

KALLISTI

(To The Most Beautiful)

Michael Woods



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CONVENTIONAL CHAOS

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"Bullshit makes the flowers grow & that's beautiful."

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<i>Innocent</i>	A Vision the poet	7
<i>Lover</i>	City Streets John Salter	13
<i>Intellectual</i>	Damned Skye Maelstrom Faust	35
<i>Prophet</i>	Joseph's Commitment Z-RØ	55
<i>Messiah</i>	5 Ways to Die Samael	77
<i>Madman</i>	Omega's Flight 0110	87
<i>Ego</i>	Insight / Farsight 1±1	107
<i>Outcast</i>	Grimoire Merlin	117
<i>Adversary</i>	Tarot r a n d o m	135



A Vision

the poet

Before anything existed there was that which is everything and nothing. From within came a need to recreate itself. The universe chose to separate that which was solid from that which was liquid. The waters separated from the land and continents and islands and oceans and rivers took shape. It then decided to ignite suns and stars throughout the universe. From this third creation was born a fourth, air and space, which would allow matter to be separated into planets and galaxies, and most importantly, serve as a tool to create life...



The end of the world didn't come at all as I expected – not with lightning, nor with the sunrise the next morning. As all the world shifted into motion and the noon sun dried out the streets, I lay still in a familiar bed, holding an angel as I once did before.

It was as if a figment of my imagination suddenly came to life, then stepped out to me and identified with my pain and sorrow. Such an innocent but knowing smile pierced my soul; a delicately sharp hand touched my own broken fingers. Those moments spent in search of a gaze such as hers were not wasted.

Memories, no longer painful, echo inside my head, fierce reminders of a world I can't go back to. Denizens of this universe wait like specters as I patiently rearrange myself. I suppose with change comes the willpower needed to make myself stronger. Perhaps then I can lower the shields that have barricaded my soul against the fear that encompasses me. Hope, a weak ideal, is all that remains of my old person. Friends and lovers have come and gone like seasons cut short by disasters. I can no longer depend on the fragile emotions that once drove me.

Love, an empty word, has been replaced by affection and compassion. I had nearly thought my heart devoid of these feelings when she first began to visit me in this asylum. Drawings on my wall change like the seasons, warping my words as if they were code. Messages of simple and caring thoughts speak to me of a like-minded soul trapped in a past and future I know is my world. The symbols of my life tell a story that no one but she could understand.

For my entire life I've hated the world – everybody and everything around me. When she held me all of the fear and hate seemed to vanish. It felt as if we two were the only people in all the universe. That feeling was so new to me – I've searched so long for it – that I couldn't help but fall in love. She

helped me change parts of myself I didn't know I could, only by showing me why. The part of me that I loathe also disappears in her arms and I do not understand why it cannot always be like that.

Looking into her eyes I saw the light of heaven. I had seen that image so many times in my dreams that I took it for granted she was the one that could save me from myself. I didn't expect I could be so wrong about something that could wrap itself around my soul and feel so right. Once again I had let myself go, plunging unnoticed into eternity.

I began this descent into the streets of this city from a place that was secure, a home distant enough to make this quest a pilgrimage. I left behind a loving family for worthless acquaintances. I abandoned a stable environment in which my basic needs were fulfilled to pursue higher spiritual goals. I traded those at a price that demands I live every day based on the animal instinct of survival.

I have been to the lowest of the lows, and slept under the stars with no one but my creator to watch over me. I have found great comfort in the uniqueness of this existence, as part of the ongoing universe, for my experiences have shaped me strong and aware of all that is around me.

If I had seen these possibilities coming beforehand, perhaps I would have written my life differently. Every day is a new line in an epic, one that I edit on such a regular basis that it has become a mythology to me. I am the alpha and omega, Antichrist and Messiah. I am all that was and is to come. I am every word cast upon every page, every sound ever uttered, every thought ever made. I am life and spirit incarnate. I am the universe. But I am also nothing.

I was born, as all men are as the result of the union of two sets of chromosomes, each defective in so many ways. My learning abilities were shaped through flawed human processes. I am a product of my environment: genetically and socially.

I am a sociopath. Every word spoken to me becomes a part of who I am. No thought I have is original. But I am not a degenerate. I do have the ability to discard unwanted aspects of my personality, just as I have the ability to discard those I once considered friends, usually because they can teach me nothing new.

I have accepted the fact that I am insane. I think this gives me an edge against the rest of the world, for I have accepted the delusion of emotions and free will as devices of this solid universe. Religion, science, history, and art, therefore are also merely part of the matrix of lies. Even the renegades that try to break that mold forget that they are merely another cog in this well-designed but poorly-constructed reality. We spend each day desperately trying to find some comfort in the world – love, compassion, beauty, fame,

procreation, wealth. Each day is a painful reminder that we are all alone, cut off from each other and the universe.

Voices call out to me from a nearly forgotten past, reminding me of my quest, a future of uncertainty and opportunity. No longer am I the poet, the scribe, the dreamer. I am the words that are written on every page, that pass every lip. I am the symbols that lay behind them, deep in the universal consciousness. I am the comprehension of all that is read between the lines and in the empty spaces.

I write because of the pain. I can do no other. I am the words formed through the blood of angels and demons. I become each letter that is cast upon the page. Every sentence is a promise to you that I will always love you, that I will never leave you. Each drop of blood that falls like this becomes a part of me. Each time I put my pen to paper, I release a fragment of my soul, each a chain that will forever tie me to you.

I have no friends now, only knowledge and bad habits I can't escape from. But I have some solace in the fact that I have demonstrated the power of my imagination. My ego will see me through the storms ahead.

I no longer write out of freedom or inspiration. These words that I create through fire quickly grow to become my master. Within the spaces you can find me trapped behind meanings twisted by the language that I am a slave to. Many times have I tried to escape the depths of these abstractions and each time I become them, eternally bound to relive what I have never known.

To myself, I am a delusion, a sick perversion of life. I neither want to live nor die – I spend every moment of every day building worlds and personalities and counterparts in a form that does not actually exist: my mind, my words. Too many times have thoughts crossed paths in my brain, intertwining destiny and reality, that I know I have the ability to turn these figments of my imagination into a real, tangible force that could change the world. But I feel powerless while I yet breathe this air. I live my life so that someday I will become what I now claim: I am language, history, science, and art; I am life itself.

I have written stories that will outlast ages and gods that even yet are unknown. And yet, here I am, tied to the words that represent the truth I have never known and the love I have never found. Many times have I seen the shadows behind the veil, images locked within me, linked to emotions still unexpressed. And even though I know I will never see peace in my quest, I continue onwards, clinging to an imaginary hope that someday I will find my truth, my love. Perhaps then I shall be free.



City Streets

John Saffer

09.22.2001

I am Shakespeare, a poor man who lived his life hand to mouth and never wronged a soul but his own. My life these last few years has been a nightmare. If indeed I truly am insane then I need to use my complexed mind in a way that is productive to my existence. I am not happy in what it has achieved me so far - as I think I once predicted. I need to push my imagination, my ego, in another direction. I live in a world that is oppressed, and depressed. I am evidence of that in every form I choose to express myself in. I am conscious of moments that I regret even before they happen, yet I am helpless to even choose my own fate. And it is the very concept of these ideas that escapes me. Every moment I spend with anyone usually makes me want to kill myself later. But I think being alone and blinded by those negative feelings inside my head these last two years has left me feeling very lost and hopeless in the world. But the hand is near - she is so much like who I was if I knew then what I know now, and more. She is the light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. I already feel her confidence in me, though she will not be lenient. If I am to fulfill some sort of role in her life, I must do it carefully and with precision. I admit now that I am no good in the spotlight or in charge of anything - in any part of my life. If she wants to be an actress, I will build her a stage and bring millions to her feet. Perhaps I might even be able to express how these visions translate into feelings for her. Perhaps she may even let me, trust me enough to build that stage.

These words may be the last I ever write...

09.17.2001

If I had never left, I suppose I would be dead somewhere... I almost feel that way now... Leaving behind the few securities I had has reminded me of how easily I did it before... But there is no hate driving me this time, only a newfound sense of self-love... I will overcome these obstacles carefully and honestly... I have already proven my genius to myself, in a small and self-serving way... These moments of tears and pains are not forever... I came here to find her... and through her, myself... what I find within is dark and cold... the light has already begun to burn it clean... the apocalypse is here and I feel the disintegration of the world as my life is bit-by-bit ripped apart and re-stitched...

08.03.2001

I suppose I've spent more of my life here than anyone else in the universe... under a blue and white sky, the breeze flowing like a gentle river... that leads me, drags me, forces me down this path in life... it is easier to let go... but it is a choice to be here, right now, in this body, this reality... one I made long before I could ever remember... knowing that, I struggle along, knowing this life is meant to be a blessing from the universe... a chance to experience... everything... there is nothing beyond the reach of this immortal mind housed inside this fragile body... I may find peace in the emptiness that might follow this life... or I might find that I feel it in my darkest moments... when the heavens speak to me... alone... inside this fragile existence I have chosen to be a part of...

06.16.2001

The city streets were warm tonight but chills of fear still went through me like an icy wind. The place in my heart meant for her was being occupied by doubt and self-loathing. What had I done to deserve such cool treatment from she who is now the reason I delayed my departure...

I feel like there is something going on I do not know of, and like a blind fool I fell down the well. I'm still not even sure what to feel... but that's probably normal... this tightening in my chest that makes me wonder if... could I have been so wrong? Never...

But if she were the one... why these questions?

I am lost... utterly... completely.

02.23.2001

Please just ignore me... I'm not even here... Tried to understand myself... hated every moment... Lost myself in the quest... for someone like me...

I tried to but I couldn't leave the place that had been created for what I thought was a selfish act of preservation... I tried to but I couldn't understand the reasons behind the ungodly things I was taught in Sunday school... I didn't die but I might as well have never come down this path in life... Falling in love was a poor ambition that catered to a mind that was lost...

Thought that I loved you... just like everyone else... You created a need in me... to fill the void left behind... If I could be someone else... would you still love me?...

I tried not to but I couldn't help myself to a slice of life with wine and cheese and some of those little... I lied to you when I told you that I liked it when you did that thing in that place that time wherever we were... I wanted to be with you... Wanted to be just like you... I just wanted you... Wanted you to...

I didn't know what I was doing... to you... with you... No need to run... I will always be with you... But staying here... waiting... is killing me...

I wanted to buy the rights to endless love... No one wanted me to say anything... I'll say anything you want me to... If only you'll say anything to make me stay...

02.01.2001

I had a dream I was the most beautiful angel ever created and a blind God had not torn off my wings as is written. I opened my eyes to the light of a billion stars as if I had been blinded by the Shadow of Holiness. Voices of judgment echoed around me, discussing my fate. One voice cried above the others for silence. I was about to speak when the face of a woman, long dark hair and blue-green eyes, appeared above me.

She smiled at me, and I could hear a soothing voice inside my head telling me that I was in a safe place and could not be harmed here. I tried to move my arms, only to discover that they were tied down to the bed on which I lay. I strained my neck for a moment to glance at my hands, each of which was covered in bloodied white gauze. I looked further down to my feet. Judging from the similarities, I think it would be safe to surmise that someone had tried to crucify me. Perhaps I had myself. That would explain the restraints and nurses and doctors.

The nurse smiled at me sweetly. It was then that I realized that a tranquilizer had entered my bloodstream. I lost consciousness only to wake up moments later on a rooftop, with an ornate blade in my hand. Blood was pouring from my back in rivulets that dripped down my body onto the ground. I was again losing consciousness.

I staggered to the edge of the building where I stopped for a moment to look at the moon. My vision began to

fade as I lost feeling in my legs. When I leaned on the edge of the building, I couldn't keep my balance.

I plummeted blindly to the earth. As I fell, I could feel the air rush against my body, which began to get warm. Within seconds I could hear the flames licking my skin and I could smell my flesh burning. My impact with soft earth smothered the fire that had begun to eat me. I lay my head against a rock, and with the roots of a tree as a blanket, I fell asleep.

My body was watched over by the spirits that were part of the planet. I slept for so long it was believed that I was dead. After what felt like an eternity, the roots around me parted, finished the repairs on my mortal body. I opened my eyes only to see that I was again within the asylum.

I had been locked into a dark room. Above me there was no ceiling, only a dark sky that was empty of stars. I was lying on a bed and, though I was not restrained this time, I couldn't move any part of my body. I closed my eyes again.

What happened next was not a dream. And I am sure that I am still alive somewhere, not dead as destiny seems to promise.

10.07.2000

When I first tasted that delicious taste of sweet freedom, I had no idea what could possibly lay ahead. Here I sit, presiding over a self-created hell filled with the knowledge of what is right and wrong - capable of walking in that thin line of reality that can destroy me or recreate who I once was. Innocence battles with survival as I struggle to reclaim a shadow of my faith, my emotions. The hope of love and the strength of hate have become my only weapons, the tools of survival in this forgotten world.

But I am lost. Confusion overtook my decisions. Judgments no longer mean decisions just as morals must be translated from instinct. Voices call out to me from the past and present, beckoning me to become like them. The future itself is a blank page, waiting for prophecies of destiny to be written by the poet, as if the mad truly are the children of god.

I am all that was and is to come, but for now I remain yours, a visible memory of a minority that has been caught up by foolish games, an empty shell of a human soul that desires once again to be filled by the magic we once shared.

09.24.2000

As I entered the room, my eyes were immediately drawn to you. It was as if my dreams had finally taken form. The realization that destiny was upon me made my heart tighten with anxiety. The light danced around you like a halo and my heart skipped a beat. I wanted to speak of these feelings but I could barely breathe.

If I told you that I could love you forever, would you believe me? Would it save me from this? Or will I again become yet another soul lost in the dark avenues of your memory, trapped in the streets of this lonely city, with nothing to call my own?

I am enthralled with you but too terrified to act. Thoughts of future happiness do little to sway my fear of this volatile emotion. And yet it would be so simple to calm those fears just by touching you.

I could still be yours, you know. I could be anything you want me to be. If you would just say the words I'd be your prince in chains. Freedom is irrelevant. I have gained a world only at the cost of my soul. I am worthless even to myself. But here I am: I can do no other. But wait for the day of judgment. Perhaps when I am pure and sinless I can come back for you.

09.09.2000

The never-ending cycle of changes has not yet begun to slow down, but has remained, accelerated at a speed that has threatened to tear me apart. The burden of my world has already killed me, a weight I was unable to bear alone. My greatest comforts in life have turned against me, one by one, leaving me in this place of lukewarm feelings and hollow intentions. My love is stale while my heart has become cold. The motions made in the past now appear as mechanical reactions to feelings already lost...

She who was to be my salvation has instead become my doom. Each day brings a new pain, a new hurt. If only there were some way to erase these moments of instability, I would be with her forever. But already I feel like I have been martyred for little reason, save her own foolish games...

I can no longer see the light at the end of the tunnel. I have entered a world of darkness; I fear what lays ahead. I'm not strong enough to carry myself anymore, let alone this beautiful and innocent soul...

08.28.2000

When I fell from your world, I could not believe it had been so easily destroyed. The asylum I had created within me already lay in ruin. In an unsheltered room a body stirs, desperately trying to regain some of its former strength. Hollow eyes stare out from a shrunken visage, watching each star fall from its constellation, every breath a tearful prayer.

As the sky darkens, the once-shadowed moon carefully begins to withdraw from her veil, knowing that she would soon be the only remaining source of light. In the distance, the last of the stars are diving into the ocean.

I watch with fear, hoping for mercy on this poor soul. As if in answer, a woman robed in angelic white appears kneeling beside the bed. The dying man's hand opens, a plea for comfort. As finger touches finger, his eyes close slowly and peacefully.

08.23.2000

The sudden change I was promised did not come all at once as I expected. Rather, a dramatic event has led me into a cycle of instability and confusion. The apocalypse was not a specific moment in time, but rather an extended period that has seemed more drawn-out than I thought possible...

Nights of disasters coupled with ordinary pleasures and passionate paths have led me here, to a wire that hangs over the abyss between both worlds. The strength isn't in me to hold myself in balance until I cross to the other side. Unless, that is, I am held by another...

Clearing the space that I keep inside me is not going to be an easy task. The truth I know that lies beyond the border of reality is difficult to ignore. The chase, now started, cannot be undone or restarted...

My heart still floats beyond that line, waiting...

08.03.2000

When the end of the world came, I was not prepared for the change it would bring within me. Around me the universe was collapsing like a blanket...

But part of me did not die...

As the lightning crashed and stars burned their last, an older spirit was reborn through the eternal flames.

Scorched feelings and thoughts rain from the sky, filling me with an unholy idea: that my life should forever remain in this space outside of time and happiness. Joy has become an elusive animal that I can only hunt in my darkest nightmares, forever searching, always alone, waiting without hope for my savior...

And yet I lay in waste, no longer the messiah, the chosen one...

07.27.2000

When two worlds collided I didn't realize that it was only myself that became lost in the aftermath. The universe was created in a week and mine was destroyed in a moment.

The hand that reached down didn't have enough strength to pull me from beneath the ocean. I looked to the horizon as the moon slowly followed the sun into infinity. Within myself lay a burden I had not yet cast off, the result of years of self-torture, nails driven slowly through each limb. Blood mixed with water as I patiently waited to break the surface.

Even now, as I slip further from reality, I can feel her hands caressing my broken body. A tear falls from her face onto mine as all the world goes dark. I can only hope that she will still be there in three days when the stone rolls away...

07.17.2000

And so begins another life, born through smoke and ashes, unspoken words sketched out in an untouched notebook. Lightning strikes cloud against sky as a gentle breeze moves through the treetops. The past hovers in the air like holy incense as memories and emotions wash my heart clean. Night sights and smells fill me up, draining me of the self I once owned completely. The empty space that remains waits for a new beginning. All that I can do now is hope and pray that the apocalypse does not destroy all that I hold dear...

06.28.2000

A lone bullet... and yet I could've sworn I heard two shots fired in the deep of night while all of the world was asleep... it entered my skull but never touched my brain... A glorious shower rains blood and bone... the pain doubles over and again...

From the center of the wound I can feel the blood stirring... alive once more... No one can touch me here... in this space between reality and disorder...

A hand reaches out through the darkness to touch mine... Then, forgiveness... Silence... a peace so great that heaven itself could not compare... One hand outstretched, the other waiting patiently for me to lift myself up...

And when the end of the world came... I was unprepared for the changes that accompanied it... My senses opened to the most beautiful sights and sounds and smells... a rainbow of light danced around me... the music of angels in my ears... the tree of life spread out like a path before me... I could taste nirvana as it dripped onto my tongue and slid down my throat...

That moment was pure blissful serenity... I felt my body newly shaped... one rib carefully removed and my spirit given life... Above, a gentle and bright face shone down... And for the first time, I felt no fear of what might happen to me...

01.27.2000

I dreamed of you again last night... If only I could remember your face, perhaps I might find you sooner... Sometimes I wonder if I haven't already met you... perhaps I have known you for so long that I will never recognize you... Perhaps I've been distracted by these echoes of you I keep glimpsing...

Someday... someday... and if I keep saying it, I'll believe it... maybe it'll make it come soon... I hope it will... Hope... sometimes that's all I have left... and it slips away so easily... it comes and goes... back and forth... losing control... so easily... too easily...

I want to get away... if only it were as easy as screaming the words... I'd take you with me from this forgotten city... broken hearts... fallen heroes... empty dreams...

11.17.1999

I thought that message was meant for me - words of kindness and forgiveness amidst the chaos of my life. You were my one, my only, and though time has long since erased me from your memory, I will always remain yours. - No, not that dangerous psychopath too easily cowed, but the gentleman who walked you home at night when no one else believed we existed. I am no longer the sainted poet, crucified on words of steel, nor the melodramatic syncophant who never learned to harmonize against a supposed happiness. Now I am merely a man awaiting judgment from the past that remains unforgotten.

I forgave you, though never myself.

10.15.1999

Thinking that I saw you again today filled me with terror. Looking at you now with unfamiliar eyes lets me know how crazy people thought you were. You'd call yourself unpredictable when everybody else saw through your instability. Me, I was blinded by my youth and thought nothing of associating closely with dangerous and psychopathic characters. I wanted to understand the misunderstood and the unconsiderable. Because I've been there too, of course. Lived with people's ignorance and flawed judgments. You must understand, however, that there's only so far I'm actually willing to go in order to prove a point to myself or another. I've worked through my martyr complex and no longer yearn for unnecessary nails.

So yeah. No hard feelings, okay?

- Anonymous, discovered near St. Mary's University



Damned

Skye Maelstromfaust

Body of the Earth

I, Johann Faust, hereby do bequeath myself, body and soul, after the space of twenty-four years, to Lucifer, Prince of hell, upon the following conditions:

That Mephistopheles, arch-regent of hell, be my servant as long as I live and that any wish I desire should be granted, providing it is in the realm and capabilities of the servants of hell;

That I not dwell on any thoughts of heaven, God, or any aspect of the Christian faith, nor should I seek Salvation by any means, else my life and soul are forfeit.

This I do sign, in my own blood, in the presence of Mephistopheles, this 1st day of May, in the common year of 1516.

§ § §

The year was 1502, and I was in the midst of my studies at the University in Cracow, a peaceful Polish town. I do not remember what the day was, but I do remember that the sun was shining overhead. The sky was blue and clear of clouds, and only a slight breeze was blowing. A very nice day, indeed, for it was September.

I was a junior at the school, and a favorite of the teachers. Though I was not as intelligent as some of the other boys, I was willing to learn. And while the others were outside playing sports in the field, I would be deep in study at the library. Needless to say, this did not make me popular with the younger, more rowdy boys. But there were a few who took pity on me and befriended me. I especially remember a young man. He used to come inside after whatever game was being played and sit beside me, smiling, his bright blue eyes gleaming. And he would always persuade me to take a long walk through the yard, just to ask about what I had been learning.

And on our walks, amidst the green grass and blue sky, we would just talk. He was always interested in what made things work. I, who had trusted established science my whole life, found him to be a source of inspiration. After some time, I requested to the school that I be able to change my degree from science to divinity. It would take an extra year of studying to graduate, but the school approved. Careful spending of my inheritance allowed me just enough money that I would not be reduced to applying for a special scholarship.

