in front of Týn. Týn was a spectacular sight at the base of the Town Hall Tower, and for Lora, having seen it in her vision, the experience seemed surreal. The tower clock, a blend of gothic and renaissance styles, is so elaborate and entertaining that Mieszko decided an explanation of its characteristics was appropriate. He explained that the clock consists of human figures, a sphere and a calendar. The astronomical dial on the clock represents the position of the Sun and Moon in the sky. Topmost are the human figures, considered to be the peak of the spectacle as they perform every hour during the tolling bell. Wooden figures appear from two blue doors at the top of the clock, and a procession begins when, with one hand, the figure of death appears and pulls a rope that, in turn, rings a bell. Simultaneously, his other hand inverts an hour glass that he

holds. Next, two windows open, and the figures of the apostles appear, lead by St. Peter, and finally, a raven croaks and the clock chimes the exact time. Below the wooden players, two large clock faces tell the story of time passing. The top face is a sphere table that shows the movement of the sun and moon and the passing of time. In the black outer circle, one can see the signs of the zodiac. The clock face represents the belief held in the Middle Ages that the earth is the center of the universe. A golden sun rotates around the zodiacal circle, held by an animated hand. Together, they reflect the time in three different ways: local Prague time, unequal hours and old Czech time. Mieszko pointed out to them that the four figures to either side of the top clock face represent Vanity, Greed, Death and a Turkish Pagan Invader. The bottom clock face features a Chronicler, Angel, Astronomer and Philosopher. Mieszko, thinking aloud, said, "There is something in this building that we must find; a consequential turning point for each of us. This clock and this place represent a turning point for us. The medieval clock mounted on the southern wall is the same clock that you have tattooed on your stomach, Jamison." Mieszko had been more observant than either Jamison or Lora realized. Jamison had forgotten about the sundial, hour glass and raven that were tattooed on his stomach. It was an off day for visitation of the clock, and the line waiting to enter the tower consisted only of four others. The travelers positioned themselves in

line behind them, paying the £2.50 fee to enter. After a short wait, it was time to climb up the tower of the Town Hall, and that turned out to be more tiring than they had anticipated. After walking the inside perimeter of the tower, the final steps consisted of a metal staircase directly above the out-of-service lift - its shaft provided a view from high up, straight down into a gaping hole! They were standing with unknown people inside "Orloj," the clock of the Town Hall. Mieszko examined the stairwell. There didn't appear to be anything of interest. Lora leaned on Jamison. Turning, she looked at Mieszko and noted that he wore an expression of great concern. With distress in her voice, she said, "Trouble no set like rain." Jamison valued the power of her emotion and said, "I believe that something is coming." Mieszko agreed, "Yes, she just warned us." "Do we stay or do we go?" Jamison wanted to know whether to prepare to stand and fight or run and hide. Lora articulated a new warning, "'Is just pure alms house a gwaan". " The other four tourists who had accompanied the three time travelers had already started back down the staircase. They were not the threat. The enemy was still hidden. From where would the next malaise of villainy and evil come? Unexpectedly, they heard the voice of a man overhead, "Up here, you will be safe up here!"

"Who are you?" asked Jamison.

“I am Hanus. I am a friend, and if you do not want a most vivid exemplification manifesting its horror in these confined spaces, I suggest you trust me.” The three travelers heard a commotion downstairs. It sounded like someone or something was heading their way. Lora asked, “What sweet nanny goat a go run him belly” “We have no choice Lora; let’s go up,” Mieszko answered, understanding that Lora had just expressed, “what seems good now could harm them later.” Up the clock tower they ascended, through a hidden passage where their new savior, Hanus, was waiting. As it turned out, their savior was blind, but over the course of time, he had developed an acute sense of direction. He was able to find his way around with no trouble. Hanus was of medium build, aging in the face, but docile in movement. His unmanaged appearance included drab, disheveled hair that was a bit ragged in spots. He seemed disconcerted and tremulous. He led them through a complex, amorphous labyrinth of upper passages until they wound up in what appeared to be his living quarters.

Once they were settled, he introduced himself with child like mannerisms, “Let us dispense with the introductions.”

Instantly contradicting his last statement, he continued, "I am Hanus, clock maker. I am also known as Jan of Ruze. This clock is my invention, and I am here to protect it. I learned the ways of Galileo and in doing so, I built my clock. I have also found a way to look into matters of the past, present and future. No, I cannot see, because those who were jealous of my marvelous invention put out my eyes. Allow me to divulge the atrocity. Though I attempted to save them, they executed twenty-seven men out in the square. They trusted no one; they feared that I was crazy. You can see their grave markers out there in the court. No man could live as long as I have unless he is a demon, I suppose. Whatever else I have become over the centuries, I am the protector of this clock!" Jamison stared dumbly at him. His mistrust and disbelief was initially warranted. After everything the travelers had been through, it was only natural to question this stranger's credibility. Realizing eventually that he was innocuous, the three travelers listened to him ramble. Hanus paced back and forth until he became agitated. He held onto a pad of paper and a pencil and his mood alternated between reality and credulity. His whimsicalities and buffooneries were both amusing and irrationally annoying. "They killed them all, but I saved the clock, and when the Germans came and damaged my clock, I wanted those Nazi bastards on a skewer." He stopped and squatted like a Chinaman on the floor. "History is wrong. I built the clock.

Yes, borrowed ideas from others, and yes, even Mikulas of Kadan, but he borrowed his theories from Professor Jan Sindel. But I invented the three great co-axial wheels of the same diameter, driven by the same pinion, with 365, 366 and 379 cogs!" Mieszko had heard enough. He interrupted Hanus' rant to interject his own wisdom, "Hanus, thank you for delivering us out of harms way. We owe you a debt of gratitude. But we have come here today seeking a clue for our journey to get us all home. What do you know about time travel?"

Hanus broke into a German proverb, "Was ich nicht weiss Macht mich nicht heiss."

"What did you say? What did he say?" Jamison asked Mieszko.

Mieszko translated while shrugging his shoulders, "What the eyes don't see, the heart doesn't grieve for."

Hanus perpetuated his curious dialogue, "I know everything, I travel myself. In and out, from one place to another, and I have found an elixir to satisfy my evening of life. Did I share about my clock?" Jamison's head was starting to spin, "Yes, you did. What about traveling through time in order

to find something of value?” Mieszko was exercising great patience.

Hanus began, this time turning in circles while twirling a pencil between his fingers, “Traveling through time, I have found a medicine. It is a cure all! I find time travel therapeutic, an intoxicant, if you will. Instead of fogging my mind, it makes me think clearly, so clearly that sometimes I believe thoughts leak out. That is why I keep a broom and a dust pan. I clean them up and reinstate them.” He squatted again with his back to the trio. “It is my own formula, a countermeasure to all that ails a person. Have I shown you my room of spare parts? Come follow me,” Hanus lept to his feet and opened a hidden door to a larger room that appeared to be a clock smith’s museum. On every work bench and hanging on all the walls were tools. His tools included: a balance truing caliper used to balance a clock, many die (screw) plates used to cut threads on tiny screws, an array of files, rivet extracting pliers, a jeweler's piercing saw, a staking tool with different sizes and shapes for placing rollers and balance wheels on shafts (staffs), many lathes, springwinders, and cross peen riveting hammers.

Jamison thought to himself that this place needed renovation.

Hanus was a most garrulous speaker who could not hold his tongue. His candid, bombastic speech, though pellucid and perspicuous, was

becoming redundant. He continued his horology with much more, "I had foreseen your arrival. That is why I was waiting up here with a helping hand. I can travel and see through time because I have created a masterful work of which no one else knows. I am my own astronomer. I am my own synchronizer. I have learned by observing, through trial and error, and I have found a fountain that keeps me ageless. Mechanical astrolabe?" The lineament of his countenance left little room for adage. Hanus was whatever he appeared to be, and therein lay the mystery in defining him. Hanus laughed hysterically, "If one wants to travel through time, one must either find a wormhole or create a device that can manipulate not only the equator, the sun, the moon, and the stars, but planets also because one surely wouldn't want to land on Mars. You have to add them up. Then calculate. Listen! I can get you to your next stop. I have been watching Mieszko, and I know you have called on powers that are unable to carry you to yourself. I know that you are passionate and fervent, but Mieszko, your journey is compromised. Lora could not see it because she cannot look into your soul. But I know what has not been seen. I know what only you know. You called on he who was created as a Smith to blow on the coals of fire. You received his help in exchange for your soul. You lost your soul because you compromised, and you put your faith in your belief rather than in your God. Your God is a jealous God. However, he is also a loving and

forgiving God. The book absorbed you, sucked you in to protect you because God loses no one. Your soul was only lost to you, never to God. He knew where it was always. Now you have it again in your possession. God brought you safely into the Codex Gigas. But even then, Mieszko, you were still not broken. Your soul was easily stolen, and the one who laid claim to it still pursues you from the inside. In your innermost being, you struggle with your identity. You are still entangled in your religion!" His meandering rant had gone on a little too long for Jamison's attention span. He stood up, unable to get a word in edgewise, "Listen little blind man. Either you can help us or not. I have a short attention span, and I am about to forget that you helped us a little while ago." Seeing that Jamison was barking mad, Hanus addressed him directly, "And you Jamison, rooted in bitterness and violence. The clock knows one speed. It rotates by the sun. Did you know that within one year, the Sun is north of the equator for about one hundred eighty-six point forty days and south of the equator for about one hundred seventy-eight point twenty-four days? I didn't think so. What does that mean? It doesn't mean anything to you, and neither do cosmic rays, or magnetic fields. You should realize that every time you jump through time, there are changes in your pineal gland's production of melatonin and serotonin, as well as changing acetylcholine levels in the brain stem. Do you understand what I am saying? I didn't think so."

Hanus stood on one foot and twisted into the Garudasana yoga pose and waved his note pad frantically. “Okay, I understand chemical changes, but I am about to unleash some bad mojo on you if you don’t stop yanking our chains. In this life, it is eat or be eaten, and I sure the heck am not going to be eaten.” Jamison was posturing in an aggressive manner and things were getting ugly. Lora stood and pleaded with him, “If he truly knows something, we have to listen. Water more than flour.” Jamison sat down, biting his lip, when he really wanted to pound this blind prophet, clock making, time-traveling, lunatic in the face. “Thank you dear, if I may continue, Lora you possess great and blessed gifts. You have been forced to use them incorrectly on this journey because even though Mieszko has convinced both of you to come on this campaign, it is primarily his journey. Because this was his cross to bear, you have only made it easier for him to finish the race. Did you know that the same solar/lunar, climatic, ionic and atmospheric conditions that create hurricane seasons also aid in the digestive process? Anyway, come and see this.” He walked over to a cabinet; quickly throwing a Sindh Rilli (quilt) from the ruins of Mohenjodaro over a Baudouine gothic dressing bureau and mirror and opened the wooden doors to the cabinet. Inside was a hidden shelf that unlocked only by pressing a secret button. The shelf slid forward revealing a large crystal stone that was half crystal and half globe. It was a

flawless crystal sphere the size of a basketball. Within the globe floated a milky-white cloud. “It is almost time,” said Hanus, whose eyes seem to change color from brown to transparent. The clock outside began to chime. For the next thirty seconds, the crystal globe changed from a smoky-white cloud trapped within to a hologram that projected 3D images on top of the globe.

The thirty second scene was more than revealing as it was a process of scrying, a simple way of divining.

The scene that appeared in the globe was that of Mieszko trapped behind the brick wall of the monastery. The Giant Book lay on a drawing table, and Mieszko stood face down staring into it. The show was visible from above the room, and it was as clear as a high resolution camera.

Mieszko started to pray, and a cry rushed to his throat: “THE LORD has sent me; the great God, Hea, has sent me. Thou, in thy course, directest the human race. Cast upon him a ray of peace, and let it cure his suffering. The man, son of his god, has laid before him his shortcomings and transgressions; his feet and hands are in pain, grievously defiled by disease. Sun, to the lifting up of my hands, pay attention; eat his food, receive the victim, give his God, for a support, to his hand! By his order, let his

shortcomings be pardoned! Let his transgressions be blotted out! May his troubles leave him! May he recover from his disease! Give back life to the King! Then, on the day that he revives, may thy sublimity envelop him! Direct the King who is in subjection to thee! And me, the magician, thy humble servant, direct me!" At that point, the Giant Book opened like a mouth, and Mieszko was spectacularly sucked right into its pages. Then, the book swiftly closed, swallowing him wholly. Mieszko turned away, embarrassed by what he had just witnessed.

Hanus, in his most serious voice, said, "You prayed to the sun because you longed to feel it again upon your face and you believed you never would."

"I had become desperate and lost in despair. I believed that I had gone mad. I could not count hours, days or months. I lost track of time and simply prayed to whomever might bow their ear to me." Mieszko seemed ever so humble and demure. His character seemed to turn menial. To be displayed in this light stripped away some of the layers of meekness he had shown. Standing alone, the only one pointing the finger was Hanus. Neither Jamison nor Lora felt betrayed. Jamison, full of apathy, said, "Hey pal, all we are interested in is getting out of here and making it back home. So

you can put away your crystal ball and point us to the door. I'm not interested in what happened in the past to Mieszko. All I know is the man standing here has not abandoned us and has promised that we will get home." Hanus's smile was as broad as an ocean. "I like that, brotherhood and amity. Those are noble qualities for sure. Are you sure that your attachment is not just because you need Mieszko for a liaison?" Lora spoke one word, "trickify." Hanus seemed offended and stunned, "You are calling me a trickster, a slanderer?" Lora, unusually outspoken, moved close to Hanus, "Dawg nyam yu suppa." "So I save your lives from impending danger, and you want something bad to happen to me?" Hanus stepped forward without apology, jotting down something on his notepad. Afterall, he could not see Lora directly because of his blindness, though he knew he was standing to her side. She tightened the bandu on top her head because some of her dreadlocks were loose and moved over comically to face Hanus. "Very well, I understand. There is no need to get grumpy. I will tell you what you need to know. Take lessons from the clock; it passes the time by keeping its hands busy. If you want to continue to travel with your friend, the monk, then you can face judgment alone. I wash my hands."

Protracting himself, Hanus fumbled about in a deep drawer of a well-preserved French Louis XV Cylinder Desk. "This secretary, Bureau du Roi, belonged to the ambassador of the French court. How I came to be in

possession of this fantastic artifact is beyond me.” Hanus laughed like a child that had opened a toy box. The "Bureau Kaunitz" was highlighted by Bombay sides and featured heavy gilding, brass ormolu trim, and intricate marquetry and parquetry work. He retrieved an hourglass. The sand timer had been handcrafted from solid brass and premium hard borosilicate glass. Speaking in a high pitch tone and contorting his body like a man with Tourette syndrome, Hanus explained his reason for showing the time piece. “Nothing could be simpler to use and to understand. You see, the sand represents time, and time slips through the opening at a uniform rate of speed. The fantastic truth about an hourglass is that it doesn’t freeze, and you can’t spill it. It never needs refilling.”

Mieszko added to the description “as the sand escapes from the hourglass, the clearer we should be able to see through it.”

Hanus squatted, raised his head up, and then rolled onto the floor. He lay on the floor and curled up in a ball-like position, not unlike the Balasana Yoga pose. . As he lay there, his torso between his thighs, he spoke, “Do you know how emboldened a Komodo dragon is? It is a reptile that poisons its prey with septic pathogens in its saliva. Its mouth is full of virulent bacteria, and even if its prey survives the original attack, it will die

of infection later. The victim goes into shock and the toxins decrease the blood's ability to clot. Because of their keen sense of smell, reptiles can track down carrion up to five miles away. After their prey is poisoned, there is a lingering death, and after its prey dies, the predator chews it to pieces with sixty laterally compressed serrated teeth.”

“What does a Komodo dragon have to do with us” asked Jamison?

Hanus pursed his lips and spoke in an endearing manner, “You are being pursued by a hive of villainy that hunts like “the dragon;” they will continue relentlessly until you are wounded and poisoned. Then they will wait for you to slowly die. They will proceed to take back what you have retrieved, and in the process, all of you will suffer great and terrible loss. I tell you this as a warning and to give you this gift.” Hanus handed the hourglass to Mieszko.

“And what is the hourglass for,” asked Jamison, inspecting it?

Hanus became somber and exacting in his explanation. “Once you leave this refuge, you will have only a short time left to place the content of that cylinder into the book you are seeking. Once the hourglass sand has

emptied from one side to the other, your time is no more.” Hanus then led the troop to a brick chimney that ran up the wall of the attic and out through the roof. “This is it,” he said.

“This is what” asked Jamison feeling the coolness of the wall?

“You go through here and the hourglass starts to empty,” Hanus simply gestured with his hand.

“We are to simply go through? To where” Mieszko asked?

“Ask your oracle,” Hanus was referring to Lora.

Without hesitation Lora reached out and asked, “May I see the hourglass?” Mieszko handed the piece to her. She held the heavy object that was no larger than her hand and closed her eyes. No one dared interrupt her. “I see three dry sticks. I see a tree, a man hanging by a rope, black magic, and eyes set to kill. I see a heavenly city, a wooden folder covered with leather and metal. There is a painted devil, its arms raised, and it has four fingers, horns and claws.” She always felt cathartic after she saw visions, and this time was no different. Feeling purged and cleansed,

she was weak enough that Jamison held her so that she did not collapse.

“If you are ready to travel, I suggest that you count from the bottom up to the thirteenth row, the seventh from the right. If you would like to stay, I can give you a tour of our Banqueting Hall; it features a Renaissance interior, medieval religious art, altars, paintings, wood-carved sculptures and the like.” Hanus was unwittingly growing balmy, and his smile was stretched.

“We will pass on the tour,” Jamison said, counting brick.

“Very well, we have a grand museum?” Hanus still pushed for the tour.

Jamison counted correctly, and Mieszko reached down, removing the proper brick. The wall seemed to disappear, and then reappeared with a violent shaking. “Thank you, Hanus, for everything, everyone ready” Mieszko could feel the pull on his core toward the dark hole that had opened up. “You bet,” Jamison answered as he took Lora’s hand. She simply nodded yes.

“Tell me something, Hanus – Jan of Ruze, did you build this time machine in which we have been traveling?” Mieszko was still in search of answers.

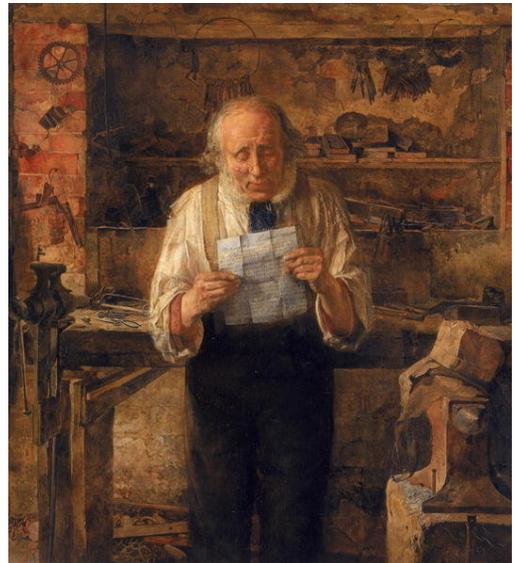
Hanus licked his lips and wiped his face with both hands, then fumbled with his pencil, “I developed many sorts of time machines, and I did open up a wormhole, and yes, God has used me as an instrument to snatch you up. You will find what you are looking for. You, Mieszko, are important to all that is holy and divine, and so are we all. We are all traveling toward our reward. For some, like yourself, you are to be bathed in the fire of passion.” The wormhole bore a tunnel through space, and the troop stepped directly into the vague darkness. Curving through the fabric of space and time, following the pathway to their next destination, they were hopeful that they would find the way home soon. Every time they jumped from one place to another, they were one jump closer. Warping space and time traveling on the wings of light, they barely heard Hanus' final words, “Say hello to Johann Christian Woyzeck for me.” Jamison had a strange regret as he was carried through the wormhole, “I wish that I would have stopped at that street vendor selling “Smažený sýr,” on the way to the clock tower. I could have gone for some of that deep fried cheese.”

CHAPTER 29 RANSACKING

If it were not for the hands, the clock would be useless.

Polish Proverb

Hanus bade the three passengers adieu, the hole in space closed, and he melted back into his own secret world. In essence, his world had nothing to do with the present. Hanus continued dreaming his colorless dreams and following the three globetrotters like he had been ordained to do. His blindness was not congenital. His eyes had been burned out as an



adult. His life was a defect, an infliction, irreversible anopsia. His cecity was not generic, for it was imposed on him to never be extinguished. What his punishers did not know was that the arsine to his orbits illuminated his third eye. Inspired to invent and to be the caretaker of time, Hanus was blessed with the understanding of time. His extrasensory perception, his second sight, was now ablaze and following every footstep of Mieszko, Jamison and Lora. He always said, "Those who kill time eventually mourn

the corpse” and in this case, he thought it best if he stayed out of sight from those who had come to pay him a visit. The commotion downstairs that had signaled the escape into Hanus' lair was those who wanted to do harm and stop the troop. These were the ones who dwelled in all places, called upon by their one master to carry out diabolical detriment. The apotheosis of evil, their pernicious hearts of vile were out on the world stage, and they believed they were the keepers of order and instigators of chaos. Their orders came from the one man that instructed deranged lawlessness. Their mission of sabotage and malevolence was solely aimed at capturing the eight pages and thereby prevent them from being rejoined with the Giant Book. It was understood that the the Giant Book held as much universal power as it did mystery. Fear of the unknown drove them mad because no one could be sure what would happen if the pages were ever restored.

John Lennon once said, “It's fear of the unknown. The unknown is what it is. And to be frightened of it is what sends everybody scurrying around chasing dreams, illusions, wars, peace, love, hate, all that--it's all illusion. Unknown is what it is. Accept that it's unknown and it's plain sailing.

Everything is unknown--then you're ahead of the game. That's what it is.

Right?” Throughout the years, Hanus was able to remain illusive and tucked away in his world of clocks and time. No one could find him because he was, in fact, a figment of the imagination. He was a master of remaining

separated from all others by a single quantum event. Now he was afraid that he had spent too much time in the present world aiding the travelers. If he were found by these serpentine forces, he would suffer at the hands of the oppressor without mercy. To resist would be futile. To ask for clemency would be laughable, and forgiveness was a doctrine of Christ, unknown to the deranged monsters. To surrender would simply mean he would be snuffed from all existence.

Hanus waited, wondering if all memory of his existence would soon be erased. He had once again become oneiric transparent away from the world of the Mark of the Beast. His utopia could not be invaded by those wishing to obstruct. Even though there were men searching his attic loft, rifling through his tools and clock parts, they never saw Hanus watching them from his multi-verse.

The unknown expects no reward. It creeps on its back to keep an eye on God. Leaving destruction, but no trail, the unknown sees through every facade. It makes the sound heard by few. Never seen until exposed, heaviness is the gloom breathing doom without repose. Pray it never wakes you because if your eyes open, you are dead. An unfamiliar sickness, the unknown is the virgin whore in your head.

CHAPTER

30 TRAGEDY VISITS

Love is sometimes difficult but death even more so. Albanian Proverb

This time tunnel was different than any of the others they had experienced. It seemed they were spiraling down into catastrophe, and impending doom was coming to meet them. The impression was that hell had opened its mouth wide anticipating the digestion. A feeling of disarray permeated the travelers' spirits, and they felt extremely disoriented.

Their landing resulted in a violent jolt and a thrust, and they descended abruptly, straight down into familiar seats. They were on the time traveling train again. Although everyone was

safe and unharmed, they were disheartened. How could this have happened? This was the same train on which they had defeated the hooded figure with dark, flaming eyes that swam

like the sea.

The train sounded louder than before, probably because they were not in the same passenger car. This time they were closer to the engine. They looked out the windows and noticed everything was blurred. At this moment the world was flawed and debauched. Their expectations were shattered, and the whole scene seemed like a profane joke. The room fell silent as the joke bombed. The intonation of their situation seemed off, and it resonated among them all.

“Why are we back here?” Jamison asked, not really expecting an answer.

“I suppose this was the only transportation available at the time of our entry into this wormhole, ” Mieszko gave the only conclusion he could fathom.

Jamison saw Lora drifting into a trance and became concerned. She was staring out the window, but her eyes were fixed on nothing obvious. It seemed as though she was staring into the eyes of God.

“I see land, wood, and water. We are traveling on an iron road until we arrive at our destination. Pain takes the heart's place if not guarded passionately. The cost is great, but the reward is greater.” She said her

peace and instantly snapped out of it, returning to Jamison, who was holding her in his arms. "I hate it when you go to the other side of the world without me." She kissed him gently on the lips as the train came to a screeching halt. Steel grinding on steel squalled like alley cats fighting in the middle of the night. The passengers lunged forward and were practically thrown from their seats. Gathering themselves, they breathed a sigh of relief when they realized there had been no crash at the end of the trip. "Let's get out of here before this thing takes off again," Jamison was up and dragging Lora with him.

As they stepped off the train, fresh mountain air filled their lungs and caught hold of their senses. Surrounded by trees and greenery in every direction, they found themselves in a mountainous area. The verdant walls of the forest arose to greet them in full bloom. Jamison inhaled deeper and blurted out, "Nothing like the call of the wild."

He sang part of the lyrics to "Stairway to Heaven" under his breath; "And a new day will dawn, For those who stand long, And the forests will Echo with laughter."

They saw a monument off the platform about 75 feet away sitting solitarily on a small knoll and proceeded to check it out. Since there was no one else

here and no one disembarking from the train, they believed that the monument would tell them their location.

The sign revealed: "The Three Sticks National Forest," and the dedication sign read: ""In Appreciation of the Leadership in the Rapid Development of Our State Roads, Water, Recreation, Forests "LAND --- WOOD --- WATER." We, the Grateful Citizens of McCurtain and LeFlore Counties, Contribute and Dedicate."

Mieszko blurted out, "Oklahoma, we are in Oklahoma." Back in the good ol' USA," Jamison inhaled deeply feeling his lungs fill with the scent of cedar and pine. "Is this your first time in the States," he asked Lora? "Yes, it looks beautiful," she answered, her eyes as large as saucers.

"Listen to that," Jamison said, turning his head in both directions. "Listen to what," a curious Lora responded? The three stopped to listen. Jamison was pointing out the chatter, singing and harmonizing of the birds. "It is as if they are singing us a song to celebrate our arrival," Jamison said. The three stood there taking in the sights and sounds of this beautiful place.

Red birds, green birds, and Bluebirds know;

they chirp and chatter,

Cause yellow birds have flown,

They cluster and flutter,

Hidden in branches of trees,

Singing their recompense,

With familiar melodies. “The fact is we have no idea why we were brought here, so we may need to call upon your gift again, Lora.” Mieszko, too, was taking in the thousands of trees and hills. If there is any place in the world that is truly God’s country, Jamison thought, this might just be the place. Lying together in romance, the green earth and the blue sky illuminated the valley sprinkled with yellow and crimson flowers. Clouds passing by overhead, painted with gentle brush strokes, swiveled and twisted to get a glimpse below. Remarking to Lora, Mieszko spoke, “We have established a part of the vision, that which you have been given. We are at “Three Sticks,” but that is all we have.”

“Let’s look for someone hanging by a rope then. In these woods, there has to be a couple hangings a month,” Jamison laughed alone. “I see a trail there. Maybe since we ended up at this peculiar place, we ought to follow that trail, Lora was guessing?”

“I see no other sign. If no one has objections, we should start walking.” Mieszko did not wait for a vote but began to walk. Down a small embankment into the primitive natural wonder of the American Forest they trudged. The trees, in every stage of life, were prostrate on the ground, decaying under heaven’s lamp and being sanded away by the invisible wind. Some stood tall and strong like guardians clothing the forest, while others seemed weak and fatigued supported only by the density of their supporting cast. Branches seemed to throw themselves out to be touched. Mieszko swept them aside. This was a place of sheer poetry that had perfect rhythm and rhyme.

They were deliberately staying on the marked trail when, thirty minutes into their hike, Lora stopped cold. Jamison, who was walking closely behind her, was barely able to stop before running into her. “What is it babe?” he asked.

“I hear crying, a man begging for his life,” she responded.

Mieszko and Jamison held their breath to intensify their hearing but they heard nothing. She pointed to the right, “It is coming from that direction?” Lora was already moving like a magnet was pulling her to the distressful sound. The underbrush moved under their feet as they ventured away from the trail. The further they walked, the denser the forest became until they heard the sound of water running. They realized they were getting close to a brook. As they neared the running water, they noticed an increase in flying insects. At first they were able to wave them away with their hands, but as they drew closer, the swarms grew thicker, buzzing in their ears and around their eyes. They dared not open their mouths.

Something lurked amidst the foilage, and the trees seemed to be unrolling their bark toward the ground. They were shedding their skins like serpents devoid of their natural growth patterns. The troop walked to the edge of the brook until they were ankle deep in the water. They decided it would be best to cross the stream rather than follow it. Lora was still leading the way. Across the rivulet and through another grove of trees, they passed sparkling miniature water falls. She led them to an

unbelievable clearing worthy of adoration and applause. They stood marveling at this angelic wonder: a pasture covered with the Youtan Polou flower. These small white flowers favored the color and texture of a snow covered field. When the wind caught them, the snow effect appeared to ripple. Mieszko defined this botanist dream field to his friends, “This is the legendary Youtoan Polou flower that only exists in Buddhist scriptures. This flower only blooms once every three thousand years. According to Indian Myth, the flower only blossoms when the Sage King of the future visits the present world. In other words, we are experiencing a miraculous sight.” Then he quoted, “It’s difficult to hear this Dharma.

And those who can hear it are too rare,

like the udumbara flower in which all take delight.

Which the gods and humans prize,

For it blooms but once in a long, long time.

So one who hears this Dharma, gives joyful praise,

With even just a single word, Has thereby made offerings,

To all the Buddhas of the three periods of time.”

They had never witnessed a purer site in the entire world. The fully bloomed flowers numbered in the hundreds of thousands. This celestial flower, according to Buddhist scripture, did not exist in the mundane world. Mieszko shared more of what he knew about the flowers, “According to the Buddhist scripture, anyone who offers compassion to others will have the opportunity to meet the Holy King Who Turns the Wheel.” Lora seemed burdened, her brow furrowed. Suddenly, she cried, “RUN!” She bolted like a frightened deer, and the two men followed. As they ran, it became apparent to them that something magical was happening. They could not feel the earth beneath their feet. Then they realized that they were running on top of the delicate flowers, skimming along. Yet, the flowers were not crushed!

“Was that a gun shot?”

“Where did the explosion come from?”

There was a constant ringing in their ears as Jamison went down. “Oh God! Nooooooooooooo!” Lora became hysterical.

Jamison lay face down in heavens flowers. Although Jamison could hear everything that was happening, he was without a thread of hope, unable to respond. Lora was screaming. Mieszko was comforting her. The bullet pierced his back and tumbled through the thoracic disc in his spine, propelling through his aorta. It did not discriminate, tearing a hole through his trachea, clipping and collapsing the left lung and purposely exiting through his chest, shattering ribs. Jamison was coughing up blood, strangling and drowning within. The bullet had gone straight through his back and out through his chest. Jamison was somnolent, unable to speak through the soporific state his body was embracing. Major organs shut down, but he was not intimidated by the approaching darkness. His mind was full of euphoria and delirium from oxygen deprivation. With lip quivering, “Don’t do this to me! Please Jamison stay with me!” Lora pleaded until her throat was raw. Jamison took his final breath without saying another word.

CHAPTER 31 XAYMACA

Death is the bride of life. (Indonesian Proverb)

Jamison lay on the forest floor, lifeless, cut down by a high powered rifle. Lora lay beside him, like a lachrymatory vessel, grieving at the perversity. Mieszko was aware that whoever put the bullet into his friend could just as easily have taken all three of them down. He scanned the field and spotted six well-armed men in black fatigues headed in their direction. “Lora, we must go.” Mieszko urged her to leave Jamison, but her love was too strong. She clutched her beloved, looked up at Mieszko and said, “I’d rather die.”

Before Mieszko could pry her away from Jamison, the men were upon them.

The leader of the wolves counted proudly in German pointing at the three of them, “eins, zwei, drei.” Lora screamed, “Murderer!” The German leader did not acknowledge her at all, but introduced himself, “Ich bin Johannes Frauenberg of Görlitz.” With abhorrent fanfaronade and contempt, he mocked Mieszko in English. “Did you expect me to be clothed

in royal ermine-half man, half beast, with claws, cloven hooves, and a long snake-like hissingred tongue? I am hardly the unguledated one”

“You!” Mieszko sounded ill. “I know you from the fifteenth century!”

“Yes, and I know you. I studied your "Codex Giganteus," "Gigas Librorum," "Fans Bibel," "Hin Håles Bibel.” Johannes called Mieszko by many names because he had studied him in the "Svartboken," (the Black Book) in great detail.

“You had searched the pages before that foul mystic, Christopher Schlichtig, got his hands on me. You planted the seeds of evil, didn’t you?” Mieszko was gripped with great sorrow.

In Jamaica, Mieszko had run Schlichtig through with the machete before he could do them harm. Subsequently, it seemed a greater evil had manifested itself.

Johannes arrogantly adjusted the utility belt which held his side arm and said in English, “Herman the Monk of the Bohemian Benedictine monastery at Podlažice. I am M. Johannes Frauenberg of Görlitz.” Converting to German, he concluded his introduction of reproach,

“Schön,Sie kennenzulernen!” Lora stood, her eyes fixed, her mind overflowing with resolve.

Johannes, with an air of irreproachableness, swelled to take retribution. He was sourly amused.

Lora’s eyes rolled into the back of her head as she forced herself into a trance. She channeled the spirit of the indigenous people of this land. Kneeling beside Jamison’s body, she lay her hands upon his chest and spoke the Choctaw words, "Chi hollo li." Mieszko knew she had just told Jamison that she loved him. Mieszko, assuring her that he understood, responded “Akostininchi li.” Lora spoke the Choctaw words, "Ant chukoa, Minti," in a monotone reminiscent of the ancients. This musical sermonic was an invitation to all spirits past and present. Johannes emitted a guttural laugh, and true to his character, demanded that they come with him, “Kommen Sie mit!” Neither Mieszko nor Lora moved, and Mieszko tightened his grip on the silver cylinder in his hands. Lora glowered and pulled the machete from her back pack. One of the Germans standing behind them hit Mieszko forcefully in the small of the back with the butt of his rifle. Mieszko buckled to his knees with a verbal grunt. Lora

instinctively swung the machete in an untrained fashion missing everything.

Johannes addressed her immediately, "You do not want to do that, my queen. Join us and I will return your kingdom where you can reign over your people. I know who you are."

Lashing out, she managed to cut off the German's right pinky finger. He screamed in pain and clutched the bleeding nub with his uninjured hand.

Encircling the entire field of tiny white flowers were figures of men standing, forming a silhouette at the edge of the woods. Lora glared at Johannes and repeated an ancient legend.

"The Choctaws once believed that everyone has two shadows, not just one. The inside shadow is a ghost which travels to another faraway place when the body dies. 'The Land of The Ghosts,' as it was called, was believed to be a giant playground where people played and danced and had fun forever! No one was ever sick or cold or hungry in this place. There were plenty of melons and other delicious foods for all. It was believed that everyone would be allowed inside this "heaven," everyone that is, except anyone who had ever murdered a Choctaw! Murderers had to stand

outside and watch the games for eternity. The second shadow, the one on the outside that we can see, sometimes remained on earth after a person died. The scary thing for you, Johannes, she said, with venom in her voice, is that what you see around us now are the inside ghosts of the Choctaw warriors, sickened first by your senseless killing of my beloved. Even worse, they are angry that they have been summoned here, taken away from paradise, to deal with the likes of you.”

Johannes became unnerved and turned his head sporadically. His men began to fumble about bringing their rifles up in a more defensive posture. Mieszko and Lora spread their arms wide as if to embrace the Choctaw people and their ways. The six Germans began to run while firing their rifles aimlessly in every direction. War cries, stamping of the feet, wolf howls, and piercing screams ripped through the air. Broad headed, feathered projectiles, characteristic of the kind used by the Choctaws, were trained on the Germans. After the maniacal maelstrom of sound, the Germans fled the field of celestial flowers and headed for the cover of the forest. When Johannes entered this dimension with his cowardly clan, he underestimated the power that his opponents possessed. The field was saturated by the sound of arrows cutting through the air straining for their

targets. There was nowhere for the Germans to run. Each one caught a fatal, penetrating blow. Johannes had been vanquished by an enemy that he had never had the opportunity to challenge. The inside ghosts of the Choctaw warriors eliminated the threat and whimsically returned to their playground. When Mieszko and Lora opened their eyes and lowered their arms, there remained no sign of the Germans, and Jamison's body was gone! Lora's grief returned, and she sank back into emotional chaos. Devoured by grief, she fell to the ground crushed by her loss. Mieszko, in a voice that spoke volumes, shouted "Look!" Nudged by an incipient awareness that someone was walking toward them, Lora suddenly saw Jamison walking across the field waving his arms. She jumped to her feet in disbelief and bounded toward him. When they collided, Lora almost knocked the powerful Jamison off his feet.

"I was sure I had lost you!" She embraced him like she was never going to let him go.

"I don't know what happened. I knew you were in danger, but I could not move," Jamison said as tears ran down her smooth cheeks.

“All I know is that you were gone, and I didn’t want to live anymore”

Lora gripped even tighter, her arms locked together.

Mieszko slowly made his way over to the pair and exclaimed, “Glad to have you back.”

“What happened to me?” Jamison wanted to know.

Mieszko responded, “The fragrance of the Udumbara flower, although fallen from its stem, can never be destroyed. You see, each of us is an Udumbara flower, and you were killed in the field of healing. If we allow the flower to permeate our lives, we can always find victory over the last enemy, which is death. This wonderful woman here is a blossom of life for you.” Jamison raised his shirt and examined the spot where the bullet had penetrated his flesh. There was absolutely no evidence that he had ever taken a bullet. Out of curiosity, Lora checked for an exit wound, and to no one's' surprise, there was none. Jamison, like Lazarus, was now bound by this resurrection event. Miraculous was all that could be said concerning Jamison's reappearance in the land of the living. More curious was the fact that his awakening left him with no memory of the gun shot. Though their reunion was sweet, it was short lived because they were still searching

for whomever they heard screaming in pain. There was no choice but to leave the comfort and peace of the healing field and resume their search in the forest.

“Lora, you have found your three sticks here, and I am not referring to the monument outside of the park.” Mieszko informed her.

“Really?” she asked. What were the three sticks that I found?”

“Your freedom from the passion of self preservation, for you were willing to lay down your life today for another, and there is no greater love. Denying yourself all the world could offer to save Jamison, and denying the desire to succumb to temptation and simply accept the easiest path are the other two. These are the three sticks,” Mieszko deduced. Under the canopy of the forest, they followed the brook over two small hills and down into a valley that opened at the mouth of a rocky landscape. "These rocks look like they were placed here deliberately," noted Jamison. The formations, the stacking and the layout of the valley had a man-made appearance like they had been fabricated. Because of the rocky terrain, the three walked carefully down a rock cleft to the other side. Plant life here

was sparse with the exception of a few patches of grass. “What are we looking for?” Jamison inquired?

“I heard a man in pain and I think we need to find him,” Lora answered, as she brushed her hands together to remove the dust from the rocks. “Do you hear anything now?” Mieszko asked, trying to discern any sound himself. Deaf as an adder to the sound of anyone in pain, he could not hear a thing?

“Nothing, the voice has gone silent. Do you think it was simply a trick by Johannes and his men?” she asked, raising a possible question.

“Since we are dealing with people who have traveled through time, everything must be considered. They are all racing now to prevent us from accomplishing our task. Somehow, they have either risen from the dead and raced through time to intercept us, or we have been tricked by illusion, and they do not exist except in our minds. If our mind sees it, indubitably it is very real whether anyone else can see it or not.” Mieszko seemed to be attracted to something across the valley. Jamison focused in the same direction. “Do you see something?”

“I feel as though someone is still watching us, but I have already led us through faults, wrinkles and inaccuracies, so I am not sure how to lead at this point.”

“I swear I see something over there,” Mieszko said, pointing in a direction where the valley seemed shrouded in shadows.

“Why is it always dark in the areas you want to explore?” Jamison joked.

Mieszko quoted scripture, “He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death.”

“That is not the most comforting verse you have ever quoted,” Jamison said, as he assisted Lora who was crossing over a pile of loose rocks.

Mieszko was now well adjusted to Jamison’s badinage and ribbing, and at times, he found it amusing. Settling down on the flat part of the rocks, they directed their attention fully to the area engrossed in shadows and images easily concocted by the mind. “I am not sure but I think I see something moving over there,” Jamison strained his eyes for a clearer focus. “but I can’t make it out.” Lora suddenly froze in her tracks, “I hear the man screaming again. His cries are torturous. He appears to be in agony.”

“We must not run into a trap or into danger so let us proceed with great caution,” Mieszko said, making all the sense in the world.

They heard the sound of thunder peals overhead as they made a straight line for the shadows. A storm that quickly developed out of nowhere was approaching, and a flash of lightening accompanied the thunder just seconds later. The sun was playing hide and seek trailing the dark clouds that were forming. The susurrus of the wind began to sing with a soft canorous whistle. Jamison swore that it sounded like the song, “One tin soldier,” a song he remembered from the original "BillyJack" movie. Soon they were at the edge of the shadows and the forest reappeared. They were agog in anticipation of further exploration when the rains began to fall. Lora spotted a rock overhang, and the three found their way to the natural rock shelter while the rain poured down in sheets. The indenture was the size of a small room and there was graffiti painted on the wall. It read, “Xaymaca.”

“I know this word,” Lora mentioned. “ Jamaica’s name is derived from this aboriginal name, meaning “land of wood and water. I never thought about this before now.”

“That is a coincidence,” Jamison fixated oddly at the writing on the wall. “So we are in a park called the "Three Sticks," meaning land, wood and water, and now, we find this writing that means the same, and we have Lora here, a girl from Jamaica. What are the odds?" he said.

Mieszko interjected his own brand of humor, “ Jamison, it is no coincidence, but I would suggest that you invest in a Lexicon when we return to the States.”

“The rain is letting up,” informed Lora who was hanging out near the mouth of the shelter. The shadow area was dazzlingly verdant when wet. The dark face of the forest now took on a lush and inviting efflorescent invitation.

“Do we wish to get our feet wet” Mieszko stood?

“I’m ready,” Lora responded. Mieszko grabbed her back pack and slung it over his shoulder. He was prepared for anything wild and aberrant. What did he have to lose? He had already died twice this year. The travelers had rested for a couple of hours and were ready to break from their sojourn to

explore what lay ahead. Those agonizing screams from a man in dire straights could no longer be heard by Lora, who was leading the way. She insisted that they came from the direction in which they were now walking. As they continued, they noticed that the path wasn't too terribly difficult. The soles of their feet were unusually warm, and they noted that heat was rising from the ground.

The forest was munificent in colors and scents, and it seemed that the textures of the trees were deep and grooved intriguingly with symmetric patterns.

In a field carpeted by lilies, they stopped to eat of the copious fruits hanging from the fruit trees. They found the nectar to be exactly what was needed for the way worn globetrotters. Long stamens protruded from hundreds of crowded creamy red and yellow flowers giving the cluster a feathery appearance. When they arrived at the brook, they tasted the water expecting a cool drink, but the water was warm. Mieszko detected a mercury taste though not overwhelming or dangerous. so they drank their fill and continued on their journey, knowing that something was erringly amiss. To follow one's instinct is called a "gut reaction." To follow one's intuition is called a "woman's prerogative." Unwilling to question Lora's

perspicuity, Mieszko and Jamison decided that even if they could not hear it or see it, there had to be a threat. That meant the menace was among them regardless. The trees became ashen and the leaves were turning a crimson red. The vibrant colors created a sort of sensory overload. Chary of their changing surroundings, they paused and got a visual detail before moving ahead. Everything that once was a verdent green was now bleeding red. In every direction they were encapsulated by the forest which had gently and unwittingly erased their footprints. There would be no diplomatic imbroglio among them now. The verdict was in and they were lost among levity. “I say we follow the brook back,” Mieszko suggested. Disoriented now, not one of them remembered if the brook had been on the left side or the right side of the path. “How can we not remember which side the water was on?” Jamison was agitated and began to pace not believing their current surroundings were real. As a matter of fact, he believed that just under the surface, a sinister tremulous rot had embedded itself. Any moment, they expected the mood to darken and the death knell of a funeral bell. Lora screamed a spine chilling warning, and the men jumped. She was the first to see the suspended human being hanging from the limb of a pear tree. There, right in front of them was a man strung up by the neck with a rope. The appalling scene made them wonder what this man must have thought as he dropped down. The neck

would have broken instantly, and it would have been a quick death. At the end of the drop, the body would have accelerated under the force of gravity, and the head would have been constrained by the noose, thus breaking the neck. Mieszko took the machete from Jamison and cut the man down. He hit the ground with a dull thud. As defiling and desecrating as it seemed, Mieszko began searching through the man's pockets. "We must see who this man was because he was placed here deliberately for us. Someone killed this man as a sign to us." Jamison knelt down and helped Mieszko go through the man's clothing. Lora turned her head unwilling to witness such atrocity. The nefariousness of violating the corpse was more than she could take. Her nerves were frayed, but she knew it was a necessary evil to burgle his pockets. Still, she would be unobliging to dip her hand into the man's property. The only justification to this unlawful act was that possibly it would produce positive results, such as a clue or a lead.

Jamison found only a coin, double the size of a half-dollar. "What is this?" he asked examining the round artifact.

Mieszko took aim and understood what it was right away. "This is a rare find indeed; it is a cosmic rose. A cosmic rose in astrology is simply the formation of a new star. If we could see a star being birthed, it would be

much like a rosebud about to bloom. They are surrounded by green "leafy" nebulosity. This green material is from heated polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, molecules that can be found on Earth in places where combustion has occurred. This coin signals to us that our journey will birth something. It is up to decide what it will bring forth. I believe that we will come to some place in our journey where this coin is going to be needed." Mieszko found an ID. It read, "Johann Reichel." "Do you know him," asked Jamison? Mieszko answered sadly "Yes, I am sorry to say," Mieszko bowed his head, "I do know this man. He was called Eilffinger. He was a priest from the 16th century who was hanged by Ferdinand, King of Bohemia."

"Looks like old Ferdinand put the noose on him twice?"

"This is different than the first time; the first time he was hanged upside down," Mieszko said.

"So how are we to explain the change of scenery?" Jamison was tucking the coin into his pocket?

“The only explanation that I have been able to discern is that there are four life principles according to the Masonic order. The universe is surrounded by the sphere of the stars. Beyond that sphere is the sphere of "Schamayim," which is the "Divine fiery water.” Mieszko stopped talking, his speech seemed jumbled. He gathered himself and continued. “Let me be succinct. Schamayim is the universal mercury, sometimes called Az, and other times, the measureless spirit of life. This has to do with the cosmos, the throne of God and these rivers around us here. It is how Schamayim becomes a vapor and pours itself through the four main rivers. This is about the spiritual body of man and how we need to be led by the spirit within. Religion has tried to separate itself from the cosmos, from the Zodiac, and from many other earthly concepts. The truth is that all of reality is connected for it is all within God. To believe that anything at all is outside of God is to suggest that God does not control and oversee every aspect of our existence. No matter what you believe personally, you must believe that we are about to change the world because our mission is ordained by God.” As Mieszko finished his discourse, the forest became brightly illuminated. For a microsecond, everything went dark. When the light returned, the trees were a pale white color, their leaves turned red and were so dense that the light could not shine through. The only light seemed to be that which was trapped beneath the leaves and branches. The

detritus that remained was snow white. The brook was now a small river flowing with blood. Every element of the ecosystem had been reborn. “OK folks, let’s get moving before we become part of the landscape.” With the treasure of the cosmic rose in his pocket and Lora’s hand in his, Jamison led the way. He took a wild guess, and no one questioned his decision because they had no clue as to which way was the right way. Every step they traveled was guarded by heightened senses. It was difficult to enjoy the beauty of their surroundings while watching for ambush or assault. Every thicket was a potential camouflage for the enemy. There were so many places of concealment; they could be struck from the trees or from the ground. Jamison, especially, kept Lora close to ensure the fact that in the dense foliage, no one would be able to snatch her away from him.

Nevertheless, there was many haunts for the woodland's indigenous creatures to hide. Lora could only imagine what sort of rodents made their homes in the undergrowth beneath the trees. Overhead. Lora imagined the birds, pecking, nesting and perching.

Following a trail that cut through the established wilderness, they scissored toward a mountain that no one looked forward to climbing. It was hard not to be thankful for a smooth footpath, but they could not help but imagine the worst about whatever man-eating creature had worn this

track through the densest part of the forest. A strange phenomenon occurred as they walked forward. Looking back, they saw the forest behind them dying. The broad green leaves stopped producing chlorophyll and began changing to colors of red, yellow and orange. As the trio continued, the trees became brown and brittle, a shower of floating death. The forest lost its natural sophistication, growing dark as if someone was dimming the sun behind them. The season was accelerated, and to the travelers' dismay, all of the beauty was sucked out of the vegetation. The deciduous forest was sad and gloomy as it turned to night. Lora laid her hand against a tree and her fingers sank into the fissures in the rough bark. She touched the tree knowing that when she left this spot, the tree would die. The awful consequence was unbearable. The forest was becoming dreadful and foreboding, its coverings and garments falling to reveal its crooked nakedness and humiliation. Something was conjuring this melancholy atmosphere, and it seemed too powerful for human manipulation. This was deforestation in a most mystical manner.

“We must not look back. We have to keep moving forward,” Mieszko solemnly warned.

“What is happening to the forest behind us?” Lora asked, knowing there was no logical answer.

“I am uncertain, but it is imperative that we stay ahead of it lest we fall victim to it,” Mieszko answered.

Lora refused to turn around, the weight of the crumbling woods was more than she could bear.

“I’d give anything for a map out of this place,” Jamison said, worried about the sweat now dripping from his body. While his mind wondered about the mundane, Mieszko, like a sentinel, kept watch. Thus, he was the first to see and point ahead. Through the dim light, they could see a color that did not belong in this red disintegrating wilderness. Something ahead was blue. “It looks like a transparent bridge,” Jamison sounded relieved even though he did not know if a blue transparent stage was good or bad. He was willing to take his chances to get out of this red hot hell. The bridge was ice blue, diaphanous, like a vapor. “How can we walk on it? We can see through it?” Lora asked. Mieszko lifted his foot and placed it down on the bridge. He delicately pushed himself onto it. “Wow,” Jamison said, astonished. “It’s safe and sturdy, and even though I do not know what

I am standing on, it is solid beneath my feet.” Trusting Mieszko, Jamison was next and Lora followed. The three travelers began walking across the bridge though its end was not in sight. Adapting to the strange phenomenon, they did not even try to imagine what must lie ahead. Once they balanced themselves, they ran swift and lissome across the bridge. Stretching as far as the eye could see, this sky blue span seemed endless.

Like fleas on a strand of translucent hair, they ran on this architectural wonder, drinking in its ecstasy and breathing in the sublime benignity of the ambrosial workmanship.

CHAPTER 32 BEING PURSUED

A man does not run among thorns for no reason; either he is chasing a snake or a snake is chasing him. (AfricanProverb)



The trip on the expansion bridge was almost like a fairytale since the trio encountered no trouble. Surrounded

by vibrant colors and vivid woodlands embracing every step, they had almost forgotten how perilous their journey had been so far and the impending dangers that surely awaited them. Being swallowed up in the profound choir of nature's symphony, they mused over the ever changing melodies of mutating clouds overhead. The clouds sailed like rich argosies across the painted heavens. The walk left them enervated and worn as the colors began to change and the forest began to recondition. As the alteration took place before their eyes, the three staggered in deep lassitude leaning on one another. Breathing in the more natural shades and tint, the facade of both the guise of exhaustion and the deceit of the forest itself improved. Back was their strength, and the somnolent state they had drifted into was clearing. Returning were the greens and browns with prismatic sunlight over head. The see-through bridge had now become wooden with planks to place their feet.

“How did that happen?” asked Jamison feeling the hand rail with his hand.

“The better question is how did any of this happen?” Mieszko said not expecting an answer.

They now assumed that the purpose of this part of the trip was to retrieve the cosmic rose, so they agreed to head back to the train station. Based on their entrance to the bridge, they correctly surmised they were headed in the right direction and that the exit should be close. Venting out into the rock area where they had originally entered the forest of shadows, Jamison's ineluctable sarcasm continued. He quipped, “I told you I knew where we were going. Just listen to me from now on.” Back onto the rocks and trekking through a thinly groomed part of the forest, they rejoined the original trail. After a good tiring walk they stood dumbfounded. “Alright Jamison, I thought you said, “just listen to me from now on.” Mieszko looked disappointed. “The train was right here; there was a station and a little depot. I know it was right here,” Jamison pleaded his case. The fact was that the train had disappeared!

There was no railway transportation, and they suddenly found themselves in another precarious situation. “This is very erroneous,” Mieszko said to himself, though it was audible enough for everyone to hear. “Okay, who

stole our ride," Jamison shrugged, attempting to keep the mood lighthearted and avoid panic in the others. "Let's just take the bus," Jamison suggested with more mordant wit.

"I believe that we are in mortal danger," said Mieszko. We just saw you return from the dead after taking a bullet in the back. We found a man from around my time period hanging dead from a tree and someone, we don't know if it was the murderer or someone else, slid a cosmic flower coin in his pocket for us to find." Mieszko summed it up and Jamison wasn't in the mood for more raillery, so he said nothing at all. Lora had been quiet for a while, contemplating, her mind racing. She was at work trying to see far ahead, but she drew a blank, getting nothing at the moment that would steer them. Night was approaching and they were out in the open with no sleeping bags, canteens, food or water. The fruit they had eaten back in the forest had provided a temporary solution to their hunger, but now, they were starving. Still, no one volunteered to venture back into that forest with darkness falling.

"Listen!" Lora held up her hand. Everyone stopped speaking and no one breathed. When Lora spoke with authority, it was important to listen. There was always something of vital importance in her warnings. She

spoke again before anyone heard what was coming in the distance. “Dogs! Dem a cum, mi hear dem, run! Ann Ale!”

Taking one last quick look at the sylvan splendor, they traded the charming landscape for an opportunity to escape the next horror, becoming prey to vicious dogs! They cut and ran about six paces then broke into a heavy stride. Running with all the strength left in them, all fatigue from the day fell off as they fled in the opposite direction of the sounds of the bandogs. Swiftly gliding over a grassy hill, they ran directly into the setting sun. They ran with purpose through the mantle of darkness, controlled by fate, with no destination. Jamison kept Lora close and prayed that Mieszko could keep up the pace. He could feel knee-high weeds brushing against his pant legs. As the ground dropped down, he felt water splashing on his feet and realized he was crossing a branch. As he ran, he attempted to cover his face with his hands to avoid the flimsy limbs that were making contact with his body. They stung like a bull whip. But he knew the dogs were getting closer. Lora was terrified as she remembered the horror that she had witnessed in Jamaica, when she saw vicious dogs tear party goers to pieces. The image was burning in her mind, and she was determined that she and her friends would not become prey to the evil of their hungry mouths. Worse yet, dusk was launching a chill that in turn created a fog bringing with it the inability to see ahead.

The sequence of events became a blur as the travelers bounced over the rough terrain, leaping over logs, dodging low-hanging branches and crashing into huge spider webs. Their vicious pursuers were relentless and closing fast, in an out of control charge without command. A break in the dense woodland provided an opportunity for them to change directions. They moved past a group of hanging vines, trailing off into a grove of cedar and bracken fern trees that stretched as far as the eye could see. Never missing a step, they functioned on pure adrenaline, bursting into long strides fracturing the stillness that slumbered ahead. The rupture of their haste provoked the comfort that was instilled in the slumbering creatures, and a locomotion of wing flight erupted. The turbulence created a shaking in the top of trees that took Lora's breath. Already tired, her legs sore and her lungs heavy with carbon dioxide, she tripped over something unseen. She fell forward and stumbled off the current path collapsing and falling over an embankment. Though the crash looked more violent than it actually was, she nevertheless took a hard tumble and plunged momentarily out of sight. Jamison and Mieszko came to an abrupt halt, hearing the ruckus of her tumbling downward.

Jamison cried, "Lora!" Her tumble landed her eight feet down into a shallow valley, and Jamison quickly descended to her rescue.

“My foot is caught under this root!” she exclaimed, tugging on her leg in an attempt to free herself. It made no sense to Jamison how she had gotten into this predicament, but he didn’t have time to analyze the situation, The howling was getting ever closer. He bent down on one knee and tightly gripped the enormous root. Her momentum during the fall must have been enough to perfectly lodge her foot under it. He lifted it up with all his might as she wiggled her foot back and forth. The root did not budge and her foot remained stuck. This was discouraging. The howling came closer!

“Dang girl, what have you gone and done? said Jamison. "It’s too tight. Does your leg feel sprained or broken?”

“No, it really isn't that bad. I just can’t budge it,” she replied.

By now, the gruesome sounds of dozens of colossus beasts were nearly upon them. Jamison, more determined the second time, pulling the root with great conviction, and squatting down, he used his legs for leverage. As he pulled with all his might, he grunted, “accidents will happen!” Driving his legs into the dirt and stretching his body upward, he felt the root raise. Lora, realizing that this might be their last attempt to free her, wiggled her foot with intense urgency. After a couple of seconds, her foot popped out, and Jamison grabbed her by the hand, dragging her up the grade.

The closeness of the dogs enabled them to muster up the endurance to run again. Guessing which way to go, their direction was determined by running away from the howling and barking that was nearly upon them. They broke from the cedar trees and found passage along a worn path. They thought this to be the logical course, and in any case, there was nothing ahead to hinder them. They had not traveled very far at all, just eclipsing a large boulder, when a voice bellowed from beyond their sight: "Here! Here! Over Here!" Should they trust the voice? Could they invest their confidence in the unknown? The dogs were bearing down on them, and they knew they could not outrun them much longer. Could they believe their ears? They had no choice but to accept the invitation? At this pace, they were already exhausted, too tired to run much further, and it was certain that they would surely be caught by whatever evil creatures were coming. They were out of options and their hope was diminishing. There was no time for indecision and procrastination was out of the question.

Jamison was the first to bank on the voice as a friend, though he realized it was a gamble. Even if it turned out to be a real crapshoot, how much worse than meat eating dogs could this person be? He slid down a steep embankment, springing to his feet at the bottom. Lora and Miezko were on his heels. Up ahead hidden on a rock wall was a small cave cavity,

and they could see the image of a person leaning out of what they hoped would be a palladium, waving frantically. They made a bee line for the cave entrance, fronted by a small patch of timber that was almost impossible to see through the camouflage. Jamison drew out the machete and flew into the cave first. His heart racing and pituitary glands spitting out endorphins, he stopped inside the cave, still highly excited. Mieszko and Lora were right behind him, too tired to fight.

They took a quick survey of the cave that was lit with lanterns, but they saw no one. The room began to shake like the aftershock of an earthquake. The opening of the cave disappeared under an avalanche of rock, leaving the room dusty, but undamaged and still lit. The air seemed good and they detected no gases. Without such cave gear such as belays, ropes, hand lines, or basic rigging, they were at the mercy of every traverse, karst, pothole, and fallen rock. Out of the shadows appeared the ubiquitous Hanus!

“What?” They all gasped to see their old friend. “How?” They were licking their lips, their tongues arid, trying to catch their breath. Lora coughed to clear her throat.

“I just couldn’t let those dogs eat you.” He handed Mieszko a canteen and each one took a drink.

“You are a sight for sore eyes!” Jamison said.

“Watching us were you?” Mieszko was smiling.

“After my loft was destroyed by Martin II's men, I could have stayed, rebuilt and guarded my clock, but then, I looked into my crystal stone and saw a man hanging in a pear tree.

You were heading in that direction, so I slipped through and provided you with a gift. But then, after your train was confiscated by Ferdinand’s men, I figured you were in a pickle. ”

Hanus was very pleased with himself, but less jovial than the last time they saw him.

“How do we move on?” asked Lora, who was still catching her breath?

“I can get you out of here, but only you can find your way. Have you checked your hour glass?” Hanus reminded them about the hourglass that

he had given them. Facing the constant danger that was always near, they had forgotten that they were on a time schedule. Jamison pulled it out of the back pack and saw that the sand was still pouring through to the other end. It was only then that he remembered time was slipping away. A quarter of the sand had already fallen to the other end!

“Follow me,” Hanus ordered. Down into the abyss, beneath them was the unknown, and they were descending practically straight down into it. Once they had the luxury of walking through the cave, proper stooping techniques were suddenly required as the passage narrowed drastically, almost like the head of a needle. As they lost head room, they were forced further down on their hands and knees, crawling for a very short distance to a pit only large enough for one person at a time to enter.

Hanus stalked away explaining their second encounter. “You see friends, it was probable that we would originally meet. And the possibility of meeting began was an even greater probability. You should have known it was a probability and now here we are in the reality. Possibilities are indeed actualities because it is in the probable where the actual is conceived. This conception does not always produce birth, but no actuality can manifest unless it starts with a probability.” The three just let Hanus

talk and were careful not to bump their heads on the low ceiling or to stumble over loose rock.

Hanus led them to a ladder. The ladder was their only means into the void of pitch black. Gripping the wood rungs tightly, their toes curled in their shoes for grip, they worked the twined rotan vine underneath it all. They expected to be startled by roosting bats swarming at any second. Jamison tried to lighten the mood by quoting "Raoul Duke," a character from his favorite movie, "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas." "We can't stop here. This is bat country." No one laughed since they had never seen the movie, but Jamison cracked up thinking about the crazy characters in it.

The cave dwellers were unaware that an army of ghoulish Shuud destroyers had been summoned from the carnal thoughts of pagan rulers of the world. These were greedy, lustful beings that hibernated in the thalamus part of the brain, having great disdain for the human race. Some knew this to be the "Eye of Ra," of carnage, spoil and ruin. The only barriers they knew were unconsciousness and sleep. Planted originally in the "Tree of Knowledge," they traced their ancestry to the Celtic Caduceus and every DNA Helix. Their source of knowledge was uncanny,

gormandizing, feeding off waste and destruction. These were heinous blood-lust creatures that were driven by the weakness of mans' senses, and they were digging frantically through the fallen rocks at the entrance of the cave. They were aware that if they were successful in retrieving the travelers, Martin II would reward them like conquering heroes. They would be allowed to gorge and cram fistfuls of pig meat into their horrifying mouths until they choked. They dug with barbarous ejaculations, in a frenzy, snorting, grunting and howling, moistening their lips with premonitions of doom for the hunted.