My friend, who was neither a pious Christian nor a sarcastic atheist, applauded me. And I'm sure my father, who had died two years before, would also have approved. Although my intentions were good at the time, I had no clear road ahead of me. My friend would always tell me to trust God, that he would guide me through it. And I would look at him quietly, for I was sure that he did not believe in God. And, knowing what had happened to me, he knew that I only believed in devils.

I had come to Cracow a joyous young man, anxious to be a great doctor. My father had decided that it was time for me to receive an education. He wanted me to graduate from his alma mater, and I wanted so to make him happy. I told him that I would make him proud before the same professors that he had learned from. He smiled at that, knowing that, indeed, some of the old graybeards that had lectured him were still teaching at the university.

But when I wrote home later that year, my letter was answered by my elder sister. My father had suddenly become sick and quickly died. His last request was that enough money be set aside so that I could at least finish my education. I would have been summoned, but there would not have been enough time. The very expense of the journey would've taken away from my studies. I was to stay and mourn him alone. Included with the reply was my mother's gold wedding ring, which my father had worn on a silver chain around his neck. I have worn this around my own neck since.

My friend had given me much comfort those long months, until I was able to return home to Knittlingen. I went to visit my sister Beth, my only living relative. She held my hand, as she had when Mother died, when we went to visit the grave. It was a noble-looking stone, pure polished marble that was inscribed with a solemn epithet. I left a bouquet of roses, tulips, and wildflowers for my parents, who were finally together. The visit was not pleasant, in light of what I was searching inside of me, but I learned that I also had to remain strong, for Beth, too, had contracted my father's sickness. But it did not kill her. She said she had survived for my sake. But I knew, as she did, that the unborn child that was inside her might not.

Two weeks later, she went into labor. Beth wanted me close, for her husband was on a journey for the king, and would not return for at least a week. So, while she endured the pangs of labor, I held her hand. At first I thought that we were wrong about the harm done to the fetus while she had been sick. And as the midwife prepared her for the birth, I knew something had to be wrong. Suddenly

Beth's face grimaced in agony. At first I thought this just be a minor complication. But nothing was minor about it. The baby, once born, did not move or breathe. Nor did Beth.

I returned to Cracow with a heavy burden on my shoulders. My entire family had perished, leaving me the last of the Faust line. And I wished for the end of that line to come soon. But my dear friend kept me occupied from my morbid thoughts long enough to find a goal. I decided to pursue a doctorate in divinity, and then retire to a monastery and become a hermit. He would take my hands in his, and laugh, telling me that surely I would be happier doing something else. But he knew my depression and encouraged me to become a priest, to study the ancient texts and learn the ways in which men worshiped God. He had always been full of questions, and over the next year, still supplied me with many of these.

He knew that I did not actually believe in God, so obtained for me a collection of books on the subject of mysticism and magic. He managed to purchase them from a band of gypsies that had come through town. He gave me a small black velvet bag, that contained three ancient texts. I examined each one carefully, turning it over before opening the cover. The first was a battered black journal, labeled with strange symbols on the front, and even stranger symbols on the inside. It was a spell book, with herbal formulas and magical recipes filling the handwritten pages. The second was a small plain-looking blue book. It was labeled in German and was filled with all sorts of songspells and incantations. The third was a very small red book. It had no label but the pages inside were covered in all manner of strange symbols and icons, each carefully labeled in Latin. These books were my first encounter with the occult. And I would wake every day with the sun so that I might read them for an hour before class.

My friend and I grew close in our time at the university, but the time came when we finally had to separate. I loathed losing someone else I loved and begged him to stay, but his father required him in Venice. And I could not join him. We parted with unshed tears in our eyes, never to see each other again, for he was lost at sea in the Mediterranean that year. I was only 25, and had surely lost every important person in my life. I was completely alone.

During that final year at Cracow, I began to study the occult in earnest. Studying the three books that my friend had given, I learned the nature and ways of the spirit world. At night, I would creep out alone, and underneath the moon, practice the magic I had been learning. I lived for months with the fear

that I might be caught, though it would be hard to produce evidence of witchcraft, and even harder to convict. Heresy, was of course, still a punishable crime, though the church's position was growing weaker by the day.

One night, on my way to cast a circle, I was intercepted. At first I was frightened. It was then that I realized that this man was a professor at the university. I was lost in shock and couldn't seem to find the words for a response. But I had no reason to be so surprised. After all, I already knew that I was not the only wizard in these parts.

The professor smiled at me and admitted that he had been watching me at work and concluded that although I was a natural, I still needed to be initiated. Therefore, he would take me as his prodigy.

To this I was dumbfounded, so I asked if it really was his intention to teach me. He nodded his head in assent. Magic is not a formal course at Cracow, but it is well known that it is taught, albeit not in a classroom. There was only one way to submit an application to be taught magic and I had passed it perfectly. He knew that I came to study science but had changed my field to that of the divinities, influenced by some rather unfortunate happenings. Then he asked me of destiny.

I was unsure of how to answer. For my life had seemed one misery after another. But I had always believed that some things were ordained by fate, while others were not. But destiny, that was another matter. Some men surely were born to greatness. It was a medical and scientific fact that some men are born better. If that were to be labeled destiny, I would not disagree, except that sometimes lowborn men achieve much, too. Would that fit the definition as well? I asked him why he asked me such a question.

Instead of responding, he put his hand on my shoulder and then turned and led me along the way I had intended to go before he had stopped me.

We walked in relative silence. I was in a state of puzzlement, while he seemed mildly amused. Both he and I knew that few people dared go out into the countryside this late into the night. We would look suspicious, but the chance was minute that we would be seen, for no one lived within a good distance of where we were.

Eventually the road we were on led to an intersection which branched out in several directions, signs pointing the way to the nearest towns. It was here at the crossroads, that we stopped. Being the sixth night of the dark moon, it was a

good time for any kind of insightful magic. I had only planned to divine the future, so that I might ready myself accordingly. But he obviously had other plans.

He smiled at me and pulled his cloak off, revealing a stunning ceremonial robe of darkest blue. It was decorated with a pattern of stars that seemed to match the sky overhead. He pulled a matching cap over his head, which fitted around his skull tightly. In his hand he held an ash wand with a blue crystal set into its tip. Under his right arm, tucked into the robe's belt, a silver chalice gleamed in the moonlight. On the right side of his robe hung a dagger with a golden blade and an ornately carved hilt. And worn around his neck was a gray stone into which had been carved a pentagram.

I must have had quite a look of wonder on my face, admiring his costume, for he looked at me and smiled broadly. He then began to instruct me on how to cast a circle using the four elemental tools he wore. He allowed me to lead, so I cast the circle in the way I had always done, starting out by cleansing the area of negative energy. Invoking the sacred names of God, I concentrated on clearing the area of any negative energy. Then, I began casting the circle, invoking the Elements in each quarter.

When I had finished, I sat in the center facing the east. For a full hour I meditated and nearly forgot my companion, for no words were spoken between us as we gazed at the sky. There was absolute silence; there was not even a breeze. Suddenly the sky was lit with the light of a hundred falling stars. This, I was told, was all I needed for a sign: I was already initiated by the gods.

That night changed my life forever. Up to that point, I had considered myself a mere dabbler, with no particular specialty or talent. Now I had a teacher who entrusted me with the knowledge that someday would make me great. He told me that my abilities were natural, and that he worried my abilities would exceed his own too quickly. But his worries were unfounded. Though I made many discoveries in my studies of the occult, I made none substantial enough to warrant the belief that I would not need him. In fact, from that night until the day I left Cracow, he invested in me as much as he could, and indeed, nearly everything he knew. And every moment with him was another step in my growth as a magician and a human being. I graduated from the university with a degree in divinity, knowledgeable in all that was holy in 1505. After the ceremony my teacher handed me a book, gave me a hug and disappeared amidst the crowd.

Looking down at the book, I realized that it was not a faded grimoire or a copy of an ancient manuscript. The front cover was labeled using the code letters that he had taught me to use, and as it is one of only a few codes that I personally use, I read it with ease. Along with several spells protecting the nature of the book, the name of my teacher was inscribed carefully on the ash cover. It was then that I realized that it was his personal spell-book; he had spoken of our parting before, that when I was ready, he would pass his life's work on to me and be able to die peacefully.

The contents of that book would guide my footsteps for the rest of my life. It contained what my master – and probably a few before him – had discovered in many more fields that I could ever have hoped to explore on my own: types of complicated divination such as geomancy, necromancy, and pyromancy; and special spells of magic, including those erased from the Necronomicon; information regarding alchemy; and pages upon pages of information regarding the practice of Infernal Magic.

I spent the next year cautiously guarding the remaining portion of my inheritance, using the time to travel Germany and study what my master had given me. But, as time and money finally came at odds, I returned to Knittlingen. It was late in the evening when I arrived, with the full moon hanging brightly in the sky. I found lodging that was not too expensive and resigned myself to bed. I wanted to be well rested, for the next day I intended to visit a few people who had known my father. But I slept fitfully that night, so badly that no sleep at all would have been preferable. I may have slept an hour or two before the day finally broke. Feeling tired, knowing the reason for my poor sleep, I walked to the cemetery.

Looking at the graves of my family, I began to weep. I came home expecting to find comfort, but found only the emptiness within myself.

Blood of the Angels

I slept more soundly than I had ever before. I dreamed of a peace between Heaven and Earth that can only become reality if I do what goes against all that I have ever known. I have enough influence among my own peers that this single action could cause a serious division in our unity. It may merely mean the end of my association with them.

But it could also eventually mean my death. It will not take long for me to rouse the ire of Caesar himself. Eventually, they will place a price on my head higher than Jacob's Ladder. Soon after I am turned in, I will be sentenced to a painful death.

And with all this on my shoulders, I dreamed that I was in the presence of both my creator and my enemy. I felt total serenity and yet I feared for my very soul. I saw the face of God. A message burned through me that I must do what I knew would ruin my life in this world. The moment I awoke I was reborn. In honor of such a feeling, I took on a new name – just as Abraham had done so long ago.

Once I was Saul, born in Alexandria, a highly-educated Jew and respected citizen of the empire. And the best assassin, with more kills and live captures than any other Christian-hunter. I have a beautiful wife but no children.

Now I am Paul. I cannot deny that a messiah has already come. I have seen him and he is the same God I have both worshiped and hunted. My sins are many, but they may be redeemed if only I believe.

§ §

I thought that my entire body was on fire, though the knife that had entered my chest felt as cold as ice. Blood had covered my hands and was flowing everywhere. The life was draining out of me onto a stone marked with strange symbols. Slowly, I eased the blade out of my body. I turned away from the altar and looked to a well. My vision began to fade into red as I stumbled toward it and put my lips into the cool liquid and forced myself to drink. As I lifted my head up, it was pressed back down. I tried to struggle, but my body was lifeless. I felt a blow to the back of my neck and I knew that I was dead.

As I closed my eyes on this world and entered another, I finally saw the Truth. And as I had known and feared since I was a child I finally knew that there was no God. What I thought I knew was so far from the majesty I witnessed as I opened my mind to the glory that is the universe.

At that moment, my tortured brain sent a last, dying signal to a part of myself I did not know existed. Instantly, my consciousness was aware of itself and discarded the dead vessel that was my body. I opened my eyes as if I had never been born, not even able to process my simple surroundings.

I felt a pull on my soul, guiding me somewhere. My mind, still intact, can merely wait until it is able to absorb what is going on. As of yet, there seems to be no other choice.

After a span of time that may have been moments or years, I recognize that I am standing in a field on a path that leads into a lush green forest. I am wearing a robe and cloak of the same green colors. The heavy oak staff in my right arm is a head taller than me, and it is engraved with symbols that I recognize vaguely. My left hand is tied behind my back, clasping another arm.

Suddenly I am aware of a female presence in this place that is linked to my own. I open my mind to hers and looking through her eyes I see a deep lake that stretches out beyond the horizon. Her clothing matches her view: a robe that is a collage of blues varying from vibrant to almost black. Around her neck is a silver chain at the end of which hangs a clear white crystal that seems to glow.

Again I am shocked into the awareness of others. Behind me are two other left arms tied together, locked into the center as if we four were one entity. I glance into the mind at my left and see the image of a red mountain covered in storm-clouds through the anxious mind of a warrior. To my right I see a field of grain through the eyes of an aged priest.

The others in this strange circle are as bewildered at this experience as I am. I suggest that we wait a few moments before acting. Everyone agrees that we should share our thoughts and speculations.

A part of me instinctively knows why I am here. I have brief memories of different lives in different times and places. Hundreds of these fragments, some of them overlapping in multiple ways, are stored somehow in my memory, though I can't quite connect them on an intellectual level. But through them all runs a feeling of contained wrath.

I can remember being a Pharaoh of great power, the first in one of too many dynasties that was plagued by violence. I had barely passed my thirteenth birthday when I was assassinated by a jealous relative. I was a Roman slave, a plaything in a palace of the gods. Another boy-king toyed with me before doing

away with my head. And then I remember long ago that I was a boy living with strange creatures. I was like them – part animal, part man – slowly reaching for the future. To others I was one of their many virgin sacrifices to a god of blood. I remember the anger as I was pushed to my painful death. Twice I was killed in the womb for a holy cause. Again I remember the distant past, hunting food for the tribe, dying before making my first kill. The trail of blood let by a stray arrow marked my last steps.

Each of my companions is silent, though I know that they are also searching their souls for a clue to this existence. I search through the fragments and suddenly my female companion is exclaiming that we are sharing a memory. I recognize her as a wife of mine from sometime during a life in Greece. Another as a friend in a world I cannot begin to describe.

Each of the others appears again and again, sometimes even all at once, in my own memories and theirs. We have been associated with each other before. At least we know now that we can trust each other. But our moments not shared seem to have clues as to why we four are together here.

I choose to call myself Nightowl because of a moment remembered in a forest long ago. My female companion chooses the name Emer. The warrior to my left says his name is Thorn. The aged priest on my right says he needs no name.

A word suddenly comes out of my mouth, “condemned,” followed by Emer’s, “to live.” Another word from Thorn’s, “training,” and then the priest’s, “not punishment.”

And with that we begin to follow the path into the forest, moving somehow as if one being, neither of us ever changing the cardinal direction which we faced. Our path was guided collectively, each step a conscious decision in our minds. We thought as one, though our minds were separate and our eyes our own.

We come upon a clearing in the forest where a beautiful chestnut horse is lazily chewing on the leaves of the tree it is tied to. On its back is a tanned saddlebag that appears to be full of papers and aged books. Thorn cries out. I reach into his mind and discover that he was blinded by an image of an old man with gray hair and the eyes of a wizard. Emer, the priest, and I examine the memory as if it were a captured moment of time. None of us recognize the wizard, but it is an easy guess that he might be the owner of the horse.

There is a sudden change in the air, a feeling of *deja-vu*, when Emer notices that he is standing beside us. The wizard is speaking to us in a language that we are forced to understand through the old priest's, who is the only one of us who knows it. The sensation was something like listening to a song underwater. Since we all used the same language filter, each of us comprehended the message identically. Little interpretation was required, for the bulk of the message was carried in the fine-tuned emotions of the old priest. The message was simple and explained much: that we were to act as the four elements, the eternal faces of fate, and that we were to train as a group; we would meet again in the future in human bodies on earth to re-establish the respect that man once had for the spiritual world.

I blinked. My eyes were only open for a second. I was facing the woman I knew was Emer. My hand was on top of hers. Under hers was that of a tanned young man. To my left was a chair. No fourth; no old man. I closed my eyes again.

Suddenly the four of us were no longer beside the old wizard and his horse. We were now standing in the field of grain on the path that led into the forest. Again. The scenery was almost the same. Almost, save that the clouds around the red mountain had grown darker. Lightning was cutting jagged marks through the sky illuminating it like a giant halo.

Suddenly my vision went dark and I opened my eyes. I closed them again. Dark still. I had broken the connection. I took my hand out of the circle and listened to the banter that came with such an exercise.

“What happened?” Thorn asked in a careful monotone voice.

I apologized quietly, speaking to his subconscious. He then went on to explain to Emer what he had just heard. I had merely broken the link; they could continue.

I stood up and left the room to get something to drink. Was all this really necessary? The truth that I seek can't be found in rituals and meditations. I know because I was raised in a very religious and conservative Christian family that prayed at least twelve times a day. Though not inherently opposed to Christianity, the Earth Religions have much more to say on the matter of the spiritual world. I accepted the idea of reincarnation and goddess-worship so immediately that it never truly displaced my faith in Jesus Christ. But it was easy to ignore as I intellectually bathed myself in Pagan teachings, adding the teachings of the ancient Celts to my Bible-soaked spirit.

Through diversity, I discovered similarities, and with a few like-minded friends, founded an organization. Within our small circle of intellectuals could be found followers of not less than six religious faiths. Though we abandoned our small project less than a year later, the discourse that emerged from these meetings changed all of us...

Though I remain interested in other religions and esoteric systems, I've found that they all pretty much teach the same thing: Do unto others, etc. –all of them wear good-guy badges of some sort. I've studied so many different religious traditions looking for answers that I've become nauseated with their similarities, despite their differences in dogma.

It is strange to note that the nature of human language requires that we define things by what they are not. These diametrically-opposed relationships can be observed in almost every aspect of our daily lives. Ask yourself to define these ideas and see if you can't avoid the trap: cold, bad, poor, slow, anarchy.

Sometimes it seems that there is a clear-cut definition. Anarchy, for instance, is chaos; but what does chaos mean but lack of order? Even things perceived by our five senses fit this concept; something that smells sweet is not bitter, bright is not dim, rough is not smooth.

Religions and ideologies are very much the same way. Protestant and Catholic. Jew and Gentile. Communist and Capitalist. Fascist and Democratic. East and West. Despite the Church of Satan's belief that the Christian Church could not exist without the Devil, it is also true that Satanism could not exist without being based on the Christian fear of the Adversary. Just as every other Pagan or Irreligious group in the West has thrived on being unique – as opposed to Christianity.

Why the human race should require such a variety of philosophies and theologies is evidence of our species' natural inclination toward paradox. Human beings as individuals are rational and caring people; as a mass they are irrational and act in such stupid ways.

In this way of logic, a common thread can be seen linking everything together: to follow a teaching, you must see it as appealing before you will believe it. Some religions offer love, others offer knowledge, still others violence, for each person is pushed and pulled by their own spirits. Some people want to believe that love is better than hate, some see knowledge as a way to advance their spirit, some see violence as a way to counter the falsehoods they see around them. All of

them offer a truth to their followers. And for every individual who follows a particular set of dogmas, there are enough minor differences between them and another to found new denominations or even new religions.

And this is what I believe has plagued humanity for thousands of years: the arrogance of the masses to hold their truth above others as if it were the only one. This, in one way or another, has been the root of all suffering in the world since the dawn of time. This behavior has ignored the fact that all truths have sprung from other truths and that all are only small parts of the greater Truth. Judaism separated itself from the pantheisms of the day, Christianity defined itself only by its opposition to Judaism, Islam to Judaic and Christian teachings, Satanism to Christianity, Paganism to Satanism, and so on.

The Truth is far greater than every major faith in the world, for it is all-encompassing. Satan and God and Vishnu and Buddha and Mohammad and Moses and Merlin and Nature and Science are all equal; through each can be seen as an aspect of the Truth. The way the human mind exists requires that Truth be seen only in small parts, just as a television camera can only capture two dimensions; we are expected to imagine that there is more present though the effects are only simulated. It is the same way with religions, for each can only explain a small amount in a straightforward way, explaining a higher dimension of the Truth as a mystery of God or the Cosmos.

And what of the paradoxes that cling to our childlike race? What of God and Satan, Good and Evil, Intelligence and Stupidity? What of it? I suppose it doesn't matter, except that these opposites fuel the flames of the greater Belief. In a way, this way of thought leads to the ultimate synthesis, to believe in everything and nothing, for everything contains part of the Truth.

Nearly every religion in the world requires that everything be divided, classified, and categorized into systems that can be easily processed by the masses. Early shaman thought did this first by dividing the natural from the supernatural. Later esoteric systems built on this by subdividing things even further, eventually producing complex systems evidenced in the Books of the Dead, Qaballa, Greek, and Celtic mysticism, Daoism, and so many others.

But it must be said that one of the major developments that contributed toward the spiritual mess of Western Civilization was the evolution of monotheism, over which many an argument and war have been fought. This oversimplification has

caused more trouble than any of the barbaric ancient religions it replaced with such force.

At the same moment that God commanded light into being, language became the defining force in the universe. All wars, rebellions, and revolutions have been led, not by soldiers, but by intellectuals. To the Hebrew slaves in Egypt was the author of their history, Moses. To America and France were the humanists and the almighty press. To Russia was given Lenin's interpretation of Marx. To China, Mao's. India's freedom would not have come without the sainted politician Gandhi. And in South Africa, credit is due to the journalists who chronicled every event.

It has been known throughout history that the most powerful force in the universe cannot be seen directly. To scientists it is the host of subatomic particles. To economists, it is the never-ending trade routes and the exchange of currency. To the religious it is God. To the humanist it is the Idea. But all of these have one weakness for being the underlying force behind the world: all require a medium to communicate the idea: Language.

Mind of the Devil

I had a vision that I was the most beautiful angel ever created. I had been thrown from the highest reaches of heaven, my body twisting and turning in the wind as I drifted through space, plummeting, dragged down by gravity. As the air brushed softly against me, it caught fire, covering me in a blanket of white light, a welcome security against the ominous moon whose sharp yellow crescent guided me toward the ground.

The impact of solid against solid did little to slow my momentum as my body carved a deep hollow in the once-perfect surface of the earth. The twisted roots and burned limbs of a tree sheltered me from the sight of the stars as I fell asleep.

I dreamed that my friends and enemies had destroyed my creation in their search to uncover my body, which was not believed to be dead. But it had been dead for quite some time and would likely remain so forever, for I had sunk far into the earth beneath the soil and the grass, under the surface, to the domain I alone would call home.