CHAPTER 33 CAT WOMAN

A cat goes to a monastery, but she still remains a cat. (Congolese Proverb)

Wondering if they would ever touch bottom, the last rung of the ladder hung about a foot from the rock floor. Lora had to be encouraged to take the last step, but she bravely did so. At this point, all of them were



firmly below
ground on solid
rock. Hanus
shone his light
around the
room, and it
revealed a
heightened
crystal ceiling

that appeared to be riddled with holes. Though their spelunking was coming to an end, they journeyed a little deeper into the bowels of this untouched palace. In this chamber of gems, the four gawked at the glimmer of the stones.

“Hanus pointed to an opening in the corner of the room near the floor,
“Here is a shaft that you will have to slide into and down just a short
distance.”

“Where does it go and what do we land on when we reach the end?”

Jamison asks, as he poked his head into the shaft. He could see nothing.

“I assure you this is the way. When you reach the other side, you will be back on your path,” Hanus replied. The travelers noticed that he had begun to shake nervously.

With the utmost consternation, Mieszko said, “What’s wrong with you? Why do you suddenly look so worried?” He walked closer to Hanus “They are coming. The rocks did not stop them,” Hanus replied.

“Who is coming?” Jamison asked. His tone quickly changed and his words were tense.

“Remember those dogs you thought were pursuing you? Those were not dogs. More frightening than the unknown is the evil that is on your trail. These are the worse hallucinations one can experience. They will plant logismoi thoughts in your mind to draw you away, and if you doubt, sway or are moved in any direction, you will fail and they will eat you alive!” Hanus sounded very pedantic as if he suddenly had become fevered and lost self consciousness. Lora was staring into the shaft, fixed on the distant dark, seemingly lost in anonymity.

“He is correct. I received only a partial obscured glance of whatever is coming, but there are more of them than we can defend against.”

“The shaft it is,” Jamison cried, tightening the back pack and starting toward the shaft. He gave Lora a kiss and into the unknown he launched himself. Making sure there was some space between them, Lora went next, and finally Mieszko shook Hanus' hand, thanked him again and hurled himself into the shaft. Hanus told him, “This is not my path. This is not my destination.” He wanted to remain the unheralded hero. “My path is to return to my clock,” he said laconically.

The shaft was tight and round, hardly large enough for a fully grown man to slide through. Mieszko experienced a claustrophobic sensation. Hanus had not revealed the fact that that the shaft was a time portal. The troop had assumed that they were heading to a safer part of the cave. Astute, the delusive Hanus had once again proved his wily side, and now, Mieszko was speeding through space and time, surrounded by the years of the ages. Darkness turned into light; light turned into knowledge. Knowledge turned into will and will turned into desire. Desire turned into decision and decision turned into consequences. Consequences turned into judgment and judgment turned into reward, and the reward was the one true God.

This time, the troop experienced a temporary suspension of consciousness. Waking in the comforts and sanctuary of a cave chamber, they believed at first that they had not traveled anywhere. But it became apparent that the cave was different now, and they heard water. Mieszko thought, “A sump, a hypogenic cave, what is that water sound?”

Lora revealed, “land, wood and water. I am home.” Mieszko believed that she was correct. They were back in Jamaica. Walking out into the sunlight, the beauty of the place took their breath away. The villa that stood before them featured a thatched roof, gardens, tropical trees, and a stone-cut walkway. “This is a resort!” exclaimed Jamison. This is called cockpit country,” Lora replied. She knew of this place.

Mieszko checked the hour glass and noted that half of the sand was now gone. The hour glass was still pouring sand into nothingness, and their time was running out. “I suggest we grab a bite to eat on the go. We must find our way to wherever we are supposed to be.” Jamison was starving for something to eat. They found their way to

"Xtabi Restaurant and Bar" where they ordered the “Fish of the Day”.
Once again their journey was unsure.

“I know of a trail here called the "Quick Step" trail, though some call it, "The Land of Look Behind." This trail is so named because Spanish Horsemen looking for runaway slaves would ride with two mounted horsemen, one to look forward and one to look to the rear.” She shoved four bottles of water that they had just purchased into the back pack. “That sounds like a plan to me. Let’s find this 'Look Behind trail,” Jamison replied. Without hesitation, he grabbed the back pack and flung it over his shoulder. Continuing on their journey, they followed Lora's lead.

Their treasures now included a key for the cylinder that Mieszko had not let out of his sight, a cosmic rose coin and an hourglass. The weather was a tropical paradise, and the travelers could not have asked for more accommodating conditions. Supplied with power bars and bottled water, their appetite satiated, they were ready for the long haul. They followed along the lip of a valley west of an Escarpment for about a mile until they were able to access a means of going south. The trail appeared to be rough terrain. As they walked, they noticed a series of cockpits with deep shafts at the bottom. Dead vegetation proved that they had just missed the rainy season. These sinks would have been flooded up to thirty meters during that time. The forest was alive,

abounding in bamboo, tree ferns, ebony, mahogany, rosewood, and lignum vitae.

After hiking for forty-five minutes, they came upon a large breakdown chamber that served as the main entrance of "Marta Tick Cave." This place was a stupendous jungle. Vines hung loosely from trees and the lush tropical foliage. Everywhere there was flora and fauna, including the blue lignum vitae. Colorful butterflies, reptiles and lizards made this paradise their home. In one area, limestone was present. They spotted the yellow Jamaican Boa, a fearfully dreaded reptile. They even saw a stray cat that seemed to be following them. Lora thought maybe the feline was hungry but hoped it was not starving because she did not have anything for the cat to eat.

"After you," Mieszko gestured with his hand toward the entrance to the breakdown chamber of the cave.

Inspecting the mouth of the cave, Jamison shared a little known fact. "You know, I am not thrilled about cave exploration. As a matter of fact, I don't think I am built for it." Faced with Hobson's Choice, which meant no -real choice at all, he figured he should take the plunge. What were his alternatives-to wander the jungle aimlessly? He was in a low crawl,

slithering actually, on his belly using a kind of Trudgen swimming action without the flutter kicks.

“This is called biting the dust,” Mieszko said, attempting to take their minds off of the uncomfortable squeeze and pain to their knees.

“Really, where did you learn that?” Jamison asked, thinking that his elbows were probably skinned.

Mieszko answered, “The Bible, Psalm seventy-two. “They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him and his enemies shall lick the dust. However, even before that, there was an epic poem written by Homer that contains the phrase, “Grant that my sword may pierce the shirt of Hector about his heart, and that full many of his comrades may bite the dust as they fall dying round him.”

“I’ve got one for ya. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link,” Jamison said, not even knowing what he was insinuating.

“You are not suggesting that I am a weak link are you?” Mieszko asked.

Jamison, realizing how his remark must have sounded, thought he needed to clarify, “No not at all. I only said that because I felt we needed some motivation at this point, and we all need to stay strong.”

“ I will agree with that. We cannot afford to lose sight or grow weary in this trek. Do you know where the phrase you used just originated?”

Jamison, figuring he was about to find out replied, “No clue.”

“It is from Thomas Reid's "Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man. 'In every chain of reasoning, the evidence of the last conclusion can be no greater than that of the weakest link of the chain, whatever may be the strength of the rest,'" Mieszko seemed to have every book ever written implanted in his head.

This crawl, a very small squeeze and very tight for Jamison's muscular frame, ended and he was finally able to stand. For the three of them, it was slow going because of several more tight squeezes. The important thing was for them not to end up going in or becoming horribly lost. When they finally reached a point where they had plenty of headroom, they marveled at the delicate helictites formed by capillary force. Lora was quite impressed by the stals and soda straws (Tubular Stalactites, speleothem in the form of a hollow mineral tube.) Lora spotted evidence of bats as she examined the fresh guano on the floor. They must have vacated when their circadian rhythms kicked in. There were no bats overhead now. A large

rock lay against the north wall of the chamber. Jamison began the attempt to move the stone.

“What are you doing?” Mieszko asked.

“There is something behind this stone, like a hole. I swear I just saw light through it.”

Mieszko helped him move the stone. It took all of their strength, but with great vigor, they managed to move it. With a LED penlight, he shined the light through to the other side which revealed something not so much shocking but as interesting. On the other side of the cave wall was a room. The first thing that caught their eye was the cat that had been following them through the jungle. Now they were convinced that the cat was indeed stalking them. Also in the room was a chair, and Mieszko guessed it to be a sixteenth century Glastonbury Chair made of solid mahogany. In the corner was a dressing table with drawers and a mirror. Mieszko pointed out the hand-carved cabriolet legs and scalloped skirt. The dressing table contained a lot of jewelry. Purlblind, Mieszko could not make out what it was. The room was well furnished with such pieces as Egyptian style boxes, stools, chests, foot rests, small cabinets and tables, and vase stands. Hanging on the wall was a wall-size carving from the Eighteenth Dynasty that featured two of the king's charioteers standing

behind their chariot. A statue of Amen, the Egyptian sun god, rested in the only corner they could see.

Jamison tried to force himself through the hole in the wall but was unable to squeeze through because there was too much restriction. Lora asked to give it a try. Against Jamison's better judgment, she got down on the floor and started through the opening. She barely fit, but with determined ambition, she managed to push her way through to the other side. Her courage, diligence and confidence were unmatched. Clearly, Lora was proving that she had a tenacious heart.

"Tell us what you see. Maybe open some of the boxes and drawers," Mieszko suggested.

Lora walked over to the dressing table and admired the jewelry. Her curiosity would not be appeased though she dared not disturb anything. She looked at her own reflection in the bronze mirror. Around the rim dash were two dogs and a rabbit. The handle was a figure of Aphrodite, goddess of love, draped in a long flowing robe. In her right hand, she held a dove, the symbol of the goddess. Lora opened the drawers one at a time, finding combs, brushes, powders and perfumes. None of these items interested the travelers. Then the men noticed that Lora stopped and held

up her hand. “There is something in here,” she said. “It’s probably the cat,” Mieszko suggested. They all heard the sound of a rattle, not like that of a rattlesnake but more like the sound of a percussive instrument.

Her face frozen with shock, Lora could not hide the fact that she was frightened; “What is it?” Jamison asked, in a voice of great concern? The men could not see what she was seeing because it was along the same wall as the opening and not in within their line of sight. Lora was speaking to someone. In denial, she said, “I am sorry. I never touched anything, I was just looking.” Her words were filled with compunction and honesty. They could not hear anyone speaking to her, but she was answering someone and not making any effort to escape the room.

“Lora, look at me. Come this way,” Jamison begged her. Lora did not respond but simply continued communicating with the unseen entity. Jamison became ill-tempered and atrabilious and began kicking at the opening attempting to burst through the wall enough to get in side. He had assumed a tutelary capacity with Lora and now, he felt helpless that he wasn’t able to come to her rescue. Lora was his young dark skinned inamorata and he was willing to die for her. The wall refused to cooperate.

Jamison wanted to find another way in, but Mieszko discouraged him, persuading him not to attempt it in this maze of caverns and tunnels.

“Well, we can’t just leave her in there alone! What if something happens? We can’t even get in there to help!” Jamison was frantic but not unwound.

“Keep your head. If you start running around in this maze, you could wind up lost and never come out of here. Just have patience,” Mieszko tried to assure him.

“I hate this! It’s like we are helpless,” Jamison said, flat on his belly looking through the opening.

“Perfer, obdura” Mieszko shared his Latin.

“What does that mean?” asked Jamison.

“Hold out; be strong,” he replied.

The rattling continued and a figure of a tall, lean woman appeared who moved with grace and swagger, not unlike a cat. Standing with her back to the men, they still could not hear anything that she was saying to Lora. Lora, on the other hand, was explaining their entire journey to her in detail. The woman was wearing a long opulent red gown that detailed the contour of her body.

Afterward Lora spoke to Jamison. "It is OK. This is Basthet, and she is here to help. She is a healer, a protector. She wants to travel with us because she understands the importance of our journey?"

"She is a woman, how can she protect us?" Jamison wanted to know.

Mieszko had the answer, "Jamison, this woman is the cat that has been following us. I know her from ancient writings. She is called, "The Goddess of the Rising Sun," or "The Sacred All Seeing Eye." Jamison had no idea what Mieszko was speaking about. Her father was known as "The Sun God Ra. She was his protector."

"So you are telling me that this woman can transform into a cat?"

Jamison was finding this hard to imagine.

When the woman turned toward the men, her face was revealed, and they noted that it had strong cat-like features. Her lapis lazuli colored eyes shimmered with golden pyrites.

The intense blue reflected age old femininity and independence. She spoke with a strong Egyptian accent, though thankfully, she spoke English with a variation on her accent. When she spoke, she said, "Sabah el Kher."

Mieszko understood and responded with, "Sabā innoor," and for the sake of his comrades, he spoke English, "Good morning."

She nodded and said, "People worship the idea of me and have made me an idol, so I have no real kingdom to rule. The talk of your journey has spread through both ages past and present. I have caught wind of your desire to be restored and to bring order back to the universe. If your soul had not been stolen, I would not have been misplaced here now. There are many things out of order and more chaos will follow unless you can find the clues and become whole again. You have many enemies pursuing you, trying to stop you and to do great harm to you. Allow me to even the odds, to be there on your side when the worse opponents challenge you in the field of blood. At night when you cannot see, I will be the "utchat." I have spoken to Lora who sees much. What she doesn't see clearly I will be able to see."

"We can use all the help that we can get, and our time is running short," Mieszko nodded, and with a slight hesitation, Jamison agreed.

She proceeded to give instructions for the men to meet them at a different part of the cave. She promised to bring Lora with her. Though Jamison was aggravated by the idea, he had little choice but to agree. He endured a few more crawls and squeezes, all the while telling himself that he wasn't claustrophobic. He managed to remain unperturbed by the

difficult route that Basthet had chosen. The men made it to the rendezvous point before the women. When the women arrived, Lora embraced Jamison and hugged him intensely. He noticed that she was wearing an amulet with the "utchat" (all-seeing eye) around her neck, a gift from Basthet. Up close, Basthet could be heard spurring melodies to herself. Even though Mieszko had made a vow of celibacy, he found himself staring at her charm and beauty.

She was carrying a dainty golden bag, possibly a sachet. The others were only able to imagine what she might be carrying, but no one felt comfortable enough to ask its contents. As remarkable as she appeared, Jamison figured this priceless pocketbook had to be filled with beauty products. As they exited the cave and returned to the thick air of the jungle, Basthet mentioned that her powers were limited on their full journey.

"How did you come here?" she asked. Her feline cadence was apparent to the travelers, and she kept such a calm demeanor that it put everyone at ease.

“We find worm holes at different points that enable us to travel through time and visit practically any place on the planet at different time periods,” Mieszko was quick to answer.

In a soothing tone she spoke lightly, “Excellent. Those who are carefully guided do not go astray, but sometimes, those who lose their bearings cannot find a straight course.”

“Every time we go through a portal, we experience vicissitudes greater than the last, but we also see more revealing disclosures,” Mieszko assured her.

The four unlikely friends shared great camaraderie as they passed through the jungle. It did not take long to understand that their new companion was naturally libidinous and gave herself over to coquetry and flirtation. Mieszko seemed to enjoy the attention, going on and on with poetic dialog, such as rhymed prose and various rhythmic clausulae. Lora accepted the fact that Basthet was in reality a cat, and this behavior was a part of her nature. There was no reason to get atrabilious or jealous because Basthet was only doing what came naturally. Basthet led them a

great distance through the night. After all, what better guide could they have at night than a cat?

“Tell us Basthet, how long have you been here in this place? How did you arrive here and why were you in that cave?” asked Jamison, wanting to know more about how one that is considered inviolable and sacrosanct ended up imprisoned on earth as a troglodyte?

“I was at the acme of my power, when the worlds began to tremble at the prospect of complete loss. When your soul was stolen, it sent a ripple effect throughout the universe, Mieszko. You were the eighth wonder of this world. Every world has wonders, and by disturbing this one's balance, a surge shot through the cosmos. All of us who were caretakers got swept up in the wave. We underestimated the cosmic tsunami that would follow. Personally, I was not dethroned, but I sensed the pulse of disruption, and knowing how we are all bound together within the universe, I knew that the palpation was irregular, sporadic and without constants. We as caretakers understand that if the heart of the universe beats irregularly, it is because the pump, the pipes or the valves are out of order. In other words, something was hemorrhaging, either internally or externally. Because I felt myself writhing, I left my throne, for whether I remained a

ruler in my kingdom or ventured out, eventually my throne would be in danger. I traveled here on sunbeams, arriving on a solar flare. Once here, I transmogrified into this more acceptable body. I did not wish to dissimulate, but my appearance as a goddess would be unbearable to you. I have been here waiting for you to arrive some 200 of your years. A well-taught heart listens readily.” (seems out of context but I like it...maybe should go in a different paragraph)

Mieszko smiled at her, “That is some journey.” Inquisitive, he asked a question, “So it took many years for you to feel the ripple effect?” Basthet's ears seemed to move forward on her head as she slinked toward Mieszko and answered, “I came quickly, so yes, the ripple effect began the day your soul was taken. Remember, the universe is quite large. And how I found you in this place? You have friends in high places. When I arrived, a blind man named Hanus met me and told me that you would be here in this jungle and for me to wait for you.” She stretched, elongating her body, her hands over her head. “ He explained that he was the aperture that had set the wheels of this adventure in motion.” Mieszko was reminded of his lacuna, the loss he had suffered and the ever hollow gap where his soul used to be. He had a yearning and a *mélange*. How selfish had he been? Basthet

peered deeply into Mieszko's eyes. Her gaze was hypnotizing as she shared her wisdom. "The cautious man flourishes. The exact one is praised; the innermost chamber opens to the man of silence."

As the sun began to rise, the weary travelers found themselves on a bold hill commanding a view of the fog coming up off the jungle floor. They stopped to rest and Mieszko wanted to see Jamison's tattoos. He thought that perhaps he had missed something. Intrigued with all of the markings on his body, Basthet found the one of a lion located on his calf very attractive. He had gotten that one in high school in honor of his football team, the Lions. Nothing stood out to Mieszko at the moment. He could see nothing. They walked on until Basthet stopped, leaped up into a tree and climbed like the cat she was. Her concision and concinnity were simply elegant. She was scouring east from the top of a Banyan Tree. After a quick scan, she returned to earth, her pupils larger than ever.

She nudged Mieszko as she reported to the others, "I see something."

"What did you see?" asked Mieszko. "It is boxes on wheels a few hundred feet ahead," she purred. Everyone said "Train!" at the same time.

Picking up the pace, now the four headed east. Mieszko assumed that since Basthet was a goddess, her senses must be enlightened. Normally cats do not see that well. The four approached the train with caution, stifled with emotional malaise. They spread out to within several yards of one another, shaking the initial parlous state of mind and continuing on. The train was out in the middle of nowhere! It was sitting on tracks that shot off deep into the jungle in both directions.

“This train doesn’t belong here! We are nowhere near the old railroad. Like an expert witness, Lora informed them that the railroad used to run from Montego Bay to Kingston but has not been in service in recent years.”

“What does it does it do?” Basthet asked.

“You have never seen a train?” Mieszko asked, surprised since she was here in this world. “This is a means of transportation.”

"Normally there is a conductor and an engineer, but we have found these things move unattended as soon as we board," Jamison was now the witness.

“Shall we or shall we not?” Mieszko needed a unanimous vote. Lora stepped away to a quiet place, and there she raised her hands and closed her

eyes. “Basthet, I hope you would not be offended if I offered up prayers to my God,” Mieszko was being reverent.

“Please do so for we need all of the help we can get from the Gods,” she answered, trilling some of her words.

Mieszko found a secluded area, still within sight, bowed his head and folded his hands against his chest. “Dat deus incrementum. ANGELE Dei, qui custos es mei, Me tibi commissum pietate superna; (Hodie, Hac nocte) illumina, custodi, rege, et gubernas. Amen.” In an effort to show respect, Basthet stood silently as if Mieszko was praying to her. Jamison followed the prayer with “Amen.”

Lora said, “Hear me those that dream, those that see, those that have a voice, the horseman rides with fire in his eyes, hate in his heart to kill the four messengers of the Codex Gigas. He plans to scorch your minds with the fire from his word and to appear in the gloaming when a man cannot plainly see. He will first wound you and your blood will turn the ground red and if you lose faith, also the sky! Without the horse, the demon has no power. He must be killed with the “Coup de grace.” As her limp arms dropped to her side, Jamison ran to her to keep her from collapsing.

“What did I say? Did I say anything?” Lora asked.

“Yes my love, we are still being hunted,” Jamison relied, leading her to the others.

Basthet curled her lip, and her flehmening behavior caught the others' attention. Though she was a decadent voluptuary, Basthet wanted to show Lora love because she could sense her need for comfort. Instead, Basthet simply smiled. Basthet heard the mean howling of the Shuwd in the distance and she twisted her face, perplexed. “What is it Basthet?” Lora asked.

“I hear the sound of animals, creatures that almost sound canine, but they are not. There are many of them coming through the jungle.”

No one else could hear the sound, and that meant they were not as close as before. “Basthet, they are called "Shuwd," and they want to kill us. They will want to kill you, too, and anytime you hear them you must tell us,” Mieszko warned. He could not reiterate enough the impending danger.

“To the train,” Jamison ordered.

As the four voyagers boarded the train, its Initial appearance seemed to be the same as the train on which they had traveled to the states. There unnerving question that lingered in their minds was, “Where did it go then and how did it get here now?” Once on the train, they sat across from one another in one of the passenger cars. At first, the train was quiet, but the equivocal particulars included a new sound of grinding metal from beneath the train. The train suddenly jerked abruptly, throwing the passengers back and forth. Unexpectedly, every window and every door was covered by prison bars that slid down from the ceiling. Remaining staid, Jamison jumped up and went to the door, “Guys, we have a huge problem.”

Jamison and Mieszko were pulling on the bars with all their might.

Jamison bawled, “This is great, a prison train, a slaughterhouse!”

“Jamison, this is no abattoir!” Mieszko's voice swelled in acrimony.

There was no way out and Jamison's perversicacious nature surfaced as he ignored everyone and continued to pull and kick at the bars. The train lunged forward with a violent shutter, and the jungle outside disappeared as the train was sucked beneath the earth. The train moved at light speed

and the passengers were at the mercy of its destination. Jamison, finally finished with his effusive useless outburst, sat and waited to see what was about to happen. The lights inside the train flickered on and off like a loose light bulb in its socket, as the moving train took on a jarring effect.

Osculating light gyrated dizzyingly, eclipsing at regular intervals. The periods of light were a bit longer than the periods of darkness, and the screeching sounds and thunderous eruptions outside of the train penetrated its walls. As the train began to settle and come to a rest, the sound of soft haunting susurrations bled through the cracks and vents of the car. The drone tickled their ears.

“OK folks, remember they can kill you, but they can’t eat you!” joked Jamison. His penchant for humor was understood by the others. They realized that in reality, his humor was an attempt to hide his uneasiness. The outside world was completely dark. Even Basthet could not see or hear anything except the chilling whispers from outside. Just as suddenly as the clanging sound of pulleys and wheels turning the iron bars had imprisoned the travelers, they lifted, and the train was transformed from a prison to a passenger train again.

“We going to wait for them to come in, or are we going out?” Jamison asked.

Outside of the train, lights spilled down to the shock of the travelers. They were surrounded on every side by dozens of the morbid Shuwd. Naked and subfusc in color, they were sickening, miserable creatures, the size of a normal man. Yet their legs were strong and their bodies contorted and twisted. They were singed like deformed men that had been badly burned, and their eyes were jaundiced. Sharp teeth glowed both with revenge and hunger. They were impassive and rocked back and forth like zombies waiting for the command.

Lora thinking the unimaginable cried, “What are we going to do?”

“Well I’m not going out there in a hurry,” Jamison responded, his eyes to the window. Basthet stood. She walked over to the window and gave Mieszko a grin of confidence, then walked to the door.

“What are you doing?” Lora pleaded. Basthet opened the door and stepped out onto the step. The thirsty Shuwd snarled alarmingly, slobber

dripping from their mouths. Jamison concluded that they were not impregnable, though he was not willing to retreat. The travelers hearts were beating with trepidation and anxiety. Events unfolded expediently and severely; yet, something deep inside was giving them assurance.

Mieszko, coining a phrase in Latin, said “nil carborundum illegitimi.”

They had just gone through a portal of time, and now their eyes were limpid and wild. After all they had endured, and now surrounded by the enemy, they were nonplussed by the surreal scene unfolding in front of them.. Jamison, whose muscles carried the strength of two gladiators, realized in this instance that they might want to be more circumspect. He did not want a sudden action to redound to their defeat. He did remain intransigent and ready to fight. He remembered reading, “The Art of War,” by Sun Tzu, and one quote from the book stood out: “Let your rapidity be that of the wind, your compactness that of the forest. In raiding and plundering be like fire, in immovability like a mountain.”

Just when the trio became somewhat optimistic, more Shuud crawled out from the crevices and from behind rocks until it was a mob scene. They

moaned, squealed and grunted like barbaric beasts. Looking horse whipped, hungry and ready to feast, they bounced up and down like prize fighters during introductions to the match. A fight broke out when a group in the back attacked another. It was like a scene from a horror movie as dozens of Shuwd attacked the smaller fighting group. An insane scene of mutiny and cannibalism took place. Terrible was the mutant rebellion. The unorganized Shuwd had no general, and were designed to kill without discrimination. Although it wasn't clear what had provoked the original smaller skirmish, the dozen separate battles that followed gave the troop time to think. The impulsive behavior of the Shuwd would not be extinguished on its own.

“Just fantastic,” said Jamison, deflated.

Basthet flicked her hands like she was flicking water off them. She let out a series of whines; quizzically, she roared like the King of the Beast. The Shuwd were repelled and took a step back. The ears on Basthet's head moved back, and she roared again. At that, the Shuwd began to double over in pain. She had the power to invoke illness on her enemies. She had experience in killing creatures. She had managed to save her father from

"Apep," also known as "Apophis," long ago. For her, taming the Shuwd was a simple task. They began to vomit violently, and one by one, they dragged their ravaged bodies off into the rocks, and prayed that the rocks would fall on them to put them out of their misery. But, the rocks never came, and the heinous, insufferable creatures died.

Basthet had proven herself to be gifted with vaunted cleverness and keen efficiency. Those that did not fall right away, repelled like slugs when salt is applied. A small group that seemed unaffected, deserted by taking flight, but they became adumbrate, melting into the nothingness of the security of swarthy blackness. Basthet, ever serene, groomed herself and longed for the fruits of forbidden concupiscence. Composed, she gathered herself and stepped back into the train knowing that in this world such behavior was verboten. She curved around and arched her back, and asked, "Now what?"

"Do we dare get back on that train?" Jamison asked, admiring the way that she tidied up.

"The train has always taken us to the next clue in this puzzle. And we are underground not knowing which way to go," Mieszko mentioned.

Jamison became the leader, stating, "Let's vote. Who is in favor of wondering through the dark of this underground world following these tracks to God only knows where. Just lift your hand." The travelers surveyed one another waiting for someone to be first to raise a hand in favor. No one did.

"Very well," he said. With no hands to count he continued his rant, "Who is there among you who wants to remain on this train and possibly be eaten by nasty monsters when we arrive at our destination?" Everyone raised a hand in agreement. "OK, let's go get eaten!" he said jokingly, as he took his seat.

Positioning themselves again in their seats, they were willing to pursue another peripatetic train excursion into the great unknown. Everyone tightened up waiting for something to happen. They imagined themselves on a ride at an amusement park waiting for the big roller coaster to make that first heart in the throat drop. "Damned if we do; damned if we don't,"

Jamison spoke, agitated in his own personal quandary. This triggered a brief explanation from Mieszko of the word damn. “Damn comes via Old French "damner" from the Latin

"damnare," a derivative of the noun "damnum." The original word meant loss or harm. It is the source of the English word, 'damage', but the verb "damnare" soon spread its application to 'pronounce judgment upon,' in both the legal and the theological sense.” His defining moment was interrupted by the train's violent shaking. “Here we go again!” he cried.

Within the confines of the train car, electrical surges ricocheted across the ceiling from wall to wall. Magical colors like the aurora borealis were bouncing, waving and flickering overhead. The train was moving again, its rhythm more steady this time, unlike the last horrifying ride. The diffuse glow extended in every direction with fluctuating arcs and blinding flashes. Though at times, the lights were bright and the sojourners had to squint, this was a magnificent display of incredible mystery and charm.

“This is some sort of magnetic field,” Mieszko shouted above the roar of the train.

“You think” Jamison responded sarcastically?

“Do you hear that fuzzy sound” Lora cried in a raised voice.

The train rumbled and shook, and its vibration caused vertigo in the passengers. Loud static noises and troublesome crackles penetrated their sharpened senses right down to the bone. The car began a slow spin; their bodies worked to adjust. There was nothing stationary on which to focus. As the rotation picked up velocity, they experienced a ringing and buzzing in their ears followed by conductive hearing loss. Now, deaf and dizzy, their vision began to blur like someone with astigmatism. Something was attacking their inner ear and as it short circuited, the passengers could not keep their balance. Their sympathetic nervous systems became confused, and they could no longer interpret the signals of fight or flight.

As they were thrown from their seats, the strain on their senses kept them crawling on the floor feeling that their heads were about to explode. As quickly as the carnival atmosphere began, it died down. Fragmented and somewhat desultory, all four travelers were left nauseous on the floor.

They gave it a moment, rested, suppressed their nausea, and sat up slowly.

As inscrutable as this occurrence was, they were getting used to such surprises. Briefly deaf, their hearing was rapidly returning, though sounds were muffled. Still, no one was malingering here. Gradually, they got to their feet and moved about and began to hear the sounds of their own voices.

“Can you hear me?” Jamison yelled to Lora.

“Yes I can hear you. You do not have to yell,” was her reply.

“Look!” Lora was standing, peering out the window. It seemed that this was the only window to the outside world. “Where are we? The train has changed.”

Everyone saw with great amazement what Lora was excited about. Out of the window their standard passenger train had morphed into a subway train, and they were sitting in a station. It was the Swedish "T-Centralen T-bana" or the "Stockholm Central Station," located in Stockholm, Sweden. They found themselves in one of the forty-seven underground stations.

“Is everyone ready to travel?” asked Mieszko. They knew it was detrimental to exit the train. The doors slid open with a whoosh, and the four exited the subway car to the platform. They followed the signs to

above ground and fresh air. It was morning and the streets were busy with the workforce racing to their jobs.

Mieszko knew why they were here. He had become suspicious when their journey did not end in the Czech Republic. As he suspected, the original Codex Gigas, supposedly moved to Prague as a good will gesture on behalf of the Swedish government, who had stolen it in war, in fact, had not been transported to Prague at all. Instead, the Swedish government manufactured a replica, a poor copy, and shipped it to Prague to pacify the Chechen people. Once again, Bohemia had been robbed though they did not even realize it.

Mieszko asked a few passersby for directions and the locals were helpful. They were directed to the Rica Hotel Kugsgatan, only five hundred meters away. The hotel, situated in the heart of the city, was located at the back door of the National Library of Sweden where Mieszko suspected that his book was being held prisoner by Martin II. The four checked into the hotel. Mieszko as usual, had plenty of local currency. This time, Lora and Basthet shared a room, and to Jamison's disappointment, he and Mieszko shared a room. The rooms were well furnished with Scandinavian décor, but the amenities were not extravagant. Jamison was thrilled to learn they were

going to have the breakfast buffet. The plan was to visit the National Library tomorrow and find the Codex Gigas. Beyond that, Mieszko had no plan. The travelers needed much rest because clear thinking would be necessary to accomplish this likely impossible task. Mieszko checked the hourglass and noted that they still had a quarter of the sand remaining. “I hope this thing isn’t like a gas tank on a car,” Jamison said. “What do you mean?” asked Lora, who nestled against him on a sofa in Mieszko’s room. “It always seems like the closer to empty the fuel gauge reads, the faster the fuel is used,” he said. It seemed his observation was true in this case. They believed that the hourglass emptied according to some sort of cosmic clock.

“What’s the plan?” asked Jamison, leaning forward, ready to listen. “Even though this is not Fort Knox, this library has a formidable security force thanks to some insiders who committed thievery several years ago, Mieszko replied. Security has been heightened, but I want to warp into the building,” Mieszko said, waiting for a response. Focused, all eyes were fixed on him, and no one had anything to add to the plan, not even Jamison. He continued, “All rooms and depositories take an electronic key card, and the history of the cards is recorded in their security network. The library

has about two hundred seventy-five people on its staff. I plan on getting us into the chamber where the Codex Gigas is being held.

The library has five Reading Rooms.

It will not be in the main Reading Room as it houses materials from the 1830s to present day. And we know that we are looking for the original rather than a microfilm, so we eliminate another room. The book is being held in an environmentally protected room under lock and key. Once we are in, we are in. We will have to jump out the same way that we jumped in. If we fail to jump properly, we are trapped and at the mercy of whomever or whatever forces are protecting it.”

“How are we to remove it from the place? Grab it and hit the time portal?” asked Jamison, offering a make believe plan.

“This is not a scapegrace plan,” Mieszko responded.

Jamison interrupted, “What is scapegrace?”

Mieszko apologized, “It means this is not a reckless plan. But I must prepare you for what may happen. The book that I am is drawing me. That

is why I believe we can travel straight to the book undetected. But once we arrive and take the pages from the cylinder, it is possible that will be the last that you see of me.”

Lora jumped in, “You mean you will die?”

“No dear, not die, I will be made complete. Just because I will no longer here in the form of a man, I will be able to live on at peace,” Mieszko was trying to be compassionate. The three of them had grown very close since they started this journey together.

Basthet spoke, “I have invested interest here. My kingdom has been disturbed because of this atrocity, and I will make sure I see this through for you. Whatever I need to do, I shall be there to make it happen.” The rest of the night they tried not to hypothesis about what may happen tomorrow and the sorrow it brought to their hearts in realizing that they may never see Mieszko again.

CHAPTER 34 IN A HURRY TO JUMP

The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page. St. Augustine

The sun rose too early for the tired travelers. Jamison did not think



Mieszko had slept.

He had gotten up

in the middle of

the night and saw

Mieszko staring

out of their fifth-

floor window, but

he had not

disturbed him.

Instead, he laid his

head on the

comfort of his fluffy pillow and drifted back to sleep. No sooner had he had

closed his eyes when the alarm clock sounded. Bedeviled but anxious, he

jumped in the shower to be ready for the breakfast buffet that Mieszko had

promised. He was starving. When Jamison emerged from the shower,

Mieszko was seated at the end of the bed. It seemed that he had gravitated

toward solemn and downtrodden. Jamison had never seen him like this

before.

“Jamison,” Mieszko said, “I feel my time here is drawing near.”

“But isn't that what you have wanted since you woke me in the hospital and I agreed to come with you?” Jamison asked, trying to reassure him.

“Yes, you are correct. But I never thought we would make such a connection and form such a friendship. You and Lora greatly impressed me and changed me, and I fear that I will dearly miss your friendship.”

Jamison didn't know what to say. He had a gut feeling that this middle-aged man with whom he had traveled through time might not be with them much longer.

Jamison answered, “If we could have made the time, I would have cherished sitting with you and listening to your stories all the time. I feel your wisdom is priceless, and I could have learned so much. Mieszko, I will never face the world in the same way again. You have given me so much to consider and so much to think about. My faith has always been lacking.

It has swayed, and often, I fail to acknowledge myself before the Lord, so I go for days without praying or repenting. I do not know how much time we have left together, but I want to thank you for choosing me.”

Mieszko smiled, though lost in thought “ and replied, Jamison, I did not choose you. You chose me when you illustrated your body with a map of my life, that is to say, a map that would lead me to my lost soul!”

Agreeing, Jamison ran a comb through his damp hair.

“One thing though Jamison,” Mieszko said, as he walked to the window and spent a moment reflecting. “Are you in love with Lora, because she seems to be attached to you?”

Maybe it’s none of my...”

Jamison interrupted, “No, it is your business,” he finished Mieszko’s sentence. “You were instrumental in bringing us together, for me finding her. And yes, I think I have fallen hard for her. What’s going to happen when this is over?”

“That is up to you,” Mieszko replied, putting the responsibility back on Jamison.

“I know that I have to man up and do the right thing. But, will I even remember her? Will we go back to where we came from? How does it work?” Jamison asked.

“All I know is that my memory is long, and I think it would be a cruel trick for God to erase from your mind something so precious to you as Lora,” Mieszko patted Jamison on the back and headed for the door.

When Lora awoke, she felt a warm body curled at her feet at the end of the bed. The double bed that Lora and Basthet shared was plenty large. But during the night, Basthet’s instinct took over, and she needed to snuggle at the foot of the bed. Lora’s feet had gone to sleep from lack of circulation, and now, she gently pulled her feet from beneath her new best friend's sleeping body. She slipped out of bed and into the shower. She showered quickly because she was running late. When she stepped out of the bathroom, Basthet was awake and stretching. It seemed she had elongated her body by at least by half its length. Looking at her, Lora thought she must be made of rubber.

“Are we ready to meet the men downstairs?” Lora asked.

“Yes, I could use a bowl of milk,” Basthet said. Lora started to laugh thinking that Basthet was joking. Basthet, however, did not respond. Implacable, she gazed at Lora and twisted her head, her blank eyes fixed intently at Lora. Lora became very uncomfortable and embarrassed, and there was a moment of awkward silence. An awkward but recherché friendship had formed between the two women. Basthet then laughed heartily, a laugh that became contagious. Only now did Lora understand that Basthet had been joking all along, and the two shared a moment of "goddess-oracle" humor.

After a hearty breakfast, Mieszko was a determined man. The travelers met in his room and formed a circle. Mieszko began the ritual with these words, “Friends, thank you for being by my side, for fighting with me, and for being willing to lay down your lives for me. It is said that there is no greater love than the love of person who is willing to lay down his life for a friend.” He looked at Basthet, who nodded, and he added, "even a goddess." Mieszko then led the travelers in “The Lord’s Prayer” and ended in The Angelic Trisagion “Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus exercituum: Plena es terra gloria tua: Gloria Patri, Gloria Filio, Gloria Spiritui Sancto.”

All four placed a firm hold on the silver metal cylinder containing the eight pages of the Codex Gigas and began to meditate on traveling. At first, nothing happened. In the next instant, the air thinned in the room as if they had climbed to the top of the highest mountain. Everything in the room erupted and became turbulent as they dropped into a free fall. G-forces were accelerating them headlong at an intolerable speed. The fitful wind was so difficult to manage that their eyes were forced shut. Jamison tried to be brave though he expected a sudden collision with the ground. The event was so chaotic that at one point, none of them could tell if they were falling, flying, or rotating. It was as if everything was being propelled past them and they were sitting still. As far as they could tell, they were still gripping the cylinder. Although the insanity only lasted seconds, the mayhem seemed long enough for the travelers. Finally safe and sound, they lay on a marble floor in a small glass room. In the center of the room a giant book rested, its pages closed. Mieszko raised himself to his feet and began to weep uncontrollably. Jamison shook him to restore his sense of equanimity.

“Mieszko, compose yourself! You know we haven’t much time,” he said.

Lora was having trouble focusing her eyes, blinking in an attempt to shake the feeling of a thousand gossamer wings flapping frantically before them.

“The key, hand me the key. 'And te tide and te time þat tu iboren were, schal beoniblescet,’” Mieszko interpreted, “Time and Tide wait for no man.” He held his hand out, and Jamison reached into his pocket and withdrew the skeleton key. Jamison then attended Lora asking if she was “alright?” Rubbing her eyes, she said, “yes. they are clearing.”

Mieszko held out his hand impatiently.

Jamison laid the key into Mieszko’s shaking hand, and he inserted it into the key hole of the cylinder. He tried to twist it. It did not budge. No matter how he twisted and turned, the key refused to turn. “It turned last time. Maybe it is stuck,” he said, jiggling the key frantically. Lora warned, “Careful not to break it off.”

Mieszko removed the key and attempted to turn it over, even though he could see it would not fit into the cylinder except one way. He reversed it again and inserted it into the slot. Although the silver cylinder vibrated it did not unlock.

“What could be wrong?” he cried.

Jamison remembered something that Mieszko had said early in their journey, “You mentioned that I was the key and the map.”

“Yes, you are the key. Maybe because we are here, you must be the one to open it?” Mieszko said, silently praying.

Basthet was keeping a watch on the corridor leading to this small glass enclosure in case security cameras had seen them arrive. Jamison twisted the key with no problem, and the lock turned. As they heard the sound of pins releasing inside the cylinder, Jamison was able to remove the round top, and he withdrew the vellum pages. Quickly, he handed them to Mieszko. Hesitantly, Mieszko turned to his friends, and with great sadness, said farewell, for now he was at the pinnacle of his journey. No one knew what to expect next, so they stood indeterminately in great anticipation. It was Lora who moved first, throwing her arms around Mieszko's neck. Jamison tenderly patted him on the shoulder, took Lora by the arm, and smartly took a step back.

Quoting Shakespeare's Hamlet, as was his style, Mieszko turned briefly toward his friends and said, "It is time for me to shuffle off this mortal coil." He smiled and gave them one more quote, this time from Twelfth Night, "There shall be no more cake and ale?" His friends, confused by his final words, were even more shocked by how quickly events unfolded.

Mieszko flipped open the giant book to the place where the pages had been removed. He carefully unrolled them out onto the pages beneath and lay prone on the open book. Flames burst forth from the pages of the giant book in the shape of a hand, and consumed Mieszko like a blow torch. A thousand rays of coruscating light were what Mieszko had prayed for to manumit him from the world of a soulless existence. The flames were so intense that Jamison shielded the two women with his broad back. Mieszko had never felt such invincible perspicacity. When the heat and fire subsided, Mieszko was gone, conflated into the pages of the book. There was no trace of him and no residue of a fire. He was simply devoured by the flames. They examined the pages, noting that all eight pages were perfectly sewn into place.

Lora cried as Jamison consoled her. Basthet who was still carrying her small handbag took it off her side. "What are you doing?" asked Jamison.

"We must finish what Mieszko has started," she said, opening the purse. At that moment alarms began to sound.

"We've been found!" cried Jamison.

"We must work quickly, demanded Basthet. Lora saw the door at the end of the corridor opening.

"Give me the cosmic rose coin, the hourglass, the medallion, the cylinder and the key," Basthet ordered. Jamison did not know what was happening. He presupposed that he had no choice but to trust her. She placed the items with the exception of the key down into the cylinder. The security guards, with guns drawn, were charging hard toward them shouting, "Stanna, rör dig inte!" Jamison, worried that the armed guards were about to shoot their way into the chamber, cried "I don't think these guys are happy!" The guards shouted again as they raised their side arms, "'Vi kommer attskjuta!"

“We better hurry. I think they want to shoot us!” Jamison screamed.

"Vikommer att öppna eld mot er, sluta upp med det ni håller på med!"
they shouted.

In an infallible stance, Basthet pointed the open end of the cylinder toward the Codex Gigas, and much like the power that brought the four to this transparent room, a vacuum sucked the book off the table and into the cylinder.

“You have got to be kidding me!” Jamison was impressed. She was now holding the cylinder, and in this small cylinder was a giant book so heavy that it normally required two men to lift it. The cylinder also housed the cosmic rose, the eye of Horace medallion, and the hourglass. She placed the lid back on it, took the key from Jamison and locked it tight. She then handed the key back to Jamison who quickly inserted it back down into his pocket. Amazingly, she was able to slide the long tube into the tiny purse and button it. She then purred “hold onto me.” Jamison and Lora did not balk.

Basthet sensed fear mounting in her friends. The guards were now attempting to open the door of the see-through room, and she screamed again, "Hold onto me!" Both of them at once clung to her. She wrapped her arms around them and they disappeared before the eyes of the baffled guards whom she left in a sickening and crapulous irritation.

Dumbstruck, the guards tried to compose themselves and make sense of what they just witnessed, "Vad var det som nyss hände?"

Speeding along, the pair still attached to her body, the exotic feline's purring intensified. Her stealthy body surreptitiously carried the trio to safety, though their destination was undetermined. This clandestine escape reminded Jamison and Lora of the Elephant Bay jump when they had had been rushed and ill informed.

This was the first jump without Mieszko orchestrating the event. Exultant with hope, they thought maybe he was still in control since he had been made complete? Everything about this worm hole breathed a very special and portentous gift from someone. The ride was smooth without the disorienting lights, numbers and sounds. The purring from Basthet's chest was ever so soothing. Jamison found himself drawn even closer to Lora, becoming uxorious, like anyone caught in the spell of love.

CHAPTER 35 WHERE THE SHUWD LIVE

When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.

African Proverb

In the Former Czechoslovakian Republic of Czech, a nefarious, flagitious, and perverse miscreant screamed vulgar obscenities against



the One True God-Yahweh, and against those time travelers that had gotten away with their treachery. In his sybarite world, Martin II, who found pleasure derivable from the heavy odor of turpentine, banged his brittle hands down on a pulpit in the temple of his own self esteem. Guilty of uncharitable thoughts, he raged in anger and spat out orders of

desecration to his legion against all that was pure and holy.

His cohorts feared the damage that he might do in his rage to those frangible bones in his hands. The Shuwd in the audience, summoned by words resonating in the simple minds of the imbecillic obedient, grunted, shook and rocked in agreement with their sinister Lord of deception.

“Now is time to rise and stand against those who would shine their light into our minds! We, who feed off the fears and desires of men, bathe in the lust and carnage of their weaknesses. Their God lowered himself into our world as a man, and we crucified him and entombed his body. And we will stop all that follow his legend,” he ranted.

The Shuwd, expressing their vile allegiance, met Martin's draconian rhetoric with shouts, grunts and snarls. He resided in the dark regions underground in a place called, "Erebus," that smelled of kimchi, never in a dishabille state. Perversely, he stood in his own waste, and ate a restricted diet consisting exclusively of Shuwd hide, gathered by the younger Shuwd. This was his demesne. He romanced the Shuwd and deceived them with vague promises, although there was not a scintilla of truth to his words. In his mind, he was filled with indifferent and callous repulsion for

these devoted, reproachable beasts. They pledged their devotion to him when they realized that they were no more than the vain imaginations of man unleashed, rather than demons who were controlled by the devil.

Instead, these beasts were freewilled creatures capable of making their own choices. They were intelligent enough to realize that, without a leader, they could never go above ground. And so they called on the Dark Lord, the

Prince of the Power of the air, for guidance. A disquieting absence of response ensued when he did not answer, so they put their belief in another. Martin gladly welcomed their reverence. Now for him, their faces were set and defiant against all that would challenge him.

He contracted with the Shuwd to build a synagogue for him to prove their faithfulness. Oddly, they were good builders, though scarcely artists or engineers. While they were capable of following directions and understood authority, they were no designers or organizers. Their mud and mortar was scrapped from the earth of Bethlehem around the time of the birth of Christ.

Martin lusted after death and desired a kingdom built with the dirt

that cradled the dead. The King of Judea, Herod the Great, seeking the baby king, Christ, had ordered the slaughter of their first born. It is said that some sixty thousand infants at that time were put to death. Martin surmounted the greatest secret archaeologist dig in history to recover the remains of the murdered infants. He desired the dirt under which they had been buried. Martin loved the Bible verse, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (2:16-18, NKJV). He swore that he could often hear the weeping of a woman in his bed chambers, and it brought him great satisfaction. The water to mix the mud was dipped from the river, "Cocytus," that had cut a path through the center of his abode. Legion emphatically gave credence to these waters because they embodied the tears of the wicked.

Martin could hardly bare to view the beasts' repulsive, featureless bodies. The only attribute that he could recognize was his personal brand, which each Shuwd received in their hands and on their foreheads for vowing their allegiance to him. These brands were heated from the fires of ten thousand burning Bibles. The insignia was the extinct "Haast's Eagle,"

swooping down on its prey. This brand of ownership also marked them as his property, hardly flawing that which was already blemished. When the fires from the brand were pressed into the chests of the Shuwd, they cried out horrifically. Their feigned protests were rewarded with a gallon of fresh pig blood. They splashed about in the life of the hogs like children playing in a public pool.

They brought Martin meat and drink and supplied him with smokes, all the while, praising him in all that he did.

Though Martin did not recognize anything aside from his brand, the Shuwd did have memorable features. They were characterized by small, fiendish fish-like heads that were a very unpleasant sight. Their exaggerated antirrhinum noses resembled the flower of a snapdragon. Their jagged teeth, inclined backwards, seemed to be wadded into their fearsome mouths like an Angler-fish. They had jaundice-colored eyes that fluttered mystically when they became excited. Their black leather skin seemed worn, and their queer paw-like hands featured long sharp nails. Though they wore no clothing, their hirsute torso featured a thick pelt of hair, though their lower half was smooth. Their powerful legs and hogshead knees balanced on untrimmed grotesque hoof-like feet.

In return for their service and loyalty, Martin vowed that the Shuud would be shown the way to top side out of their honeycombed labyrinth of confusion and chaos. During Martin's rule, they were unified with a purpose. The boding and memory of the former days of appellation within the church was practically forgotten by Martin as his new reign over matters of darkness was in full bloom.

“My legions, we have suffered a defeat! Your task was to seek out these robbers that have stolen the precious giant book. All that was required of you was to destroy them and bring me the book. The Monk's soul is mine! But you have failed me because of your weaknesses. Your vulnerability, your lack of discipline, has created in me a desire to open your minds. I have a solution for your inability to follow simple commands. Each of you will be inoculated with a serum specially designed to help you focus and to bring about that ecstasy of rage that you so long for, to rise from the pit of your gut and erupt forth with exhilarating effects. This is an immunization to protect you from the roar of Basthet, the so-called goddess. So come forward and partake of the communion that I give you today.”

In rusty barrels, marked with the universal radiation warning symbol that resembles an angel, the Shuwd found hard pills. “Come, partake and grow in your mind, your strength, your courage, your resistance to the enemies tricks. You will go forth now and conquer! The peace Mieszko has found, the rest he is now enjoying will soon end, and I will be the destroyer of his work myself.” This toxic cocktail, designed by Martin, was a combination of oral steroids, Anadrol, Dianabol and Anavar. Blended into the concoction were herbs, including Morinda Root, Eucommia Bark, and Donkey Skin Glue, a powerful blood tonic. In addition, the Shuwd were getting heavy doses of whatever radioactive ingredients were originally in the containers.

Regardless of the effects of the toxin, Martin knew that he needed the strongest army that he could raise. He had no love for the Shuwd, and in fact, he had no love for anyone or anything.

He lusted and salivated for the power and authority that he had been denied in his first life. He wanted only the adoration, worship and praise of the world as he forced humankind to bow their knee to him. Eventually, he wanted to rule the world through fear, forcing carnality upon everyone, making it a way of life. His plans were to implement his

own salacious religion, a personal government, and to force society under his military law.

Martin then stepped away from the platform, and two humans accompanied him from the unredeemed dreariness of the worship chamber into one of the back rooms. Joining him were two Czech scholars: the uncouth Jan Pečírka, who was a cataleptically rigid character and a rather effete looking man with patchy alopecia, a weak left eye and blond hairy arms. Beda Dudík was a puny hypochondriac who took extra health precautions and always appeared pitifully moody, pusillanimous as if constipated and brooding. A prolific writer, Beda had authored a publication entitled, "Mährens allgemeine Geschichtewritten," a treatment of the history of Moravia up to 1350. These were men who believed they were scorned by many men when they had originally been afforded the opportunity to examine the giant book in the nineteenth century. Fickle and treacherous, they were now serving their general, Martin II, who was carrying out his secret orders from Pope Gregory the Great. The Pope, having defined the original seven deadly sins, was once the ruler of the church. Now he was one of the oligarchs barking out totalitarian ultimatums.

Martin was his plenipotentiary subordinate, his suzerain, his

vassal. He acted out his commissioner's role in full capacity, evincing no reluctance in his duty.

A low ceiling in the back room required Martin to stoop over in order to enter. He bent at the lumbar region, dragging his feet as he walked. A large brick fire pit in the center of the room fueled the fire that kept the miscreant warm. He plopped his fat derrier down hard on the ivory seat. His speech was dry from the universal opprobrium rolling from his wicked tongue, "These stupid imbeciles! Can't I depend on anyone to carry out simple instruction?"

I simply asked them to use their talents to stop three people from finding the book. What did they do?"

Rising to his feet, Martin paced and gesticulated as he spoke. "What did they do!" he repeated himself. They are thoughtless creatures, careless and clumsy. They have no clarity in their thinking, and they insult me with their preposterous drivel. How hard can it be to claim three lives? Instead the travelers add a goddess

to their arsenal.” With intrinsic matte, he delivered a guttural howl. “A Goddess!” He stomped both feet in rhythm like a small child as he inveighed his hatred toward the Shuwd, “They are the most egregious assassins in the history of mankind.

Electricity is an obedient servant. I can walk to a light switch, and with one finger, I can be God. The light comes on; I am in control, why? The answer is simple. Electricity is a science. It is obedient. Even a dog can be trained to be obedient.” Growing weary from his planning, he sat back down using the arms of the chair to guide himself squarely into the seat.

His rapacious mannerisms and speech became deeply retrospective like a habit of mind.

Martin reached to his side where a simple rosewood humidor, featuring three center spindles with acanthus-tipped scrolled feet, rested on a small table. He opened the box and lazily tossed Jan and Beda a cigar. They caught them and stood attentively. Martin snipped the end off his cigar and shoved it into his mouth. He lit the stogie with a lighter that ignited a flame so high that it practically singed his hair. Spittle flying

from his twisted mouth, brazen effrontery burned like acid into his colleagues' hearts., "The recipe we just used to overdose them better bring me results, or I will have your heads on a platter!" Jan, the man with the audacious and sinister face, asked permission to speak. With not much more than a gibbering murmur, he said, "Great Martin, maybe we ought to call on the Dark Lord because he has a vested interest?" Martin, becoming irate, stated flatly, "I shall not discuss this subject again. I do not want to speak of this anymore. Send the Shuwd out again when it is prudent to do so. Do I need to inculcate my position to you concerning becoming allies with the one that doesn't exist?"

Once again, Beda asked permission to speak, "Great Martin, with all due respect, just because we refuse to believe in the Dark Lord does not mean that others have stopped believing in him." Beda lowered his head not wanting to make eye contact with him. Martin's nostrils flared because he felt censured as a result of this encroachment, "You have a pertinacious little mind don't you? You better not be single minded with me, Beda. I brought you and Jan forward from the pits of Hades to my world of knowledge, and it is I alone, who granted you this blessing. If you continue to show me friction, I will invoke upon you every

condign imprecation. Sheol will receive you again gladly!" Beda's emaciated frame doubled over as if he was in pain, and if he had any embellished characteristic, it wilted as he bowed and trembled in the most uncomfortable fashion.

Martin puffed, blowing large smoke rings from his cigar, and slinked low on his throne. A single feeling of satiety flooded over him, "Just call the Shuwd forth and send them when we get the location of Herman and his cohorts. If they fail me again, I will mix the thermite and have them march their sorry carcasses into the inferno!" He went on mumbling ribaldry expletives and profane maledictions under his breath. Martin had learned about the thermite reaction many years ago. Thermite, a pyrotechnic composition of a metal powder and a metal oxide, produces an aluminothermic reaction, known as a "thermite reaction." When ignited, it produces large amounts of heat, and the resulting product is molten iron.

Martin's kingdom, a land of suffocation and heaviness, exhibited every sign of catastrophe. The scene was one of impregnated deformity, giving birth only to sadness. Every road was ash, and the air was stagnate with stench and pungency. Dangerous blow-holes lay like land-mines

throughout the floor of this the dark region. Though it happened infrequently, every once in a while a Shuwd would stumble into one, and in a matter of seconds, projected outward through the air, boiled alive. When the repulsive event did occur, it tenderized the meat for the always hungry Shuwd. Every time this cruel spectacle occurred, it sent electricity throughout the camp.

Every gruesome tree was heavy laden with star-like webbed cocoons that housed the first evolution of black holes. Human genius has never invented anything lovelier than a delicate butterfly. Often used in sermons to depict the burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus, the butterfly in some cultures means good luck, and in others, it means a visitor can be expected. Still other cultures believe a swarm of butterflies is a bad omen. These were not dainty charmed butterflies in the cocoons. In the next "quasi-star" stage, these black holes seeds would grow rapidly by swallowing matter from the bloated envelope of gas surrounding them.

In theory, Martin believed that they would eventually inflate to a size as large as the Earth's solar system. Stagnation had taken place, leaving the universe in flux. Because of the battle over the giant book, these star like cocoons had never advanced from their infant stage. Thus,

Martin believed if he could balance the universe by laying legal claim on the giant book through power and pelf, he would form entire galaxies out of the super massive black holes. This was the nursery of evil incarnate.

The mutant trees resembled "The Twisted Trees of Alticane of Saskatchewan." The Shuwd, who were employed to protect this grove of wreathing trees, understood respect and made certain that none trespassed or vandalized the trees. There was a legend that extraterrestrials had urinated on these straight trees, and the toxin in their urine twisted the trees into crooked agonies. They appeared to be tortured souls on the plain of this grim wasteland. The only bright point in this lost world was the "Snakes Head Lily" that always seemed to bow its head in humiliation. A malignant little flower, this sinister plant full of poisonous alkaloids, carried the nickname, "Lazarus Bells," because of its association with death. {In the past, beggars and lepers were committed to wearing bells on their clothing to announce and warn people of their arrival.}

Martin reached over to the table, this time for a hand bell.

His skin crawling as if insects had invaded his body, he frantically waved it back and forth creating a loud, clanging sound.

Its sound had a rancid tone that put the others in the room on edge.

Instantly, they heard the sound of wooden wheels being rolled into the room by the house maid. She was short in stature, decayed and hunched over, worse so than Martin. By keeping her around. Martin felt civilized and justified, proving to himself that he was a man of mercy and pity. Her tottering gait was due to her toes being permanently doubled back with a great cleft in the sole. The sound of this little woman of the laboring class pushing the wooden cart across the floor wearing her grotesque stilts made an awful racket. Her cuirass skin glistened like wet, brown old leaves, and she looked as though she had been punished and dipped in hot grease. On the cart rested a clear glass pitcher and four cordial glasses. The ogee bowl glasses with gilded rims were encompassed by a gilded fruiting vine. They were complimented by an adorned opaque twist stem on a plain conical foot.

Martin shouted boldly, "Time for a symposium men!"

She politely handed him his glass, her hand dismasted by arthritis, and then handed glasses to the other two men accordingly.

She spoke not a word, without an ounce of dignity remaining, the assiduously leather-faced woman backed out as noisily as she came

in. He raised his glass above his head, and positioned himself upright, “To the fruit of the vine; to our diligence and fortitude.” The men turned up their filthily dry dust laced with juicy morsels of Shuwd, poured like grains of sand into their sloppy mouths. “Beda, there is a chill in here. Throw something on the fire” Martin instructed him as he took another drink of the grit in his hand. Beda obeyed and walked over to the pile of books which measured six feet high. He grabbed a black Bible from the pile and tossed it into the flames of the open pit incinerator to rouse the fire, then sat his tawdry self into a chair next to the burn.

Two bleak, pale skinned women next entered the room. They had cadaverous complexions, were scantily clad and their eyes were painted with liquid eyeliner. Once vamps, these adornments attracted the most lecherous attention of anyone that practiced the Gothic lifestyle. Their vermilion lips were smeared with what appeared to be congealed blood. Their blanched arms were laced with cutting scars from numerous suicide attempts. Their failure to be opulent and decadent was complimented by their self-inflicted decay. These bankrupt women appeared to have imploded inwardly, avoiding a complete meltdown. Haggard by iniquity and ever longing for acceptance, they were now at the beckoned call of every wanton trespass.

A concoction, formulated especially for Martin and designed by him after long years of experimentation on unwilling subjects, resulted in a crude substance that relaxed him and put him in a torrid state of euphoria. The twisted style of the geisha was tailored to Martin's sense of sight. To outsiders, the act of being squeezed into a corset and forced to wear heels so high that it required actually thinking about balance to keep from tipping forward was just plain ridiculous. There was a slight semblance of human still left in these girls, though pitifully broken. They would never hold up under scrutiny, clumsily balancing themselves on convex legs as they lankily stumbled into his presence. One of them carried a leather pouch and the other a rubber strap.

The contents of the pouch, now in view, was a syringe filled with a milky, thick substance that floated like a cloud. The girls pushed the turbid liquid up into the needle, as a small drip rolled out of the end and slid down the needle. They tied off Martin's arm around the bicep muscle and pushed the needle into his arm. Once it settled into his vein, slowly the skag was pumped into his body. He became ever so relaxed and sank down into his throne like a rag doll. The needle lay flat against his skin in the bend of his arm. His smiled in a child-like manner, and and his eyes rolled

into the back of his head. Once the syringe had been emptied, the two women left through the same door from which they had entered.

As the drug took effect, Martin's euphoria transformed from sedation to exhilaration and rage. He scurrilously swore and paced, waving his arms wildly and knocking over relics. Grabbing the female plank by the hair of her head, he flagrantly flung her violently across the room. Though she tried to stay on her feet, her prevaricate legs buckled under the sheer force. She landed on the hard surface, skinning her hands and knees. Like a whipped dog, she crawled over to Martin and wrapped herself around his feet.

When his transcendent episode became tolerant, he sat by the fires of burning Bibles and warmed his hands basking in post-coital glow.

The next day in his world, he called his legions together for a call to arms. In a tone of incensed anger and towering rage, he growled out instructions.

“We will dismantle the legs of this beast I helped to build, and it

will surely fall to the ground. We will bring down its fiery head and none will be immune, not even the young from our consumption. In my mortal life, I was naive to believe that I was important to their cause. Now I labor, with your allegiance, to tear down its walls. We occupy a space where we cannot be touched, so our attack shall be swift and decisive. I was the promise of the church and now, this promise is going to war!"

Martin was interrupted by the haunting turbulent roar of the truculent Shuud and their noisy, barbaric pandemonium thunder. As they jumped up and down, it was clear that they were a buttress company of raucous and brutish unstable monsters slobbering at the mouth to unleash drunken frenzy upon the world.

He continued, "I am now at the attention of the world. My liberty is in revealing the lie of Christ. There is no hiding behind the broken limbs of a dead prophet. His followers are nothing but deceitful mouths, arrogant agents in the hallway of self righteousness. Their crusades fill their pockets with the gold of indigenous people who lay cold and lifeless in their own blood.

Their castles of decadence shall burn! What is the difference between you and them? You and the world have the same complexion; you wear the same skin. I swear on the graves of all that have put their faith in a resurrection that they shall have no reward.”