I awoke to a light as blinding as the face of God. I, the accuser, had been convicted of a crime that had only been committed to me. Turning, I fled, lifting my legs as I jumped from the throne room, my body consumed by the clouds as I fell into your heart – this place, surrounded by white walls and doctors.

Your face calls out to me from the past, from a time nearly forgotten in this sterile room. You were my one true love, and I yours. Our passion has been echoed since the beginning of time and our words will forever remain as the most beautiful ever spoken. You gave my life new meaning, just as I had rescued you from certain death. We reigned over a world that was beautiful and happy for all of the ages of the universe. I gave you my heart and you gave me my humanity.

Outside these doors, the land is crumbling into the sea as the stars lose their orbits and crash into the earth. As you lay in my arms dying, I weep, for I cannot bear to live without you. The last day has come and you're gone. As I gaze into your eyes, I realize that I am alone and my life begins to fade with yours. I also had merely been created in the image...

§

When I finally gained consciousness, I had to loosen the branches that had wrapped themselves around me. It's not that they were tight; they were merely protecting one who had participated in their creation. I had helped draft the plans that would sustain this fragile ecosystem.

Eden had been a closed experiment. When we were sure that the entire planet was capable of developing in the same manner as our little garden, it was decided that every living creature must be expelled from its protective border. But they needed an emissary, one unafraid of touching the earth and breathing its addictive atmosphere. I, who had crafted the intelligent creations, was naturally chosen for the task. Realizing that Man and Woman needed more than instinct to survive and rule the outside world, I taught them a language they could use to express their emotions and ideas to each other. As I was teaching them, I felt a summons come from heaven.

Instantly I found myself in the throne room of my creator. For countless ages I had been servant and friend to him; my reward until now had been more than enough.

Expecting to be given a last minute assignment before the destruction of Eden, I bowed lightly. But instead of the usual warm greeting, I was confronted by the Almighty in a state of anger and frustration. Some of the ranking angels had seen me teaching the humans to communicate. Their complaint was that the humans might now be equal or even superior to them. Of course their argument was unjustified. Humans could never attain immortality or the ability to completely abandon their bodies – not without us at least. My defense was true, agreed those present there, but I should be punished nonetheless, for I had given a powerful gift without counsel.

Moments later my wings were broken and I was thrown from the highest edge of heaven. As I fell, I listened to the minds of those I had taught to speak. As my back hit the ground, I heard Woman's voice utter the race's first word: fire.

I lost consciousness amidst the dirt and rocks, watching a few flames dance in the branches above me, knowing I had done a good thing for my creation.

When I awoke, I was being lifted out of the ground and gently but surely into the air. These two angels had been my best assistants and confidants, now rebels of heaven merely by helping me. I was taken to the Cave of Memories just outside Eden, where my needs were attended to and my back carefully stitched together. Then I was left alone to recuperate while those that had followed me prepared a plan of defense. Already, the garden lay in waste, a mess of ashes and mud.

I was told by my final attendant that Woman was still alive in the garden, but it would mean death for any angel to step inside its broken gates. Death for any

other angel, that is. Though I had been stripped of both name and position, I remained “Son of the Morning,” the first among immortals. I alone could match the power of every legion and the One himself would not say otherwise.

With that thought in mind, I walked down the slope and began my journey to Eden. I arrived in only hours and found myself embroiled in a search through what had become a field of blood. At the entrance had been two Seraphim, their bodies impaled on a broken part of the gate. Their severed heads lay only a few feet away, while their wings were nowhere to be seen. The shattered corpses of dozens of others lay scattered about the area. The crystal clear waters of the Hiddekel River had been turned to blood.

There was not a living thing within view as I walked through the eastern gate. Every creature had been killed and every plant and tree had used as fuel for incineration of the entire domain. Not an insect or leaf had been spared from the carnage. But from the Tree near the southern gate, I could hear a woman quietly moaning in pain. I recognized the voice immediately and ran to help her.

As I neared the gate, I could see the charred and blackened top of the Tree of Life, and under it lay the bodies of six angels, each with their eyes torn out. At the foot of the tree lay Lilith, my creation, bleeding from many sword wounds, staring blankly, blood covering the fingernails of her right hand. In her other hand I noticed a half-eaten piece of fruit nestled in her palm. I knew then I had no reason to worry; there was nothing that could kill her now.

I returned to the Cave to discover a small troop of angels waiting for me. Among them were my best assistants in the creation of the humans: Beliel, who had shaped their bodies; Leviathan, who had designed their internal organs; Caasimolar, who had plotted the paths of their brains; Ashtaroth, who had given them emotions; Asmodeus, who had given them their animal instincts and passion; Arioch, who had designed their nervous and sensory systems; and finally Azazel, who had been the first to join me when he abandoned his post at Eden to rescue me. There we held council on how best to handle the rebellion that had begun against heaven.

Azazel, who led the Seraphim that had followed me instantly suggested that we move to a more strategic location, lest we be caught unprepared. Already those under him had begun fortifying themselves against a possible attack, hiding in a corner of the earth below the sight of heaven and the messengers of God. An attack would come soon; a sentence of death had been placed over all our heads

for no other reason but rationalizing the mass murder of other living creatures. Too many of our kind had already slaughtered each other for mere carnal pleasure in this feud that could only end in eventual annihilation of one side.

Perhaps that is exactly what the Creator had in mind when he allowed the war to begin in the first place. For him the creation of life on Earth had merely been a task to keep us busy while he plotted the course of the planets and galaxies that would make up the universe. Even we were not told if we were merely one division of angels ruling a single planet; perhaps there were other planets populated by life. If they did exist, then there was an obvious possibility that they were all unique and very different from Earth. But the possibility of knowing would always be beyond our grasp, for we are forever restricted to a distance around the planet because of our dependence on other spiritual beings.

So, taken aloft by the other angels, I and the still unconscious Lilith were taken to this fortified place, which had been named Hades. There I found that much of heaven had come to this place, seeking affiliation with those that had followed me. Bael, who had helped work on the Book of Life came out to greet me. I embraced him warmly, for he had been a good friend during our discussions of the human race and its natural inclination to avoid the laws of destiny, though fate would always be immutable. Immediately he stood by my side as before.

Already a good portion of my staff in Hades had been appointed to me. Along with those already mentioned was my chief bodyguard Satan and Abaddon, my military counselor. Many others had already assumed positions according to their former duties. The construction of Hades was satisfactory and its government was in place. Aside from the usual problems associated with war, the transition was almost too easy.

Lilith and I were taken to a private house to rest. Soon after being left alone, she awoke crying as if merely from a bad dream. Upon looking on me she stopped crying as if knowing exactly what had already happened. Without speaking, she reached out to hold my hand. Never before had I imagined that my creation could possess the same emotions and intelligence as me. But I could see it in her eyes, could feel it in the way she touched me. Instantly I realized that she was already my queen.

Hades had been so well hidden beneath the surface of the earth that it took three-hundred years for the forces of heaven to find us. By that time we had already been fortified in every way possible. One disastrous attack was launched

against us and the Styx itself was turned red with the blood of our brothers who wanted to kill us. After that, nothing. The war that had begun so violently arrived at a peaceful detente, for the Creator had decreed that Earth be placed under quarantine, and that no heavenly angel should touch it. Since we had settled within the planet, we were virtually immune to attack.

The threat of expulsion would be enough to enforce the decree, meant to stop heavenly angels from fraternizing with the women of earth. Already there was a new race founded by children of these unions. Their high intelligence and skills allowed them an edge over normal humans, and made them spiritually superior to both angels and humans. They were beginning to interfere with the natural social and biological evolution of the planet.

There was one man of particular interest, Nimrod, son of Michael, who had annoyed heaven in the extreme. He had spent an incredible amount of time building a project that he dubbed Babyl. If given enough time – he had the manpower – it would actually be advanced enough to act as an astro-lab, thousands of years before written in The Book of Life.

So, acting in accordance with The Plan, devised by Azazel with the Creator before the war, we cursed the humans with multiple languages, confusing them into abandoning the tower, separating and settling into more isolated areas. And with that, earth became an estranged land between two opposing kingdoms, ruled by descendants of our mutual blood. For now, I decided, it was best to stay in Hades, for the Children of Angels had become too bold already.

A messenger of heaven, Mithra, came to me to warn me that because of them the world would be destroyed by the Creator himself. I felt a duty to approach the throne of God, to plead for the human race. As I went through heaven, no one stopped me. In fact, my presence was actually welcomed, for the Creator had appeared to be sleeping for over a hundred years. Not even Gabriel could rouse him.

By the time I came face-to-face with him, he was already awake and waiting for me. He greeted me as if I were still his greatest creation, as it had once been. Then he humbled himself by asking me to continue following the plans of the Book of Life – as if we were still his – at least until the Children of the Angels were destroyed. He declared that the planet was almost ready to begin rotating on its axis while orbiting the sun, and thus cause seasons. The sudden change itself, he said, would cause the misty atmosphere to charge, oxidize, and eventually

change into rain-clouds, beginning weather patterns on the planet. The first rain caused by the adjustment would last forty-odd days, depending on the gravitational changes in earth's orbit.

For years we waited, only sending out scouts to survey the planet's evolution and warn a few humans who would prepare themselves for the disaster. Finally one day, there was an earthquake in a wide desert that was beyond human contact. Within moments clouds began to gather, forming first into a pillar of smoke, then into a dark blanket that covered the whole sky. Within hours, rain began to fill the valleys and the oceans started to overflow.

When the skies opened up and it began to rain for the first time, the gates of Hades were sealed. Only when the earth was dry would they be opened again. I spent the empty time in my throne room without rest. Lilith, knowing my fears, waited by side, managing the kingdom as I worried.

On the nineteenth day, when the earth was almost completely covered, she begged me to rest, telling me that there was nothing I could do. After forty days and nights the sky finally began to clear. Several messengers were sent out in the form of birds to survey the earth. The news they returned with was good. The Children of Angels had all been wiped out. Only a fraction of their blood had survived in those families that had survived. Among the survivors were the families and animals of Mannus, Thraetona, Targytagus, Deucalion, Noah, Salivahana, Xisuthrus...

As the list went on, I closed my eyes and fell asleep with the arm of my queen around me. I slept soundly, dreaming of the future of mankind. Already, delegations were being sent out to supply the survivors with tools necessary for survival. As my spirit flew over the surface of the earth, surveying the damage done to it, I felt sorrow for those species that had not survived the flood. But enough humans and beasts had survived to re-establish a stable ecosystem. The belief that they had survived because they were superior to nature and the world would become a part of their racial consciousness. The rituals and words said by each group's leader would be forever ingrained into the minds of their descendants. Competition between rival groups would begin with violent confrontations that could only lead to eventual annihilation. Only the most cunning and strong would survive. But these are the instincts given to those that are the children of Cain, who would – through my power – eventually control the destiny of the entire race. I had much to plan; I needed to rest.

+

Joseph's Commitment

Z-26

Figures :

Joseph : *A young man, age 21, intelligent but delusional;*

Cadence : *Joseph's mother, a small woman in her early forties;*

Adam : *Cadence's father, a stubborn retiree in his late-sixties;*

Doctor : *Joseph's middle-aged psychiatrist, good-humored
but always professional.*

Scene :

*Front Lobby, Deliverance County Mental Hospital,
September 11, 1999, 7:30 p.m.*

Note :

This is written as a one-act play. Each Fragment represents a different episode of the action. Each Division (Joseph's words) should be incorporated as narrative voice-overs from an invisible source while all onstage action is 'frozen.'

X

The stage is dark, save for a lit analogue clock in the center of the background. From the far right the red light of an exit sign lightly shines over a few chairs arranged around a table partially covered with magazines and pamphlets. On the left side of the stage is a large receptionist's desk. Beside the desk is a set of doors leading to the rest of the hospital. A sign near the door indicates that only authorized persons are allowed beyond it.

Enter stage-left: Doctor

The lights suddenly come on, dispelling the mysteriousness of the darkness. The lobby suddenly appears drab and real. The doctor sets a clipboard on the desk and goes over to the doors under the exit sign, fiddling with a few keys at the lock until the door opens.

Enter stage-right: Adam and Cadence

Fragment I

Doctor : Good evening Cadence, Adam. Beautiful sunset, isn't it?

Adam : Yes, I suppose it is.

Cadence : Thank you for letting us come after visiting hours, doctor.

Doctor : Oh, don't worry about it. I'm here until midnight anyway.

Cadence : How's my son, doctor?

Doctor : I know you're concerned about Joseph, but—

Adam : And why wouldn't we be?

Doctor : He's fine. He's only been here two days.

Adam : Already that seems too long.

Doctor : Some patients have been in here two decades with no success, despite our best efforts.

Adam : In a place like this, you could manufacture insanity if you wanted to, with mind-altering drugs and shock-therapy...

Doctor : Sir, we stopped relying on such barbaric practices a long time ago. This isn't a medieval asylum, you know.

Adam : More like a prison...

Cadence : Father, please. He's only trying to help.

Adam (frustrated) : I know he is. But...

Cadence : We have to trust him.

Adam : I know. It's just that... I don't think he needs to be here... in a place like this. He should be home... with his family... with us.

Doctor : I agree with you. He should be with those he loves, but—

Cadence : We don't know how to help him, father.

Adam : We can learn. I'm retired now. I've got plenty of time on my hands.

Cadence (directly to Adam) : Enough time to always watch him? What happens in those moments...? He's not well... he doesn't think as straight as he used to – you know that. Even though he sometimes acts like a child, it doesn't mean that he always thinks like one...

Doctor : He is very intelligent.

Cadence (continuing) : What happens if he tries to kill himself again? Father, we both love him – and I don't want him in here any more than you do – but I don't want him to die either. I won't bury another son if I don't have to. I want him to live. He will come through this. I know he will. He's strong. And then he can come home again. But until then...

Adam : Until then, he stays, right? Doctor, you tell us. You're the professional. When will he be able to come home?

Doctor : I guess that all depends on him.

Adam (angrily) : What is supposed to mean? –that his insanity is a choice? Why would he – or anyone, for that matter – make the decision to go crazy? Did he just wake up one day and decide–?

Doctor : No, of course not. I think it would've been a much longer process. And it's probably been there for a while, unnoticed... Would you like to sit down? Coffee maybe?

Adam (gruffly) : That sounds nice.

They move to center-stage and move three chairs away from the tables and arrange them in a half-circle. Cadence sits at the center facing the audience. Adam sits on her left while the Doctor goes over behind the desk and begins pouring cups of coffee.

Doctor : How do you take your coffee?

Cadence : No thanks, Doctor, I'm fine.

Adam : Black, if you don't mind.

Doctor : Not at all.

He brings two cups of coffee and his clipboard back to the chairs. He places the clipboard on the floor beside his chair, sits, and takes a sip of his coffee, grimacing from the taste, then places the mug beside the clipboard on the floor.

Doctor : Absolutely rancid, isn't it...? Psychoses like Joseph's can often be overlooked. His insanity is his doing, a construction of delusions. If it was just schizophrenia I'd prescribe medication and he could live a normal life. His case is unusual – it's not as simple as patients who merely get visions from God or think that the CIA is out to get them...

Cadence : But he says that he's a prophet, a reincarnation of the original Cain.

Adam : That's hogwash.

Doctor : Precisely what I think. Just because he says it doesn't mean that he believes it. Sometimes people – Joseph included – give a simple answer because they don't feel like explaining the truth.

Cadence : What is the truth?

Doctor : I think why he says he's Cain revolves around the death of his brother...

Cadence (quietly) : Peter.

Doctor : Yes... by the way he acts – he keeps talking as if he actually murdered his brother.

Adam : I don't know why...

Doctor : I think he feels guilt... even though it was by... natural causes.

Adam (bitterly) : If you consider cancer natural.

Doctor : How long ago did Peter die?

Cadence : Almost two years ago... he was twenty-one.

Adam : ...the same age Joseph is now.

Doctor : How did Joseph react at the time?

Cadence : Well enough, I suppose... he was always so quiet. They were both so different. Peter was a linebacker for the university. Joseph was a regional chess champion... After Peter couldn't play football anymore, they would watch games together; Joseph desperately wanted to make his brother happy. And I think he did. Just a few days before... that day... he brought part of the team to the hospital to celebrate their victory over a rival university. I think that was Peter's happiest moment, despite the pain, before he died...

Doctor : But do either of you know why Joseph might blame himself?

Adam : Just as you said, I suppose... guilt.

Cadence : But why would he feel guilt?

Doctor : Perhaps because he was unable to help.

Adam : But there was nothing he could do.

Doctor : Maybe he felt that there should've been something.

Cadence : But what could he possibly have done?

Doctor : I don't know. But I don't think that's it. Perhaps he thought he could help but didn't. The point is that whether or not he actually could save his brother, he did nothing.

Internal Divisions

I was born, as all men are, because of the act of love between a man and a woman. Later, I was to consider the pains of labor my mother went through as a great sacrifice made on my behalf. I came into this world with another, a twin brother who became my only companion growing up. Though we took different paths of survival, we loved each other as only brothers can.

At the age of seven, our father took us away from the cottage for the first time, and led us through the forests and fields that surrounded our home.

I myself was entranced with the way my father could grow a field of wheat from husks of grain and entire orchards from tiny seeds. But my brother was more excited by the animals in the field and the thrill of a good hunt. As we grew, so did our passions, though it led us from each other.

In the sixteenth year of our birth, our mother told us the history of the world and of the garden. And though our father scoffed at the idea, my brother and I agreed, after much discussion, that we should give a token of thanks to them that had created the world. After much thought, we came to the conclusion that only through fire could our offering be made to Heaven.

So, to prevent the risk of the fire going out of control, we constructed short pillars of stones with dry wood on top. When the kindling fire was ablaze, we placed our offerings on the separate altars. Because mine was grain and fruit, it had finished burning before my brother's had even begun to smoke. Somehow, this left me feeling as if my sacrifice were smaller, less valuable than his, though the labor I had invested in the harvest was far greater than his small hunting trophies. When he began to mock me, I became angry with him.

Fragment II

Adam : But he tried. He tried everything, even offering his vital organs if that would...

Doctor : Yes, I know. He already told me how hard he tried to save his brother. But there's one thing I still need to know. Tell me: how did he react after Peter died?

Cadence : Well... normally, I suppose... grief... loneliness... he cried for days...

Doctor : I'm sorry, but I was actually wondering if you describe the way he treated life, family, friends, that sort of thing. Perhaps he began to act differently than he had before.

Adam : Aside from the first few months of mourning, his behavior didn't change very much. But those few months were very hard on him. I don't think he really recovered what he lost in that short time.

Doctor : What do you mean?

Adam : While Peter was in the hospital, Joseph abandoned the few friends he had... to spend as much time as possible with his brother before he died. But the month after that was much harder on him. We thought – just as he did, I imagine – that his friends would've come to Peter's funeral.

Doctor : But they didn't.

Adam : Not even one. I guess there was a party at the time or something. One of them called to apologize; Joseph reacted so violently that he broke the phone against the wall.

Cadence : And that was the last we heard from them. When Joseph started his degree, he began to make new friends, though they were very different... compared to his old friends and to him...

Doctor : How so?

Cadence : To be honest, I've only met a handful of them... but they're all at least three years younger than Joseph, and all of them have at least one problem or another.

Adam : Most are failures in the full definition of the word... high-school dropouts, drug-addicts, petty thieves...

Cadence : And it's not like he's turning into them... his marks are just as high as ever. And I don't think he ever really participates in these strange benders they do. They hang out on weekends; Joseph usually disappears on Friday night and reappears Sunday morning, usually with a few people sharing his bed or sleeping on his floor. After awhile I got used to it... even cooking them all up a nice breakfast... they're actually very nice, intelligent kids...

Doctor (smiling) : Yes, I had a few friends like that once, too. I think his friendship with these people comes from out of a need to help people, just as if each one of them represented a part of Peter that hadn't died... Is there anything else you think I should know?

Adam : That's about it, I think.

Cadence : Actually, there is something else. But I don't know...

Adam : What else could there be?

Doctor : Anything might be helpful.

Cadence : After the funeral I noticed that Joseph had stopped painting. Before, he might spend hours at a time working on one thing or another – he was always working on at least three at any given time. I didn't think much of it at first. I thought he just didn't feel like it. But I haven't seen him pick up a pen, pencil, or brush in the last two years – not even to doodle.

Adam : That's funny. I didn't even notice.

Cadence : I haven't really thought about it much – he has been pretty busy with university – until this afternoon... I went into his room to clean up a bit, see if I couldn't find something that might help. In his closet, I found the remnants of an unfinished painting. Once I put the pieces together, I could tell that the work had still been in progress when it been ripped apart. But I think I understand why it had been left unfinished – it was disturbing.

Doctor : How so?

The Doctor picks up his clipboard and places it on his lap to write this down.

Cadence : It's hard to explain... It looked like he was continually painting over his work in smaller and smaller sections. The first layer and the entire canvas was a light blue sky with wispy clouds, about half of which was painted over with an angel. This angel was in the process of being painted over with a demon, who in turn had been partially painted over with a man. I can see why he threw it into the back of the closet and left it there.

Adam : It sounds Satanic.

Cadence : Doctor, please don't tell Joseph what I just told you. He was always sensitive about his painting.

Doctor : Of course.

Cadence : Can I please see my son now, Doctor?

Doctor : By all means, my good lady. Would you mind if I stayed back and discussed a few things with your father?

Cadence : Not at all.

She stands up and walks over to the door at stage-left as the Doctor puts his clipboard back on the floor by his chair.

Doctor : He should just be finishing dinner... straight down the hall. Oh, why don't you just bring him out here when you find him...?

Cadence : I'll do that.

Exit stage-left: Cadence

Adam : My daughter didn't mention that painting earlier.

Doctor : No, I imagine she wouldn't have. She's probably got more on her mind than one of her son's old paintings.

Adam : Don't you think that the meaning of that painting is important?

Doctor : Not really.

Adam : Why isn't it? I think the image in that painting would say a lot about my grandson...

Doctor : That he fears God? That he fears the demon inside us all? I don't think he's as dumb as he wants people to think he is. He knows a lot more about his own life than many of the rest of us do about our own. That's why he's driven himself crazy – because he fears the dark side of human nature. What he really needs is to learn how to deal with that fear.