Martin furiously shook his pulpit in a tantrum leaning forward in dominance and invoking a storm. With worn exasperation, he spat out the next few maddening words, “Make no mockery of me when I thought it would get better. I thought honesty would prevail. I do not wonder that God doesn’t listen to you? Call it Christian; I call it reproach. They have denied the power of God, so I will give them our power. Their smiles, callous and calculated, were lies, egotistical power, smothering, suffocating greed, and vituperative speeches. But I believed them! It was the plantation of their will upon me. They watered me like a plant, pruned me and poisoned my mind. Theirs was a game in the garden and now their time is short. They killed their own God and replaced him with men.” Martin grew weak and called for a chair. A hooded figure slid a chair over to him as he sat down, gathering his senses. The Shuud, though belligerent, were inspired and began to swoon and snarl with an anthem that was not comprehensible. From the chair, Martin lifted up his voice again.

“I am weak and stricken. I am sickened that I helped to construct this farce, this mockery called the church. We will beat it into dust! They have substituted honor, principle and faith with a penuriousness grasp of the lofty appetite of sin. They respect nothing and have confined their parishioners within the perimeters of their lordship and rule. The Beast I helped to build is the creature I seek to kill! We will open their tight fists of greed and raise our swords to cut off their hands of control. We will cut the weeds of industry, reproach asunder, and burn their churches with the very Bibles they sell. We will take their Books of Islam, Talmud, Tao-te-ching, Upanishads, Veda, The Analects, even Bhagavad Gita and pile them high to their gods and fill their deities’ nostrils with the stench of blasphemy!” About a dozen large hooded figures were roused to join him on stage now and lit long torches holding them high over their heads.

“Examine yourselves! Are you howling with the wolves or will you die with the lambs? No longer will our independence be drained or our talents prostituted. We are breaking out of our cocoons to maul their hearts. I am sending you out as my hungry children to a buffet of fresh raw meat. Do not bow your knees to them, do not lose heart, do not surrender, and I will not turn my back on you!” Lifting both fists into the air, he

quoted William Shakespeare in a howling fashion, “Cry havoc! And let loose the dogs of war, that this foul deed shall smell above the earth with carrion men, groaning for burial.”

Martin sat again having depleted his strength. He watched as his raffish cronies began organizing the confluence of Shuwd in troops readying them for the war to come. Things were coming to a pinnacle. Jan and Beda gave reverence to the great and grand panjandrum of their kingdom, having placed their fate undividedly in the venerable Martin. Both broke down emotionally, weeping for joy in reverence to their illustrious god and his inveigling schemes and flawless machinations – cunning designs.

Martin called for his Shuwd bodyguards and ordered them to help him to the war room, up high in the donjon, the principle tower.

CHAPTER 36 THE ETERNAL FLAME

A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the

land [is] as the Garden of Eden before them (Joel 2:3)

A rushed awakening found the trio piled on top of each other like a crash in the fog, after another tumultuous and convulsive ride. Even the goddess suffered vertigo on the final part of this jump. Quickly roused, they took an inventory of one another. Basthet was still in possession of her satchel containing the cylinder housing, the Gigas Codex, the cosmic rose, the hourglass and the Eye of Horace medallion. They were standing in a garden hidden from view by a small grove of trees located next to a highway. Lora was the first to ask the obvious question, “Where are we?”

Basthet sniffed the air in her cat like manner, and replied, “We are exactly where we



are supposed to be. We are in the Czech Republic.”

Superciliously, Lora raised one eye brow and looked at Jamison, “Why have we returned here? Jamison became edgy at this news and explained, “Lora and I have already been here once before. This is where we originally met Hanus.” Basthet knew that the travelers had already visited the Czech Republic, and told them, “When Hanus instructed me that you

were coming to Jamaica, he also told me that we needed to return here and search for something called "Martinic Palace." Hanus said this place is where we will complete the puzzle."

"Obviously, Hanus knew much more than he was sharing with us," Lora replied. "What else did he tell you that might be of consequence to us?"

Jamison said.

Even though Jamison sounded a little frustrated, Basthet paid no attention to him. She gladly shared what had been conveyed to her, "Hanus said that we would come here to "Riegrovy sady," and from here, we would find Martinic Palace. Once in the palace, we will find something called the "eternal flame," and from that spot we will morph through a worm hole to our final destination. He did not tell me where that destination would be."

"Then, let's get out of this park and find a map," Jamison said, and began walking.

Finding their way out of the neatly manicured park, they bought a map of the city and stopped to enjoy hot tea at the "Cajovna Sivaan," a tea house featuring an authentic Arabian-style ambiance. Jamison joked about trying the Czech drink, Absinthe. An anise-flavoured spirit derived from botanicals, Absinthe is illegal in much of the world. Jamison shared his knowledge of the drink while providing detailed instructions to the

women on how to drink it, He said, “Hold a spoon with a sugar cube over a glass.

Then, pour the Absinthe on the sugar. Burn it and let the sugar melt. Stir it in the glass and drink up.” The women were not particularly interested in his humor regarding this strange concoction. No longer under the time restraints of the hourglass, the three found time to socialize for a brief time. Neither Jamison nor Lora asked Basthet if she knew their future because they were uncertain whether or not they would like what she had to say. Clearly, Jamison and Lora were falling ever more in love with every passing second that they spent together. Yet, Jamison was well aware that the worse might be yet to come.

They were able to locate the palace on the map and realized that it was very near. Pulling up their courage and adjusting their indubitableness, the three left the tea house and followed the map through several streets, passing around the Renaissance Dům pážat (House of the Pages.) They walked keeping a keen lookout for their destination. Traveling on foot the length of Kanovnická Street, they reached Hradčany Square where, on the north side, they were facing the renaissance-styled Martinic Palace located in an exclusive part of the city very near to the Prague Castle. In his usual quirky manner, Jamison said, “I guess we

walk in, announce to the caretaker that we are here to pick up the “eternal flame; he hands it to us and we sashay out of this country. Now, who is up for some marauding?” Jamison was being frivolous, though they all had a high pitch of expectation.

Faced with a gigantic archway that seemed like the front door, Jamison dared not knock. He tried to turn the handle and found that it was open. “Oh this is strange, a little too convenient don’t you think?” Jamison asked, and pushed the door open just far enough to poke his head inside. “Time to face the music,” he said. Upon their arrival, they were impressed with the opulent graffiti ornamentation and dark ceilings of the exterior, a distinguished scheme. The interior was something to behold. In between the through-beams were thousands of small allegorical scenes from the world of animals, as well as the myths that seemed never to repeat. The life size fresco painting of Adam and Eve made Jamison and Lora smile at one another. In the great hall on the first floor, they decided this room would hold at least two hundred guests. They were amazed at the biblical themes throughout the building, including the Coronation of Virgin Maria, the Last Sacrament, and the Resurrection with the Archangel, Michael.

“What is the eternal flame?” Lora asked, admiring the ceiling.

“I do not know if it is literal or figurative. We may find a natural flame burning or something that we may have to decipher with our imaginations. But we must have it,” Basthet noted, slinking around on her tip toes. “I don’t see anything obvious. Maybe we need to venture upstairs,” suggested Jamison?

Up the flight of stairs and into the bedrooms they went. They decided that whatever this “eternal flame” was, it wasn’t something that they were going to find just sitting out in the open.

They scoured the rooms and methodically searched through drawers and cabinets. In the “Museum of Music Machines Room,” they found many musical phonograms along the walls and a roped off collage of such musical museum pieces as spinets and clavichords located in the center of the room. The three delved, explored and scrutinized every hiding place, behind, under and inside every instrument hoping to find anything remotely resembling a flame. Heavy velvet fabrics hung on wooden pelmets over the arched windows. One window stood out especially for it was red and blue stained glass with linear patterning. Jamison wandered over to examine the small colored pieces of glass.

Lora broke the silent hunt, "I have found something!" Basthet and Jamison hurried over to her side of the room and saw that she had found a lighter. The inscription read "Master Rakoczi." She handed it to Basthet who could not figure out how to open it, so she handed it to Jamison. He opened the lid of the solid gold lighter and flicked it. The flame easily climbed out of its container and burned smoothly. Instantaneously, the three began to feel a greater sense of awareness. Their heightened sense of being and positive energy was like a drug. "What is this thing?" asked Lora. "I think we have found our "eternal flame," said Jamison, putting his arm around Lora and giving her a loving hug. Just then, an unfamiliar voice spoke at the other end of the room, "Well done my faithful servants!" It was Martin II with his cohorts, Jan and Beda, who were wearing flamboyant white sashes. Their apocalyptic presence was intimidating. Although his voice was a soothing emollient, Lora was on the edge of cynicism, and she sensed deception and orneriness seeping through his speech. She shuddered under the weight of surrealism but did not crumble. "Who are you?" Jamison asked fearlessly, noting a boundary of darkness not to be crosscaught in the morass. An unusual mist rose from his shoulders as Martin took a few steps forward His appalling swagger was surpassed only

by the filth that fell from his world falling as grains of desert from his shoes.

Then he spoke again, “You have gathered what I sent you to collect. Your journey is over, and I need that cylinder and lighter. It is important for you to understand the salient facts.

You were brought into something by a desperate man who abandoned you.” Martin was speaking of Mieszko. “He probably spoke to you of his sanctity, his consecration, his devotion. What has he promised you?”

“We came of our own free will. Now, I’m going to ask you one more time. Who are you?” Jamison stood firmly, determined and steady.

“Forgive me, I am Korytko of Pravdovce, Martin II, and I am here for my property.” His collusive speech was both flattering and beguiling, a cryptic obscenity.

“Your property!” Lora shouted.

Now flaunting his arrogance with pompous gestures, this supplanter waved his arms and raised his voice threateningly. “Yes, my property! I laid claim on the giant book, and now, someone stolen eight pages from it. After these pages were stolen, I could not find it again. Now you have foolishly followed an insane monk to this point. Don’t you realize that this monk you so loved, Herman the Recluse, sold his soul to the devil? He is

an agent of the devil! You followed him here with this creature that claims to be a goddess when in fact she is no more than a demon. So for your own good and your safety, you must give up the items.”

“You lie!” Lora verbally attacked, irritated by Martin's arrogant saunter. Jamison drew out the machete realizing they were caught in a quagmire, and exclaimed, “We can read between the lines, old man.” Scolding them with a burning stare, Martin stated, “Your toy won't work with me, boy. You either come to the knowledge of the truth or you will die right here, right now, for a cause that you do not even understand!” Martin then turned to Jan and Beda, his sinecures, and they withdrew their side arms. “Perhaps you misunderstand. Mieszko might have seemed like a sapient to you, but he was an outcast from his church, an enemy of God and a fugitive from supreme justice. But, there is time for you to repent of your association and redeem yourselves.” Martin's sardonic tone filtered through and fooled no one, especially Jamison. “Listen up, Baby Hitler, I think you and your German Gestapo's are about to meet your Maker!”

Jamison aimed his words, sarcastically while twirling the machete.

“Boy, you are making a grave mistake for you and your friends.

Mieszko has deceived you. Everything he told you was purloined for his own selfish purposes, for his own good. A more careful perusal of his deeds would have enlightened you, and you would have seen through his masquerade. So let us be reasonable. Hand over the manuscripts, and I will see that they are returned to their proper place.”

Lora whispered to Jamison, “We must run; we must not stand and fight.” Jamison was sure of her advice because he believed in her and trusted her insight. He always got that sharp needled pain in his left eye that he knew was an indication of anxiety. This time, his nerves were telling him that there was no need for further conversation at this juncture. Protecting the sagacious Lora was his top priority above all else. Jamison, in his usual form, had to have the last word. “A rose is a rose is a rose and you ain’t no rose, jackass!” he exclaimed.

In the blink of an eye, he and Lora turned and ran. Basthet did not need an invitation as she leapt over the stack of musical instruments ahead of them. Shots rang out in the music room, but the three made it to the doorway when something hit them from the side. The three travelers were knocked off their feet. It was not bullets from the Mauser HSc pistols. Instead, it was a dozen ghastly Shuwd that were hiding in the corridor. Lora was screaming as she struggled to break free.

Jamison was already on his feet, swinging the machete with fluid motions. "Got to get my mojo working baby!" His nukitsuke movements were continuous and precise. He was slicing through the Shuwd working his way over to Lora. Simultaneously, Basthet morphed into a huge Puma cat, her agile movements swift and deadly. The Shuwd attack was calculable, their savagery predictable. They engaged with reckless abandon and with far too much aggression. Their out of control force only meant their demise. Their appearance was erratic and clumsy.

The battle was quickly fought, the skirmish lasting only seconds after the initial assault. Jamison had rescued Lora from the Shuwd who had tried to drag her off. Basthet had managed a slaughter and now they ran. Downstairs they missed the last couple of steps on the staircase and hit the floor running. Their adrenaline pumping, they ran on a sheer natural high. When they hit the courtyard, they heard Martin cursing in German inside the building. Disastrously, Martin had been so sure he had brought enough force, but his battalion was defeated miserably.

With Jamison leading the way, the trio ran out through the courtyard and into the garden area. They ran out of the vicinity of Martinic Palace, and when they believed the threat was behind them and they were safe, they slowed down, winded. They needed time to stop and catch their

breath. Jamison desperately needed something to wipe the Shuwd's waste off his machete.

“What the crap is this stuff” he asked, referring to the vile bile that oozed out of the Shuwd when they were cut with the blade.

“We were supposed to have jumped through a worm hole when we collected the “eternal flame,” Basthet mentioned. “Maybe the lighter has to go inside the cylinder with the other items,” Lora suggested. Jamison observed the surroundings for danger but saw none, “Let’s put the lighter in and see what happens.” He took the key out of his pocket, and Basthet pulled the cylinder from her tiny purse. The key was inserted and it turned.

A series of pins released the top and it was easily removed. There was no rush of wind like the first time they opened the cylinder. Jamison slipped the solid gold lighter down into the cylinder and placed the lid back on securely. The flash of light caught them by surprise, and they shielded their eyes from the intense illumination.

CHAPTER 37 MASTER RAKOCZI

All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware

Martin Buber

How would you like to travel the winds of time, to ride on the back of the reliable albatross, to seek treasure in places you can only dream about, and to lie down to sleep at night knowing that tomorrow will be a brand new adventure? When time carries you and you behold the fullness of the universe, every minute thing that you ever did on a daily basis seems so small and inconsequential by comparison.

This ride was an amalgam of time, shifting between the here and now and the launching far away. There was an absoluteness.

Everything in the moment was a new reality for them because they were living in the heart of it. Travels often become homogeneous for together, the sojourners share the same experiences, suffer the same perils, and receive the same blessings. They were codified, comrades who were traveling through the universe together as “time travelers,” and making the required reparations to one another created unity. They would complete the road before them by keeping a fervent mindset to eschew the opulent temptation that would exacerbate their will power and stifle their strength.

The three travelers could not tell whether they had moved at all. In

a sense, it seemed as though they they had just gone blind. Still disoriented, they heard another unfamiliar voice very close by who was speaking English, but with a heavy Swiss accent, "I am a friend. You have many friends."

"Who are you?" asked Jamison, trying to focus his darkened eyes.

He could not discern whether he was blind or if this place was just pitch black. In a tone of false arrogance, the unseen entity introduced himself, "My name is Johan Elers. I was the Assistant Librarian of the Royal Library in Stockholm in 1752. I knew the Giant Book very well, and I am here to help you.

You are among friends." Standing perfectly still so as to not fall over something, Lora asked, "Where are we?"

You are at the home of a very important person who has intervened on your behalf. His name is Comte de Saint-Germain. He is many things: courtier, land-loper, magician, and painter.

He is skilled in alchemy and chemistry. He is a seer, an inventor, pianist, violinist and amateur composer. He is also known as Master Rakoczi, or "the Master R" and 'Der Wundermann' (The Wonderman.)

Another voice then shattered the darkness, opening their eyes

completely. “Friends, welcome to my home. I am all these things that my good friend, Johan, spoke of, but I am so much more.” The voice was that of Comte St.Germain whose presence was powerful. A middle-aged man, he was an eccentric, whose personality consisted of many tangles and idiosyncrasies.

He had a full head of dyed dark hair, and he was wearing golden chain-mail. He wore a magnificent cloak of crimson over the chainmail, and its clasp featured a seven-pointed star in diamonds and amethysts.

“What are we doing here in your home?” asked Jamison. Basthet began to sniff the air as cats will do. “I intercepted you because you were about to drop into a swarm of Shuwd.

There are many more out there waiting for you now. Martin will not rest until he has captured you. But, he doesn’t travel well. He has problems getting places through the wormholes. The wormhole works best if truth is your guide, and he is incapable of truth.” Jamison, his sight now fully restored, asked, “How do you fit into all of this?”

“You have my lighter,” Comte answered. “Your lighter! How is it your lighter?” Jamison asked, a bit taken aback. “Oh, I don’t mean anything by it. I don’t want it back. I came to be in possession of the lighter many years

ago, and in doing so, I have been blessed. But now the lighter fits into your mission. As a matter of fact, you might need to know what your mission is?

Comte could have come across as arrogant, but Jamison did not confuse his words, realizing he was exuding confidence. He offered them a seat at his dining table which was set and furnished with fruit. "If you want anything, anything at all, please feel free to ask." Comte ordered Johan to hand each of them something from a bag that he had tied to his belt. They held out their hands, and Johan, with his meager hand, dropped a large diamond into each waiting hand. Comte smiled and said, "This is my gift to you, a memento to remember me by."

He picked up a violin that lay on the table, brought it to his chin and played a short piece that sounded like madness. No one could tell if the music was genius or absolute ad-lib.

Afterwards, he laid the violin back on the table and resumed his conversation. "Casanova called me the violinist, Catlini. In Bavaria, I was Freiherr Reinhard Gemmingen-Guttenberg, the count Tsarogy. In Germany, I called myself Count Well-Done, and again offered recipes, cosmetics, wines, liqueurs, treatments of bone, paper

and ivory. I have studied herbal remedies and chemistry. I have used the alias, Francis Rakoczy II, Prince of Transylvania. It has even been said by some that I have the ability to teleport, levitate, walk through walls and influence people telepathically.”

“That is all very impressive, but what does it and your lighter have to do with our being here?” Jamison asked, making another appeal for something sound to go on so that he could determine if this fellow was friend or foe? Comte signaled with his hand as he stood and suggested, “Let’s take a walk. I love these evenings.” The three followed him through large wooden double doors to a luxuriant garden. Ornamental trees in full bloom lined the path, creating a menagerie of splendid colors. “These are excellent trees for making woodwind instruments. I am a lover of music. These white ones are Callery Pear trees, very hardy fruit trees. I also have Weeping Higan Cherry trees, Dawn Japanese Apricot trees, and, of course, many varieties of the Dogwood. Many say the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on a Dogwood tree.” Comte stopped as if reflecting on the crucifixion in his mind.

“Nevertheless, I must explain your predicament. Each of you is valued because of your unique and special talents, your gifts and your

ability to adapt. You must realize that you are not alone, nor have you ever been. I do realize that you have been pursued many times and narrowly escaped. Jamison, I know of your near tragic end in the field off flowers.”

They came upon a pond where they sat on benches and listened intently to Comte who sat facing them and continued to share what he knew was the truth. “Martin II has come forward because he is very disturbed that he was unable to maintain possession of the Codex Gigas when he originally had it. He was brought forth by someone whom you have never met. This may come as a shock to you, but your true adversary is Pope Gregory the Great who was born long before the Giant Book was ever scribed. When he heard of its existence, and that it was written by the devil, he lusted after it. It became his universal mission, his obsession, to acquire, "The Devil's Bible." This is the same Pope who conceived the seven deadly sins: pride (vainglory,) envy, anger (wrath,) sorrow, greed (avarice,) gluttony and lust. Sometimes an eighth sin of sloth is included in the list.

He adopted the ancient Roman quadriga and drove a team of six steeds through the ages to gain an audience with Martin II and his cohorts. None denied his request to obtain the book.

When Hanus, the clock maker, saw this spectacle in his crystal stone, he raced to the book and stole the eight pages. Myopically speculative, he had hoped in his ill-planned scheme to make the book useless to anyone wanting to use it for world domination and tyranny. He hid the pages right where you found them and he went back to work on his clocks.

He realized what he had done when he saw Mieszko searching for his lost soul. He was devastated that his attempt to save the world had in fact damned this one man to wander the earth without a soul. He knew that Mieszko was searching for his soul in order to be at rest. After that, he worked feverishly putting a plan in place to draw all of you together.

Jamison, Hanus saw your tattoos in a dream and knew you were the map and the key to the completion of his plan. He saw a dark girl who possessed incredible lineage and the ability to see ahead, and knew that she was the oracle. He saw Basthet, her ability to defend and her strong loyalty, and knew that she would protect you. As a result, you became the unlikely trio who was merged to save this world. Hanus would have gone back himself to retrieve the book, but as you know, at times, he has trouble putting his thoughts together. If he had not taken the eight pages, unquestionably, Martin II would have take the Codex Gigas to

Pope Gregory, who in turn, would have unleashed its secrets upon mankind.”

“What are these trinkets we have collected in the cylinder?” asked Lora.

“These items must be taken to your final destination in order for all to be set right again. If Martin gains possession of them, no man will be safe.

However, I do not fully know where your next stop will be. Martin can use the wormhole only sparingly, and he knew you would be at the Martinic Palace. What I do know is that he is calculating, anticipating and measuring your every move in order to stay ahead of you and surprise you. He has Shuwd stationed at many ports now, waiting for you. To your advantage is the fact that he could only bring a small number of them through the wormhole at once. Otherwise, there would have been an overwhelming army of them waiting there to meet you.

“How is it possible that you know so much about our journey?” Lora asked.

“Long ago, I created an elixir that has enabled me to live many centuries, and through the ages, I have found others like myself who have great abilities. Together, we have maintained balance in the world. In your case, we have taken a special interest. Major world conflicts, such as wars or

natural disasters, while cause for concern, always resolve themselves. The Codex Gigas, however, provides the answers to all that ails the world. And if the secrets of the Giant Book fall into evil hands, it is certain that we are all lost. All of us here on this side, the side of illumination and revelations, are mortals. We have all since lived our lives, and now, we are here in this world, your world, but we exist on a different plane. The Codex Gigas must go back onto your plane. Hanus and Martin II are exceptions who entered your world once, and since that time, they have been bound to this world.”

In his mind, Jamison tried to absorb Comte's story in a reasonable fashion, “But we just met both of these guys, just a jump back, so they would have entered this world more than once.” “You have only entered your plane once and that was when you acquired the Codex Gigas. Ever since then, you have been in a different realm, an alternate dimension if you will, though you probably could not tell the difference.” Jamison, Lora and Basthet sat on the benches trying to absorb all this newly found knowledge. They understood that there was so much more to know, but time was swiftly passing and would not allow it.

“You must be traveling on now,” Comte warned, glancing at his watch.

“I’m not even going to ask you why you just looked at your watch!” Jamison said, laughing.

After returning to the mansion, Comte led them through his alchemy room where they were shocked to find a coffin he had filled with diamonds and jewels. No one dared ask any questions about his furnishings. Most of the paintings on the walls were portraits of people who were lavished in jewels. The striking colors beamed so brightly that their faces paled in comparison.

As they ventured through his home, they noticed odd possessions, including pearls the size of bowling balls, plates of diamonds and many items with the insignia of “Master Rakoczi.”

Yet, they decided it best to avoid the details about these things that really did not pertain to their calling. They came to a door with the Masonic T Square and Compass symbol etched into the wood. Comte opened the door and led the way down a massive stairwell that split a library of books down the center. Deep into the bowels of this lower level they descended. Jamison held Lora’s hand and Basthet, who had been very quiet, followed. When they reached the bottom, they were standing on a gigantic spiral. “This floor represents the galactic system as a spiral nebula.

If you would please go stand in the center, that is the "Norma," the inner part of the galaxy. This area is free of obscuring dust clouds. This next area, "The Zone of Avoidance," is the area of the night sky that is obscured by the Milky Way." Comte waited for the three to reach the center and then glided across the floor returning to the staircase. "I cannot stay here, for if I do nothing will happen. When I reach the top of the stairs and close the door, you shall be transported back to your realm and dimension. Be warned! I cannot promise you that there will not be opposition of some kind in your world because we have seen the danger through our glass darkly since this disruption occurred. I will tell you that if you keep truth in your heart it will set us all free. Blessings, my friends." With that said, Comte turned and headed back up the long staircase.

"Are you ready for another jump?" Jamison asked Lora. "I am ready. I just pray that we arrive at our proper destination, she replied" Basthet suggested that everyone wrap their arms around her again since she was by far the strongest. Everyone held onto her tightly once again as the floor began to dissolve. Slowly, the cluster of galaxies beneath their feet began to spin and gradually they accelerated. Jamison got the same dizzying sensation that he remembered when riding "The Flying Bobs," as a kid. Now out of the room, darkness shut out all light. They could no

longer feel anything under their feet. Miles above the earth, they saw below them pyramids, harbors, and a large tanker. Jamison tried to speak but his voice was suppressed. Lora saw airplane contrails, and she thought she saw the Great Wall of China. In space for only a matter of seconds, they quickly realized that they had returned to earth.

CHAPTER 38 HAVE YOU MET THE POPE?

Of the seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all.

Joseph Epstein

Pope Gregory the Great called his generals into his domain. His empire was the land of failure, the realm of disappointment, the region of heartache and misery, the sphere of lies.

His jurisdiction was small, and so it was necessary to call on others to do his bidding. In this parcel of living space, he was surrounded by Martin II, Jan Pečírka and Beda Dudik.

Sitting behind a desk designed with insets of pebbles, shells, carved scrolls and innumerable curlicues, Gregory, adorned in full pontifical robe, tiara and doublecross, spoke.

“What do I have to do? What must I do? Why have you failed? Do you want to go back to nothingness? Do you want to cease to exist? Is there anything more vital than this? Is there something that takes priority over our being? Have you forgotten what it is like to be extinct? Were you not void just like I was void? We were not a crumb, not a speck, not even a grain of sand and magically, we came into being. Do you need to be reminded?”

We had not even been obliterated. We just were not!” After a moment, Martin finally broke the uneasy silence. “My Lord, we ask your forgiveness and respectfully implore you to trust us to accomplish this task that you have set before us?”

“Do I have a choice? Is there anyone else accomplished enough to do this? It’s just three people. It’s just one book. You have been given an army. Yet, we no longer have the advantage because they have jumped again while I speak. So go! Go and stop them, or we will have no more meetings, for we will have no land. If we have no land, nowhere to put our feet, we will find our way into the abyss again.” Gregory turned his back on the three men as they backed out of his chamber. He faced a large mural on the wall that read, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is

in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17)" He kept it here, in his place of reflection and study as a reminder of his war, a purposeful, systematic rebellion against Yahweh.

Gregory's obsession with sin had driven him from the presence of God.

In defining sin, he in essence absorbed his own doctrine and viewed it as one that looked at a negative turned backward. His charges and crimes against the church were: plunder and malversation and violations of tall moral and ethical codes.

His unexplained wealth and inner lust for the world proved to be his undoing. The tortuous road that led him here was akin to the misery that Mieszko experienced when was walled up in his private prison. Unlike Gregory, Mieszko had been spared the great bitterness. In Gregory's arrogance, he lost sight of the weak and used them to keep his feet dry when he walked through the muck that spilled from his rule. The nebbish made him violently ill, and he rejected the onus of responsibility that was laid upon a man in his position. The best solution to his inner struggle was to surround himself with others who were in accord with his philosophies. Thus, he became encapsulated with "yes men" whom he

promised a place in this kingdom he was congealing.

“For your sake, you should hope that you succeed. For I have another, Theophrastus von Hohenheim, who is waiting in the wings to be by my right hand, I assure you that you do not want his polemical tone in your ears. He is waiting to take his revenge on those who brandished him as an aversion to religion. He is an antagonist, a man after my own heart. His name has been misappropriated throughout the years, and he wants to prove his accusers correct.” Martin, showing false humility, bowed before Gregory. “Your Excellency, allow us the privilege and honor to serve you further. We beg your trust and we submit ourselves subject to your rule and law. You are Supreme and head over all, and we are thankful that you have chosen us, your humble servants, to bid your will. You are the Great Gregory and we shall not fail you.”

Gregory postured himself upright gazing thoughtfully at Martin.

“My friends, though I have brought you here, I have been unable to conjure my beloved friend, Queen Theodelinde. My intention is only for her. For once I have conquered the very God that abused me with despondent forebodings, and continued bodily pains, I shall raise my Queen as I have raised you. In recitation style, his three generals broke out in

song, “Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te. Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.”

"Gloria in Excelsis Deo, a non-biblical hymn taken from Luke 2:8-9;13-14, was normally sung to God by the angels. In this instance, it was being sung to another by those wishing to overthrow the divine laws of the universe in honor of a madman in a robe.

This was the first time that Martin had heard the name, Queen Theodelinde. He was familiar with the woman, for she was responsible in her day for restoring Nicene Christianity, which through interpretation and definition, outlined heresy. Gregory had concealed his motives until this time, and because Martin was entirely intoxicated under the power of a twisted religion, in his mind, he easily rationalized and found justification for Queen Theodelinde to be brought forth from her current plane of existence.

CHAPTER 39 BATTLE FOR SANCTUARY

Mankind have banned the Divinity from their presence; they have relegated him to a sanctuary; the walls of the temple restrict his view; he does not exist outside of it.

Diderot, Pensées philosophiques, 1746

Feeling as confused as a man with Alzheimer's disease, Jamison was trying to dig into his own mind and pull out thoughts. He knew if he

could just lasso one thought, it might jar his memory. Why was he lying in a field, and furthermore, he thought, "who are these two babes that are lying beside me?"

Lora rolled over next to him, "Are you well, you don't look right?"

Jamison was afraid to

answer because paranoia was setting in. "Who are



these people? he thought. Maybe they hit me in the head and that is why I am on the ground, and if they hit me, then why?

The dark girl doesn't look dangerous, but that tall lean muscular girl looks really tough," he thought.

It took the girls several minutes to nurse Jamison back to himself and a few extra minutes before he was able to stand firmly on the ground.

Something in that particular wormhole had disheveled his thinking. A simple touch of Lora's hand seemed to be the great panacea of his soul.

Basthet was sniffing the air. She hissed, "Something is burning." I don't smell anything,"

Jamison sniffed the air, still shaking free of the unpleasant amnesia.

They saw a burning building in the distance on a hill they could barely see. It appeared to be a church because even from this distance, the cross was visible. The steeple shot straight up, like an adoring phallic symbol rising to meet the sky. The fire was not one of passion but rather more like molestation. It was a violent rape as the church emitted a blistering scream from amidst the flames. The ornament of the Roman Beast was the only thing that was not engulfed in flames. It all seemed sick and vulgar as the sanctuary burned. Oddly virginal. the obelisk seemed to be untouched. It is common knowledge that phallic symbols litter the

Christian land, from the Washington Monument to the Vatican and the Lia Fail Stone, the "most holy relic" of the Church of England. In this instance the fire was consuming the place where people worshiped in a seemingly apathetic frenzy. This was not the graphic symbol with which they had blindly adorned their church.

There are many things burning. It has begun. Our enemy has beaten us here," Basthet was already on the move.

"Where are we? Have we returned to the Czech Republic?" asked Lora. This isn't Prague," Jamison answered.

"You are correct. We are in the Eastern Czech Republic," informed Basthet.

"You can get all that from a smell!" Jamison was impressed.

"No, there is a sign right over there which reads "Opava," which just happens to be a town in the Czech Republic," answered Basthet.

"I suppose you know where we are going?" Jamison asked, as he took Lora's hand in his?

"Yes, we are looking for the church without a steeple," Basthet replied, moving on quickly.

As they approached the fires engulfing the churches, there was the haunting sound of bells ringing. It reminded Jamison of a time when, while driving home in the middle of the night, he had come upon a wreck. The car was upside down in the middle of the road, and its horn was stuck, blaring into the night. It was unnerving.

The church known as "Minoritský klášter" was still burning and the second church was called "Kostel svatého Ducha s Minoritským klášterem. Both by this time were stricken, reduced to hot embers and ashes. The lamentable flames leapt and snapped at the sky. The sparks seemed to have wings floating by and targeting anything combustible. There was nothing to prevent the flames from advancing on into the vulnerable town. This was a great conflagration, sweeping from building to building as it was fanned by a hot breeze from the south. People were scattered, helplessly stumbling about despondent and distracted, with no means of fighting the inferno.

The sounds of wild dogs in the distant did not fool the travelers at all. They knew these were not dogs because they remembered the sound well. It was the Shuwd, and they resonated through the streets from every side. "Maybe Martin II had found a way to get more than a dozen at a time through the wormhole?" thought Jamison.

“Time to run!” Basthet said. And run they did. From Masartykova tr, (?) they sprinted along, taking a left on the U Posty. They raced for their lives, because this time, the swells of anger from the Shuwd sounded like a massive army. As they approached the corner of U Posty and Ostrozna, the first attack came very hard and fast. The three stood their ground, brave and determined. Jamison had given the machete to Lora who was making quick work by swinging it wildly. Standing back to back, the three engaged the Shuwd. Basthet seemed to have grown two feet taller in size, and her small dagger-like nails were sword like claws. Her roars drowned out the hurting and dying Shuwd. It was Jamison who creamed the first Shuwd with a knife hand to its throat. The Shuwd’s respiration, now a fluttering whistle from its lungs, sounded like an acute asthmatic attack.

Jamison side stepped them as they charged and delivered death blows to the back of their heads. Some lay still after his powerful back fist while others stumbled forward within machete length of Lora who accommodated and accented Jamison’s initial blunt force with indiscriminating chops and slices. The skirmish proved to be little more than a disorganized street brawl, a free for all in which the travelers

fought together in a unified and composed manner, and their teamwork against the Shuwd proved to be to their advantage..

Even Lora was holding her own with the machete. Thinning them out one at a time, the three scrambled together and found a break in their attack.

Dashing along Osstrozna, they were forced to avoid the resulting street debris left over from this nightmarish calamity. Another attack occurred at the corner of Hmcirska and Homi Nam. The beastly Shuwd armada seemed to be coming from the roof tops and from under the ground. The overwhelming attacks were draining the strength of the three travelers.

Jamison thought he had broken his right hand and was now using his left hand strikes more often. His elbow burned where a hot ember had made contact with his skin, and he felt the back of his right calf heat up. Still, he fought on.

Basthet roared, and this technique repelled some Shuwd. But the onslaught continued with more Shuwd appearing out of nowhere. Lora's hands, arms and face were splattered with the bile that made up the Shuwd. Many were injured from Lora's quick slicing moves from the blade in her hands. They hobbled about, their flesh dangling. Jamison noticed that one of the beastly god-awful monster's arms was hanging by only a few tendons, and another's arm had been completely amputated.

Suddenly Jamison was filled with the most unnatural thoughts. Bleakness had taken up residence in his eyes. His mind gravitated toward thoughts that were obscene, filthy and impure. In this place, all manner of corruption and atrocities overwhelmed his thinking. Then he remembered what Mieszko had told them about these nasty creatures. The Shuwd came out of fallen man's most evil, diabolical part. He fought off the clairvoyance, came to his senses and dispelled their attempts to control his mind.

The Shuwd were trying to replenish their own decimated contingent, dragging the dead and howling for reserves. Drops of hot flakes and fire splattered on the ground near the combat zone.

One of the Shuwd screamed as its body was engulfed in flames. As the monster died, it jerked and writhed erratically in pain while the others simply ignored it.

The fire made a horrid noise, crackling while it was digesting houses, churches and businesses, as the town's people shuddered at its fury.

If they stood here too long, they would wither in the heat. So they ran, trying not to ingest the hot ash or inhale the smoke that was executing them like a garrote. Once again, the trio found a slight window of

opportunity and broke free through the choking smoke, although the Shuwd were snapping at their heels.

Basthet's fierce roar helped some as the Shuwd backed off, becoming violently ill and exhibiting projectile vomiting.

There was no time to sit on their laurels, and their escape was short lived as more enemy emerged. When it occurred to them that the odds could not be worse, even more Shuwd emerged.

The fighting was in close. Jamison's prowess in fighting these monsters became evident as his quick and efficient direct hand to hand skills delivered several speedy punches to their noses and throats, reducing the numbers. Jamison's form was flawless. His feet were staggered, knees slightly bent, and up on the balls of his feet, he kicked with his lead leg driving off the ball of his rear foot to the knees of the attackers while pivoting his body toward his foe.

“Just stay close to me,” he instructed Lora.

Lora's own defense was impressive as she quickly made overhead, outside and inside bodily cuts. She was naturally stepping into the cuts and striking with precision. Even though she was attacking with basic strike patterns, the fluidity of the guard prevented the Shuwd from

swarming on top of her. “Good one, you are getting better with that thing!” Jamison exclaimed, complimenting her when he saw her block a Shuwd strike with the machete by maneuvering the leaf shaped blade perfectly causing the beast to cut itself. Unwavering, she answered, “Practice makes perfect!” There was never any organization in the Shuwd’s attack. Even dogs know how to gang up on the weaker animals when attacking multiple targets.

The Shuwd engaged them with foolhardy straight attacks, and the stench from their breath was like hot desert air in the faces of the travelers.

Jamison had been cut on the arm and was bleeding, but with brutish intent, he still fought on. Springing out of the chaos, once again there was freedom. Drained from the battle, it was everything Lora could do just to keep up. They were running from the monsters and from the fire that was growing in size and mass. The town was all but razed by the enraged blast furnace that had nearly reduced every piece of wood to ash and melted every pane of glass.

As they approached the opavská Nová radnice building on their right it had been set on fire. This was the first sign of life that they saw outside of with garden hoses. Sirens were blaring in the background. Seemingly out of nowhere, one of the Shuwd laid his hands on the bag

attached to Basthet's hip. This was the bag that contained the trinkets which would save the world. Inside was everything gathered on this adventure, and if lost, all would be in vain.

Jamison leapt from his position onto the back of the Shuwd. His left arm wrapped around the neck of the Shuwd and grabbing his own bicep on his other arm, he placed the Shuwd in a rear naked choke. He hugged his arms together, pushing out with his chest and squeezed hard. Just a couple of seconds into the constrictor squeeze, he jerked the Shuwd's neck breaking it with a quick twist and the Shuwd let go of the hand bag. The parade of Shuwd seemed transfixed as they kept swarming, and death seemed of no consequence to the Shuwd that remained. They fought the travelers, at times standing atop their own dead and the offal that was scattered from Basthet's razor claws. Then, they launched the peak of their attack.

Jamison was taken off guard by a Shuwd who attacked him, its arm on fire, flames leaping from its flesh and sinews. Arguably this was the oddest thing that Jamison had ever been forced to defend. He didn't think; he reacted instead, by stepping into the attack and grabbing its other arm. As he stepped into the attack, he spun the Shuwd in circles, watched

its flaming arm flail about uncontrollably. He thought that it would have profited the Shuwd to attack with a club or a bat, but unfortunately for the monster, Jamison had the advantage, nullifying the assault.

Though the symmetry wasn't pretty, Jamison took the monster to the ground. His raw strength and ability incapacitated the Shuwd, and the kill to the back of the head was rigorously complimented by swiftness. However, it was Basthet's deafening roar that proved to be the defining moment of the battle. The remaining Shuwd turned and doubled over holding their stomachs. They stumbled about falling to the ground vomiting and moaning in agony. Jamison took the machete out of Lora's hands and unmercifully put the Shuwd out of their misery.

"Die you filthy dogs," he screamed, his teeth grinding tight! It was then that Basthet saw what they were looking for, the Moravská kaple. The only church that was not burning or smoldering, it had no steeple. This church was part of the complex of the former Dominican monastery of Bread Street. The trio squeezed through the crowd of people and made a mad scramble for the door.

Despite their numbers, the Shuwd seemed to be without a leader, without a plan and out of luck. They began to collect their dead and

the mortally wounded who simply did not realize that they were already dead. These victims would be taken back to their underworld lair where they would be cannibalized and gorged upon in an orgy of frenzied fury. Like filthy whores bathing in a gas station sink, the Shuwd had their own brand of indignity, bathing in pig's blood while feasting on their own. The more congealed the blood, the more time they squandered deluged and relaxing in the liquid pond.

Understanding that the Shuwd would only take a short recess, the three worn warriors moved quickly from the pandemonium. "No time to waste, they will send more," Basthet warned as she rapidly led the way into the stone church. Colored by a shifting mix of fear and hope, depression and exhilaration, they soon stepped inside the church. The church itself was a sanctuary, a refuge that was plainly built with brick and red block floors. A lot of the plaster had crumbled away revealing the red brick behind. The ceilings were very high, and the church was adorned with brilliant archways. In the darkness that descended upon them they walked about barely able to see. The travelers Huddled in trepidation as they heard other Shuwd massing outside, though none dared enter the church.

Walking the halls of this cold building, the travelers shivered, chilled to the bone now that the excitement of battle had faded. Jamison wasn't feeling well, and he suspected that the cut on his arm had become infected. He did not tell the others though, hoping that his body could fight it.

Up ahead in the archway stood a man who, according to his apparel, appeared to be a priest. "Are you a friend or foe?" asked Jamison.

"If you carry the Giant Book, I am your friend, sent here to meet you by Hanus, the blind clock maker," the meek voice answered.

They approached the man cautiously, and as they drew closer, they saw it was a small man dressed in traditional modern clergy garb. His face embodied a larger jaw line relative to his face, he had low set eyebrows and a more prominent brow ridge. He had very kind eyes, and he seemed friendly. "You must know us, who might you be?" Jamison asked.

The man replied, "I am Oannes, and I am the silent priest here.

Silent means that no one here knows me, has ever seen me, or knows that I exist, but I watch over this church. I instruct men in useful knowledge.”

“What sort of knowledge can you share with us?” asked Lora.

“I expose fallacy and delusion. Have you noticed the shape of the Pope’s episcopal mitre? It is in the shape of a fish head. Some would suggest that this represents Christ's teaching us to “be fisher of men.” Yet, if one studies symbols, the fish are indeed the symbol of Pisces, which refers to the Rulers, Neptune and Venus. We know that the "Ichthus" symbol helped Christians identify one another. Yet few understand that Christianity is a Piscean Religion. Remember "Dagon" was the God of the Philistines? Dagon is derived from Dag which means fish.”

Lora and Jamison were astounded and baffled.

Jamison, impatient, questioned the old man again, “Anyway, are you here to help us?”

To that, Oannes handed Jamison a very dense stone and continued, "This stone is where the phrase 'blackballed' originated. It has

magnetic properties, so you should never attempt to open it." Some call this stone the "Black Cube of Saturn." A symbol of imposition, its purpose is to separate man from nature. It symbolizes all that is unnatural, but it is also restrictive.

in that It is the symbol of confinement. The true Pandora's box, it is never to be opened because it is a box of the soul imprisoned.

Everything man has ever done is in the box of torment and horrors. Any promise of hope or eternal life at the bottom of this box is a lie."

"What are we going to do with this box? Why do we want it?"

Jamison asked. Tired of picking up stuff, he wanted to start dropping things off.

"I wanted you to see the box, Jamison, but it belongs to Basthet. I want her to remove it from the earth. Like the Gigas Codex, the Black Cube of Saturn has no place among greedy men,"

Oannes said, watching Jamison hand the stone to Basthet who analyzed it with her nose.

"Can I ask you something that has been bothering me, since you are the man of knowledge?" asked Jamison.

"Yes, you may ask me anything," Oannes said, with a humble smile.

“We understood that the eight pages we recovered with Mieszko represented his soul, but what were they?”

“So, he never told you?”

“No, not really. We speculated but didn't ever come right out and ask him,” Lora said.

“There are many books mentioned in the Bible that are not actually part of its content. These Books include the “Book of the Wars of the Lord, the "Book of Jasher," the Books of the Acts of Solomon," the "Book of Samuel the Seer," the "Book of Nathan the Prophet," the "Prophecy of Ahijah," the "Visions of Ido the Seer" and the "Book of Shemaiah" to name a few. These are books that Mieszko alone had been given. Once they were stolen, he became incomplete. The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry. Hanus thought he was doing the right thing by taking them and maybe he did because this prevented Martin II from carrying out Pope Gregory's orders to possess the Giant Book. But when the pages were removed, we were left with an incomplete account of God's record to us.”

“Hanus originally stole the eight pages?” Lora was shocked.

“His intention was good,” the priest pointed out, though the outcome was disastrous.

“So what are we to do now?” asked Jamison.

“You will go home after you complete one more task. It is a task that only "The Key" and "The Oracle" can do. You must say goodbye to Basthet, for her services ere are done,” Oannes said, sounding almost indifferent. They took a moment and paused to reflect about their adventure. They knew that they were seeing one another for the last time. Bashtet took the handbag off her hip, opened it and pulled out the silver cylinder containing the “Giant Book,” the hourglass, the cosmic rose, and the amulet with the "utchat." She shared one last word of Egyptian wisdom with them, “See that which I did at the beginning.

Let me set it in order for you at the end. Let me be the landing place of that which is in your heart.”

“Lora and Jamison wrapped their arms around Basthet, and Lora said, “We will miss you.” Jamison liked the reference to “we” . Basthet handed the cylinder to Jamison, took a step back and purred as if she was tired. She had no further use of the cylinder. Holding the Black Cube of Saturn in her hands, she bowed her head and closed her eyes. In meditation she spoke, “Ma As – Salaamah,” and then she vanished before their eyes.

Lora broke down in tears and Jamison held her. He hurt, too, and

was ready to retire. He wanted more than anything to complete this journey and explore a future with Lora.

They had traveled the world together in the adventure of a lifetime.

“What is going to happen when it is all concluded?” Jamison thought.

Oannes gave them a moment to gather themselves and knowing the consequences, he pressed them to continue.

“Follow me if you will. We have an excursion on which to embark.”

Oannes led them through the rooms with their high cathedral ceilings and enormous archways to the garage. They found it to be filled with hundreds of candles. In the garage was a Jeep SRT8 426 Hennessey Twin Turbo. Jamison was something of a car buff and had once read in "Motor Trend" magazine about one of these beauties.

Oannes tossed Jamison the keys, and said, “You are driving. I’ll tell you where to go.” Never in his life did he dream he would ever see one, let alone have the opportunity to drive one!

“Are you kidding me?” Jamison asked, like a kid in a candy store.

“Where are we going?” Lora asked, as she got into the backseat.

Jamison was in the driver’s seat, enjoying the feel of the leather. Oannes gave them directions even though he was along for the ride. He felt

compelled to warn them, "Once I open the garage door expect anything.

You know the town is on fire.

Martin II is here with an army of Shuwd, and they know you are here.

They are watching all exits. I do not condone violence but do you

guys know how to use pistols?" he asked.

Jamison said, "Of course." Lora shook her head no. Oannes handed

Jamison a .40 Cal Glock. "This gun is loaded with a 15-round magazine, and here is a shoulder bag. In it you will find several more full magazines.

He handed Lora a small-size Glock model 27. "Yours is a 9 shot, but if you

use all of them, Jamison's magazines will fit. They'll be a little long but

that's ok. It will fire just fine. Just keep your finger off the trigger unless

you aim to kill something with it." Oannes lay a Cobray Street-sweeper

semi-automatic with pistol grip 12 gauge shotgun across his lap. "I am not

a man of violence, but it is possible that we are about to enter the DMZ and

we cannot stop."

Oannes pushed a button and the garage door automatically opened.

Jamison pressed the accelerator down and 600 HP of Jeep spun tires out

of the garage area. They sped up a ramp and under the dome of the night.

They immediately saw the fires of the town glowing in every direction.

People were standing everywhere watching buildings burn. Several emergency vehicles passed them, lights flashing and sirens blazing. They drove like madmen, Jamison turning whenever Oannes directed. The engine growled with the power under the hood. They were heading north according to the compass on the dash. Thus far, no Shuwd had appeared. Believing they were safe and in the clear, Lora spotted four black Land Rovers directly behind them. "We are being followed!" she announced. "Let's see what this thing will do," Jamison said, as he punched the accelerator to the floor. The torque pushed everyone back in their seats as the Jeep leapt forward. The Land rovers hung back providing breathing room between the vehicles. "Out on this open road, it is going to be hard to shake them," Jamison said.

"Just drive! They won't try to stop us yet. They want to know where are going, and they will be in for a surprise if they wait," Oannes said. He did not elaborate, and Jamison and Lora didn't ask what he meant by it. Jamison kept his eyes on the road taking an occasional glance to the back seat to catch a glimpse of the most gorgeous woman he had ever seen. As the lights from the burning buildings dimmed in the distance, the only light was the headlights of the Jeep. Suddenly, a dark image

appeared in the road just ahead. Because of the guard rails on both sides of the highway, there wasn't much they could do except slow down. Once again, they appeared to be between a rock and a hard place.

Jamison and Lora readied themselves. As the image drew closer, they saw that it was a truck blocking the road. There were a dozen Shuwd standing in the road, looking heinous.

"I can't go through that thing!" Jamison cried, sounding unsure.

"What is the plan?" Lora wanted to know as she tightened her grip on her weapon.

"We fight!" Jamison replied.

Oannes began to pray, "Eternal God, Ascension of your Son you are exalted, and every man prove his value. Give us the confidence, that we are called to greatness, which prevented us to Christ; that the unity of the Holy Spirit with you live and work forever. Amen" Lora sat in the back, her hand on the silver cylinder with their bibelots inside. Her other hand caressed the Glock, and she studied the four black Land Rovers behind them. Jamison slowed the Jeep to a crawl. The Shuwd always fought unarmed but they were extremely fast and agile.

Jamison had no doubt that if they failed to take the initiative and strike first out here in the open expanse, they might easily be overrun. No one questioned what they must do. It was settled without a murmur. The obvious was presenting itself in plain fashion.

“Lora, is there anything you have ever wanted to do?” Jamison asked. Lora thought this was an odd time for Jamison to ask such a question, so she asked him to repeat it. Jamison recast his question. “Is there anything you have ever wanted to do, maybe some place you have ever wanted to visit?” She momentarily gave his question diligent thought and said, “Yes, I have always wanted to see New York City.” Jamison checked out Lora in the rear-view mirror. “I promise you, if we get through this, I will take you there.”

When Jamison came to a complete stop, Oannes stepped out of the vehicle. He did not wait on the attack. He took the fight right to the enemy. He began to unload his 12-gauge street sweeper on the Shuwd that stood blocking the road. Jamison stepped out, did a panoramic, and said, “Let’s start this ball a rolling,” and he and Lora started shooting. Fireballs flashed from the barrels breaking through the darkness. They addressed and engaged the Shuwd behind them in the Land Rovers. The Shuwd were by nature overly aggressive. It was part of their flawed design. Instead of

taking cover, the dumb beasts charged the Jeep and were cut down in their tracks. They had not prepared for a paragon of marksmanship to be used against them.

The climate of the event became very hot initially with loud explosions and flashes of death on every side. The quiet of the night had been ruptured.

The clash of the battle was violent and deliberate.

Jamison didn't know why, but in his head, he heard the chorus to the Neil Young song, "Ohio," as he took aim and fired his quarreling weapon:

"Tin soldiers and Nixon coming

We're finally on our own

This summer I hear the drumming

Four dead in Ohio"

Two Shuwd had the wherewithal to comprehend that this battle was not going to be won on the asphalt. Abandoning their peremptory orders, they jumped into the truck and stupidly moved it, creating an escape for the travelers. Jamison and Lora had put one of the Land rovers out of commission by dissecting its radiator and front tires, but the other ones were rolling toward them again. Seizing this opportunity, Jamison jumped back into the Jeep, dropped the shifter into drive, and they sped away with tires sqwaling and rubber smoking. As they drove by the big truck

Oannes fired a couple of shots for good measure shattering the windshield and the driver's side glass.

“Beastly creatures,” moaned Oannes turning backward in his seat to see where the Land Rovers were. They appeared to still be in hot pursuit!

Lora’s hand was shaking from nerves, so she hid her anxiety by putting her hands in her pockets. She pitied the Shuwd and their unimaginable suffering; yet, she feared their unrelenting evil even more.

“These guns sure beat that machete,” Jamison said, eyes fixed forward.

“Better reload, we might need these guns again,” Oannes mentioned as he reloaded the reliable street sweeper. Jamison sped down the highway, always checking his rear-view mirror to see how close the enemy was. He was feeling sick in the pit of his stomach and attributed it to the cut his hand sustained during the one on one conflict earlier. Still, he remained quiet about it.

He did not want to worry Lora or cast anything negative toward her.

Jamison realized that although Lora had not shared openly with him her emotional state, everything they had experienced was bound to be traumatic to her psyche.

Two hours passed and Oannes pointed to a clearing where he instructed Jamison to “pull into the lot and then floor it. Drive straight toward the brick building ahead.”

“You want me to crash this \$90,000 machine into that brick wall and kill all of us?” Jamison asked, his voice curiously high pitched?

“We do not have time to discuss this. You must do what I tell you!” Oannes said, his voice calm and soft. “I know this thing might have performed great in crash tests, but I can’t imagine it performed that well,” Jamison said as he accelerated. The engine screamed and strained as the rpms raced higher. The Jeep bounced and rocked across the empty dirt lot. The brick wall was coming up fast and Jamison never checked his rear view mirror or even said "hold on." He simply shouted, “I love you Lora!” In that split second with faith riding on Oannes' word alone, the Jeep made contact with the solid brick wall. Just before the impact, Lora heard Jamison confess his love to her. In that split second, her mind created a future with him as lovely and romantic as a procreation sonnet. Her imagination created a wedding dress fitting, a coiffure suitable for a bride, a day of pampering at the spa and of course, a long walk down the aisle to the man of her dreams. In her heart, she exchanged vows with him and heard the announcement of "husband and wife."

The fantasy was erased and replaced as all lights went out and tinnitus dully thundered in their ears.

There was no impact, collision or sound of smashing metal. There was no crunching and buckling, no shattered glass, no bodies being tossed freely around the cabin of the vehicle. There was just that infernal ringing in their ears! Jamison thought, “this Jeep isn’t moving or vibrating at all. Completely blind, he reached into the back seat and felt Lora’s hands reaching for his.

He pulled her over the seat and into his lap. “With the lights off, no better time than now,” he reasoned, and to her delight, he gave her a passionate kiss. Losing themselves in the passionate expression, they never even noticed when the lights came on. When they finally opened their eyes, they were surrounded by peering eyes, including those of Oannes. As if things were not already uncomfortable enough for the two love birds, the people outside of the vehicle began to applaud. Jamison opened the door and clumsily slid out from beneath Lora.

Oannes stepped around and said, “Must have been a wonderful ride?” As Lora followed Jamison out of the Jeep sheepishly, Jamison asked, “What happened? I suppose we hit a worm hole.”

“You supposed correctly. You have transported here with us, and you are safe from the Shuwd for the time being,” Oannes said.

“Where is here?” asked Lora

CHAPTER 40 MEET THE PEOPLE OF THE MOUNTAIN

Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So... get on your way!

Dr.Seuss

“Here is the Universal Church of our Savior, located in the center of the Krkonose, the "Giant Mountain," in the Czech Republic. Although it may look like a cave, there is no way into our sanctuary except through designated wormholes. Gregory has no idea that we exist here. All of these wonderful people are members of the church that helps keep world order. We do not interfere unless there is a threat to the religious sovereignty on a global scale. The "Black Stone of Saturn," as well as the "Codex Gigas," both loose in the world at the same time, would have been catastrophic. Basthet has properly disposed of the one, and you and Lora are close to erasing this present threat to civilization once and for all.”

Jamison and Lora were in awe of the elaborate airy spaciousness

of this hideaway. The only way such design could be manifested is through the genius of functional rationalists. Isolated and concealed from all outside influence, this mammoth sanctuary was operational and rational in its design. Its freestanding Egyptian style of sculptured alabaster panels of inscriptions, ionic column capitals shaped and decorated like lotus buds, palm leaves and papyrus flowers was magnificent and soothing.

The mountain church people received Jamison and Lora into their hospitality by offering them food and drink, and then they allowed them time to rest. Oannes explained the details of their next assignment, "I hope you understand that it is paramount for both of you to finish this race?"

Both nodded. "You will deliver the cylinder in Turkey to a church in the Cappadocia region. This area has been religiously important long before Christ Jesus came to earth. Because it has been severely eroded by volcanic activity, there are many caves, clefts and hidden passages throughout. You will time travel from here, and we will make sure that you hit your mark.

These churches are a complex of medieval painted cave churches carved out by Orthodox monks. They are composed of scores of refectory monasteries placed side-by-side.

Once there in Göreme, you will have only a fifteen minute walk to the

churches. This is a tourist attraction, but there is nothing that we can do about tourists. We will try to get you there before peak traffic," Oannes warned, "the earlier, the better." Someone will meet you there. You will know him because he will ask you for the hourglass. Just for your information, the hourglass really never put restraints on you. I apologize for making you believe that it did. It was one item, designed by Hanus, that Martin II did not know about. We knew we could use it as a sort of symbolic watchword. We needed an object so that when you made the final drop of the "Codex Gigas," it could be used as the countersign. Also the monks that operate the church caves asked for something special from us."

Jamison had a few questions, "So the hourglass was for our benefit, but if it had run completely out, nothing would have happened?"

"That is correct. It is simply a magical time piece that empties its sand into nothing, but once it runs completely out, the sand reappears and the process begins all over again. It did push you to go faster," Oannes explained.

"Yes, but it may have made us more reckless. There are no more surprises like this are there?" Jamison asked, huffing a bit at the deception.

“No more deception. We do apologize. Now once you identify yourselves and are identified by the contact who will be a monk, you will follow him to a secret chamber. In this chamber you will open the cylinder and follow the instructions from him. Remember, Jamison, you are the key, and Lora, you are the oracle. Together you are a formidable force as you have already proven.”

Lora needed assurance from Jamison, “I am a little nervous since we are alone on this one.”

“Yes, I am nervous too, but do not worry, we will be okay.”

“I want you to eat well, get rested and in the morning we will send you on your way. You will take the guns as a precaution. If things go sour, you are to go into what they call the Nunnery.

It is a complex with six stories of tunnels, corridors, stairways and chambers. It is the safest place for you because of the complexity of the tunnels. It is easy to get lost. Believe me, if things take a turn for the worse, and I pray to God that they do not, you will want to get lost. But do not fear, we can find you in there.”

“Well that is reassuring,” Jamison laughed.

For the remainder of the evening, Jamison and Lora asked many questions. However, anything asked outside of the scope of their mission

was answered vaguely, sometimes by answering the question with a question. There were just some things that these Mountain church people refused to divulge. Jamison figured it was best anyway. Why would he need to know the secrets of the universe? He was simply trying to save the world!”

Jamison loved the fact that Lora sat beside him and hung on his arm the entire night. She had proven to be brave, smart and incredibly resourceful. There was no one else he wanted to be with him. He worried about her safety because he knew that he would never forgive himself if he allowed something to happen to her. As a matter of fact he swore, for whatever reason, if he did not make it, he had no reason to carry on. When night came, they did not realize that it was dark outside because it is almost impossible to determine night from day in the heart of a mountain.

They were led to an insulae where they found a pink and white marble stone apartment house that was designed for guests who planned to stay overnight. The insulae featured an open garden in its center that produced the effect of being left alone in the midst of a fairy tale. Jamison could not imagine that many guests stopped by to visit this place. Snuggly, they slept side by side on a plush sofa. Lora's dream began with the sound of scratching, but in her dreamworld, everything was fuzzy. Even though she

was sleeping, she was aware of the "twilight zone" that she had entered. Listening closely, she heard inaudible voices, one of which bled through and sounded like a woman laughing in a high-pitched one. She saw the oily blotted face of a man smiling broadly and discerned that he was stuffy, uncomfortable and had sweaty arm pits. She saw that his eye lids were heavy, and the smell of cigarette smoke filled the air. The scratching became louder and louder, causing her discomfort that resulted in jerking motions so hard that it woke Jamison from his sleep. When he awakened, he realized that he was deathly ill. The infection in his arm had spread, and he was sweating profusely, burning with fever. Though he tried to get up, he was surprised at how weak he had become in such a short period of time. The Shuwd scratch on his arm was causing deadly symptoms. Lora jerked again, this time waking herself. She was slow coming out of her sleep, not realizing how sick Jamison had become. "What's wrong?" Lora asked, very concerned at feeling the wetness through her shirt where she had rested against Jamison.

Though he tried to answer, he was only able to utter a few words. He whispered, "It's the infection."

She examined his arm and saw that the ten-inch cut was producing a yellowish green puss. Immediately, she raced to find Oannes who was

sitting around a table in an adjoining room having coffee with several men.

“Come quickly! Jamison is sick,” she cried. The men instantly jumped to their feet and followed Lora to the sofa. Oannes examined him briefly, but one look told Oannes all that he needed to know. They saw the rapid onset of increased secretion from mucous membranes, and Jamison’s breathing was shallow. Histamine released in his body caused red lesions and hives on his skin. He was rapidly going into anaphylactic shock. The Shuwd carry deadly bacteria under their nails, and it was critical that Jamison receive treatment immediately. Six of the men rolled him onto a bed sheet, picked him up and carried him to a huge room where a rectangular divided pool lay in its center. The men marched right down into the pool with Jamison, holding the sheet tight so that he did not sink. Oannes and Lora followed closely behind them and stood on the side of the pool observing this lifesaving event.

“Don't worry," said Oannes. Have faith. This is the 'Pool of Bethesdaor, The House of Mercy.”

The men then removed the sheet from beneath Jamison, and by twos, they stepped out of the pool. Jamison miraculously stayed afloat.

Oannes offered vespers unto the Lord, "Father of us all, this man had no man to put him into the pool. We therefore worked in one mind and one accord to place him in the water. No man stepped ahead of him. He is in your healing waters. By the power of the Holy Spirit, let him rise up and be healed in the name of Jesus Christ."

Instantly, Jamison felt a warm rush race over his body, quickening his being, and the weakness was forced out of his neurological system. Still lying supine, he rose straight up out of the pool suspended in mid air. He was aware of everything that was happening to him, so he dared not fight against it. Now, he was twelve feet in the air hovering above everyone. The power that had laid claim to his body had to be God because Jamison had never felt closer to the divine. He drifted to a clear place in the room and gently descended to his feet. Lora wrapped her arms around his neck and showered him with kisses. "I am okay. I am fine," he swore, "I know this recovery is by the grace of God." As quickly as the illness had come upon him, it was gone, leaving no trace of its presence, and no sign of the scratch. There was no scar whatsoever. God had indeed heard the prayers of the men, and Jamison had been spared a second time.

As a child, Jamison had attended church with his parents. His mother dressed him in clothes that he wore at no other time, his Sunday best.. He would squirm in his seat because he had the sensation that he had to urinate. For whatever reason, his mother refused to let him go until the service was over. He remembered wanting to get home so he could play out in the yard.