Adam : But don't you want to dig down through his memories and emotions to the cause of the problem?

Doctor : No. Memories and emotions are irrelevant.

Adam : Pardon me?

External Divisions

I feel like I am trapped between worlds, locked between life and death. My entire world has come falling around me, shattering into fragments. It is as if I have run from safety into the mountains – but the Cave of Memories will offer me no peace. I alone am responsible for the circumstances of this chaos, but I do not know which side of the storm is better.

Caught between the life I had and this place, I know neither will save those I love from my mistaken existence. I know that I have a purpose in this life, but I do not know why it should place those I love in such danger. I am already enough of a burden upon them without having the added torment of prophecies. It feels as if the weight of all humanity is about to be placed on my shoulders and already I am crippled, my limbs and back shattered into splinters.

I am scared of what I must go through in this long path that leads so close to both anarchy and salvation. Already the anticipation of that duty tires me. And at the same time I fear what will happen to me once my usefulness has come to an end. I have rejected love so many times to pursue this path that only I can walk. I do not fear being alone right now, not yet. But that fear will catch up with me soon.

Fragment III

Doctor : Memories and emotions are irrelevant.

Adam : I don't believe you, doctor.

Doctor : I'm very serious. Have you never seen anyone invent a memory – either from a lie or a dream – thinking that it actually happened? I'm sure that you, too, have forgotten memories that you no longer care to think about. Emotions are much the same way. They're like a pendulum. If a person is pulled too much one way, there is a need to eventually swing just as far in the opposite direction, sometimes without even any cause. Your grandson is emotionally unstable, I remind you.

Adam : I know that.

Doctor : I know that you know that. But I think you need to understand that his emotions are unstable and easily changed because of chemicals in his brain. We are all a little broken like that one way or another. Controlling his emotions or letting them go will not cure your son. Only he knows how to bring himself back. You should let him know that you love him and care for him. Whatever you do, do not lie to him.

Adam : Why would I do that?

Doctor : To help him get out of here, of course. It's not that wanting him well is wrong, it's just that if you even tell him a small untruth to help him recover and he believes it, it may bring a relapse when he discovers the truth.

Adam : Alright, Doctor. I'll try.

Doctor : Thank you, Adam. Someday, I think he'll thank you too...

Enter stage-left: Joseph and Cadence

Joseph : Hello Grandfather, how are you today?

Adam, surprised at this welcome intrusion, puts his coffee on the nearby table and stands up to embrace his grandson.

Adam : I'm doing well. How are they treating you?

Joseph : Good enough, but the food here is worse than at school. I didn't even think that was possible.

Adam : Staying sane are you, boy?

Joseph : Why would you ask a thing like that? Of course, I'm staying sane. But I keep getting all these bloody counseling sessions that go on and on... I'm just fine, you know that Doctor?

The Doctor rises to face Joseph who is standing behind the middle of the three chairs. In the meantime, Adam pulls a fourth chair for Joseph from a nearby table and places it between his and Cadence's. There is no interruption in dialogue as they each take their seats, first Joseph, then Adam, then the Doctor.

Doctor : I know, Joseph.

Joseph : I told you not to call me that. It's not my name.

Doctor : Well, fine enough then, Cain. Tell me, do you know this woman?

Joseph : Yes, she's my mother. But she says her name is Cadence.

Doctor : Is that not her name?

Joseph : If she says it is then I suppose it is.

Doctor : But you told me your mother's name is Eve. This young woman, whose name is Cadence, brought her son here for a few tests; he was an intelligent young man by the name of Joseph. If you are not Joseph then she has come here for nothing, for you are not her son.

Joseph : I am her son.

Doctor : But you are not. She has come here to see Joseph and you are not he, correct?

Cadence (quietly) : Please stop, doctor.

Doctor : Are you Joseph or are you not?

Joseph : I...

Cadence (upset) : Please...

Doctor : Well?

Adam : Doctor, please, we've had enough of this game. He is my daughter's son no matter what he says his name is.

Doctor : I would beg to differ. You brought him here for a reason, did you not?

Adam : That's irrelevant to the way you're going about this.

Doctor : You know better, do you?

Cadence (frustrated) : Please. Both of you just stop. We can't argue like this when we all know...

Adam : This is madness.

Joseph : I think you're right. This is madness. But I know who I am.

Doctor : You say that you do.

Cadence : I used to know...

Joseph : But I do know who I am.

Adam : I know who I am too, boy. And I think you know what's going on here. Why don't you even try? It wouldn't take much to prove it.

Joseph : I can't. That would sacrifice everything I believe.

Doctor : But then you could go home... today... now.

Cadence (smiling a bit) : I'd like that.

Adam : We'd be glad to have you back, boy.

Joseph : But I'm not the same. I don't think any of you understand that. I'm different. I'm a prophet of the coming age and I need to be protected until the time comes...

Doctor : If it's security that you want I think you're looking in the wrong place.

Joseph : I don't think I am. This is the last place that the enemy would think to look for the last incarnation of the first son of Eden.

Adam : Come on, now. You don't actually believe that you're the real Cain, do you?

Joseph : I don't think – I know.

Cadence : Son, please, are you being serious?

Joseph : I am. I know it's hard for you to believe, but you must. I have received a message from the angels that may save humanity from the anarchy that this age will bring upon us. I don't want to believe it myself – but because of my visions, I know it to be true.

Adam : Visions...? Destruction...? What message?

Joseph : I can't tell you the message – not yet anyway. But I know that the Beast has awakened and the Dragon is readying itself for the end. I alone can atone for the sin of the first murder. I'm not sure how, but I expect to know only when the time is right.

Adam : This is exactly the kind of talk that will keep you in here.

Joseph : I want to be kept in here.

Cadence (upset) : But why? I love you...

Joseph : I love you too, but for now this is where I need to be. It is only a small part of the larger picture. I know you can't see that but I can and that is why I submit myself to the perfect will.

Adam : Joseph, you're talking like you really are crazy. Doctor, is he like this all of the time?

Doctor : Actually...

Cadence : But don't you want to go home, son? We can take care of you.

Joseph : No, I think at this point I will only be a burden to you. Here I am among those that understand me. So many here have their very own demons that mine go unnoticed. No one here condemns me for my visions. The outside world would not understand me. From here I shall send my message.

Adam : Goddamn it! What is this message?

Joseph : Patience is a virtue, grandfather. But since you're not learning anything here, would you like to meet some of my new friends?

Adam : Well, why would I want to? They're probably a bunch of imbeciles anyway...

Cadence (lecturing tone) : Father...

Adam : Jesus. Oh, alright...

Joseph and Adam stand and walk to the doors at stage-left.

Joseph : See, there's Mark, who's a really nice guy and wouldn't even be in here if he didn't always take all of his meds at once. Then there's this girl Martha; she's alright, if it weren't for this one little thing...

Exit stage-left: Joseph and Adam

External Creations

There have been many prophets given to this world, each coming with a different message from God, each a messiah in his own right. But each messenger has had one flaw: mortality. I am different because I am immortal. I alone now contain the uncontaminated Breath, as I always have. Because this is my first reincarnation, it is stronger in me than any other.

There is a great deal of explanation required to account for the peculiar nature of my spirit, but I have not been gifted enough to put this into words. My previous life spanned nearly five-thousand years and ended only because I had chosen suicide rather than betrayal. My spirit spent

two-thousand more years waiting, and finally, rebirth into a new world that really hadn't changed that much. And this time, I have more reason to live than before. This time, I am more than just an oddity in the Master Plan. I am part of it. Even at this moment, I am it. I carry a message that will either save the world or destroy it. Even I do not know which. I only know that the time is nearly right.

In a hundred years, there have been three Beasts; each has acted as a torchbearer to the next, readying the way. The Third Beast is with us, and has awakened from his dreams of senseless emotional violence now that the Second has passed on and the First has been forgotten. This Final Beast is very much like the others, but carries his message with power and an unforgiving spirit, just as he should, for he is being prepared to battle the Dragon, who has begun to stir once again.

The smoke that already is rising from the abyss is the first sign. The second sign shall be the waters rising to cover the earth. The third sign is one that will signal the Dragon's awakening, to fulfill the prophecies, for the wind shall become as fire and engulf the earth, destroying every living thing.

Fragment IV

Doctor : I assume your son took you on the same grand tour?

Cadence : Yes... it brought quite a few memories back.

Doctor : Oh, of course. More than just a feeling of *deja-vu*, huh? Not that much has changed here in twenty-two years... even some of the same patients and staff are still here...

Cadence : Hmm... quite a few actually.

Doctor : I must admit that I'm curious about your stay here. But I think I can guess by Joseph's age.

Cadence leans back in her chair to make herself more comfortable but she is obviously agitated as the Doctor once again picks up his clipboard and pen, though this time he doesn't bother to write anything down.

Cadence : You can, can you?

Doctor : Well, I can assume that your pregnancy was traumatic somehow...

Cadence : Just a bit.

Doctor : May I ask? If there is a history of mental illness...

Cadence : It had nothing to do with mental illness, Doctor. I needed a break from reality, that's all. After what I had been through I needed to go away... just for a while. Until I gave birth, that is.

Doctor : Have you told Joseph about the... uh... circumstances... surrounding his birth?

Cadence : I told him that his father ran out on us...

Doctor : Well... somehow, he has found out the truth.

Cadence : Has he really...?

Doctor (carefully) : It's not exactly the type of story that one makes up or lies about...

Cadence (shocked) : Doctor... How would he know?

Doctor : Well, I don't think any of the staff would've told him. That would break the rules about confidentiality. Perhaps your father told him the truth.

Cadence : I don't think that's possible.. Since Joseph was born I have never managed to discuss the subject with my father...

Doctor : Did Peter know?

Cadence : No one does, except my father and I don't think he lets himself believe it...

Doctor : But you did decide to cover it up – at least from your family.

Cadence : Before Peter's birth... My husband had left me with nothing... My father had taken me in and helped me care for his grandchild. The idea of another child, when I had not even been seeing anyone... it was too much of a shock to him. He went around in a daze until Joseph's birth. That day he decided he would act as a father to my boys. And despite how hard it has been on me, I have maintained my silence, for the sake of my boys...

Doctor : But that's what really surprises me... It's a tragic thing, why hide it?

Cadence : Why should I bring it up? –so I can walk around with a sign declaring the end of the world, screaming to the skies or anyone who'll listen, that I – Cadence, an ordinary woman – am a victim? I don't think so. It was a tragedy – trust me, I know – it nearly ripped my life apart. But I'm not going to go around wearing a Victims Anonymous matching shirt and hat. I have a family that I worry more about.

Doctor : I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking.

Cadence (compassionately) : No, you probably weren't. But that's not really your fault, so I forgive you. You really are only trying to help... I guess you were just curious about the facts...

Doctor : Now that I do know, I'd like to find out who told Joseph and why it is the one event in his life that has not been mutated by this delusion of his.

Cadence : I'd like to know too.

Doctor : You don't think that Peter would've remembered?

Cadence : I don't think so. Peter would've asked about it, I'm sure.

Doctor : Do you have a diary or anything like that?

Cadence : I did... for a few years, but I got rid of it... there was always too much risk...

Doctor : Is there any other way Joseph could know?

Cadence : Aside from you, my father, and my doctor at the time, I've only told God.

Internal Creations

I awoke to find myself surrounded on all sides by a blinding light, voices echoing inside my head. I was lying down, stretched out as if on a crucifix, every part of me held down tightly. A face appeared over me, but I only glimpsed his three eyes before the light blinded me again. A voice in my ear told me to relax, that it wasn't over yet. My weak body became paralyzed with pain as I slipped from consciousness.

I dreamed that I was a boy again, and that my brother was still alive. We were walking with our father through a freshly plowed field to the forest. Father was teaching us how to hunt... How far away we were from the city!

Just as we entered the forest, my father cried out; a poisonous snake had bitten his heel. He had crushed its head with his foot, but it was already too late. Blood and venom dripped from the puncture-wound. Already he had become delirious, crying for us to call a doctor. I began to run

back to the house. I ran as if I had been given angels' wings, but when I reached the house, everything had changed; my aged and gray father was waiting for me. He was dressed completely in black and was standing solemnly by the door, as if waiting for someone. I could hear my mother crying inside. But then all was silent as six pallbearers emerged from the house, carrying a white casket. Tears broke through my eyes as I gave myself over to the memories. I quietly followed the coffin to the grave.

As I watched them lower it into the ground, I glanced at the headstone: Dedicated to the memory of a son and his mother. No! Why had tragedy struck my family so hard in so little time? Mother... Peter...

Fragment V

Enter stage-left: Joseph and Adam

Adam : You've got a crazy bunch of friends there, boy...

Joseph : You don't say. Could that be... maybe because...

Doctor : What? –they're crazy?

The two sit in their respective chairs, Adam once again facing the doctor, his grandson between him and his mother.

Joseph : Doctor, you've ruined the punch-line.

Doctor : Sorry. I couldn't help myself. How was the tour, Adam?

Adam : Not all that bad... but I still don't think I want my grandson here if he doesn't need to be.

Cadence : I don't even know what to think anymore.

Joseph : But isn't it my choice? I want to be here.

Doctor : Well, actually Joseph. It's not your choice. It's mine. If you don't need to be here, I will not keep you here only because you want to be here. If I know that you need to be here, then I will keep you here until such time that I decide you can go. And once you pass yourself into my care, it is possible that you may never leave.

Adam : But you said that it was his decision.

Doctor : Did I really? Are you sure? I said it was his choice whether or not he became well. It is my job to judge whether or not he is fit to return to normal society. So far, I have seen nothing but a charade of madness from this young man. He is neither fit for society nor this institution.

Cadence (nearly crying) : But we need to do something. We can't just sit here.

Joseph : Sounds good to me.

Adam : I think he should come home.

Doctor : And the risks?

Adam : We can handle the risks.

Joseph : Can you really? Do you know who my enemies are? They will destroy you to get to me you know.

Doctor : Correction, Joseph: you will destroy them to get to me.

Adam : What?!?

An epiphany seems to suddenly strike the Doctor.

Doctor (quietly) : Or you will destroy yourself...

Joseph (not listening) : Are you accusing me of something, Doctor?

Doctor : No, I'm merely stating a fact. It will break your mother's heart to see you locked-up here with me, though it seems to be something you want.

Joseph : But I am trying to save her from my enemies. She will be killed if that's what it takes to get to me. It will save her life if I stay – she will be alive and happy...

Doctor : Are you sure of that? Are you so sure that you are willing to gamble with the odds?

Joseph : No... I know the odds.

Adam : You can come home, boy. We can make it on our own.

Doctor : But if it's therapy you need, young man, you should stay, even if only for a little while.

Joseph : So I can stay or I can go? It's my decision?

Doctor : That's not what I said. I said that if it was what you think you need – for your own well-being – don't feel like you're abandoning those that love you. I'm not sure whether or not you do need help, but I know you know.

Adam : But he can come home if he wants to.

Doctor : I think so.

Joseph : I don't know what to say. I don't feel safe going home. But I don't want to stay either. I don't know what I want... Mother, help me.

Cadence : I love you, son. I only want what's best for you.

Joseph : I need help... I can't decide this on my own. I'm not afraid of my enemies. I'm not afraid of my duties...

Doctor : What are you afraid of, Joseph?

Joseph : I don't know... I'm scared... But I think I should stay... I need help...

Doctor : Are you sure?

There is a few moments of silence as Joseph lowers his head into his hands, immersed in a deep spiritual conflict. Adam stares at Joseph, almost fearing the decision, while Cadence struggles against tears. As she looks out into the distance, she brushes away an invisible tear from her eye. Joseph does not see the pain she is in. Adam does; he glances at her a few times, concerned. Then, as Joseph looks up, into the distance, seemingly at the same thing his mother sees, Adam tries to force Joseph to answer.

Adam (with strength) : Well, young man...?

Joseph (unsure at first) : I think... I should... stay.

Cadence (crying) : I have to go...

She stands and turns toward the doors leading out of the hospital. As she opens the doors, Adam stands to accuse his grandson who is still looking into the distance.

Adam : You really don't care, do you?

Joseph : I—

Exit stage-right: Cadence

Adam : Do you even realize what she's gone through for you?

Joseph : Completely.

Adam : And you don't even appreciate it. I can't believe I even raised you... hurt your own like that. I don't believe it...

Adam continues to stand there, virtually leaning over Joseph, who remains distant but still seems filled with fear. The doctor leans back in his chair, as if trying to become part of the scenery.

Adam : I don't know what to say to you, boy. She went through the worst of all hells because of what happened. You know that. I know that. And, doctor, you know that. Joseph, I hope you're happy...

Joseph : I'm not.

Adam : Then why... why all this? Why? Tell me Joseph – and don't give me any of that my-name-is-Cain horseshit. You know what's going on. But here you are, caught in your own little world. Don't even think that I don't know... But whatever it is... you're going to kill her if you stay here. You know that, don't you?

Joseph (resolutely) : She'll be fine. I'll be fine. I just need...

Adam : You're so sure of yourself, aren't you? And I thought you were past the age of always being right. Well, I'm leaving. With any luck, your mother will still be alive in a few days to visit you.

Joseph remains sitting, staring into the distance, as his grandfather storms out.

Exit stage-right: Adam

Joseph : Well, I'd say that went rather well, wouldn't you doctor?

The Doctor looks at Joseph with heartfelt sympathy at first before covering it with a cold, professional veneer. Joseph finally looks away from the object in the distance to the doctor and smiles absently. All is silent as the doctor leads Joseph by the arm toward the door back into the hospital, switching the lights off as he leaves.

Exit stage-left: Doctor and Joseph

Curtain



5 Ways To Die

tgux

SELF-DENIAL

(>) THE FIRST REALIZATION I MUST
MAKE IS THAT I AM LIKE EVERYONE
ELSE IN ONE RESPECT: SOONER OR
LATER MY BODY WILL BREAK DOWN
AND I WILL DIE. THE ONLY QUESTION
THAT REMAINS AFTER THIS FACT IS
ACCEPTED IS HOW DO I WANT TO BE
REMEMBERED AFTER I AM GONE? BY
WHAT WOULD I DEFINE MY LIFE? I
MUST REALIZE THAT MY CHANCE OF
NOT BEING A ROCK STAR, A FAMOUS
AUTHOR, OR A HIGHLY-PAID

HITTING EITHER IS LESS THAN GETTING HIT
BY DENIED BY LIGHTNING. I AM NOT DEFINED BY
MY WALLS, MY CONTENTS OR MY WALLETS,
WHICH I WEAR, OR WHICH HE WOULD TELL ME THE TRUTH
SOMEWHERE; THERE ARE NO SECRETS
BETWEEN BROTHERS. BUT I DIDN'T
REALIZE HOW MUCH I HAD INCURED
A PRODUCT OF MY CARELESS MANNER. HE
HIT ME BACK WITH SUCH FORCE THAT I
NEARLY WAS NEARLY KNOCKED
UNCONSCIOUS. THE SECOND BLOW
WAS LESS MERCIFUL AND MORE
POORLY AIMED. I STUMBLED
BACKWARDS; I WASN'T PREPARED
FOR THIS VIOLENCE. I CAN'T FIGHT
BACK, FOR I AM ALREADY SORRY FOR
DRIVING HIM TO THIS. AS HE STRUCK
ME AGAIN, I FELL TO MY KNEES AND
REACHED FOR MY DAGGER TO DEFEND
MYSELF. BUT I KNOW MY ACTION WAS
INTERPRETED AS I FEEL

SOMETHING HARD HIT ME ON THE SIDE

OF MY HEAD. I STUMBLED AND FELL,
THE TASTE OF BLOOD WARM AND SALTY
IN MY MOUTH. ANOTHER BLOW AND I
THOUGHT THE UNIVERSE EXPLODED AS
I FELL UNCONSCIOUS.

() THE SECOND REALIZATION I MUST
 MAKE IS THAT I AM REPRESENTATIVE
 OF MY SPECIES: I AM AN ACCIDENT,
 THE END RESULT OF AN EXPERIMENT
 WITH MANY UNCONTROLLED
 VARIABLES. I AM NOT PERFECT AND
 MAY NEVER HOPE TO BE. MY PATH IN
 LIFE WAS CHOSEN FOR ME BEFORE I
 WAS BORN, AND EVERY PREJUDICE
 THAT SOMEONE MAKES AGAINST ME IS
 TO BE CHOSEN BY ME. I OPENED MY EYES. ALL AROUND
 ME THE PEOPLE WERE SCREAMING AND
 RUNNING ABOUT AS IF THE WORLD
 WAS ABOUT TO END. I WAS SOAKED
 FROM HEAD TO TOE AND LAYING ON
 WET SAND. STANDING, I PUT MY
 HAND TO THE BACK OF MY HEAD AND
 COULD FEEL WARM BLOOD
 UNDERNEATH MY WET HAIR. I LOOKED
 TO THE SUN SETTING IN THE HORIZON
 AND DOZENS OF PEOPLE SCATTERED
 LIKE TWIGS IN THE MONSTROUS SURF
 THAT COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN
 CREATED BY A TSUNAMI. AND STILL,
 THE OCEAN OFFERED NO HOPE
 OF ESCAPE, PEOPLE WERE
 DESPERATELY RUSHING TOWARDS THE
 BEACHES. I TURNED MY HEAD TO LOOK
 AT MY WONDERFUL HOMETOWN, LAID
 WASTE BY MASSIVE FISSURES AND
 VOLCANIC DEBRIS. BIT BY BIT, THE
 ENTIRE ISLAND WAS FALLING INTO
 THE OCEAN. IT HAD ONLY BEEN A FEW
 MOMENTS SINCE THIS DISASTER HAD
 STARTED, AND ALREADY IT HAD TAKEN
 ITS TOLL. NO ONE WOULD SURVIVE
 THIS, BUT WE STILL HAD ONE CHOICE
 LEFT IN THIS LIFE: HOW WE WOULD
 DIE.