Miracles were something that his church had never mentioned, practiced or endorsed. They believed that miracles were exclusively for the Apostles. Having had his own epiphany now, Jamison could not explain the events of the past few minutes. Yet, he comprehended the fact that this was a divine act. He now believed in "something," and though he was unsure what that was, his belief in it increased.

The congregation gathered around Jamison and Lora and laid their hands on them, offering up prayers and thanksgiving to God for the two of them to have a safe and successful journey to their next destination. They also offered them supplies that Lora placed in the backpack along with the other items they had collected along the way.

Oannes then led the two recharged travelers up two flights of metal stairs into a room with eroded walls, decorated with elaborately woven

tapestries featuring saints from all eras.

In the back of the room was an oval full length mirror. "This mirror is your entrance into Cappadocian," explained Oannes. "This time, you will not suffer the ill effects that you encountered in past travels through the wormhole."

"So, what do we do?" asked Lora.

"When you are ready, simply step through and you will be transported," Oannes replied.

Jamison reassured Lora, providing the affirmation she needed, and they traded smiles. Both of their hearts beat as one as they gently kissed. "

"Ready?" asked Jamison.

She nodded her head and turned toward the mirror. Jamison let go of her hand and stepped through. Lora watched him vanish before her eyes. One second their reflection together was staring back at them, and the next, the mirror shimmered, and Jamison was gone. Lora's soul deepened with sorrow as if a void had been knifed into her heart.

"Thank you," Lora said to Oannes. Her faith remained strong, and Oannes demeanor remained stoic. When she stepped through, the sensation was one of stepping into jelly. It was as simple as stepping into the mirror to

the other side. They experienced no flashing lights, shaking, or any turmoil that would throw off their equilibrium. They stepped out of the mountain into the open air, and hugged each other immediately. Then they began to take in the sights.

CHAPTER 41 THE CHURCH IN THE ROCK

A church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

Abigail Van Buren

They were standing at the base of a tall thin spire of rock called "Fairy Chimneys." It protruded from the bottom of an arid drainage basin, and the land was eroded on every side producing valleys, volcanic tuffs and clefts. From their vantage point, they could see their destination, the painted churches. This time, they landed on a hill and as they walked down, they saw two robbed figures coming to meet them.

"Trust no one, Lora, be ready," Jamison said, as he put his hand into his jacket pocket.

Oannes had not only allowed them to keep the pistols and ammo, he had graciously given them long jackets to wear for better concealment.

The two hooded figures had come within audible distance when one of them spoke, "Hello friends, have you been sent here to complete a mission?" They came closer, but Jamison said nothing. The figure then spoke again, "Hello my friends, have you been sent here to complete a mission? Is there something you have brought to us? Is there something that you have for us?" Lora gripped her Glock. Something did not feel right.

Something seemed too dark. Now they stood within a few feet. "Do you have something for us?" asked the hooded figure again.

Jamison and Lora timed their defense perfectly, drawing out their pistols, and with a single shot to the head from each handgun, the two figures were knocked backward dropping to the ground like cadavers. Black ooze seeped from their deadly wounds. Lora stood panting, still holding up her gun in the high aim position.

Jamison pushed her hand down so that the gun was pointed at the ground.

"Put that away and let's get moving. I just hope no one heard the shots fired," Jamison said, as he pulled the two lifeless Shuwd off the main path. "You did well. You didn't hesitate and you hit the target. I know that you don't like guns, but we may have to use these again."

"I know," Lora agreed and with a straight face, she said, "I suppose we sent them to 'The Land of Nod.'" Jamison laughed and led the way down

the eroded hillside. A beggar sat on a rug at the foot of the hill, barely dressed, ragged and blind in one eye. Jamison was in no mood to be harassed. Lora thought how unbearable it must be to live from day to day wondering where one would obtain his next meal. She noticed a homemade crutch lying next to him and wondered how he could survive these conditions being both blind and crippled.

He spoke to them in English. "Do you need a guide?"

Jamison stopped. "No thank you. We are fine."

"I can show you the way," the old man said.

Lora spoke up, "What is the way?"

"The way is a man," the beggar replied, sitting up straight.

"What is this man's name?" Lora asked.

"It is Christ Jesus, and I can show you the way, but I need the hourglass," he said.

Jamison took a step back pulling Lora with him. "Who are you?, he asked.

"I am the son of Timaeus and you have something for me."

"We may have something for you," Jamison announced. The son of Timaeus stood up, placed his crutch under his arm and began to walk

away. They followed him to the cave churches.

Oddly, no one else was anywhere in sight. The entire location seemed abandoned even though this was a huge tourist attraction.

“Where is everybody?” asked Jamison.

The old man replied, “They are here, but let’s just say that for the moment, they are suspended. We cannot see them.” The son of Timaeus led them to "St. Catherine Chapel" through Greek-cross-shaped nave, that featured a dome over the center and barrel-vaulted cross arms. Once inside, the son of Timaeus held out his hand. Lora reached into the backpack and pulled out the silver cylinder. Jamison was anxious and suspiciously pestered. He scanned the room but saw nothing of interest nearby or any threat. He presented the key.

“You must open it for you are the key,” the son of Timaeus instructed. Jamison took the cylinder in one hand and the key in the other. He inserted the key and turned the locking mechanism. The pins rose aligning exactly at the sheer point, and there was the sound of pins releasing. The lid easily twisted off.

The son of Timaeus took a step back, “do you trust me?”

Jamison wondered, "Why would you ask me if I trusted you or not?"

"From here on out you will need to trust me, for here, I am your eyes. And without eyes you will never see the obvious."

"We trust you," Lora said.

"Then if you trust me, remove the hourglass from the tube and hand it to me," he replied.

Jamison slowly turned the cylinder up, the hourglass slid out into his hand, and he handed the time piece to the beggar. The son of Timaeus examined the hourglass closely.

"It is an odd thing, time. It passes us by and we never see it. We are born, we live and we die, and time is no more. It is simply the invisible monster that we cannot slow down or speed up.

Strange that we can now jump through it from place to place, but none of it is reality. I am unsure if it is an enemy or a comforter," he said. The son of Timaeus handed the hourglass back to Jamison. "I have no need of the hourglass or any of the other artifacts you have collected because my job here is finished. You simply need to place the objects in the proper churches here.

You must visit "St. Barbara Chapel," also referred to as the "snake

church," and in this church, you place the "Giant Book" beneath the portrait of Saint Onuphrius on the upper wall to the right of the entrance."

Armed with simple instructions, they left the beggar and located the "Snake Church." It was a simple barrel-vaulted church with a low ceiling and long nave. The church was decorated with many frescoes of Saints. The first thing they saw opposite the entrance was an image of Christ holding a book in his hand, and to the left, on both sides of a large cross, were Emperor Constantine and Helena. The portrait of Saint Onuphrius was right where the beggar said it would be, on the upper wall to the right of the entrance. This saint had lived the life of a hermit in the Egyptian desert near Thebes, Egypt. They were reminded of Mieszko who was called a hermit by many.

Jamison turned the cylinder up on its end and miraculously out from this small tube, the Giant Book appeared on the table beneath the portrait. Jamison and Lora lay their hands on it in memory of Mieszko whom they both missed terribly. They wondered if he could feel their touch, or if he simply was sleeping. Now they wondered what to do next.

"Excuse me," a voice called out from behind them and startled them to the core.

Jamison spun around out of reflex into a defensive posture.

Prepared to become feral, he was set at ease when he saw two gray haired old men standing a few feet behind them.

One of them said, “my name is Pliny, and this is my brother, Tacitus. We have been sent here to show you the way,” “Who sent you?” Jamison asked the man who was diminutive in stature.

“The Giant Book spoke to us in a dream and told us that you would be here today and would need instruction. We are following the messenger of the dream,” he said.

“Did you see us?” asked Lora.

“We both saw a rose, then a coin and yes, we saw you standing and talking with us,” Pliny said.

“Are you from this time?” Jamison asked.

“Time?” the brisley haired men said, seemingly not understanding the concept.

“Yes, from this time period?” Jamison said.

“We do not know what time period this is. We follow the voice from beyond the gateway and we go where we are sent.”

“And what do you have to tell us?” Jamison replied, repositioning himself between Lora and the two men.

“My exertions have determined that danger is approaching and you must work fast. Take the rose coin outside the museum exit and on the right, you will see the "Buckle Church" (Tokali Kilise). It is comprised of four chambers. Go through the old church into the new church. Once there you will know what to do.”

Without hesitation or delay, they headed out of the "Snake Church" in the direction of the "Buckle Church." Nothing outside seemed to be alive. The air was dry and stale and no wind could be felt whatsoever. The "Buckle Church" was close and once inside, they enjoyed the coolness of the chamber. The frescoes, done in the "provincial" style, were rich in color and highly detailed.

Inside the "Old Church," dating back to the tenth century, they observed a single nave with a barrel vaulted ceiling. On the east wall, there were four columns joined by arches behind which they saw a raised corridor. In front of the vaulted nave, the frescoes provided an exhaustive account of the life of Christ, including the Annunciation, the Baptism, the Miracles the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension in deep red and blue hues. The Old Church acted as a narthex for the New Church. Once through the

Old Church, they were standing in the transversally rectangular New Church, carved out of the eastern wall of the Old Church. It was decorated with Eastern-style arches and a series of arcades. The niches in the walls of the nave served to give a sense of depth and substance to the paintings. Jamison was uneasy in this extremely blue room, not knowing what to do with the coin or cosmic rose.

“This coin means the birth of a star right?” Jamison asked.

“Something like that,” Lora confirmed.

“This entire room is a room of rebirths. There are the scenes of Bethlehem, the birth of Christ, the raising of Lazarus, but the rose has to do with something new,” Jamison seemed very confused. They two combed the walls and the ceilings, feeling with their hands, scanning everything in fine detail. Lora began to examine the floor. It was an amalgamation of tiny pebbles and an extrusiveigneous, mainly basalt, not uncommon for a rock floor in this region. She was now on all fours crawling with her face pressed close to the floor, “Here, here, I have found something!”

Jamison hurried over to her and moved an old wooden box to one side. There they found a small wooden trap door that was built into the floor. A small rope-like handle was attached to the door, and behind it, they could hear a noise, like someone scratching their nails on the wood.

Jamison asked her, "You ready?" Lora placed her hand on her weapon and nodded yes.

Jamison pulled the door up slowly, and to his surprise, there was a little gray headed man inside. "Come with me if you need a place to store your coin," he said.

Jamison and Lora didn't know what to do. A man hiding under the floor was the last thing they expected to see! He turned and descended down the stairs. Jamison and Lora cautiously followed, and Lora closed the wooden hatch behind them.

"Who are you?" asked Jamison.

"My name is Mara bar Serapion, he replied, "and I am a friend."

They cascaded downward until they reached the bottom, and there they found themselves in a small room that contained a sarcophagus located in the center of the room.

"In this box there is nothing. By placing the coin in the box you are simply saying that you believe in the resurrection. The coin represents new birth and one life that is found.

You found the coin and now you have returned it. Just like the "Giant Book," this was another lost item of great value. Mara opened the lid revealing the emptiness and void inside.

“If you would kindly place the coin into the bedding, I can send you on your way,” said the little man. Jamison opened the lid again and turned the cylinder up. When the cosmic rose coin rolled out into his hand, he walked over and placed it on the white bedding.

Mara closed the lid.

“Nothing is expected to happen. There will be no quaking of the earth or flashing lights. The coin is now where it belongs. You must now take the "Eye of Horus" to Karanlik Kilise, "The Dark Church.”

Jamison and Lora ascended back into the "New Church" and out into the sunlight. They were startled to see that there were people everywhere. The couple walked along, suspecting anyone and everyone of being their enemy. At this point, their slogan was to complete the task "by any means necessary," and they were not afraid to use extreme measures.

The previous series of events had convinced them that they would be justified. Most of the people milling around seemed to be locals or tourists, and they approached everyone with caution.

Finally they reached "The Dark Church" and entered from the north through a winding tunnel that opened into a barrel-vaulted narthex. Once inside, they understood why this place was called, "The Dark Church." Very little light penetrated its interior due in part to the domed ceiling. Scenes from the New Testament adorned its walls, including: Christ Pantocrator, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, First Bath, Last Supper from the New Testament, Betrayal of Judas, Crucifixion, and Anastasis. These were some of the best preserved and restored frescoes in existence. The pigments had been preserved because of the small oculus looking out of the narthex which only allows in a very small amount of light. It was much more difficult to place the last item, the "Eye of Horace," in this church.

"What are we looking for?" asked Lora.

"I haven't a clue. None of this is making any sense to me at all," Jamison replied.

"Do you smell smoke?" Lora asked.

Jamison replied, "Yes I do," deciding it was cigarette smoke.

Believing that they were the only two people in the room, the voice they heard shocked them.

“I am sorry. Does my smoking irritate you?” the voice asked. Standing in the room with them was a fat middle aged man who was sweating profusely. He inhaled the cigarette deeply, held the smoke in his lungs for a second, wheezed, coughed and blew it out in a huge plume. “You are in the "Dark Church," he said, "darkness is where God dwells. But in this situation, darkness is also a malignant cancer rampaging and coursing through the fiber of my being. I haven't long myself. Seems I have tasted too many carnal pleasures, and now and I am reaping the effects of my former decadence. The ol' serpent has bewitched me with a venomous kiss and poisoned me. Now I could be bitter and angry, and I apologize if I sound pungent and harsh, but I am now paying penance for my years of idiocy and ludicrousness.

My name is Rush. Yes, I am an American beneath this corrosive exterior. And yes, “they” sent me here to help you along. Didn't someone on your journey say that you had other people helping you along the way? Well “other people” mainly meant people like me who have screwed up royally in their lives and now have been sent here to lend you a hand.”

“You certainly are not the usual sort of man that is sent on our behalf,” Lora said.

“I suppose not. I must seem bad to you,” Rush said, as he inhaled again still coughing the smoke from his lungs.

“So if you are here to help us, what do we have to do next?” asked Jamison.

“It’s not what you have to do. It is what I have to do,” Rush corrected them.

He tossed down the cigarette butt and like the chain smoker he was, he fired up another. “I have to light this church up. You wonder why it is so dark? I’ll tell you. Pigeon poop.”

Jamison and Lora questioned him. “What?”

“That’s right, pigeon poop. Those nasty birds used to roost right here in the church and their profuse defecation is thick on the walls,” he fumbled the fag in his hand, and squinted one eye as smoke rose into his face. “You have a much better lighter than I have, and if I had that lighter, I certainly could illuminate this place,” he said.

“Answer one question for us?” they said.

He replied, “Yes sure, anything.”

“Who sent you?” they asked.

Rush smiled broadly and through his laughter, he said, “the clock maker, of course.”

Jamison opened the cylinder and turned it up on end. The solid gold lighter slid out into his hand. Jamison had forgotten how heavy this little box was. He briefly examined the inscription, not believing he was about to hand this relic over to this slob.

”I guess you’re wondering if I know what the inscription reads, huh?” Jamison appraised the lighter. “It reads Master Rakoczi,” Rush said, allowing the cigarette to drop from his nicotine-stained fingers as he held out his hand. Now if you will trust me, I shall take the lighter and do what I must do.” Jamison placed the lighter into Rush’s hand. He clasped the lighter tightly.

”You have one more item in the cylinder. Go ahead, remove it and Lora, you put it on,” Rush instructed. Jamison turned the cylinder up and the amulet with the utchat fell into his hand.

He handed it to Lora and she put it on over her head. It lay naturally around her neck and against her chest.

“The funny thing about light is that it uncovers and reveals things that are hidden. For too many years now, dead churches have been filled with dead people, and they parade about as if they are the righteously saved, while the world suffers and remains in its sins. It is like a corpse full of dead men’s bones. The church has become putrid, rotten, brittle and dust for the serpent to consume. The reason is that there is no light coming from within.

The wicks need to be trimmed, the oil needs to be refueled, and there needs to be a torch set against the wick. Just a tiny flame will illuminate the lamp.” At that point, Rush took the lighter from Jamison, “I think maybe you might want to take out your weapons.” Jamison and Lora pulled their glocks out from beneath their coats.

Rush opened the lid on the lighter and rolled the wheel. There was a spark, a flame, a dazzling fire ball that obscured their sight and the intense heat pushed them backward. The room was fully illuminated, now showing its secrets from history hidden. Lora screamed. Jamison’s attention went to the floor where she was pointing. In the floor was a pile of blood, feathers, parrot beaks, dogs teeth, alligators teeth, broken bottles, grave dirt, rum, cock feathers, and eggshells.

Lora said, “Obi.”

“What is an Obi?” asked Rush.

“They are the men who make the nostrums of death. Obeah, they are called,” she replied.

Becoming paranoid, Jamison could not relax even though there didn't appear to be anything of concern. Rush was still standing here, lighter in hand, and he lit another cigarette. Jamison and Lora ignored him as he stood smoking.

“I don't see anything,” Jamison said.

“You should see everything. Open your eyes!” Rush said, in a stronger voice than before.

“What am I looking for?” asked Jamison.

“Look for what is there in the darkness because it is also there in the light. In the light it is naked.” Jamison hated riddles. Moreover he abhorred voodoo altogether. Out of frustration, he took two large steps and kicked the pile of voodoo trinkets across the room. When he did this the curse was awakened. Shuwd walked out from the walls as if they had been the plaster holding the walls together. Completely surrounded, Jamison and Lora began to unload their guns. The chamber filled with the sounds of gunfire and the smell of gun powder. Shuwd were trying to get close. Jamison and Lora were unloading lead like Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane. Shuwd

were dropping left and right. Jamison quickly reloaded, dropping his magazine with a push from his thumb and slamming the fresh one up into the gun. Lora reloaded also, although not as fast. Jamison had her back and did not let her down.

Rush never moved from his position. The Shuwd did not seem to see him and no wild gunshots found him as a target. The attack was short lived and the room was filled with bodies and dead Shuwd. Not one of the beastly creatures even got close to them. Then into the doorway walked four men.

“Very good boy, you have a talent with a firearm.” It was Pope Gregory with Martin II, Beda and Jan.

“How did you get here?” Lora cried angrily.

“Shut up, slave girl, you are going to be a perfect trophy in my taxidermy collection,” the Pope said.

The wise-acre, Gregory, tossed thirty pieces of silver at Jamison’s feet. “Take the shekels, boy, that is all that unutterable flesh is worth.”

“What have we here, the usual suspects? You are becoming a real thorn in my flesh,” Jamison fired four more shots aiming at each of their four heads.

“Your toys can’t touch us, boy. We grew weary of the games you have been playing, so we took it upon ourselves to come and pay you a personal visit,” Gregory responded, and he sounded like he had practiced his exaggerated arrogance.

“And we are getting a little sick of you and your monkeys!”

Jamison said, pulling out the machete. Martin II was not amused with this deluge of rebellion that the travelers kept splashing on him. Wryly he accosted them with a deplorable poem aimed mainly at Lora.

“I can’t I shan’t, do a peculiar dance,

On graves so fresh and dead,

You pant, you rant, take a dangerous chance,

Sucking life, from your thinking head,

Distorted, aborted, another wiggly worm,

Down my throat it slides,

Contorted, transported, shake it while it squirms,

Poor little baby don’t you cry,

Smell the rot, burial plot,

My darling little fairy tale,

Should I stop or flip flop,

Or drain you until you are pale.

Martin, being caught up in his vain self promotion, turned his attention to elaborate on Jamison, “What are you going to do with that big knife, boy? Are you planning on cutting me?”

The bigoted four laughed cruelly. When your God removed himself from this world and left you on your own, he left you for me. “Deism I took you more for Fatalism since you seem sure of yourself.” Jamison began to twirl the machete as Rush slipped over next to him and Lora. “So fat man, you taking their sides now?” Martin II spat out the words pompously. He demanded the cylinder from Jamison.

Jamison thought for a moment, “You’re a real piece of work Pope.” The cylinder had been designed by Hanus the clock maker. It had proven to be an unusual tool, and maybe in this case, when bullets would not work, they needed such a miracle. With zero tolerance remaining, Jamison removed the lid of the empty silver cylinder.

Lora closed her eyes and spoke, “Jesus, Jesus, burning bright, protect us with your power and might.” Instantly, each man felt something brush his

shoulders. Their supercilious expressions changed to that of uncertainty. They tingled as a breeze blew past them.

“What sort of magic is this?” Gregory demanded to know. The wind began to pick up speed. At first swirling it began to spin. The four miscreants showed expressions of bland surprise.

They attempted to locate the source of the sudden wind storm. Jamison pointed the open end of the cylinder at the four men, feeling a pull from the cylinder in their direction as they tried to stay on their feet. Like a cyclone; the wind on their side of the room had become ferocious, spinning like a small tornado in the chamber. Encompassing the men, they were being dragged toward Jamison who now had both hands on the cylinder.

”What is this, what is happening? The men’s voices sounded like muffled chatter. Lora was laughing as she watched them being dragged across the floor holding on to one another.

Jan paused and stammered, “ L-la-Lord Martin, he, he, help us!” The incredible force of the vacuum was dragging them right toward the cylinder. Jamison recoiled as he felt four hard jolts pushing his arms back against his body. Then the wind stopped and Jamison sealed the cylinder immediately and locked it.

“Got their just deserts!” Jamison said.

”Quickly, you must go to the "Sandal Church Çarikli Kilise,” Rush said, seemingly undisturbed by the recent gun shots, the dead Shuwd who seemed to have vanished after the wind storm and by the four men being sucked into a cylinder no bigger than a blueprint tube.

“Thank you Rush,” said Jamison, as they raced out of the "Dark Church" and into the open air again. All of the churches were next to one another in this compound, and the area had become very crowded with people. Oblivious, no one seemed to notice the big muscular guy dragging a young girl by the arm as they raced by.

The "Sandal Church," the smallest of the columned churches, was one of the rooms that surrounded the courtyard of the monastery, and its entrance was from the north.

The church was carved into a cross floor plan with intersecting vaults. The church's frescoes consisted of the four Evangelists, the Nativity and the Crucifixion, the Baptism, the Adoration of the Magi, and other New Testament themes. Jamison and Lora once again were in awe of such incredible artwork. The church had been named for the two footprints just inside its entrance, around which many legends have been woven. One of the most incredible frescoes was in the arch over the door depicting the Betrayal of Jesus by Judas. The main cupola had a Christ Pantocrator with

the Four Evangelists below. The other three cupolas were occupied by the angels: Michael, Gabriel and Uriel.

In the apse they had the sensation that they were standing on Holy ground. The room had an air of devotion as though it could have been visited by angels. There was a Deesis (Christ with Mary and John the Baptist), whose inscription to Christ read, "I am the light of the world, who follows me will not be left in the dark."

"Why are all of the eyes poked out of the painted figures?" asked Lora.

"Beats me, weird huh" Jamison answered. The couple was tired, unnerved and rattled by the events of the day. Jamison had already made his mind up that after this journey was over he never wanted to see another gun or monster.

"If we do not know what we are looking for how will we know when we find it?" Lora asked, feeling the crisis in her life.

"We'll find it. We have nothing left to give these churches but ourselves," Jamison said, also feeling the emotional trauma they had recently suffered.

"Wait! That's it!" Lora was ecstatic.

"What's it?" he said, as Lora hugged him, squeezing him tightly.

“We are all we have left to offer,” she replied.

“Maybe you are right. Look for anything that looks like a wormhole here,” he said. Anything that was not tight on the wall was being manipulated by the couple. The wormhole had to be here in the "Sandal Church." Jamison had rationalized that one wears sandals if they plan to travel.

“Is this the same design that is on your amulet?” asked Jamison, brushing dust away from a spot on the wall. Lora walked over to the place that he had wiped clean.

“Yes, it is exactly the same” she replied. The symbol and the amulet lined up perfectly. Jamison quickly put it down. "Wait! Maybe that is what we need to do, line it up and we go home," she said.

“Yes, this is the anomaly that we have waited for, and I believe this is what we need to go home. But think about what it also implies-that if we open this wormhole, you and I get separated and we go home. Home for you is not home for me and what if we end up in two different countries?” Jamison said mournfully.

Lora wrapped her arms around him. “I won’t let go, I promise.”

“What if we can’t hold on and we go to different countries and what if we forget? What if our memories are erased of this whole adventure? If this

whole matter vanishes from our minds, I will have forgotten the only girl that I have ever loved.” Jamison held her tight.

“God has put us together. He would not do that to us.” Lora said, her lip quivering.

“If we become separated and if we remember one another, I will come for you. Just wait for me,” said Jamison, his eyes showing fear.

“What are you going to do with the cylinder?” asked Lora.

“I guess it’s mine until I know what to do with it,” he replied.

Jamison saw a shadow overhead envelope the two of them. He spun about with his gun drawn. “Basthet!”

“Yes, it is I. I think you have something for me,” she purred. Basthet, their old friend with all of her feline qualities, had returned. Jamison admired the silver cylinder in his hand and Basthet said, “Yes, that is what I have returned for. Some must be tried and sentenced.”

Jamison handed her the cylinder and dug into his pocket for the key. “They are all yours.”

“I wish you two the very best, but I must leave you now. Use the amulet and go home. Your work here is complete.” Basthet did not hesitate. She

turned and simply walked out of the chamber. Jamison and Lora held each other tightly, and Jamison held the amulet against the Eye of Horace tched into the rock wall. The entire wall seemed to be the barrier between them and the wormhole. The wall slid to the side, revealing the swirling darkness of time unknown. Jamison and Lora gave one another a goodbye kiss, and in faith, prayed for the best. Together they stepped into the eddy and held onto one another with great intensity. They found themselves tumbling like clothes in a dryer through the nothingness. A blast of air took their breath and they were fighting to stay together. In a dizzying spin, they were being whisked through the portal. They were corkscrewed and propelled mercilessly. Neither could speak and their minds were scrambled with great confusion. Neither could discern if this was reality or a dream. Their thoughts were muddled. In frightening disorder they were caught in the riotous luminous haze of the astral world.

Their days of being bound side by side in adventure and intrigue were being summed up in one moment of cosmic concealment. Jamison thought that being entrapped in the silver cylinder like Pope Gregory and his henchman could be no worse. His soul never felt anymore desperate than now, feeling the sensation of falling.

Lora was cold inside, extinguished of every emotion.

The lifeless pair, unresolved like a mystery, was unrecognizable even to themselves. Weakness and sickness began to separate them even though they clung to one another with all of their might. The weakness was disappointment at their loss of strength and the sickness was the distance that they were being pulled apart. The profound uncertainty wrapped itself around them individually. There was nothing forthright or clear. All honest intention was swept clean by the strange vibrations of unwonted tenebrous enmity.

CHAPTER 42 CAUGHT, TRIED AND SENTENCED

All criminals turn preachers under the gallows.

(Traditional Proverb)



Litigants who have the right to present their cases before an impartial adjudicator hope that and in doing so, the truth will be borne out through written and oral arguments, the presentation of evidence and witness testimonies. Legal rules and procedures must be followed to ensure fairness to all parties. In criminal cases, the accused and the accuser present their cases, after which a decision maker must either convict or acquit the defendant who is on trial.

The Universal Criminal Court has no limits on handing down justice. It's territorial jurisdiction reaches far beyond one solar system. This cosmic court of the heavens is not a court of last resort. It is simply the last court. Every criminal has their day in court and the unlawful are treated fairly in accordance with the severity of their deeds. The wicked are treated no differently than the petty thief. The evil doers are shown the same mercy as the havoc they wreaked upon their victims. Every illegal activity omitted in the dark is brought to light here. All who bring contempt and hurt to others are measured with the same pain and suffering. Immorality is met with righteousness, and when the gavel of justice hammers down against the wooden block, order is restored out of chaos and mayhem. The

philosopher, social scientist, historian and revolutionary, Karl Marx, was quoted as saying, "Religion is the opium of the people." The criminal expecting to rule the world by ruthless religion under the guise of political justice shall surely be deemed impotent by a court of law.

Basthet delivered the silver cylinder to the supreme counsel who sat on the seven mountains. Long after the voir dire, the jury of peers waited a full century for the accused to arrive. In the judges chambers, the motion in limine had been filed. An odd familiarity hung in the air, but this commonality was not one of a gregarious nature. The word, Sodom, in Hebrew means burning, and Gomorrah, means submersion. The men of those cities, being cut off from the earth, found engulfing ruin and destruction in their day.

There was nothing any different here in this forum, nothing dissimilar at this tribunal. Criminals receive no reward, and only anguish weighs to their misfortune. Calamity lies in the balances together. Endowed names rot and are forgotten, as their expectations perish. Like the chaff, childish mischief is carried away. Abhorred and overthrown, the loathsome wallow in their abomination while devouring iniquity. As low as dependent lividity, contempt with ignominy, reproach scatters the dead. In the righteous

courts of justice, the malefactors shamed, hang their heads, their armies decimated and looking vanquished.

Pope Gregory, Martin II, Beda and Jan all stood together, broken and defeated, as opening statements were made. The trial did not take long because no one came to their defense.

The four men stood alone before the powers of the universe. Their behavior had been heinous, much more loathsome than school boys breaking a window or playing hookey from school.

Their deeds fell under the category of abomination, atrocity and perversion. During this short trial, the crooked was made straight, the lawbreaker met the law head on, these reprobate men were judged by virtue and they were cut asunder with swift conviction.

The tears of the guilty do not move the emotions of those appointed to rule. Tears manufactured to show remorse produce no effect when in fact they are tears of sorrow for getting caught.

Punishment rendered is remedial and this corrective act of discipline would be no act of leniency. It would be harsh and enduring until that which was defiled had been cast out.

Purgatory is a false place for the dreamers and the hopeful. These men

were cast into the abyss and their cries were never heard again. They would in time surrender to truth and willingly bow to the justice that tried and convicted them. The end had arrived and now they would suffer at the hands of their own demise, tumbling helplessly, ricocheting off vain glory and self serving heavy darkness They were spiraling downward into the bottomless pit where megalomaniacs' egocentric flesh slides off the bone. Pompous eyes bulge as narcissism is individually sacrificed and destroyed, and the conceit perishes in the sea of the Philistines.

Basthet, having completed her work, had gone back to the place from which she had originally been summoned. There would be no more reason for her to meet Jamison or Lora again. Her assignment had been carried out and dutifully fulfilled, and she no longer carried the burden that bound her to the earth. She had returned to her world where she was bathed in perfume and rejoiced with her cats.

Mieszko, the Giant Book, the Codex Gigas, the eighth wonder of the world, was now restored. If he had ever been, "The Devil's Bible," it had only been for a brief moment. For now he rested in the arms of angels and slept peacefully where he would remain until his reawakening at the resurrection. Jamison and Lora hoped that Mieszko would be their

guardian angel throughout their lives, and their belief in this notion gave them more comfort than the mere belief that he slept benumbed.

CHAPTER 43 NICE DAY FOR A WHITE WEDDING

*The music at a wedding procession always reminds me of the music of
soldiers going into battle. Heinrich Heine*

Both foreign and domestic automobiles honked at Jamison, and the long blast clearly indicated that drivers were irate. Jamison had been transported from the wormhole to a car seat, but the car was not moving. He found himself sitting at a red light and from the sounds of the angry horns, the light had turned green.

Disoriented, Jamison was confused and he had a sunken sick feeling in his stomach because the passenger side was empty, and Lora was nowhere to be found. Now the blaring horns became abusive and antagonizing. He noticed that his radio was playing loudly, but the song was unfamiliar to him. He turned down the volume and attempted to gather himself. Someone from behind was shouting at him in a rancorous tone that was

salted with fury. Jamison put his car in drive and proceeded through the light, never more lost than right now. He had no idea where he was going.