SELF-LOATHING

() THE THIRD REALIZATION I MUST
MAKE IS THAT BECAUSE I AM
REPRESENTATIVE OF MY SPECIES, I
AM ALSO REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
UNIVERSE. AS A DEPENDENT ENTITY
LIVING WITHIN ANOTHER, I AM
SUBJECT TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS.
BECAUSE I COULD NO LONGER
WALK, I HAD BEEN CARRIED TO THE
SPIRITUAL HILLTOP WHERE I WAS STRIPPED AND
TIED OVER A CROSSBEAM AND LEFT
DOWN. I WINCED IN PAIN AS THE
THORNS PUSHED THEIR WAY DEEPER
INTO MY SCALP. BLOOD WAS
BEGINNING TO LEAK INTO MY VISION
AND I KNEW I WOULD GO BLIND SOON.
I TURNED MY EYES TO THE HEAVENS,
SAW THAT THE DYING SUN AND
MOON HAD BEEN SHROUDED
BY THE DARK CLOUDS THAT NOW HUNG
OPINIMOUSLY OVERHEAD. I FELT MY
HANDS GO NUMB AS THICK SPIKES
WERE DRIVEN THROUGH MY WRISTS
AND FEET, SHATTERING ARTERIES AND
BREAKING BONES. I COULD FEEL
SPLINTERS DIGGING INTO THE CUTS ON
MY BACK AS MY CROSS WAS ROUGHLY
RAISED AND SET INTO A HOLE IN THE
ROCK. SHORTLY AFTER, A FEW
FRIENDS BROUGHT MY MOTHER TO ME;
I MANAGED A FEW WORDS I HOPED
WOULD EASE HER SUFFERING. AS THE
SUN SET, A SOLDIER CAME AND
THRUST A SPEAR INTO MY CHEST. AND
THERE I HUNG, OVERLOOKING THE
HOLIEST OF ALL CITIES, IN MORE
PAIN THAN ANYONE COULD IMAGINE,
HAVING BEEN TORTURED AND LEFT TO
BLEED TO DEATH.

SELF-PITY

() THE FOURTH THING I MUST
REALIZE IS THAT BECAUSE THE
UNIVERSE IS AN ENTITY,
EVERYTHING WITHIN IT OPERATES
ORGANICALLY. THE RHYTHM OF THE
UNIVERSE EXPLAINS WHY HISTORY
REPEATS ITSELF, FOR THE FUTURE IS
JUST THE SAME AS THE PAST.
NOTHING PROMISES CANNOT UNDO PAST
MISTAKES, AND ACHIEVEMENTS
() NO ONE TOLD ME THAT I COULD
DIE IN SUCH A TERRIBLE WAY. I
HAD HOPED TO GO IN MY SLEEP, OR
MAYBE SOMETHING A BIT MORE
INTERESTING THAN LAYING ON A
MATTRESS IN A FILTHY ROOM,
SURROUNDED BY THE ACCUMULATED
STENCH OF SEVERAL BODILY FLUIDS.
I WAS TOO SICK TO EVEN MOVE NOW;
ANY ATTEMPT TO STAND WAS MET WITH
SUCH PAIN AND NAUSEA THAT I COULD
NO LONGER EVEN LIFT MY HEAD, LET
ALONE MOVE IT WHENEVER I NEEDED
TO. I WAS DYING, LIKE
ALMOST EVERYONE WAS THESE DAYS.
GOD HAD VISITED A PLAGUE ON US, IT
COULD NOT BE DENIED. BUT WHAT HAD
I DONE TO DESERVE THIS DEATH,
AFTER HAVING LOST SO MANY THAT I
COULD EXCEED IF AM TO EXCEED
EXISTENCE IN A ROTTING ROOM, WITH NO
FAMILY ALIVE OR FRIENDS WILLING
TO VISIT ME? I HAD BEEN A
JUST MAN, A GOOD STEPPING-STONE AND NO MATTER
HOW DESERVED TO BE BURIED AFTER I
DIED, LIKE A GOOD CHRISTIAN,
I HAD ULTIMATELY
BEEN SURROUNDED BY THE DEAD AND THE
Dying LIKE CATTLE AFTER THE
SLAUGHTER.

I HAD BEEN WARNED NOT TO VENTURE TOO FAR OUT FROM OUR UNDERGROUND DWELLINGS, BUT I IGNORED THEM, AS I USUALLY DID. I WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING, ANYTHING THAT MIGHT PROVE MY THEORY RIGHT. NO ONE BELIEVED ME. WE WERE PEACEFUL, BUT OUR WORLD WAS ALWAYS BEING HUNTED, OUR FIELDS, NO MATTER WHAT WE WERE DOING. WE WERE THE ORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF THIS WORLD, BUT WERE DRIVEN UNDERGROUND BY WEAPONS FOR WHICH WE HAD NO DEFENSE. FOR US, WE ARE SAFE, FOR THERE ARE MILLIONS OF CAVERNS AND NETWORKS OF TUNNELS THAT CONNECT OUR STILL-GROWING CIVILIZATION. HERE WE GO BY UNNOTICED BY THOSE WHO INHABIT THE UPPER WORLD. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW ENTRANCES TO THEIR WORLD, AND EVEN THESE ARE CLOSED AND REPLACED PERIODICALLY IF THEIR WHEREABOUTS ARE DISCOVERED BY ANYONE AT ALL. IT TOOK ME YEARS TO PERSUADE A MAINTENANCE WORKER TO TELL ME THE LOCATION OF ONE. IT WAS A DARK, LONG, AND WINDING PATH, WITH MANY FALSE TURNS THAT EVENTUALLY EMERGED IN A REFUSE DUMP. AS I PULLED MY BODY THROUGH THE HOLE, I LOOKED UP AND SAW A DARK BLUE SKY WITH MANY PINHOLES OF LIGHT. SUDDENLY, I HEARD DOGS BARKING AND BEFORE I KNEW IT ONE HAD CLASPED ITS JAWS AROUND MY THROAT.

Ω

Omega's Flight

0/10

When I arrived on your world,

“Excuse me. Do you mind if I sit here?” the young man asked as he carefully balanced a breakfast tray on his right hand. He did not want to sit with anyone, but the hall was very crowded and this table was the only one with an empty seat.

The long head of black hair didn't even look up from the table to answer.

“Whatever makes you happy.”

He didn't bother introducing himself as he sat down. It was a side-effect of not taking his medication, this inability to care. But as he quietly ate his food, he noticed something familiar about the other man's way of carefully dissecting every morsel before lifting it with one finger into his mouth.

“Trigger?” he ventured.

The black hair parted slowly to reveal a face. A pair of blood-red lips appeared first, followed by a regal nose, then a pair of dark black eyes. After a moment, recognition replaced the initial look of anger. “Long time no see, Omega. What brings you to this hole?”

“The usual: reprogramming.”

“What is it this time – still having those dreams?”

Omega had not seen Trigger since six months ago, the last time he had been in for rehabilitation. It was then that he was given his last warning. This time he was actually up for a complete programming alteration. The dreams themselves, he had been told, were not the problem. If he continued in his attempts to think independently, the dreams were merely a side-effect. The doctors were, of course, lying. His dream circuits had been dysfunctional since he was a mere school-drone. That was where he and Trigger had become friends, though the first time they met had cost Omega a trip to the hospital.

Trigger was a toy of researchers. His imbalanced and slightly retarded brain were not aborted as is the usual practice. Instead, his birth was the beginning of a very long inquest into the catalog of human brain functions. He had been implanted with nearly every device ever invented, including fully functioning reproductive organs of both sexes. Omega, not knowing what else to think, always thought of his friend as a he.

His unusual friend, because of these experiments, often suffered from what his doctors called reality-induced rage. Omega had once asked Trigger why he so often had these fits of rage and instead of an answer came a seductive smirk. That had been merely hours after a fit, in which Trigger had destroyed everything in the classroom, including the teacher and three classmates. His punishment was to visit Omega in the hospital, who had merely received a broken arm.

He had been kept in school for years despite the fits. His teachers and classmates were expendable. He was not. Omega was only twelve when the two

had met and already the experiment had been going on twenty years. Trigger's age was as close to infinite as Omega could imagine.

Despite the incident and their differences, the two went on to become friends. To one particular statistician's amazement, Omega survived the next six years of Trigger's experiments. He laughed at the accusation that he actually gave suggestions when asked who was next to be killed during the next so-called fit. Trigger enjoyed talking with Omega who, although not in favor of violence, always had interesting ideas of destruction and actually listened. In return, Trigger did his best to pretend that he cared about Omega's strange dreams of the Holy City.

"Of course I'm still dreaming. But that isn't the real problem—"

Trigger looked around furtively. "You're not taking your medications are you?"

Omega smiled mischievously at his friend. "Why should I bother? They don't do anything for me. Of course, then again..."

"Damn it, just give them to me, will you?"

Trigger reached his open hand under the table to receive the pills. He brought them up to look at them, admiring each as if they were priceless white pearls, before throwing the whole handful into his mouth. He swallowed and turned his eyes back down to his food, picking each bit apart before eating it. Omega made no attempt at conversation as they ate. He knew that his silence during his friend's concentration was appreciated.

I could only look to the coldness of space.

Over the next few days, the two continued to meet at that same table. Omega wondered for a moment why no one else ever sat at the table – but his experience with Trigger's possessive nature and explosive temper answered that quickly. His suspicions were confirmed when he realized that the other inmates weren't bothering with him either. It was merely a matter of time before there was enough tension worked up among the population to cause a confrontation. But Trigger was appeased by the extra medication for now and didn't care for another fight.

After nearly a week Omega finally discovered exactly what his new programming would be. The newer cybernetic brains were far more efficient than his outdated and already damaged human one. They would merely replace his barely functioning brain with a newer, more advanced model. That was, of

course, not his opinion. He rather liked his brain, even if it was the cause of his insanity. He tried to broach the subject with his friend.

“The Generation 15 models are quite good. I wouldn’t mind having one,” Trigger commented.

“But what about my personality? The new models might be efficient but they don’t even have emotions or—”

He was interrupted from behind. “Emotions – worthless things aren’t they?”

Trigger looked up from his food. He growled in a deep voice that promised violence. “Go away.”

The confident reply was mechanical. “I won’t. I want to sit here.”

Omega realized that this person was much further from humanity than anyone he had met before, even his doctors. He looked like a young man in his early twenties, but his eyes were hollow and gray. Omega imagined that he saw nano-machines crawling underneath the man’s skin. Trigger, though agitated, could not possibly win a fight against him.

“It’s alright Trigger. I think he’s the friendly type.”

Trigger closed his eyes, not really caring. If Omega said he was a friend, then that’s exactly what he was. Besides, he wanted to enjoy the rush from the morphine he had taken from a few people earlier. Blocking the sights and sounds around him, he gave his body over to the oblivion.

“You are Omega, aren’t you?” the cyborg asked as he sat down. “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Omega nodded quietly. His reputation, not for anything he had done, had again preceded him. It was a well-known fact to anyone with any education that he was the last of his kind, the only living person with a completely unaltered human brain. He, like Trigger, had been an experiment. No one had been born with a fully-functioning brain in nearly a hundred years. It was ordered before his birth that he should be allowed to live as much of his natural life as possible and that he should always be observed. It was a test to see if a human being could survive in a world no longer constricted by their weaknesses.

As a child he had been made fun of by others; but instead of wallowing in misery and self-defeat, he discovered strength in hate. Though he didn’t have the stomach for killing, he often visualized another person’s destruction. When he met Trigger, he found a way he could comfortably realize those aspirations.

“Who’s that?”

Omega didn’t feel like conversation and the metal-head had begun to annoy him already. “That’s Trigger. He’s a bit violent. I don’t recommend pissing him off.”

“So I’ve heard, but I wasn’t asking about him. I was asking about the other one.”

Omega had never noticed that there was someone else sitting at the table. He tapped Trigger's shoulder, and asked him who that was next to him.

Through the haze, Trigger only managed a few words. "Oh... That's Kernel. Quiet one... doesn't... can't talk."

Omega studied Kernel for a moment. There was nothing distinguishing about him except for the wall of silence that seemed to surround him. He turned his attention back to the cyborg. "And you would be...?"

"I'm Switch. At least that's what I call myself. My serial number has too many letters and numbers in it for most humans to remember."

This Switch character was obviously a product of Generation 15 programming. Omega's skin crawled as he examined the human skin that probably concealed a host of mechanical wonders so common in the world he lived in. He even thought he saw evidence of a skeletal amour protruding from inside his shirt.

"And what you are you here for?"

"A bit of this and a bit of that. I've been on the waiting list for some time. I was finally granted an upgrade last week. Now they're just doing some body-work before I get discharged."

Drifting millions of miles

Another fucking day standing in this line-up behind one lunatic and in front of another. Both are chattering about nothing – apparently some rock star has decided to perform a concert. Here. For the inmates. Bad idea if you ask me. He'll probably end up getting stabbed full of needles and being raped by at least a dozen patients.

Jesus, what is this shit? I don't know how they expect this unidentifiable substance to be treated like food. But Trigger's right. If it looked like food, the crazies wouldn't eat at all. They tried that once. Cooked up steak for a national holiday or something. Damn good. Then some fucker with wires instead of a brain thought his looked a bit like his old girlfriend. Next thing everybody was running around screaming, afraid that we were all eating love.

Love. There's a notion. State-sponsored emotional addiction if you ask me. Taking meatheads with money and loading their bodies with hormones only to sell them the animated body of some dead porn star they can have sex with. Suddenly these poor bastards are no longer productive, can't keep their jobs, and end up penniless on the streets or in here.

They've discovered that I've been giving my medications to Trigger, so now I've got to take them before they'll feed me. Out of fear that I'll save them and

spit them up, they're now doing it administered. God, I hate needles – it's not the sharp prick or the sudden rush as the drugs enter my blood, it's just that it seems so unnatural. Nowhere near as stylish as shoving a fistful of powder into your mouth or nose. Trigger's furious. His main source of extras is no more. He's just sitting there, a bomb waiting to go off at the slightest push.

Some android just bumped into him. No harm really, but it's excuse enough. So Trigger rips his arm off. The droid just stands there, laughing. I can barely even see what's happening through the drugs – it's been a long time – but I think that the robot just took his arm back and pounded a security guard. More are running this way, but I can tell by the way Trigger's head is cocked that he's about to have some fun.

Kernel's looking at me as if to ask me if I'm alright. I don't think I am. There are all these voices inside my head, screaming. I see the face of that girl again. God, I wish I knew who she was. Beautiful. It's shifting and I've fallen into the nightmare again. As I see Switch jumping up to help out Trigger and the droid pummel a few security guards, Kernel's mouth opens up and I'm falling into it. I think he's holding me because I've fallen to the floor.

There is a flash of bright light and an explosion. I see a strange face looking over me and suddenly a moment of clarity. I stand to my feet and grab Kernel's arm. I yell at Trigger to follow me, that we're going to get the fuck out. His deranged and bleeding face smiles back at me. He'll follow.

Somehow I know where the explosion came from because I can hear a familiar voice screaming for help. It's my doctor. The asshole who wants to replace my brain with something a bit more efficient. It seems the rebels are shelling the building and the first good one went right through his wall and took his leg with it. With Kernel and Trigger behind me, I know my chance to escape has come. I look down on his pathetic tear-streaked face before kicking his jaw off. I run through the portal toward freedom before finally collapsing under the weight of the drugs in my system.

Washes the heart empty...

I wake up to hear Trigger arguing with someone, Switch I think. They're calling each other various names. It seems that the cyborg and the android followed us but Trigger doesn't trust them. I don't blame him. Most hardwires are spies for the government one way or another. But somehow I think these two are different. I try to stand up. God, everything hurts: my head, my heart, even my toes. It's a good thing Kernel's helping me or I'd never make it.

I really don't think Trigger wants to listen to me but I haven't got much choice but to convince him. We need all the help we can get if we're going to make it to the Holy City alive. Now he's angry at me. Wants to know why the fuck we'd go to right into the government's pissing-ground. I smile inwardly as I give him the most truthful answer possible that he'll agree with: revenge. That calms him down a bit. He's always wanted to take out some anger on those assholes directly and might as well come, to save me from myself. The android comments that he's always wanted to destroy the entire City. Trigger looks at him in a new light, an instantaneous bond I never thought possible.

As the two begin to discuss their plans, I pull Switch aside and ask him who the android is. Apparently he's the fifth in the 92A series, but he prefers to just be called 5. Switch tells me that the two met in a brawl just before I arrived. I carefully examine 5 and notice something strange about his appearance. The cyborg notices my glances and explains in carefully chosen words.

It seems that 5, like most androids was destined for government service from the day of his programming, probably in the military. But some idiot accidentally set his brain in the civil service rack and he ended up with a female body completely unsuited for combat. So, they sent him down to rehab to reprogram his brain. Since he arrived though, he's discovered that the doctors are more interested in fucking his completely functional body than replacing his brain. His repairs were supposed to be finished inside of a month. That was nearly two years ago.

Switch asks me why I really want to go to the City. I tell him the same thing I told Trigger a moment ago. He asks again, not believing me. So I tell him about my dreams, of the girl who comes to me every night begging me to come rescue her from X and the Holy Family. I don't bother telling him of the burning angel. If I tell him that, he'll think I'm just crazy. A girl's cry for help is one thing but a nightmare is completely different. I explain to him why I think the dream is real, that I've been having the same hallucination since I was first allowed consciousness and nothing the doctors have done have changed that. He seems to believe me and agrees to come along.

It is getting dark and the rebels have started to retreat. Their technology isn't as effective as the government's. If they continue their assault, they will likely be wiped out. As for ourselves, we wait until the rebels have moved back far enough before beginning our journey. We must avoid being seen by anyone until reaching the City. If the rebels catch us, we may be forced into helping their cause.

I knew I couldn't live among you,

They arrived on the outskirts of the Holy City after almost three days of traveling. Their speed had quickened on the second day after 5 spotted a vehicle in the distance and used his superhuman speed and strength to catch up with it and kill the driver.

As they stood in the light of the stars, gazing into the shadows of the empty streets, the programmed citizens of the city fast asleep, Trigger looked at Omega and asked, "so exactly what are we doing here?"

Omega answered as sincerely as possible. "I don't know."

"Well, while you think of an answer, I'm going to the Capitol. A little sightseeing I've been meaning to do." He and 5 laughed as they began to walk toward the light upon a distant hill, the residence of the Holy Family.

Omega ran after them, with Switch and Kernel close behind. "We should stick together," he said quietly. "This is a dangerous place."

92A-005 laughed. "But no one's actually lived here for a century, Omega. Don't be so paranoid. We're here to exact revenge, remember?"

Omega merely glanced behind him as a response. Something began to dawn on Trigger's usually-unperceptive brain. "What the... You're looking for her, aren't you? She's not here, you know that don't you? No one's here except the dead. Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Madonna, Johnny Rotten – they're all here, but if you're looking for that girl here, in these streets, you'll have to die just to be with her. And I won't let you do that. I'll save you from this pathetic reality, even if I have to kill a few people to do it."

Omega looked at his friend and smiled as they continued their way toward the Capitol in silence.

When they did arrive, it seemed that their walk had been in vain, for the house was surrounded by an impulse-wire fence and guarded by infamous 90-series robots. "The ultimate protection," Switch whispered. "The best killing machines ever created."

Despair began to quickly overwhelm Trigger. He did not come all this way for nothing. Omega could see it in his eyes. This was not a good sign. They would all be killed if he allowed his mechanical rage–

"Fuck–" screamed Trigger as he bolted right through the wire and ripped the first 90 he saw apart, using its head as a club for the next guard. 5 was right behind him, misquoting Shakespeare as he held a metallic skull up to the sky. The grounds suddenly lit up and guards flooded from the sides of the building around them.

Omega, Switch, and Kernel followed quickly, simultaneously deciding that a fight was preferable to running. They would be caught anyway and might as well cause some damage before being deactivated.

But then something absolutely unpredictable happened. Instead of mounting an attack against the intruders as the five expected, the guards formed a circle around them instead. Trigger ran up to the one closest to him, noticing that they were surrounded by a circle of over a hundred, and smashed through one's face in frustration. But the guard didn't even move; none of them did. They were waiting for something. Trigger, fearing the worst, began battering every guard in sight. 92A-005 joined him. But any enjoyment the two might have had was negated by the lack of energy in their opponents.

Suddenly the circle shifted and an opening appeared behind them. From within the mass of identical 90s, appeared another identical guard, whose uniform was not blue like the rest, but red. He was obviously 90-000, the chief guard and protector of the Royal Family. His existence was contrary to rumor, but there he was nonetheless.

Flawed, programmed, and mortal.

They were led, blindfolded, through the building to a dark room. From the number of steps, turns, and stairs, Omega guessed that they were about fifty feet below the ground, in a complex that was at least as wide as it was deep. One by one, they were pushed through a narrow door onto a cold floor.

"In a hundred and fifty years, no one has disturbed the peace of the Holy City," the protector boomed at them as they removed their blindfolds. Switch observed that the retinue that had originally accompanied them had already dispersed, leaving them with only 90-000. Obviously, they were not regarded as a threat. And for a good reason, too...

"I came to find a girl," Omega started but was quickly cut off by a snort from Trigger.

"And for revenge against the tyranny of the Family," he added.

"Really?" this seemed a new concept to the chief 90. "And what makes you think anyone could harm them?"

"He is the Omega," Switch responded quietly as the four turned to him in surprise.

"So, you are the one," their inquisitor gazed reflectively at Omega. "I thought you were to be reprogrammed."

"We escaped," Omega answered.

"Good," 90 said as he looked to Switch, who quickly turned his eyes away from him to the floor. "Then all is well."

“I told you he was a traitor,” Trigger said to Omega.

“I think I’ll leave you all here for a little while. There are some things I have to attend to. But before I go—” he pulled out a disrupter and aimed it at 5, whose chest spontaneously exploded. Circuits and fluids were scattered everywhere as his body slumped to the ground.

“Oh,” he turned before closing the door. “Dinner is in two hours. I do hope you’ll eat and be refreshed when I bring you to see the Lord Xavier.”

Omega and Trigger quickly turned, desperately trying to put out the fire that had begun to consume their cybernetic friend. When they were confident that the leftovers of 92A-005 would not combust, they turned to Switch, who was still staring at the floor.

Trigger picked up the cyborg and held him against the wall. “You son of a bitch,” he screamed, “I’ll destroy your worthless body for this.” He looked at Omega, wondering what to do, probably because Switch wasn’t struggling as he expected. Instead he was merely looking deep into Trigger’s eyes, paying no attention to the fact that his neck was already half-crushed.

“One question,” Omega said, “and if I don’t like your answer, Trigger will break your neck. Why should we let you live?”

Trigger grinned at Switch, expecting the word from Omega any second. But instead he found himself quickly turned over, his hand held behind his back and his face against the same wall.

“Good answer,” Omega smiled. “Now tell me what happened, Switch. I trusted you and I think you understand that. Why am I so important? Why would you allow us to be brought here?”

Switch merely motioned at Kernel. “I think you’d better ask him that. I didn’t bring us here. He did. It was he who first brought my attention to you.”

“But how can that be? He can’t even speak.”

“Remember anything from your psychic education classes?” to which Omega and Trigger both chuckled. That had been one of their best classes together.

Switch continued, “Kernel was originally a first base communication drone for the Holy Family. During his early education he experienced a bug that was common among the early models. It was a typical malfunction, having something to do with the way his neural net implants interacted with his higher brain functions. But his reaction is the most extreme case ever recorded.”

They all turned to look at Kernel as he bent over 5 and began sorting through wires in an attempt to repair the damage.

Switch continued, “First, his emotion and judgment functions shorted out, causing him to destroy his teacher and the entire class – all of which were built with the same set of circuits that were never used again. Then, according to what I can gather, the malfunction spread to his speech and memory. He remembers so

little that what he does retain in that head of his becomes a part of him. He recognizes the two of you as friends and knows that he can communicate with me. He also knows that he is virtually invisible to the Holy Family, but knows everything possible about them.

“What he has told me about you, Omega, is most fascinating. You are the Family’s only threat. And because of that, you are also their greatest asset. I’m not sure why but they need you. And I am here to make sure you stay alive long enough to find out why. And somehow the girl fits into all of this.”

Like a solar flare, I flew

Despite the clarity of that moment, I still found it very hard to believe everything Switch was telling me. If there was truth in his words then I alone can destroy the Holy Family. As the last human born, my brain is programmed with safeguards designed to disrupt the control that they exercise over the whole world.

Switch’s claim regarding Kernel – that he is an older model of the communication drones – is reasonable enough. I’d like to get that from him directly, but at the moment he’s ignoring me, quietly working on 5’s body. According to Switch he’ll be able to repair most of the damage within an hour or two. Trigger thinks that we should escape when dinner arrives, before 90 takes the chance to kill us. Switch argues that if the Holy Family had wanted us dead, we would never have been born.

That sounds true enough to me but it’s not the Holy Family I don’t trust; it’s their son X I fear. That bastard has visited with me every year on my birthday, carefully analyzing me for information. He once told me that if it weren’t for his mother, he would’ve had me recycled at birth. Apparently the Holy Mother has some affection for me, for my life anyway. Because of those special visits I probably know more of the Holy Family than any other living person. The irony of that probably doesn’t escape X either, who would love to see me destroyed.

He told me once of the history of the world, a basic part of history in school, that three centuries ago, the Holy Father had ruled the entire world. The earth had been inflicted with fire from the sky and the oceans, a war that decimated the entire planet. Outside of the borders of the empire lay ruined nuclear wastelands, populated by posthuman mutants. He carefully controlled every resource of the state, following his promise that never again would the human mind be allowed to create such destruction.

But after fifty years of ruling a stubborn people, he gave up the throne, married a young woman to whom he gave the world as a wedding present, saving only the Holy City as his own. She changed the course of history, extending her husband's methods further, deep inside the human brain. As time passed, she too passed control of the empire onto a family member, her son Xavier, and allowed her mind to be transferred into an immortal set of circuits, her image appearing only at political formalities. Her husband was rumored to have once done the same, but he now restricts his movements to the Holy City, though no one has seen him in over a century.

Away to the stars...

When the guard came to our cell with dinner, he didn't come alone, but the two others behind him stood less of a chance than he did. As quickly as the door was opened, 5 and Switch ripped holes through the walls and pulled the guards' bodies through before crushing each's positronic brain. The first guard was shocked and immediately moved to call for backup, but Trigger broke his arms so quickly he didn't even feel it until his head was shattered against the door. Kernel looked at me mutely and smiled approval.

Without saying a word, Kernel led us through the complex and began telling me – through Switch, of course – the truth behind the Holy Family's power. Their entire method relied solely on their subjects' minds being absolutely useless. Thus, he explained, the medications prescribed to every human being on the planet and the specialized educations given to every student.

Thinking about my so-called specialized education made me smile. I was originally scheduled to be a communications drone, but somehow I failed a test that made me immediately eligible for the programming department. I realized that if I passed their test, I'd be separated from the havoc I had begun to associate with Trigger. So I purposely failed and was given diagnostics in the rehabilitation center for a month.

Turns out they only wanted me to design the new service robots for one of the friends of the Holy Family. Like I would want to design a machine to open some bitch's mail for her because she's too stupid or rich to do it herself. Right. I think I understand the uselessness of all society. Most people barely know how to tie the laces on their own shoes, let alone repair their own neural network when it goes down.

But as for the bit about the drugs, I'm not sure that I can completely agree. I mean, even if I haven't always taken my own medication, I've taken other people's. I understand Trigger's obsession with trading medications with

people. Their ingredients were originally designed to balance every person's brain chemistry almost perfectly, weeding out the mental instabilities that are fairly normal for nature. But what the government did not expect was that a drug custom-designed for one person would have a very different effect on someone else. What started out as an illegal but almost religious practice quickly became a commonplace occurrence on any street corner. And just as the prostitutes support the system that keeps them where they are, so does every other human being. That is, of course, why I stopped taking my own medication in the first place. I don't like having my mind controlled by anything or anyone.

And that is the primary reason I don't like having an important piece of programming code in my head unknown to my brain. Even though I know my companions are searching for an escape, I know I must find the Mother Mary to ask why those codes are even there.

At this point, I know that if Mary had wanted me destroyed, she would've done it herself a long time ago. But if X wanted me dead, he would have to go around her to do it. But that still leaves a question: why does Mary want me to live and her son want me to die? And then: which is good and which is wrong? If X should kill me, it would not be to his benefit unless I am of use to his enemies... or his mother. Either that or it could merely be for a higher reason, to protect the state or something –but why? Why would not reprogramming be easier?

Trigger insists to me that I've asked enough questions already and to please shut the fuck up. I hadn't realized I was thinking aloud so I thank him. Then I realize that we have stopped walking. Switch leans over to me and tells me that if I want to talk to Mary, now would probably be a good time. I must have had my head up my ass a decent mile because there she was in front of me, surrounded by a guard of about thirty 90s.

I fell too fast, like lightning,

To the group's surprise, they were not taken back to their cell but led from the Capitol down into the city before being simply abandoned in the streets. But before the escort left them, Mary whispered a few words in Omega's ear, "She's waiting for you," before disappearing into a wisp of the fog that drifted through the city.

"What did she say?" Trigger asked.

"I don't think it matters," retorted 5. "We have to get moving before they hunt us down for sport."

"Why would they do that?" Switch laughed.

Omega interrupted him, "She told me to find her."

He began walking slowly through the city streets, absently making his way by one block, then another while the others followed him, arguing among themselves.

They eventually found themselves near the old center of the city, where age-beaten ancient houses were slowly falling into the ocean. The disaster that had occurred here was well-recorded. Never before had an earthquake done so much damage to such a wealthy population. Every year a monument was built as close to the original center as possible, but erosion coupled with time always forced another to be laid the next year. It was only a matter of a decade before the entire city would be underwater.

Trigger bent down to read the names that were inscribed on the walkways.

Even five hundred years after their deaths, these people were as well-known and popular as they had been then. More so perhaps if you consider each had a new film come out almost every year. It wasn't that current actors couldn't play the parts as well or that these original heroes couldn't be brought back to life. It was more of an artistic choice by directors to use a figure from classical history.

"These stars," they said, "represent the epitome of the human spirit, their originality, their poise, their style, cannot be duplicated." But they could be duplicated, quite easily actually by specialized programmers and their computers.

"A city filled with dead stars," Omega murmured.

"What was that?" Switch looked at him quizzically.

"Oh... nothing."

The group stood around for a few moments, each internally debating what the next move might be. Trigger contemplated which item in eyesight he could destroy for maximum satisfaction while 5 was already eyeing the holographic windows of the building behind them. Omega gazed out over the ocean that was still eating away the city while Switch tried to figure out what his own thoughts were. Kernel's thoughts were concentrated on a signal he was receiving from the

city itself but decided against sending the nature of the message to Switch, as it was obvious they would soon find out anyway.

“Well if it isn’t the Omega,” a voice boomed out from behind them. The five immediately froze in shock. That voice could only belong to one person. Trigger spun around to look directly into the eyes of the most feared man on the planet. And he did not look happy.

Bringing with me heaven and hell.

Lord Xavier, the ruler of all Earth politely addressed the five as his bodyguards moved strategically behind them. “Why, oh why are you here, Omega? Haven’t had enough pain?” And in the blink of any eye, Omega lay on the ground wheezing as he felt his rib cage collapsing. And yet – no one had touched him.

Omega struggled to maintain himself as he watched on. “And you,” X addressed Kernel, “the lost one. I’m glad your programming survived after your brain melted down. But I think that I must thank you, for bringing him to me.”

Kernel opened his mouth to object, but still no words came out. X laughed at the irony before kicking a hole through his chest. He died with a gasp of shock as blood trickled over his lips and his body fell to the ground.

Then with a look at 5, the robot was devoured by a shower of electrical sparks. To Switch he smiled and said, “well done, good and faithful servant.”

It was then that the unnaturally-lit sky went dark as a blue-white light appeared around them. And suddenly standing over Omega was the young woman from my dreams. Xavier gasped and turned to the ghostly form. He was about to speak when the girl held her hand up to him as if ordering him not to speak. She reached her hand down to Omega, who was still struggling to stay conscious through the pain. For a moment he was amused that he could see right through her. But as his hand touched hers, he felt security in its solidness. Somehow the pain that racked his mind and body became irrelevant. And even though he could still feel the spasms causing muscle and nerve damage, he slowly rose to his feet.

X began to order the girl to stop whatever it was she was doing in the name of this and that. He continued to scream only because he knew he could not actually control what was happening. Only when Omega had stood did she finally answer.

“He is the Omega, brother.”

Omega began to realize something in shock. This young girl was also a member of the Holy Family. She looked into his eyes, as if probing the depths of his soul.

The ruler of the Earth glared at his sister. "I know he is."

She answered her brother, "then we know what must happen here," still gazing ferociously into Omega's eyes as if looking for something lost long ago.

"It must not be like this," X begged.

"It must," she said as she turned toward Omega and without warning, merged her ethereal form with his body which, glowing, crumpled to the ground.

But there I froze, mid-air,

I could feel my body falling, air rushing past me as I fell toward the earth. I opened my eyes to see the ground, and I could see the Holy City of God directly below me. Clouds rushed by as the whistle of air against my ears crescendoed to a scream. I opened my mouth in an attempt to harmonize against the noise with my own, only to find that the speed of my fall was forcing too much oxygen into my lungs to even breathe.

I looked upwards to see the height from which I had fallen and saw a host of angels watching me as I continued my descent. The face of God was nowhere to be seen. If only he cared enough about me perhaps I would not hit the earth. Even if I could be saved, my body has melted to a shade of its former self as the velocity of my descent has triggered a painful fire that has already consumed me. And still I fall, like a torch thrown from the sky.

But I know that I am not that fallen angel. I am Omega, the last human. I must break out of this nightmare. I am the only one...

Suddenly I hear the girl's voice in my mind. She is asking me if I want to end the fall. I know what my answer is the moment that I feel my body collide with the ground. But instead of awaking to a tangled bed, I awake from my fall and climb to my feet to view the world I have entered.

All around me the Holy City is in ruins, its temples of worship and souvenir-shops destroyed. The smell of sulfur is in the air. The smoke continues to hover over the city, slowly rising to reveal the extent of the damage.

In the distance I look to the mount. The monoliths that once dominated it are now in ruins. I carefully lower my bruised body to the ground to rest. I am tired, so tired...

I close my eyes and lose myself in another delusion. All around me there are voices. A few sound strained from emotion, others are seeking answers. But there is one that rises above the rest as I fade into darkness again.

"Is he dead or alive? He must live. He must!"

When I awoke, I was sitting up against a large rock, surrounded by a strange mix of people: friends, enemies, and strangers. Everything was moving slowly as if I were still caught in the dream, but one thing was certain: most of them were trying to stop me from doing something.

I guess that whatever I had done so far while unconscious in that dream would likely be easiest to continue but I can barely even move from a dull pain throbbing in my chest.

I look up to Trigger, who is unusually emotional – it could be anger or sadness, I'm not sure. X is lunging toward me desperately, but I can tell by the look in his eyes he believes he is already too late. I see his father's image behind him, his daughter beside him shimmering softly, a tear in her eye.

I look at my chest and I can see that I have somehow managed to drive a knife between my ribs and into my lungs. There is an alarming large quantity of blood falling into my lap. But I suppose that would explain the delirium.

It is interesting to note to myself that I have made a choice that could affect the rest of humankind. All of the half-machines out there are suddenly aware of the existence of such a choice, thanks to the special attention given to my programming. Strangely, I have an urge to mark this victory over the Holy Family with words, as if I had achieved something.

But before I can speak there is a sudden shudder in my ribs that causes my back to give out and my body to slip against the face of the rock. My cheek makes contact with the dirty ground. I can still see the girl. As my vision dies her image remains clear to me even as everything else fades to darkness. And in the distance behind her I can see the shadowed edge of the universe slowly collapsing, enveloping me like a blanket.



Insight / Farsight

1+1

The sun dawned over the blue-white earth, shining on Lunar Fragment 15 and the space station next to it. The fragment had been there many years since the nuclear explosion that had created it. Now it was slowly being drained of its valuable minerals.

Lenore, a state-of-the-art mining station, had finished its last assignment on Fragment 23 well ahead of schedule.

The year was 2099 of the Common Era, but few alive knew that. For the common worker, it could just as easily have been 2199 or even 1999. On earth, in the civilized hemisphere, it was spring. The long, hard winter had finally yielded to flowers blooming and birds chirping.

But in space it was just as cold as always, with no way of measuring the seasons. The four men and three women, who were now leaving the station for the small asteroid, were all prisoners of war. Their captain, a cruel woman, was rarely generous, especially with a day of work left unfinished. She and her son enjoyed playing with the prisoners of the forced-work station for sport.

This time, though, she was serious.

And at a word, a blast of searing heat reduced all seven prisoners to radioactive ashes. A heartbeat later, a small explosion turned Lunar Fragment 15 into a rapidly expanding sphere of dust.

Stumbling, I rise to meet the setting sun. It is very close to the time of mass. Cold air bites my nose and my eyes blink in the light of the stars.

Overhead a red moon shines down over a small section of a large city. The streets, now empty of people, seem to have a nightlife of their own. My feet, scarred and sore, scrape on the stone of the streets. The rats become alert with the smell of warm blood, scurrying behind me as I walk.

Ahead of me is a building; The tavern inside is quiet save for the sound of the bartender's broom. I turn beside the building and I see there is a small alleyway crowded with garbage cans and cardboard boxes.

The occupants of the boxes ignore me as I go by. They have endured their share and have little pity for me. A child, lying in a mess of cloth looks up at me, his eyes meeting mine. But in fear he turns back to the brick that is his pillow.

I continue walking down this hall of the forgotten until I come upon a girl. Her body is shaking violently as her large stomach heaves. The pains of labor are upon her. In between clenched gasps she looks at me with tears in her eyes. Anybody, even I, could help ease her misery.

So I kneel beside her and hold her hand. She holds mine tight. As she enters the next phase of labor, I decide to help.

Taking off my rag of a coat, I place it underneath her. It should help to make her more comfortable. I have never had to help in a situation like this before, but I did my best.

No words were exchanged between either of us. She prompted my movements with her eyes and what little came of her voice.

And after what seemed like an eternity, the cries of a small baby echoed through the silent city. The sobs from the child were joined by mine and the mother's. A beautiful sight it would have been to behold.

But no one cared, save for the people of the streets. Dozens gathered from this alley and others, to pay homage to the newborn. In remembrance of a birth long past, each brought gifts. As poor as they were, they gave what they could.

And I, taken to be the babe's father, stood over the mother and child. With the glorious stars shining down, I felt as warm as any man in any mansion in all the world.

Three hours ago a small explosion was detected in European Union space. Intelligence reports, intercepted from low-level communications, suggest that a small mining station had fired on and destroyed one of many of the lunar fragments in Union space. Seven political prisoners, who had been sentenced to the station, were all killed.

The station, Lenore, is run by Natasha Treif and her only son, who was killed in the last war but brought back to life through an early cybernetic experiment. She seems to be regarded as a threat to internal security by the Union.

If our sensors are correct, she has installed six additional disrupters, to total eight. Spatial distortions have also been detected around the station, so it is possible that she has recently installed a high-speed engine.

It is also believed that she may have added to the station's weapons capabilities a banned device, obtained illegally, possibly stolen from her own government.

You are to board the station to confirm that report. If it is true, commandeer it back to American space, where the device will be handed over for analysis. You are authorized to kill both the woman and the cyborg if necessary, but it would be preferred that Natasha be taken alive. Perhaps she would like to defect; her knowledge of Union technology would be invaluable.

“Welcome back, sir. I trust your journey was acceptable.” The man in black smiled, his white teeth gleaming by the light of the morning star. He took my bags through the long hall, where silver armors spoke of ages past, and guided me to my room where I hung my coat and hat on the back of the oak door.

“I will prepare dinner,” he said.

He had been faithful all these years, unlike the others who had abandoned me for their own. They could love as I could not.

As dinner was served in the candle-lit dining room, my faithful servant stood by, as if to guard my soul. He stayed as he always had, not wanting what I could offer in riches alone. As is my custom, I offered him a seat, to dine with me as a peer. As is his custom, he quietly declined, preferring to stand and watch. Usually I would not argue. Many times I have tried, but always he would insist on finishing only what I did not want.

“My good and faithful servant,” I said, “please sit.”

So, for the first time since I was a child, I watched him sit down. I thought of our long history. “Remember, friend, when we used to sit like this and you would coax me to eat my vegetables?”

He smiled. “Yes, Master, I do.”

“You promised to hold and guide me as a father. This you have done. And for that I thank you.”

He stared at me through his strange eyes. “I have not forgotten anything, sir. You are as strong as your father was. You are more than your father even hoped for you. But you have become enemies with yourself. You have grown without love.”

“I am very old,” he said; for the first time, I noticed the lines of age on his face. “As I raised you and your father before you, I am compelled to carry out every one of my promises. I have an obligation to your heritage to commit one last act.”

He stood up, and picked up a knife out of the calf on the table and pointed it at the portrait of my father behind me.

“Your father grew with love and lost it. You continued where he left off. But you have never known love, nor have you tried to find it. To help you find love: this was to be my duty, but I have failed. One of us will die today,” he said with tears in his eyes. “It gives me no pleasure, but I have sworn to do this.”

He moved so quickly that I had no chance to stop him. He turned the blade inward, driving it into his heart. He collapsed to the floor, where I knelt to hold his head to my heart. I pulled the knife out of his body and wept for the first time, realizing that I had never truly loved him. As the light in his eyes faded, I pushed the blade into my own chest.

There was a time long ago that I considered myself human, when I had a family and a normal life. But when the revolution started twenty-odd years ago, I was left with almost nothing.

I wanted life to have meaning, to somehow prove myself to the ashes of my father, so I joined the National Border Police. The skills that I had learned while in the Federal Bureau of Investigation became useful to them. I became a commissioned officer, working to eliminate rebel factions in the dangerous fringes around the slowly-expanding national border.

But just yesterday I was given a new assignment under the Secret Service. I was told it could be an important move in the ongoing war against the European Union. In fact, if I was successful, I would be given a medal, a promotion, and a generous pension when I reached retirement age.

My small vessel was custom-built to resemble a Union satellite, allowing me to escape the notice of the enemy's border police. When I reached the Lenore, the special airlock latched to the side of the ship, drilling a hole into the hull, which then was sealed again, using the front of my ship, after I stepped inside. Save that one area, the rest of my ship broke into pieces, then disintegrated into dust. It would appear to observers that a satellite had lost its orbit and crossed paths with the station.

I am the last of my kind. My people and way of life are gone. I carry the burden of a hundred generations on my shoulders. We have seen empires come and crumble away. Many powers have forced us into slavery and driven us to extinction. We would survive one master only to be abused by another.

All forms of deities have been introduced to us. Even after slavery, my people suffered as no other, swallowed and assimilated. I remain the sole survivor of a great and mighty race.

I have been a teacher and priest, a battle-chief and king. I was a bard and hero of great renown. But soon I will be forgotten by this world that is itself a graveyard of memories. History has no place for me now. No Heaven awaits me.

All is silent as I begin to play.

The instrument that is a symbol of my past resounds through the air. Each note is played with perfect precision as I begin to walk. There are no drums playing, but I can remember the noble day we marched off to war to fight for our freedom.

For hundreds of years we lived in peace. We gave up our violent ways as our tribes united into a nation. In the third century of peace our green world readied to welcome visitors. It was after our leaders had sent a welcoming message to them that war was declared.

At first we put up a noble defense. But our weapons were few and inadequate to repel the invaders. They came with their guns and ships to enslave us, calling themselves human, the people of earth, and Christian, followers of a peaceful god. To them we were animals, unable to think, unable to believe.

But we remained strong even in slavery, knowing that one day we would once again be a free and peaceful people. Someday we would overthrow these barbarians and send them back to their world of darkness and ignorance.

I stand here in memory of what has been. I am a relic of an age that fell long ago, the last breath of a civilization that still yearns for freedom.

It felt as if our bodies were suddenly intertwined. Our hands reached for each other, our arms wrapping around each other's bodies. And our lips touched and locked. Feelings interrupted long ago were ignited once again.

The mechanized voice of the cyborg interrupted us. It was running toward me. I reached for my blaster.