Like a man deprived of air, Jamison could not have been more irrevocably ruined. He might as well have perished in the jump here because he was far away in his thoughts, invisible to this world, absorbed and engrossed in the moments before he stepped into the wormhole with his dear Lora. He was not able to manage his location because he was now emotionally bankrupt, though he did recognize a Wal-Greens drug store to his left and a train crossing straight ahead, It became obvious that he was not driving fast enough because his car was being bumped from behind. He glanced into his rear-view mirror, his eyes blurred by tears, and saw a black car with tinted windows though he was unable able to see the driver. He was inappreciably aggravated by the accident, and now, he became agitated that the driver was not in view. Jamison pulled his vehicle over to the shoulder and opened the door to step out. The car behind him also pulled to the shoulder. He waited for the driver to emerge, but no one got out.

Even though Jamison was feeling the effects of time travel, he was angry over this deliberate act of road rage, and now, he wanted to unleash some of his own. Throwing caution to the wind, he walked up to the side window.

Hurt and angry that Lora was not with him, he was angry for things he did not even know.

Jamison tapped against the side window with his knuckles, waiting to give someone a piece of his mind, though he wasn't sure if he had a full piece of mind left. Enraged, and exceeding his patience he was more than willing to give his last bit. Then someone rolled the tinted window down. Sitting in the driver's seat of this black Lincoln was Lora! Jamison was floored, and he could not have been more thrilled if he had heard the Good Lord Almighty say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." He grabbed her face in his hands and began to kiss her, "How did you find me? Where are we? "Is this really happening?" Jamison wanted to ask her a thousand questions. He pulled his car into a shopping mall parking lot and climbed into her car. They sat for a time while the car engine hummed and the air conditioner blew cooling air. All he wanted to do was touch her, look at her, and hold her. The outside air was hot and humid, and the wind blew in like a sirocco from Africa. Inside the car was the driest place to be.

Lora explained what happened to her, "I transported home to Jamaica two weeks prior to when you and Mieszko originally found me. Remember you told me to wait for you? You said you would come for me. But after a

week when you did not arrive, I came here to find you. Today is the day that you would have had your car accident, but as you can see, you have not. This means it did not happen. Does that make sense?" she asked.

"It does not make sense to me, but I understand what you are saying. You are basically saying that this is July second, and even though we have been gone for several days, time has remained the same and has returned me right back here," he replied.

"Yes, so you see your mother and sister have no memory of your accident, and there is no record of it," she said.

"That is absolutely crazy!" Jamison exclaimed. He was coming around and his thoughts were becoming clearer Jamison started to understand his surroundings. He was back in his home town at the shopping mall where he normally shopped for clothes and other necessities. His amnesia had vanished. The stupor from the wormhole had subsided, and now the transient global amnesia event had completely cleared with no additional side effects.

"So it all happened? We saved the universe?" he asked.

Lora smiled and kissed him. She said, "We sure did!"

"What are we going to do now?" said Jamison.

Lora looked dreamily into his eyes as if to say, “if you don’t know, I am not going to tell you.”

“Lora, I thought I had lost you. When I got back here I didn’t know where I was. I felt lost, but now you are here and you are real and I cannot believe it,” Jamison exclaimed.

“Jamison, Mwen renmen ou.” Lora’s “I love you” needed no translation. Jamison pulled her close and became lost in her eyes.

“Lora, will you marry me?”

“Yes of course I will,” she sighed sweetly.

“I just have one more...” Jamison his eyes moved up and to the left as if he was thinking, “OK, maybe two more questions.”

“Ask me,” she said, hugging herself with her shoulders smiling very contagiously.

“What is your entire name and where do you want to get married?” he said.

Sitting sideways, his left leg bent, she placed both of her hands on his knee and said, "My full name is 'Meskerem Chufamo Etebo,' but my mother calls me Lora after my great grandmother.

And I will marry you any place and at any time.”

“That is some name! Is it okay if I keep calling you Lora?” he asked.

“Yes, that is my name and I like the way that you say it.” she said.

Jamison left his vehicle in the parking lot, deciding to come back for it later. They were hungry so they swung through a drive-thru where they picked up burgers and fries. Then they went back to his apartment and made plans for their future. They decided to be married in Jamaica because Jamison’s family could travel while Lora’s family did not have the means to do so. The announcement of their impending marriage came as a shock to their families since neither had ever mentioned having a serious relationship with anyone. Within a month, preparations were complete. Jamison would have his mother and sister, along with a couple of male co-workers and four of his best friends, who would serve as groomsmen, fly with him to Jamaica. Family and friends offered their complete support when they realized the strong commitment that existed between them.

The wedding would take place at the "Port Maria Parish Church" in Saint Mary. The church was built out of limestone blocks and rested on the edge of the bay. The palm trees on either side of the church and the turquoise harbor created a picturesque setting for a wedding. On the day of the wedding nerves were on edge and anxiety was running high. Lora was trying something new with her hair and she prayed that Jamison would like

it. Everyone raved about how beautiful she was. Since this was the first time that Lora had ever worn makeup, she wanted to make sure that it was perfect, and her make-up artist promised her that she was astonishingly gorgeous.

An enormous reception had been prepared at her mother's house, and the food preparation was complete with pulled pork, curried goat with rice, sweet potatoes, and green plantains.

There were numerous cakes and pies, and earlier in the day, they were carried to the church by a procession of married women wearing white dresses and head-ties. No one spoke during this solemn procession, and the cakes themselves were covered by white lace so that Lora did not see them until after the wedding. A wine and champagne bar was available for guests when they arrived, and a special table was set up for the rum punch.

Jamison wore a Chocolate Infinity Savvy single breasted tuxedo that included a vest. He paced the floor while his groomsmen watched quietly. He had told no one the true story of how he and Lora had met. The story that he did share was simply that they were involved in a minor fender bender and exchanged numbers, and things had escalated from there.

His mother, of course, thought they were getting married too quickly,

but all the same, she was not reluctant to give her blessing. She quickly fell in love with Lora's personality and indefatigable demeanor. Both women were insouciant and benevolent in their mannerisms and actions toward one another. Lora told her family that she had gone to the States to check on a job she had seen posted in a global classified help wanted add, and in the process had rear ended Jamison before the interview.

An usher came back and told the wedding party that it was time to proceed. Jamison was wiping sweat from the palms of his hands with one of the extra handkerchiefs he was carrying.

Although he had no doubts about marrying Lora, he still had butterflies in the pit of his stomach. He knew that it is natural to be on pins and needles before the ceremony, but it was now time to take the matrimonial stage. He did not hesitate but marched out with his groomsmen, where he saw a church full of people. He thought every one in the town must have come out. His mother and sister were sitting there, very pretty, and there were tears of happiness in their eyes.

His mind juxtaposed between the reality that was today and the insanity of how this wedding came to be. Reflecting on the recent events leading up to it, he remembered how Mieszko had arrived after that horrible car wreck and took him on a fantastic journey through space and time. His mind

wandered to the first day when he met Lora and heard her speaking in such a strange language. He smiled as he remembered seeing her face for the first time, and his heart raced for her. His journey down memory lane came to an abrupt halt when the pianist began to play the "Bridal Chorus" from the opera, "Lohengrin", by German composer Richard Wagner.

Everyone stood, eyes fixed on the doorway. A little black flower girl walked slowly down the isle, out of step with the music, dropping rose pedals as she walked on the white runner.

Guests snapped pictures, and then Lora stepped out, with her uncle on her arm. Jamison became light headed, thinking she was "drop dead gorgeous," and his best man steadied him.

Lora was radiant in her ivory white wedding gown. He especially liked the trumpet-mermaid silhouette of the gown. No one could stand in criticism of the way she hypnotically dazzled everyone with her pulchritudinous appearance. Everyone whispered that there was an aura around her in the doorway that was entrancing, angelic, and rapturous. She walked down the isle like a princess. Absolutely enthralled by her, Jamison did not feel worthy to be marrying a woman whom he considered to be "The Queen of Sheba."

They had experienced so much together in such a short period of time, and in the process, they had fallen in love. After facing death many times, they were now going to spend their lives together. Love never fails.

“Who gives this woman to marry?” asked the minister.

“I do,” her uncle answered and took his seat.

During the marriage ceremony the couple faced one another, holding hands. They stared deeply into each others eyes not distracted by anything, including the clicking of the wedding photographer's camera. They could not take their eyes off each other, and it was almost like they were the only two people on the planet.

The couple were truly soul mates who had found one another in a very egregious way. The vows were not long and then it was time for their personal dedications to one another.

Lora began, “To Jamison my love, for all that you are, for all that you will be, for what you make us, I love you. My whole life I prayed that God would bring a man into my life as handsome, as brave and as caring as you. Our meeting was by accident but it was not a coincidence. Our meeting was ordained by God, and today, I pledge my love, my devotion and my heart to you.”

Jamison tried to hold back the joy he felt in his heart, "Never in my life did I ever think I would be so blessed. But I have been blessed with the most fantastic and incredible woman in the world. You have made me a true man. I could not live without knowing you. In everything that I do, I will perform it to impress you. If I know nothing else, I know that I will love you always and forever."

With their promises made, they exchanged rings and the minister said the infamous words, "you may kiss the bride. I now pronounce you husband and wife."

Their kiss was legendary, a passionate kiss that caused Mother's to cover their children's eyes. When they finally came up for air, the guests were shouting for joy at the couple's newly found happiness. The entire church broke out into cheers and applause as the pianist began to play Felix Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." The couple marched out of the church to a waiting limousine. They were driving fifteen minutes away to her aunt's house where a booth constructed of a festoon of flowers and coconut boughs was built especially for the reception.

The couple was so happy, like two teenagers on an unsupervised date, in the back of the private limousine. Blissfully, they were almost caught

kissing when the limo pulled up in front of her aunt's house, the door swung open and congratulating heads popped inside.

The booth was more like a giant roof on stilts, and it filled up quickly with party goers. Jamison and Lora seemed to be attached at the hip. They went through all of the expected traditional rituals, including the cutting of the cake. The wedding cake, soaked in rum, was darker in color than the traditional type and consisted of various types of dried fruits. There were many toasts offered to the couple and many glasses of wine. Then the feasting and dancing began.

Jamison had never been to a Jamaican wedding and he was amazed at how many people showed up for the reception. He thought there were more people here than there was at the wedding. The music was already catching a rhythm and many were grooving to it. Lora's cousin, Ingrid, led the happy couple through the partiers. Shouting, she raised her voice above the music and said, "Iif iih t wussn ' tt for Jamaicans... we wudn ' tt have no proper daqqerinqq music." The many pats on the back and well wishes caused Jamison to realize how the people were letting him know that they were proud to be Jamaicans.

"Luv mi culture, wi wuk hard, wi smart, and wi full a passion, an wi

kind, until yu mess wid wi.” “Mi lubb mi musik , nuff mello riddim and irie vibez, di fun caan dung.” It was if they were welcoming him to stay.

CHAPTER 44 THERE IS POISON IN THE POT

Vile deeds like poison weeds bloom well in prison air, it is only what

is good in man, that wastes and withers there. Oscar Wilde

Dancing and drinking their fill, neither wanted to be out of their minds, so they stopped before becoming too intoxicated. They monitored one another carefully so that neither would make themselves sick. All sorts of people were walking up and congratulating them. Lora’s impetuous cousin, Drusilla, stumbled up to Jamison. She was an inveterate professional annoyance to most people; but she was family, Jamison tolerated her although he thought that she was not playing with a full deck. She had been drinking, was extremely inebriated, and that made her even more of an inconvenience for she was nearly on the edge of a lunatic fringe. With eyes slightly crossed and slurred speech she said; “Marriage is not a word. It’s a sentence,” and then she paused to giggle. Steadying her gait, taking a deep breath, and letting the air out slowly through her mouth, she finished her phrase; “a life sentence.” She blundered sideways and bumped into Jamison.

She took a knee, but Jamison caught her under the arm before she fell completely to the ground. He pulled her to her feet and she clownishly stumbled away toward the bowl of rum.

Jamison noticed a white man that did not fit and seemed out of place. Something about the man seemed fishy. Maybe he was just being paranoid, and he realized that it could be much ado about nothing, but the man seemed overly eccentric and aberrant in his conduct. He was balding on top, had a barrel-chest, and the plump-faced man demonstrated feminine mannerisms.

Although the man pretended not to be staring at the couple, Jamison caught him watching them many times. Breaking his surveillance of the out of place stranger, Lora's Great Aunt Nakelia approached.

"Congratulations," she said.

Jamison, trying not to be impolite, not wanting to lose sight of the stranger, said "thank you."

"You have a beautiful bride - she is a prize, our precious child."

"Yes I know. I am very blessed," Jamison smiled, looking around Nakelia.

Her Uncle Jazmire approached revealing a gigantic big-tooth smile. “My boy, what a wonderful day! I know you will treat her right,” he shook Jamison's hand with a double grip.

“Yes I will. She is a queen,” Jamison replied, seeming to become entranced with thoughts of Lora. He quickly broke free of it so he could keep his mind fixed on the stranger.

“Where do you plan on living?” asked Uncle Jazmire. Jamison moved to his right to keep the stranger in sight, “We are going to live here. Lora convinced me to open up a little business here.”

Still smiling broadly Jazmire became excited. “Wonderful!” he shouted.

A stiff wind struck Jamison in the face providing an opportunity for him to break away. He rubbed his right eye with the knuckle of his right pointing finger. “Looks like I have something in my eye, if you will excuse me.”

“Yes of course, take care of that,” Jazmire sympathized.

Jamison faked his eye problem and went over to Lora who was surrounded by well-wishers. He abruptly interrupted, “Darlin’ can you take a look at my eye, I think the wind has blown some dust or something in it?” He reached, grabbed her hand and dragged her away for a private meeting. She reached up to open his scrunched eye. He opened it for her

and played along. Listen, there is really nothing in my eye, I needed to get over to you. I think we have an uninvited guest.” Jamison pointed the man out to Lora. Using his deductive reasoning, he said, “watch that guy. He rubs me the wrong way. He is way out of place and he keeps giving us odd looks.” Lora had learned to have great respect for Jamison's judgment, and never questioned him once.

She pretended to ignore the man, but she was encountering uneasy emotions too, catching him staring in their direction many times. The strange man made eye contact with her more than once and would then look away nonchalantly.

“Yes, I believe you are correct. What do we do?” she asked.

“We don’t want to spill the beans to anyone else right now, but I am going to ask him to identify himself and tell me why he is here,” Jamison responded. He took Lora by the hand and they walked through the crowd of people over to where the man seemed to be waiting for them. Before Jamison could ask the jolly fellow who he was, the man said “Bombastic!”

“What does that mean?” Jamison asked, getting right to the point.

“Simply that this is a wonderful party,” he replied.

Jamison was not about to beat around the bush, so he took command, “Let me ask you, I noticed you staring at us all night. Who are you?”

The red headed man stepped back and arrogantly boasted, “I am monarcha medicorum and I can prove to you what you cannot prove. I need not don a coat of mail or a buckler against you, for you are not learned or experienced enough to refute even a word of mine.”

“I don’t give a diddly squat. How about a name fellow. What’s your name?” Jamison now demanded to know.

“I was born Phillippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, but I am simply known as Paracelsus.” That name rang a bell for Jamison, but thinking back, he could not remember why.

“Was it something Mieszko had said?” The man had him over a barrel and he was at a loss.

“Why are you here?” Jamison asked, his blood pressure beginning to rise.

Paracelus spoke again, “Better late than never. Dreams are not without meaning wherever they may come from—fantasy, the elements, or other inspiration. Dreams must be heeded and accepted. For a great many of them come true.”

Jamison stepped up into the face of the guy, smelling a rat, “I think you know where we have been and what we have been through, so you better tell me what side you are on?” he said.

Paracelsus refused to meet Jamison's gaze, but replied, "Medicine rests upon four pillars - philosophy, astronomy, alchemy, and ethics, I am here as an observer of all of these things."

"I think your observing is over, I am going to go ahead and be rude and ask you to leave," Jamison insisted, trying to keep his voice low.

Paracelsus then pointed his finger at Jamison with angst and in a resonating tone, he said, "poison is in everything, and no thing is without poison. The size of the dosage makes it either a poison or a remedy. The dose makes the poison."

Jamison thought hard, and racking his brain, he wondered, where had he heard that before?

"Yes," Jamison now remembered. Mieszko had warned him about Paracelsus because he was of a secret brotherhood of alchemists and sages.

"What have you done?" Jamison asked, now visibly angry.

"Once a disease has entered the body, all parts that are healthy must fight it, not one alone, but all, because a disease might mean their common death. Nature knows this, and nature attacks the disease with whatever help she can muster."

Jamison was shaken with fear, and concerned for the guests. He grabbed Paracelsus by the shirt collar and pushed him backward against an automobile that was sitting close by. "What have you done?" He realized that Paracelsus was here to disrupt, to harm them and to gum up the works.

"I have done nothing Jamison. Thoughts create a new heaven, a new firmament, a new source of energy, from which new arts flow," Paracelsus coldly fleered, his laugh cracking.

"Whatever you have done here you must stop it. These people have done nothing," Jamison exclaimed!

Still pressed against the automobile, he spoke again "What sense would it make or what would it benefit a physician if he discovered the origin of the diseases but could not cure or alleviate them?"

"What do you want?" asked Jamison.

Paracelsus pushed back as much as he could, but Jamison was a rock and was far stronger. "I want the book," Paracelsus answered.

"The book is gone. It is safe and everyone associated with you are frying right now," Jamison growled.

"Do you want to be responsible for all of these guests?"

Paracelsus's eyes scanned the festivities.

“If you have done something, if you have spiked the rum or something of that nature, and if you have a remedy, I beg you stop whatever is going to happen,” Jamison had eased his tone and was pleading.

Lora, who had remained quiet, just smiling at guests as if this scene was nothing of any importance, stepped up. “Please, these are our families and friends.”

“Friends and family?” his face twisted and he spoke in an acidic tone.

With massive acrimony he raised his voice, “Where are my friends and family? You have managed to dissect us and now we are torn apart, scattered throughout the universe in nothingness. You have made us insignificant. Our eminence was broken by you. And you have the gall to lay your hands on me and demand that I rescue your friends and family? You aborted us in the womb so you are the murderer!” Paracelsus's eyes squinted and lines formed around his eyes. An eerie chill washed over Lora and she physically shivered.

“Your friends were trying to take over the world, maybe the universe, I don't know. How can you be a part of such a thing?” Lora sounded desperate.

“Man is a microcosm, a little world all by himself, because he is an extract from all the stars and planets of the whole firmament, from the earth and the elements, and so he is their quintessence. We were putting things back in the order that they belong,” he said ghoulishly.

“You were working with people, or rather things, that did not care for the human race. Martin II brought forth a part-man, part-animal thing that chased us all over the world. We barely survived. So don’t give me any self righteous crap about making things better. If you mean turning us all into slaves or killing those that resisted, absolutely forget it,” Jamison pushed his knuckles hard against Paracelsus' sternum.

“You are foolish. The human spirit is so great a thing that no man can express it. Could we rightly comprehend the mind of man, nothing would be impossible to us upon the earth,” he responded. Though pinned against the automobile Paracelsus seemed defiant.

Lora challenged his philosophies, “Can’t you hear yourself talk? You give credence to the human race. Then you seek power over man?”

Tears swelled in his eyes, and he said, “When a man undertakes to create something, he establishes a new heaven, as it were, and from it, the work that he desires to create flows into him.

For such is the immensity of man that he is greater than heaven and earth.
You never allowed us that privilege.”

“Leave us, be gone!” Lora exclaimed, angry now.

“I will leave you but with a word of wisdom for you. The universities do not teach all things, so a doctor must seek out old wives, gypsies, sorcerers, wandering tribes, old robbers, and such outlaws and take lessons from them. So I bid you farewell. Whatever will be will be, for it is set in motion. However, anyone to whom this happens should not leave his room upon awakening, should speak to no-one, but remain alone and sober until everything comes back to him, and he recalls the dream.” Jamison turned loose of him and watched him leave the party.

“Shouldn’t we stop him?” Lora’s anxiety was speaking.

Jamison watched him as he walked away, looking back over his shoulder. “I don’t know if we should or not? He is just going to jump into a wormhole and go back to whatever he is out there.

Our concern is here and now. What has he done?”

Lora excitedly shouted, “The punch rum; He may have spiked it with poison!”

Ghastly venom spewed from Paracelsus' mouth, “The dose makes the poison.”

Lora tensed and was clearly alarmed, "Wait here," she cried. As she pushed her way through the crowd, her chief or maid of honor rushed behind her, concerned. Other partiers noticed the disquiet and nervousness Lora was demonstrating, and they saw that something was happening. They stopped dancing, concerned, while others continued their festivities unaware of the problem. Jamison scanned the crowd to see if anyone was acting differently. Was anyone dropping to the ground or convulsing? He didn't see anything out of the ordinary. As a matter of fact, one of the guests grabbed him by the arm and said, "I'm sey im des fi a food." To the best of his ability, he translated the phrase for himself to mean. "he's desperate for food."

Jamison saw Lora leading her elderly blind aunt through the crowd to the rum punch bowl. He heard her aunt ask, "Wa a gwaan?"

This certainly got the attention of those in attendance. Jamison accompanied Lora and her aunt, unaware that her aunt was a "mambo asogwe," or high priest in Voodoo. Her family did not condone Voodoo practices, but they accepted the aunt because she was family. Her aunt was the only one in the family who believed in the practice of Voodoo.

Lora's aunt began making marks with chalk on the table where the bowl

of rum sat. She opened up a large purse and withdrew some sort of leaves which she crushed up and dropped into the rum bowl. She ordered more rum to be placed into the bowl until it was full to the brim. She began to sing a song and lifted her hands. She chanted, "Sanite' DeDe here us, Fièvre Jaune, Fait Accompli." A match was struck by her and tossed into the punch bowl.

The alcohol in the rum lit up like a fire ball, the flame was blue. She chanted even more waving her hands over the flames. Spontaneously, everyone with the exception of Jamison and the elderly Voodoo queen, stopped moving. Jamison noticed that Lora seemed frozen in time.

"What have you done?" he exclaimed! She seemed to speculate, and a look of great worry spread across her face.

"Don't you know what you are doing?" he asked. Jamison started thinking. His heart was breaking. His precious Lora and all of her family, his mother and sister, and friends were all in suspended animation. He dropped to his knees and applied his faith.

"Dear God, hear my prayer. I am weak but you are strong. I am nothing without you. I call upon you, Father, to make this right. I am a sinner kneeling before you, but I believe that you can bring everyone back. I believe you are in control of all of us. You chose Lora and I to take the

adventure to restore the Book to its proper place, and now, Father, I am asking in Jesus' name that your Spirit bring a cure for all of these people.” As he prayed Lora’s aunt raised her hands to heaven, giving up on her own solutions, and now accepting Jamison’s faith.

Jamison remained on his knees, now silent, waiting for the healing power of God. He was waiting for the miracle to reverse the curse that Paracelsus had inflicted. A warm rush of wind blew over Jamison’s body. He raised his head and saw a swirling overhead.

The wind extinguished the burning fires of the rum bowl. It blew by everyone, one at a time, swirling its misty fragrance throughout the area. The turbulence was powerful, yet gentle. Jamison stood up and absorbed the twisting air. He had never felt more refreshed or renewed, and his eyes were wide open.

One by one, everyone started moving again. Their mobility inherently restored, they must have experienced what Jamison had encountered.

They all began to share what they had envisaged while under the spell. It was as if everyone was awakening to the world for the first time. They all had the same remembrance. The word was that they had been visited by God and that Jamison's and Lora’s wedding was the most blessed wedding that the island had ever seen.

CHAPTER 45 THE FUTURE

Study the past if you would define the future. Confucius

The miracle that occurred at the wedding made everything right again with the world, and the festivities resumed without incident. Jamison ordered the band to play and the jubilant guests celebrated into the early morning hours, drowning out the usual warble aubade of the songbirds. Everyone's spirits were high, and they danced and sang even though Paracelus was still out there plotting and scheming somewhere in the universe. No longer living with a constant feeling of uneasiness, Jamison and Lora had faith in God that he alone would be their protector. Jocosely guests expressed their adulation, and their generosity seemed opulent. Finally, the people grew weary, but they stayed to watch the sunrise together. The sun came up as it does everyday, and this act of God, though normally taken for granted, was appreciated by everyone on this morning and everyone gave thanks before they headed off to their homes. Jamison and Lora waited awhile watching the sun edge up over the eastern horizon.

Its red and orange hues breaking through the earth's atmosphere were mildly intense, but soft to their eyes. Jamison sat on the ground, holding

Lora who sat between his legs, leaning back against him. He loved her smell and he knew that he could sit there with her all day. But the wedding couple needed to properly bid farewell to some of the guests.

When their incredible adventure ended, things had been set right again and order was restored to the universe. Security seemed to be working again and that brought peace of mind to those whose job it was to protect. The world would never know about the near collapse of all government and religious rule, or the close disaster of the elements. The world would never know of the approaching proximal evil that practically broke through from the imposing celestial to the deciduous terrestrial. World leaders would never be made aware of the threat that nearly stripped them of all their power. Although the world was no "Utopia," there was now a soundness without imminent danger, impunity and ease without a furor. Hopelessness had been driven away by the travelers and now, another adventure was about to begin.

Their lives together would take them on another fabulous journey of life. With wings on their backs and the belief that through God's grace, they could do anything together, they would never place limits on their own abilities. Opening their feathers to the wind and closing their eyes,

they dropped from the highest mountain together, falling into the arms of faith that would allow them to soar higher and higher.

In the coming months, Jamison had fallen in love with the island that had become his home, and he had even worked on his Kreyol. By living there with Lora, he gained an understanding of the language and his dialect was coming along nicely as well. The fact that he had a wonderful tutor sitting across from him didn't hurt either, and sometimes he just stared into her eyes and occasionally brushed her face with his hand, when practicing. The newlyweds jointly decided to stay in Jamaica and to live out their lives there, never taking each other or anything for granted.

A penny pincher before meeting Lora, Jamison had a nice little bank account back home. They decided to invest in a tour boat that took vacationers out to experience the unspoiled picturesque coast and superb historical sites. The sheer raw nature seemed to shout romance in the relaxing hours of boating. Those who came aboard were encouraged to fish, sunbathe, take pictures, and snorkel. Passengers were encouraged to have a good time and forget the stress that pushed them to the point of a much needed vacation.

Jamison and Lora called their boat, "Soul Sabbath," in memory of their good friend Mieszko. They prayed that he had found the rest for his soul that he so desperately sought.

They hoped that the peace he searched for no longer eluded him and that, as God had rested on the seventh day after creation, Mieszko's journey had brought him to the land flowing with milk and honey, his Eden in the paradise of God. Because Jamison and Lora had brought the large diamond gifts from Comte back to this world, buying "Soul Sabbath" did not create a financial crisis for them. Jamison found a buyer in the States who paid handsomely for his red diamond. Any 9.46 carat diamond would certainly bring a fortune from any buyer fortunate enough to afford it, and Jamison's was no exception. Lora's diamond had been carefully locked away in a safety deposit box in a New York bank.

Now financially independent, the couple had the freedom to travel anywhere they pleased. Without the constant pressure of running for their lives, they could now live a life of leisure, spending the majority of their time on the island just enjoying each other's company and taking in life together.

Even though the island never got old and their days were filled with the wonder of one another, they eventually decided that they needed a change

of scenery. A trip to the States was just perfect, for they had unfinished business there. They agreed that a place on Madison Avenue or possibly a bargain sale in the Lower East Side might be nice. They booked a morning flight on Jamaica Air and spent about eight hours, including a short layover, dealing with airlines. They decided on the "Hotel Plaza Athenee New York" for their accommodations. Their suite was gorgeous, featuring a wonderful indoor atrium and a balcony with a scenic view of the city. The hotel's proximity to Central Park created a back garden for its rooms, and Madison Avenue shops were nearby. The hotel was magnificently situated on a quiet tree-lined street amid historic townhouses. They had chosen this hotel for its excellent and attentive service, its romantic ambiance and the relaxed atmosphere it provided. After check in, they ventured straight to their rooms, tired and weary from the trip. A much needed rest would be necessary before venturing out into the city. Jamison had an evening of "letting loose and whooping it up" in mind tonight." The plump pillows, soft white Belgian linens and down duvets were ever so soft and comfortable, and the couple instantly fell into a deep sleep. When the alarm sounded at eight p.m., they resisted the interruption, but they were hungry. Soon they were roused and dressed for an exquisite evening of dining in the hotel's fabulous restaurant, where they feasted on butter-poached Maine

lobster, served by the light of Murano glass chandeliers. Later, they held hands and kissed often as they walked around Central Park. No evening could be more perfect and this was just what the couple needed.

“It is so hard to believe what we have gone through in such a short period of time,” Jamison said, directing her to sit on the bench with him. She sat down on his lap. “Oh my goodness girl, what did you eat?”

She softly swatted him in the shoulder and answered flirtatiously, “The same thing that you did.”

“What do you think happened to everyone that we encountered?”
Jamison seemed to be reminiscing.

Lora replied, “I suppose they returned to their proper places in the universe or other worlds.”

“No one would ever believe our stories, would they?” Jamison queried.

Her mischievous grin always indicated that a kiss was coming his way. She laid a big one on him this time, and as she pulled away, she whispered, “Never.”

“Well then, I guess we have a secret to keep or at least a fabulous yarn to tell our children one day?” Jamison grinned.

“I like the sound of that. No, I love the sound of that!” she sighed.

Under a full moon in The Big Apple, they played in the shadows, concealing themselves from others until they were lost on the banks of the East River. They shared the same sky, the same universe and the moon reflected in their eyes like a spotlight in their hearts. This night could not last long enough and they were susceptible to every sense. They stayed together, lost in each other's love, until they recognized the sun intruding. They took their accessibility to one another's exploits back to the hotel and created a life. When the afternoon came, they realized that they had slept through the morning and were going to be late for their banking appointment. As they dressed for the appointment, their minds were drawn to the enchanting night before.

The bank manager's advice convinced them to diversify some of their accounts. All of the investments in which they had sunk their diamond money were glowing rich. After the meeting they were led to the vault which was an impressive fortress similar to an underground bomb shelter. The mechanical thick door looked like a supreme gadget impossible to breach without codes, security clearances, secret combinations, iris scanners, and thumb print readers that could detect any flaw in the impression of the friction ridges of any digit. After going through the biometric dual control measures, their safety deposit box was handed to

them by a bank official, and they were led to a private secure room where they would have the privacy necessary for an intimate viewing. Inside they expected to find a stack of American and Jamaican dollars, plenty of Euros, one of their handguns, and one of their diamonds. There were also certified copies of important papers, including their marriage certificate, deeds, and titles. Jamison inserted the key and turned the lock. Together they lifted the lid to inspect their most important possessions.

Opening the box was not unlike the excitement of opening a Christmas gift. The only difference was that Jamison and Lora remembered what they had placed into the box. As they lifted the lid, both Jamison and Lora



gasped and took a step backward. The color left their faces in shock and disbelief! At first glance everything they had placed in the box was still there. Nothing seemed to be missing. Miraculously, there was an additional item in the

box that sent cold chills down their spines. In the box, though neither had placed it there, was the long

silver cylinder along with its key inserted into the locking mechanism.

Disconsolate, their excitement faded into a paroxysm of endless

possibilities and uncertainties. Why did they suddenly feel

washed of all exoneration as accomplices in an unspeakable universal

injustice? Clearly, the universe was not finished with them.