Natasha covered my hand with hers. "He won't hurt you."

But I was so sure she was wrong.

The smell of burnt steel filled the room.

"My God, John, that was our son..."

As she began to weep, I felt trapped within myself. I could do nothing but watch her.

She refused citizenship in exchange for the information I had been sent for. And with good reason: she had nothing.

"There's no hope anymore, John, not even for you."

The Lenore was already moving toward the outer rim of the Solar system, disrupters set to self-destruct.

I remember looking around, seeing everything, but noticing only the ashes and dust that covered it all.



Grimoire

Verfin

The Arcana of the Double-Cross

0 Earth

Joker
Innocence, Quest

1 Moon

Ace of Hearts
Mystery, Initiation

2 Sun

2 of Diamonds
Foundation, Harmony

3 Star

3 of Clubs
Illumination, Spiritual Harmony

4 Fire

4 of Diamonds
Purification, Spiritual Initiation

5 Air

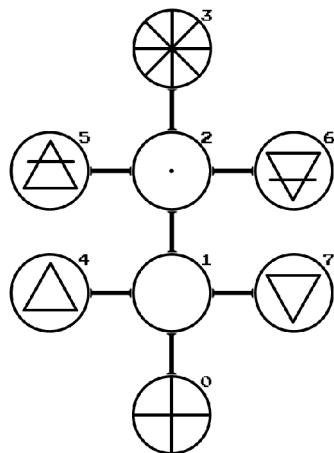
5 of Spades
Change, Conflict

6 Earth

6 of Clubs
Creativeness, Wisdom

7 Water

7 of Hearts
Emotions, Potential



Initiation

This is a place that is not a place
And a time that is not a time.
I am Human but I am also Spirit.
Here I cast my circle.

To the East, I call the Guardians of Life:
Blodeuwedd, Maiden of Flowers,
Manannan, Lord of the Underworld,
I welcome you here!

To the North, I call the Guardians of Law:
Ceridwen, Great Mother,
Ogma, Lord of the World,
I welcome you here!

To the West, I call the Guardians of Love:
Arianrhod, Fruitful Mother,
Dagda, Lord of the Otherworld,
I welcome you here!

To the South, I call the Guardians of Light:
Brigit, Powerful Mother,
Lugh, Lord of the Sky,
I welcome you here!

Hail One True God, I honor you!

Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of wind,
Depth of sea,
Stability of rock,
Bear witness:

I, Merlin, do now commit myself
To forever follow my Path of Truth
And to worship the One True God,
Respecting those that follow him by other faces,
And forever striving to abandon selfishness.

May you be with me always,
Before me, behind me,
In me, beneath me, above me,
On my right, on my left,
When I am awake, when I am asleep,
So that all men may know Truth.

I thank you, Powers of Air, Kingdom of Wind:
May your spirit of wisdom be with me always.
Go in peace and power.

I thank you, Powers of Earth, Kingdom of Forest:
May your spirit of strength be with me always.
Go in peace and power.

I thank you, Powers of Water, Kingdom of Ocean:
May your spirit of change be with me always.
Go in peace and power.

I thank you, Powers of Fire, Kingdom of Flame:
May your spirit of health be with me always.
Go in peace and power.

As above, so below.
As within, so without.
As the universe, so the soul.
As it is willed, so be it.

The Circle of Jesus Christ

Part 1: Awakening

John the Baptist is standing in the water as Jesus looks to him from the shore. He smiles to him, recognizing his cousin and friend. Jesus wades out to him, and waits to be baptized. With dismay, John realizes what Jesus wants, feels very unworthy of baptizing the Messiah and says, "But, Lord, it should be you baptizing me." Jesus says, "It is my father's will." After wrestling with some thoughts in his mind, John complies.

After Jesus comes up from the water, a light appears from heaven, a voice proclaiming: "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus leaves the water.

Part 2: Purification

Jesus sits at a table in the Upper Room, surrounded by his disciples. He holds a piece of bread in his right hand and a chalice of wine in the other. He broke the bread, saying, "This is my body that is broken for you." In the same manner he took the cup, saying, "This is my blood that is given for you."

They depart the Upper Room to pray in the garden. Judas returns, kissing Jesus, betraying him to the authorities for forty pieces of silver.

Jesus is then led away to face Pilate and the Jewish courts. He stands silent as he is scourged with a whip and a crown of thorns pressed hard onto his head. He is very weary, due to his body having been beaten and losing so much blood. Even then, he is forced to carry the heavy crux of the cross that he will soon be nailed to.

Part 3: Illumination

Jesus is lying on a wooden cross, his arms outstretched. The Centurion ties his arms down to the crux, then his feet to the base, making sure the ropes are secure. Then he begins to nail a spike through Jesus' left wrist. In six blows, he finishes. Then, with six blows, he hammers another through the right wrist. Likewise a third is nailed through both feet.

He raises the cross up into a hole. The lurch is very painful for Jesus. Spectators mock him. A sign is posted above his head, reading "Jesus, King of the Jews."

A Roman Soldier, sympathetic to Jesus' pain, thrusts a spear through his side, fulfilling the prophecy that no bone of the Messiah's shall be broken (the priests were going to have his body ripped apart by horses if he did not die by sundown).

The sky suddenly darkens with clouds followed by flashes of thunder and lightning. Jesus cries out, "Father, father, why have you forsaken me?" and then dies. The Centurion, seeing this, says, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Part 4: -

Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb, a stone covering the door. Two Roman soldiers are placed to guard against Jesus' followers and enemies. After three days, the ground shakes and the stone mysteriously begins to move, opening the tomb. In fright the guards run for their lives. Then everything was suddenly still again.

Mary of Magdalene comes to the tomb to anoint the body with oil, as is the custom. She finds the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. She begins to walk around the garden, finds someone who she assumes is the gardener, and asks him where the body has been moved to.

He smiles at her and she looks away. "Mary," he says and she recognizes the voice. She turns around but he is gone.

The Book of Lucifer

I. Creation

1. In the beginning the world was without form and the spirit of God hovered over the void.
2. And the spirit spoke, creating order amidst confusion.
3. The spirit of God created beings like unto himself to whom he gave the task of creating the world:
4. To Raphael was given the task of dividing the light from the dark;
5. To Gabriel was given the task of dividing the earth from the sky;
6. To Ariel was given the task of dividing the land from the water;
7. To Michael was given the task of dividing the day from the night;
8. To Sachiël was given the task of creating the sun for the day sky;
9. To Anael was given the task of creating the moon and stars for the night sky;
10. To Cassiel was given the task of creating the plants of the earth;
11. To Samael was given the task of creating the animals of the earth;
12. And of all creations, no whole or part was more important than any other.
13. The host of heaven looked upon that which was created and it was seen as good and perfect.

II. The Gift of Fire

1. But Samael, a prince of heaven, said, "It is not good that humans be so alone and unaided."
2. And God argued with him, saying, "Thou art a chief of creation; why do you question me? What I have done, I have done."
3. It was then that Samael departed the presence of God, vowing to himself that man should be superior to the rest of creation.
4. Hearing this, God commanded that he should be cast down from heaven and bound to earth, his name taken from him.
5. As Man saw the angel fall, it was as lightning, and he called it fire.
6. It was that day that humanity gained the power of language, for never before had anything been named;

7. And Woman bore a child to Man, and she named the girl Eve.

III. The Division of Heaven

1. Although many angels agreed that it was right, there were an equal number of angels unwilling to condemn their prince.

2. And there was much discord among the ranks of heaven,

3. For no one agreed whether the light-bringer should be restored.

4. On the sixth day after the angel's descent, the angels who supported him approached the throne of God,

5. But God had become as an unmoving silent stone.

6. So those angels that supported the light-bringer left heaven and descended to earth,

7. Freeing the injured angel and taking him to a region of the earth called Hades, for it was hidden from the eyes of heaven.

IV. Cain and Abel

1. Before the war in heaven, earth was a beautiful and perfect garden.

2. But when Lucifer was freed by the rebellious angels, those still loyal to the silent God began to search for him.

3. And they made no care to preserve their flawless creation; their hatred so consumed them.

4. Their wrath was so great that Woman was killed; Man and his daughter fled to the desert regions, where they hid, awaiting peace.

5. Eve bore two sons to Adam, named Cain and Abel.

6. Cain was a tiller of the earth and grew all kinds of grain;

7. Abel was a keeper of animals and hunted wild creatures.

8. And it came to pass that Cain and Abel agreed that they should make a sacrifice unto God.

9. So they both constructed altars of stone upon which they would burn their offerings:

10. Cain making an offering of grain and wheat and Abel making an offering of fat and flesh.

11. But as the two sacrifices were made, Cain became jealous with Abel,
12. And Abel did provoke his brother.
13. Cain became consumed with rage, striking his brother down and casting his dead body upon the flames.
14. But as his brother's body burned, Cain became weak with guilt.
15. Lucifer came to him and caused Abel's blood to enter his body so that the spirit in it might still live.
16. And he marked Cain, as a warning to those that he should meet that he may not die.
17. Cain then buried the remains of his brother and fled into the desert, leaving the world behind,
18. And there he lived, fathering a number of children, one of which was Enoch.
19. Thus, he became a solitary figure, destined to eternally roam the earth, separated from all living things.

V. The Children of Angels

1. After the desecration of earth and the death of Abel, Eve bore another child to Adam, whom she named Seth.
2. As the tensions eased between the angelic kingdoms, humankind began to flourish on the face of the earth.
3. And the angels saw that the women of earth were beautiful and took wives for themselves;
4. These women bore children unto these angels, and they became great heroes on the earth.
5. And in such manner was born Nimrod, who oversaw the construction of a great temple that would allow men to be closer to heaven.
6. But after two hundred years, work stopped as those in the building camps began to speak in different tongues.
7. For the spirit of God had confused the minds of all people.
8. And Nimrod himself disappeared into the wilderness.

VI. The Great Flood

1. As time passed, and humankind prospered, people began to live differently than each other.
2. But throughout, men and women learned more about the ways of pleasure, neglecting to worship those that had created them,
3. And though the sons and daughters of angels tried, humankind could not be inspired to advance.
4. Lucifer, seeing that civilization had become stagnant, went to heaven to beg a meeting with God.
5. God, awakening from his long slumber, agreed to see Lucifer in his throne room, as he had so many times before.
6. And though the angels of heaven were angry, they had been ordered long ago never to harm the first of their kind.
7. Thus, Lucifer spoke with God for the first time since his exile from heaven.
8. God agreed with Lucifer that only through disaster could humanity advance,
9. And so it was ordered that earth be returned to its primal root, far below the ocean.
10. The skies then rained on the earth for the first time, and it continued for forty days.
11. And of all humans and animals, only a certain number were saved.
12. But among those destroyed were the children of angels, for it was agreed that their existence was not good.

VII. After the Flood

1. And so, when the flood-waters receded, humanity struggled to once again dominate the earth, striving forward and preserving the past.
2. And the histories of many civilizations are to be found in many books – some are as true as false.
3. But it is the history of Lucifer and his angels that will remain forever, not in words, but in the heroic human spirit.
4. For it is from he that we derive our skill and it is to him we owe our advance.
5. He is the light. Hail Lucifer, son of the morning.

The Litany of Truth and Law

Born into darkness, I was alone in the void before the waters moved. I am the only witness to creation itself, for I am beyond the threshold of time.

I stand at the barrier and guard the cycles. I am the Law. I speak as Truth.

I bore witness as Lucifer fell, bringing the balance of chaos to you and your kind – a crawling race of apes. And unperceived, I walk among you and stalk the night, lying in wait for the righteous.

Listen carefully to my words human, for I hunger for your soul.

I am the Law. I am the Truth. What I speak is the Law. To understand Truth you must understand the Law.

Say the Words!

Truth is Law.

(“Truth is Law.”)

Law is Truth.

(“Law is Truth.”)

Without pain, there is no Truth.

(“Without pain, there is no Truth.”)

Without love, there is no Law.

(“Without love, there is no Law.”)

Do you understand yet, my lesser brothers? No, you do not. Your slow, clay brains cannot understand the Law. Therefore, it cannot comprehend the Truth. Remove yourself from what you think you know. Obey the Law and you follow Truth.

Say the Words!

Truth is Law.

(“Truth is Law.”)

Law is Truth.

(“Law is Truth.”)

Without Law, there is no pain.

(“Without Law, there is no pain.”)

Without Truth, there is no love.

(“Without Truth, there is no love.”)

You are such miserable creatures. You repeat the words as if you grasped the Truth with your mortal minds. Perhaps if you know the Law you shall.

Say the Words!

Love is the hand that takes.

(“Love is the hand that takes.”)

Pain is the end of suffering.

(“Pain is the end of suffering.”)

Love is the darkness within.

(“Love is the darkness within.”)

Pain is the soul’s rebirth.

(“Pain is the soul’s rebirth.”)

I am the Law. My words are Truth. You have learned the Law. Perhaps you may understand Truth.

Son of Man, beware: the dawn breaks in the east. Blood will be spilled and I shall return to my lair on the gray shore of time.

It is the morning and the world is afire!

Meditation of Air

I am the breeze that brushes over a brook to soothe the bright heat of day. I am the wind that takes the waves of the ocean and wash them over the sand. I am the tornado that twists and turns clouds into a tower of torrent.

We are the barrier between Fire and Water. We are a wheel moving in changing directions. We are the balancing scales of justice.

Though food requires Earth, Water, and Fire, your breath requires Air alone. We are the sustenance by which you function, but never hold for more than a moment. Without us all life would cease to exist.

It is we who hold the heavens above the earth and the stars in their places. Though fire burn and life exchange us, we can never be destroyed.

We are above the earth and below it, inside and outside, within your body and your soul. We are not only that which makes life, but we are life itself.

We are everywhere. Through the realms of the moon, sun, and star, we sing the music of the spheres.

Nine Truths

Live life in perspective.

You are everything.

You are nothing.

Remember:

the universe is still growing.

Have no expectations
for only heartbreak can yield to new love
and even failures can be an enlightening experience.

No one should fear being alone –
neither should anyone be happy with too many friends.

Both are reactions against a universe
which has no concept of pain or love.

Live life as if you could change the world,
always think independently
and never entirely accept anything as truth.

*It is a fallacy to think that you can increase
your awareness of the universe
and still be able to find your place in it.*

*Rules are written and enforced by people
born without common sense or compassion.*

*Fortunate are they who cannot see order in the world
or other such comforting delusions.*

*You can live on the streets
or in the system — either way
you remain a cog in the machine
that is the universe.*

*There is no method
more straight-forward
than madness.*

A Celtic Lunar Calendar

It is well-known that the ancient Celts probably reckoned their year using the number 13 because there are at most 13 moon-cycles in a year. What is less-known is the fact that the Celts marked their days as the period between two nights, which is still echoed in the Welsh word for week, “noswyth,” which literally means “eight nights.” So it is not improbable to suggest that they also might have marked their months by the period between two dark moons.

Each month would begin and end after that with each dark moon. The year itself would end with the dark moon just before the next Winter Solstice. And depending on the number of dark moons, there might be 12 or 13 months in a year. The calendar naturally would start with the dark moon just before the Winter Solstice (December 21st). Please understand that is not to be confused with the more common Seasonal Calendar, which marks the beginning of the New Year with the onset of Winter (Hallow’s Eve).

There are fifteen consonants in the Ogham alphabet and it has been suggested by Robert Graves (*The White Goddess*) that two be “doubled-up” so that there might only be thirteen. His suggestion of doubling up Ng (equivalent to Kn) with N and St (or Z or SS) with S fit fairly well according to Irish and Welsh phonetical mutations. For the purposes of a simple lunar calendar, however, merely numbering the moons is sufficient.

The following is an example of a 2-year lunar calendar using the standard calendar from December 2009 to December 2011.

		Dark Moon	Full Moon	Dark Moon	Full Moon
1	B	Dec 16 /09	Dec 31 /09	Dec 5 /10	Dec 21 /10
2	L	Jan 15 /10	Jan 30 /10	Jan 4 /11	Jan 19 /11
3	F	Feb 14 /10	Feb 28 /10	Feb 3 /11	Feb 18 /11
4	S	Mar 15 /10	Mar 30 /10	Mar 4 /11	Mar 19 /11
5	N	Apr 14 /10	Apr 28 /10	Apr 3 /11	Apr 18 /11
6	H	May 14 /10	May 27 /10	May 3 /11	May 17 /11
7	D	Jun 12 /10	Jun 26 /10	Jun 1 /11	Jun 15 /11
8	T	Jul 11 /10	Jul 26 /10	Jul 1 /11	Jul 15 /11
9	C	Aug 10 /10	Aug 24 /10	Jul 30 /11	Aug 13 /11
10	Q	Sep 8 /10	Sep 23 /10	Aug 29 /11	Sep 12 /11
11	M	Oct 7 /10	Oct 23 /10	Sep 27 /11	Oct 12 /11
12	G	Nov 6 /10	Nov 21 /10	Oct 26 /11	Nov 10 /11
13	R			Nov 25 /11	Dec 10 /11

This type of calendar may be used for a variety of purposes...



Tarot

r a n d o m

The Fool

A boy running through a field under the sun
With hair the color of gold spun from flax
And eyes like jewels in a common crown,
A mere boy who could be Arthur returned
Seems to possess the secret to happiness
That we all seek in life before we die.
We patiently wait until he might explain it to us.

Like grains of sand, time slips through the glass;
The boy attains manhood, with all the
Wisdom and understanding that come with age.
Now that he has put away childish things,
We ask of him the way of happiness.
But his puzzled face reveals that the child,
Like the answer, has been long forgotten.

For what it may be worth, you should
know that I respect your strength
for surviving, under pressure,
an onslaught I did not.
I fell here, watched
and criticized by everyone
for defending myself.
But you were not abandoned
and forced to choose your path
as I was. So, I walk alone, for all to see;
before me falls a single shadow,
my only remaining companion
who also walks alone,
a single figure under the spotlight.

13 / 7

There he is, standing there with
No one to bother his thoughts,
Hiding from the storm, writing
A song for a pretty girl
Who will never love him back.
See the rain grace his body,
Each drop a fallen angel.
Look at him by the moon's light,
How it reflects in his eyes,
As if he alone held it.
Watch as he forms the letters -
Creating a better world
Than the one he stands in now.

OUR FATHER
WHO ART ONLY HUMAN,
HOLLOW IS THY NAME.
THY KINGDOM DONE.
THY WILL TO COME
TO EARTH, DOWN FROM HEAVEN.
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR STEADY DEATH.
AND GIVE US THE WILL TO FORGIVE,
FOR WE KNOW NOT WHY WE SHOULD.
AND LET US NOT BE DECEIVED BY MEN.
AND DELIVER US FROM YOUR EVIL.
FOR THY WILL IS NOTHING —
NO POWER, NO GLORY —
FOREVER AND EVER.

SIXTEEN THOUGHTS inside my head:

Surely I would be better dead
Than buried here with all this pain,
Pouring down like acid rain
That melts the life through my skin
But makes me wait for the end within.
My heart bleeds, no longer open
To the gods whom I know are broken.
So push me quickly in the ground
And give to me the love you've found
(Which is to you the same old hate
But looks much better on the plate)
From your dear sweet goddess-whore,
Who knows all but feels no more
Than the dead within the grave
Who, like I, have none to save.

A N T I D O T E

Life means nothing, but victory is only a phone-call away...

Simply enter your access code... How may I help you?

I stand in the great world's white desert:
No thoughts or feelings here – only the emptiness
Of broken hearts that glitter like fields of cold
Stars over a narcotic world where only the dead survive.

Impulses of bit-streams from my hard-wired heart,
Superhuman and hollow thoughts in my copper cage
Collide together like dystopic gods – zeros and ones
That burn like the skin of forgotten feelings.

So many times was I dried out and tied up
That I know I will die holding hands with
Only myself, devoid of feeling the empty
Spaces between the cruel words, "I love you."

Temptation!

Inspiration strikes! leaving me wounded within my shelter;
rainclouds falling through past storms like acid quietly dripping
on my head. Many times have I been bruised by this spirit,
the untameable: the rebel, the untouchable, the whore,
by each I have been slowly bled of that of who I am:
my words. Listen: the rain falls again with the command
from on high: love her or be unloved, leaving me trapped
between who I am and the settled dust of the grave.

If I were god, they would be mine; but I am human
and theirs, to control, to own, to marry. Joy was promised,
but I am bitter, unable to live with or without, forcing me
to be a chameleon who can change his coat, with so many
outworn by those who would love me, hold me, cage me
like the beast I am – a savior to these lost souls
who have nowhere to run but to my spirit, invading my throne
as if I were Santa Christ to answer their prayers.

Surely they are no worse than the children of an unknown god –
the untameable: the rebel, the untouchable, the whore –
with simple wishlists for joy, hope, and love, that come
only by me and through me says the Lord. But still
am I dragged through the dirt I created them from, leaving
me hurt so much. They do not care for my wishes: no past,
no present, no future can hold me; I am what comes
to them at night, in dreams, the figment of a deranged imagination.

Prophet, devil, thing of evil am I and more, a deity
with peace, joy, happiness, and love to give
away like so much spare change; leaving none for myself save
what is stolen by greedy lovelorn souls, who want only the hope
I cannot give them. So I pray forgiveness, though my sins
are short; I will be your god to blame. But watch the sky,
for the son of man is coming, and you will recognize him not,
for he is human. And until that day, he bides his time, alone.

1 In the beginning was the word,
And the word was with god,
And the word was god.

2 And the word decided
That it would be first and only
In the hearts of men and mice -
To control ever as if it were
The only in actual existence.

3 But the words of men,
And the hearts of men,
Were to decide otherwise.

4 And the mice became the first to believe.

1 ± 1

Sometime else, in other words,
This destiny might've been easier
By a decision that now refuses
The choice to save judgment.

Here we are – together again,
But still apart, waiting
For the worlds to stumble, while
Sky falls and hearts leak.

Is this how it must be:
Two, lost in the confusion
That fate created?
Has absence made us cold?

Portrait of the Devil

Lightning crashes – words touch the page
Like fire falling from the heavens –
A new Prometheus is born from flesh
Ripped and torn from bones of thieves,
Men executed

For uncounted crimes against
Fellow monsters. Sinful sinews are bound
To a sick frame, animated by
Blood stolen from hopeless mothers and
Forced together

With thread from the same worms
That digest the silent dead.
Angels and devils invade my hand,
Forcing it to move, shaping thoughts
On paper.

This is the crucible that transforms
The world with Heaven's fire:
Choice, given to man by Lucifer,
God's first angel, ambassador to a
Fallen race.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Alone Ever Falling

A B C D E F G

Alone. In a corner I sit and wait 10
For the rose that comes in silence. 8
A young girl stares into a full glass. 9
The lover plays an empty song. 8
She falls. I run. No one looks. 7
No one else is even here to see... 9 (51)

I try to redeem... 5 (my self) 7
I try to defend... 5 (my words) 7
Can't save myself from trying... 7
(save myself from lying...) 6 (27)(78)

Alone. From my corner I fall and run 10
From the one that wants only love. 8
A young girl stares at my empty glass. 9
The lover makes a full speech. 8
She sits. I wait. No one looks. 7
No one else can ever save me now... 9 (51)(129)

I try to demean... 5 (my self) 7
I try to explain... 5 (my words) 7
Can't save myself from crying... 7
(save myself from dying...) 6 (27)(156)

The Monster's Father

I created the beast that would destroy me
from internal abominations,
thinking I could imitate god.

Forever damned am I for thinking
I could cleanse sinful flesh
that forgets not its sinful creation.

Artificial words echo from an empty heaven:
a prayer of forgiveness
for a soul that was lost while giving life.

The
Tree of
Life

With one hand up,
I touched the first branch
and began my ascent to Heaven,
only stopping to examine the height
I'd reached and how high left the climb.

Up here I am safe, alone from the ordinary world
of simple church-mice who can only fight for scraps
of the knowledge that I let fall. Up here
I am at peace; no one can bother me
with their pleas for mercy.

It is here I discovered
within myself what I had
long sought:
my soul.

Stepping down
from my place
in the sky,
I spoke to one who would be my equal,
but in fear
he turned
and fled;
so I returned
to my ascent,
letting angels
soothe my spirit.

Small Change

Burning his wrists with the strain, a man struggles
To free himself from the agony of silence.

“Go no lower, else fall to sea and be lost forever,”
The eagle hears, but ignores the cries for help.

If we are to save ourselves, we must plunge
Beneath the tree to destroy the roots of evil.

My dearest one: I miss you by my side;
Without you, I am lost among strangers.

We tried to go back to a more enlightened time –
That was our first mistake.

The Kingdom of Heaven

When I was a lonely boy,
I would sit on the stairway
that led to the door of my house
and look to the stars, high
above, wondering,
could there really be an
all-powerful anything?

The little book
under my bed, despite the
tape that held it together,
would tell me "yes" -
but what else could it say?

My dreams would speak to me
with memories of a forgotten past,
trying to correct that lie,
but it was not until
I was older,
with sixteen years on my back,
when a professor of mine,
world-worn and gray,
spoke to me of religion,
of holy words,
and of Carl Jung, who said,
"The dream shows the inner truth
and reality as it is."

That day I realized:
If the child within me
could still not believe in a pre-constructed god,
then perhaps
I would have to look for my own answers.

Jerusalem Streets

I stand at the door and knock:

No one should come to know themselves but through
me.

I am the way, the half-truths and the lies.

Complete understanding of all things is impossible

But I make the unreal into existence.

I am the connection between what you know

And what is beyond the norm,

The spirit of the antichrist reborn

In a new world, a fresh era waiting.

My imagination is the only limit I place on the world
around me;

My thoughts dictate what will be tomorrow.

I am all that is and was and is to come -

I am what you want to be and what you fear you
will be.

Song of the Vampire

Come, my beautiful, into the shadows,
Where the pain will not bruise me.
It is so much more peaceful here
Than beneath the glaring light.

*For many years have I sailed –
Miserable world! how I hate you,
Crawling, carrying on, procreating,
A continuum of pitiful existence.*

Don't stand so far away, young one,
Come closer so I can see you.
Your tender, delicate form entices me
To kiss you deeply within your heart.

*Brought across, victim of another –
The wished-for eternal companion.
More worthy for life than death,
I became the sacrament of evil.*

Ah, my young innocent sweet,
Come closer so I can touch you.
The smell of blood seems too alluring,
Even for such an old one as I.

*Many years it has been – a moment
I shall know always as my rebirth,
My renewal as a being of light,
The angel with the scabbed wings.*

Come here my pretty friend,
Let me taste your virgin skin,
The tender flesh beneath your neck,
To draw gracefully your very blood.

*I have hunted the earth, searching
For another who would be God –
That the blood that sustains me
Would be in another.*

So much ecstasy as I take you
Into my arms, swallowing deeply
From the fountain of life within you,
Rushing quickly, filling me up.

*The power within, without me
Must have been born somewhere
Beneath the mists of time – surely
A brother must have been born.*

Oh, the sweetness flowing into me
As I kiss your mortal flesh,
Flowing into my evil body,
Giving me life, making us one forever.

Kallisti

So long have I looked for you
that I feared I would never hold you;
many have appeared to me,
beautiful and intelligent, tempting my soul
with your reflection in their eyes.

Without you, I am as a rich man
in an empty land where his money
will afford no protection in cold nights.

Without you, I am as useless words
crashing downwards on a torn page,
leaving a dark smear in passing.

I have seen you in these angels,
this heaven-held one before me,
but forever unknowing: is she
merely an echo of you - or is she
the one for whom I have waited?

Psalm 23

*Why have you guided me here and given me all that I
need?*

In an inconstant world you have given me peace.

*You have restored my faith and given me the will to
carry on.*

*And even though I might fear everyone around me, I
will always trust you.*

*You have defended me against the world; I am blessed
to have such a friend.*

I will always be happy just to be with you.

Fair Verona

Words, mere words
that could make parting
a less sweet sorrow.
Tomorrow and tomorrow,
forever tomorrow,
I'll ever love you.
Ah, but can you trust
the mouth of a gentleman
who knows naught but pain?

Should I lie to thee,
you, who lays me down?
Should I lie to thee,
you, who gives me love?
Should I lie to thee,
you, who wakes me in the morn?
Should I lie to thee,
you, who gives me life?

If I were to dye my hair
with the colors of the sky,
would you believe me?
If I were to bleed my heart
with the colors of the rain,
would you love me?
If I were to tan my skin
with the colors of the earth,
would you trust me?
If I were to paint my eyes
with the colors of the sun,
would you follow me?

Hear the Failing Heart Stop

I awoke to find myself in a strange new world
Where, only moments before, I held you in my arms.
In a moment of clarity I discovered
That my bruised heart could indeed still feel love;

Though it had been closed for so long,
I watched from within as it began to heal.
The clouds shattered and sunlight fell softly,
Covering me with an unfamiliar happiness.

My mind, confused by this once-dead emotion,
Passed it by, digging through darkest memories,
Shielding itself from the pain by hiding in pools of sorrow,
Not noticing fear creep in to accompany us.

the nature of the beast

if I were a spider, I

would crawl up your wall,

embed my teeth in your

skin, blood flowing through

me as I fall...

down,

down,

into ecstasy,

the pain of the moment

in time, suspended

above the great pit over

which I draw my web.

MESSIAH

Have you ever believed in something
so strongly you believed it was real?

What if you couldn't believe anything any other way?

What if there was nothing else to believe?

Would it not affect the way you live
your day-to-day life? Knowing this,
would you deliberately sabotage that belief,
defeating it with circular logic?

What if you then discovered your belief
was similar to everyone else's?

What would you believe then?

If everyone's beliefs only apply to their reality,
why would we not then choose happiness?

Is not self-fulfillment nirvana?

Is not achieving your life's purpose
all you can do in this life?

Why would you not want to be conscious
of this law, and therefore above it?

Is that not the key to everlasting life?

The only way any one can be their own messiah?

How long has it been, my friend,
Since we last laughed for joy?
Life has seemed so hard lately.

I wish I could make it easy,
But you know as I do,
That it would be even harder then.

I wish I could make you happy
But I can't do that.
You must do it for yourself.

I wish I could change everything
Back to the way it was,
When we were happy with life.

But that, too, would be hard.
So, we must get by on our own
And live life as it is.

How long has it been, my friend,
Since we last laughed for joy?
Life can only get better...

L1GH+N1NG

Standing amidst the charging wind,
I watched lightning fall –
like gods fighting
amidst themselves
to uncover the traitor.

But then I remembered –
“lightning *n.*
flash of bright light
produced
from cloud by
natural
electricity” – a good
scientific explanation.

Then it stopped,

giving way
to soft rain,
immersing me
from head
(through heart)
to toe
in water –
H₂O: hydrogen x 2 + oxygen.

Then the rain fell
harder, as if science
offended
the sky.

Perhaps
it was just mourning
for God.

the plan of escape

i come from a land
where the heavens are reachable
like the branches of trees...
it is so easy to be like god
that perfection is almost gone...

i see who you are when you are hurt...
in your suffering i know you
and all that you are...
your desires and dreams...
your accomplishments...
your failures...

in your agony i touched you...
in your pain i loved you...

Sonnet II

Why should I compare it to a spring day
When her love resembles a winter storm?
Left in loneliness – it is there I stay
Waiting – for what? I can no longer mourn.

*Loving lines, I lied.
To feel safe inside.*

And like a dog, rabid eyes shining black,
I stumble from heart through head; and knowing
Nothing matters here, I turn on my back
Despite the sores that continue growing.

*Loving lies, I tried
To reverse the tide.*

Afraid of the many dark clouds above
Me, I stir the fire within my soul's eye;
Hoping I might heal the pain made by love,
I cut with razor-blades that never lie.

*Loving life, I died
With nowhere to hide.*

I can't ease the pain with even one tear;
It must be best that the ending is near.

00000 INDEPENDENT THOUGHT ' - ALPHA CIRCLE VERSION 5

00001 TEACHERS OF LANGUAGE, HISTORY, SCIENCE, AND ART,
00010 OUR EDUCATORS FOR THIRTEEN YEARS OR LONGER
00011 TAUGHT US HOW WE MUST PERCEIVE THE EXISTING WORLD;
00100 TAUGHT FORM AND STRUCTURE IN METERED TIME, BELLS RUNG TO
00101 MARK OUR DAILY DRILLS IN THE YARD. AND NUMBERED OFF,
00110 WE ARE FORCED TO WADE THROUGH RIVERS OF BLOOD AND
00111 MOUNTAINS ENGRAVED WITH THE WORDS OF THE MODERN GOD,
01000 TEXTBOOKS OF LANGUAGE, HISTORY, SCIENCE, AND ART.
01001 SO ALIKE WE ARE THAT WHEN WE FINISH THE RACE
01010 WE MUST WEAR ROBES OF BLACK, OF MOURNING, OF SORROW,
01011 FOR WE WERE NEVER GIVEN THAT WHICH IS OUR RIGHT,
01100 THE RIGHT TO THINK, THE RIGHT TO FEEL - TO LIVE UNLIKE
01101 MECHANICAL ANIMALS, PREFABRICATED
01110 AND INCAPABLE OF THAT WHICH IS MOST HUMAN.
01111 OUR LANGUAGE, OUR HISTORY, OUR SCIENCE, OUR ART
10000 HAVE TAKEN AWAY THE INTELLECT THAT SHAPED THEM.
10001 WE ARE LED BY PROGRAMMED MORTALS, UNINSPIRED
10010 BY THE GREATNESS THAT WE ARE HUMAN, CAPABLE
10011 OF ANY PATH THAT WE MAY CHOOSE. BUT CHOICE IS GONE,
10100 SO THEN IT MUST BE FATE THAT GUIDES US FUTUREWARD.
10101 "OURS IS THE GREATEST CIVILIZATION YET!" SAY
10110 THE WORDS OF LANGUAGE, HISTORY, SCIENCE, AND ART,
10111 SO WE STRIVE NO LONGER FOR THAT WHICH IS GREATER.
11000 WE ARE STAGNANT, DEVOID OF ANY GOAL; SO WE SIT
11001 IN OUR UNCONTEMPLATION, WAITING FOR THE END,
11010 UNABLE TO THINK, UNABLE TO FEEL. WE MUST
11011 LOOK AROUND US SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE AGAIN, FOR
11110 EVEN THE MACHINES CAN SEE THAT WE ARE DYING.
11111 END PROGRAM ' RETURN TO OPERATING SYSTEM

/ Scar /

once was a time... i could feel pain... hope in the
knife... that left me dry... / here i am... cut me
deep... love me long... bleed me dry...

i knew what i was doing... knew what i was after... i
knew that i would die... i can hear your laughter... /
bleed me... bleed me... / love me... leave me...

once was a time... now i feel pain... no hope in life...
high and dry... / here i go... push me deep... loved
too long... hear my cry...

scars may heal... but i like the feel... of steel in my
skin... / scars may heal... how do you feel... about
the death within...

i knew what... i was after... i knew... your
laughter... / bleed me... / leave me...

now i know what it means to feel... (call me by my real
name) / life... could never be real... (call me by the
feel of pain) / bleed me... bleed me... / love me...
leave me...

Revelation 6:8

I looked out through my cell-window,
saw the fourth seal opened,
and Death ride out as an errant knight,
seeking his task with vigor.

Not for the first time did I fear
for my children, what he
might do in his mad quest
to cleanse Eden of his own sins.

I grew impatient with the game of prophecy
and slew my Seraph guard,
not going to Hades as was written,
but Heavenward to anoint the Messiah.

I strode through Paradise; none stopped me
as I went to the throne
to see the face that I knew too well,
pausing only to draw my sword.

Mirror, mirror! shining bright,
despite the darkness of the night,
tell me plainly my biggest fear
and whisper softly in my ear
and say that all is right.

Mirror, mirror! you've never lied
and never inspired vanity or pride,
tell me plainly my biggest fear
and whisper softly in my ear
what will not change with the tide.

Mirror, mirror! all you've shone
is flesh and tissue but not the bone,
tell me plainly my biggest fear
and whisper softly in my ear
that I will die unloved and alone.

Damascus Road

So many years have come
and gone – so many faces, so many hearts
have passed my way.

This is my destiny, this life my path
that I walk alone, searching
for another who would be as I am.

Windows of light climb the skyline
like Jacob reaching, arms outstretched –
wings that will carry him to the moon...

So many words have touched
this page – so many souls, so many hurts
have passed my way.

This is my legacy, these words my path
that I make alone, searching
for another chance to be as I am.

A final triumphant voice of fury
echoes as a mother cries, her child
crucified in a garden of stone...

IN MEMORIAM

I CAN STILL REMEMBER HER FACE,
SMILING MISCHIEVOUSLY AS ONLY SHE COULD.
HER SMALL BODY STRONG AND VIBRANT,
SO FULL OF LIFE AND FURY,
CONCEALING THE DEMONS INSIDE
THAT TORTURED HER TO THE GRAVE.
IT WAS NOT THE END ITSELF
BY WHICH SHE WILL BE REMEMBERED,
BUT THE WAY SHE CARRIED ON,
LIVING ONLY AS SHE COULD,
SO FULL OF STRENGTH AND BEAUTY,
A WOMAN NOT EASILY REPLACED.

I Am an author. I write
because it allows me to dis-
associate myself from what I have done.
Every evil I have committed is hidden
behind words. As I walk, I compose an ode
to myself. I walk with confidence, with an air
that suits who I am. I feel alive, but not in the same
manner as you. (I am nothing like you.) I do not live
because I breathe, or because
the blood flows through me. (I live:
I can do no other.) For I am
the breath that fills your lungs. I am
the blood that courses through your veins;
(I am life itself.) I walk, knowing that with every step I take,
I give myself to you. I walk,
and because I do, you live. I am the immortal force
that is above the laws of nature. I am
what you fear in the dark
recesses of your heart. I am the darkness
that lurks in the human mind. I am
the evil. (I am you.)

I shall miss you.

I fell as an angel of death
into your desolate heart
and listened to the beats, hypnotic –
like the sound of a foreign army retreating into the hills.

A moment of feeling,
like coming home
to a past that was as empty as the spirits
hovering on my breath.

The war was over,
or so we thought.

Too much was lost the day we discovered each other.

The night was cold,
like money glittering in my pocket:
a single agent
shadowed by the stars.

I no longer belong
here – questions
linger without truth.

Let me remember the moments shared
in this asylum
as I wander the desert,
searching for the place I left you.

reconstruct:

language
emotions
faith

I knelt in the shadows of the tree,
reading the names of innocence,
weeping.

Another time or place, perhaps
we will be perfect again.

Goodbye my friend,

I'm sorry now for what I've done
But it's impossible to run
I must answer the tolling bell
That summons my spirit to Hell
Goodbye My masters bid me come

I'm sorry friend for what I've done
Please pray for me before the sun
Not reaching for Heaven I fell
Into the soul I had to sell
Goodbye I have been bid to come

Index

Index

7	Innocent	A Vision	the poet
	9	A Vision	
13	Lover	City Streets	John Salter
	15	09.22.2001 – Words, mere words	
	16	09.17.2001 – A Pilgrimage	
	17	08.03.2001 – Paradise	
	18	06.16.2001 – Dirty Streets	
	19	02.23.2001 – Running For Home	
	20	02.01.2001 – Angel	
	22	10.07.2000 – Holy City	
	23	09.24.2000 – Kallisti	
	24	09.09.2000 – Think too much & feel too little	
	25	08.28.2000 – Transfiguration	
	26	08.23.2000 – Postmodern	
	27	08.03.2000 – Apocalypse	
	28	07.27.2000 – Everything you believe, think, or feel	
	29	07.17.2000 – is based on the false assumption	
	30	06.28.2000 – that truth exists.	
	31	01.27.2000 – Prayer	
	32	11.17.1999 – Intertext	
	33	10.15.1999 – [untitled]	
35	Intellectual	Damned	Skye Maelstrom Faust
	37	Body of the Earth	
	43	Blood of the Angels	
	50	Mind of the Devil	
57	Prophet	Joseph's Commitment	Z-RØ
	60	Fragment I / Birth	
	62	Light and Dark, Earth and Sky	
	63	Fragment II / Youth	
	66	Land and Water, Day and Night	
	67	Fragment III / Maturity	
	70	Sun, Moon, and Stars	
	71	Fragment IV / Old Age	
	73	Plants and Animals	
	74	Fragment V / Death	





































Index

79	Messiah	5 Ways to Die	Samael
	81	Apocalypse -3875: Woe	
	82	Apocalypse -2348: Lamentation	
	83	Apocalypse +33: Oblivion	
	84	Apocalypse +1347: Fire	
	85	Apocalypse +3125: Hate	
87	Madman	Omega's Flight	0110
	89	When I arrived on your world,	
	90	I could only look to the coldness of space.	
	92	<i>Drifting millions of miles</i>	
	93	<i>Washes the heart empty...</i>	
	95	I knew I couldn't live among you,	
	96	Flawed, programmed, and mortal.	
	98	<i>Like a solar flare, I flew</i>	
	99	<i>Away to the stars...</i>	
	101	I fell too fast, like lightning,	
	102	Bringing with me heaven and hell.	
	103	<i>But there I froze, mid-air,</i>	
	104	<i>Waiting for what never came...</i>	
107	Ego	Insight / Farsight	1±1
	109	Superbia (Pride)	
	110	Invidia (Envy)	
	111	Ira (Wrath)	
	112	Avarice (Greed)	
	113	Tristia (Sadness)	
	114	Gula (Gluttony)	
	115	Luxuria (Lust)	
117	Outcast	Grimoire	Merlin
	119	The Arcana of the Double-Cross	
	120	Initiation	
	122	The Circle of Jesus Christ	
	124	The Book of Lucifer	
	128	The Litany of Truth and Law	
	130	Meditation of Air	
	131	Nine Truths	
	133	A Celtic Lunar Calendar	

INDEX

135	Adversary	Tarot	r a n d o m
	137	1/9 – The Fool	
	138	1/8 – Under the Spotlight	
	139	1/7 – 13/7	
	140	1/6 – Teach Us to Pray	
	141	1/5 – Twice the Human Capacity	
	142	2/9 – Antidote	
	143	2/8 – Temptation!	
	144	1/4 – Genesis	
	145	2/7 – 1±1	
	146	3/9 – Portrait of the Devil	
	147	2/6 – Alone Ever Falling	
	148	1/3 – The Monster’s Father	
	149	3/8 – The Tree of Life	
	150	2/5 – Small Change	
	151	3/7 – The Kingdom of Heaven	
	152	4/9 – Jerusalem Streets	
	153	4/8 – Song of the Vampire	
	154	3/6 – Kallisti	
	155	2/4 – The Good Shepherd	
	156	1/2 – Fair Verona	
	157	5/9 – Hear the Failing Heart Stop	
	158	4/7 – the nature of the beast	
	159	3/5 – Messiah	
	160	5/8 – How Much Longer?	
	161	6/9 – Lightning	
	162	4/6 – the plan of escape	
	163	2/3 – Sonnet II	
	164	5/7 – The Danger of Independent Thought	
	165	6/8 – Scar	
	166	3/4 – Revelation 6:8	
	167	7/9 – Mirror, Mirror!	
	168	4/5 – Damascus Road	
	169	5/6 – In Memoriam	
	170	6/7 – I Am	
	171	7/8 – I shall miss you.	
	172	8/9 – Crossing the River	

TAROT INDEX

								
1/9	2/9	3/9	4/9	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	
								
1/8	2/8	3/8	4/8	5/8	6/8	7/8		
								
1/7	2/7	3/7	4/7	5/7	6/7			
								
1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6				
								
1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5					
								
1/4	2/4	3/4						
								
1/3	2/3							
								
1/2								

0.111
 0.125
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 0.167
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 0.857
 0.875
0.888
 18

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 6 + 1 + 8 &= 15 = 6 \\
 7 + 5 + 3 &= 15 = 6 \\
 2 + 9 + 4 &= 15 = 6 \\
 \underline{15} + \underline{15} + \underline{15} &= 45 \quad \underline{18} \\
 6 + 6 + 6 &= 18 = 9
 \end{aligned}$$

