

# *The Wars of Magic and Man*

*Days of Magic's return*

**The Order**

By, *Michael Lewis Collins*

## Pawn like a Bomb

Fitz Glick was on his post as a security guard for ten years now. He retired from the Berlin Police, but he soon found out that retirement wasn't all it was cracked up to be. A new job gave him a new purpose. He took this job at the Heinz Museum so that he could watch out for people. He now helped more people in one day than in weeks as an officer of the law. His ability to speak and understand four different languages made him the go-to guy for wayward tourists. The museum was dedicated to the Berlin Wall and the art based on it. The museum included some segments of the wall that had graffiti. Fitz remembered the wall. He grew up on the wrong side of it. But that was a long time ago. He smiled as people took their selfies next to the wall. He would answer questions about it as well as what it was like living in East Germany. The curator once said that he was the most popular exhibit in the museum. Today he felt like an exhibit. His age was catching up with him. Soon he wouldn't be able to do this job. The curator told him he would always have a place there. Fitz wondered if that meant as a guide or on display.

A young Japanese girl walked into the museum. She was six maybe seven and out of place with the sea of white faces. She walked into the middle of the room and stood on an old metal marker in the floor. The museum was built on a site that was over a thousand years old and had a history that most people didn't know. Fitz watched to see if a family walked up to her. She stood there with a rucksack in the shape of a teddy bear and holding what looked like a scroll. Japanese wasn't something he spoke. Fitz went to one of the guides and said they might need someone to translate for this little girl. For a moment Fitz stared at the bear. A feeling came over him. Could she be an unwilling suicide bomber? Terrorist attacks were on the rise in Europe. He could see such men using a young girl to do something like this.

Fitz found some courage and went to the girl. She watched him walk up to her. He asked in English, "*are you with someone?*" She just shook her head. Fitz was happy she understood a language he knew. He said, "*let me help you.*" Her eyes went wide. The pupil expanded until it filled the eye. A trickle of blood came out of one eye. The room went still. A blue light

surrounded the girl. It was the last thing Fitz ever saw. The light expanded out. As it did it covered all the people in the circle. Their clothing burned away. Then their flesh and organs. Soon all that was left was their bones cleaned to the point of being polished by the blue light. A perfect circle of death formed around the museum. Then the light faded. At the center of the circle was the white bones of a young girl that was kidnapped from a mall in Bakersfield California and transferred to Berlin in just an hour.

In a small village in Italy, a man watched the women walk. For Vincent, life was good. He liked living the stereotype. A construction worker ogling the passing women. It was summer, and the skirts were high. As he stood there something came along, that looked out of place. He looked like a young boy in a heavy jacket of maybe six or seven. He was sweating quite a lot. Vincent pointed at the boy to a passing police officer. He caught up with him about a mile away. Vincent could see a bright blue light rush at him. He shut his eyes and turned his head. The light stopped about three feet short of him. It had formed a perfect circle, and everything inside it was dead. The jacket belonged to a Russian boy that was kidnapped nearly two years ago when he was six.

Jack James sat and read the reports coming in. At the time the young man was dying in Italy there had been seven other attacks including Berlin and Stockholm. The other side was using children as suicide bombers but really as bombs. Jack turned to a man sitting in his office. He was against the wall watching him read. He asked, “*Stanley what does this all mean?*” Stanley Smyth said, “*they are attacking the original sites of the order. They most likely don’t know where we are, so they are going for where we were. They are using these people as pawns in a war no one knows about.*” Among the pictures were a couple of shots of the young girl’s skeleton in Germany. Jack asked, “*what can we do. How can we stop them?*” Stanley said, “*I don’t think we can anymore.*” Jack turned on the news to see just how the normal people were taking all this. The word terrorist was the most used word. One channel seemed to understand that this was something new. They had a quote from a source in the American Federal Bureau of Investigation says, “*as of right now no kind of explosive residue was being found at any of the*

sites. They had never seen something that can cause this kind of death without harming anything else.”

Deep in the Catskill mountains in upstate New York, a magician was doing his best to entertain a crowd that was mostly asleep. At one time this was the place to be in the summer, but that was a long time ago. Now this place was for up in coming performers to learn how to be heckled and the down and out to realize they should just quit. The Amazing Franco was on his last stop of what would most likely be his last job in the business. He had started as a street magician. After a few years on the streets of New York then Las Vegas he decided he wanted to find an audience. As a slight of hand and misdirection mechanic, he was one of the best. He made enough to set aside and buy a real act. Looking back on it, Franco could see that his real act was just a retread of someone else’s greatest hits. After the first year, he had a hard time finding venues that would allow him in. Soon his act was out of date. He ended up using his skills on the street selling drugs. In the audience were three of his current customers baked out of their minds.

As usual, he was in the ancient art of cutting a woman in half. His assistant of the day went into the box. She was someone that would do the job now and her regular job tonight. Her regular job was a prostitute. They worked cheap and sometimes he could negotiate a reduced rate for something more. Someone in the audience yelled, “*what’s in the box.*” Another person said, “*gonorrhoea.*” A hand came out of the box with the middle finger raised. Franco waved his arms over the box. He said the words the man that sold him the box had said to say. That was when it all went sideways. His hands seemed to catch fire, but the flames were a bright blue and white. The eyes of the audience lit up with something new. The blue flames shot out into the audience. Franco watched in horror as his audience disintegrated right in front of him. His own hands were just bone. The flames went up to his elbows. When the flames stopped, his lower arms fell away. He fell onto his back. Just before fading away he thought, “*I really killed today.*”

Jack got on a conference call with the others in their group. They made plans to meet and discuss what they were going to do next. After the call, Jack went to a painting of a Celtic cross. It swung away to show a safe. The safe was built in the eighteen-hundreds and modernized with an eye scanner and keypad. Jack knew all that was just a decoy. The only thing that could open this without damaging the contents was the key around his neck. The key was in three pieces, and if a person doesn't know how to assemble it, the key won't work. He had never opened the safe before. In the safe was the last bit of magic in the world. A book of spells that was protected from the great upheaval. He had the book but not the key to open it. The key was in New York. The codex to read it was in Tokyo, Japan. In three days those three things would be in the same place. It had been nearly a thousand years since that had happened.

## Reflections

Asher sat and stared out the window. Just outside he could see his daughter Rachel. He loved watching his daughter play. He knew that he couldn't watch over her forever, he just thought he would have a little more time. She was ten going on eighteen. Rachel was playing with one of her friends on the swings in their backyard. It had been about two years since her mother died. She was just now showing signs that she would be able to move past her mother's death. She reflected her mother. Debra was headstrong and self-assured. Like her mother, Rachel had an olive skin complexion with long straight jet black hair. Most of all she had her mother's eyes, so dark that they appeared all black.

He had met Debra on a trip to Israel. He was on a business trip, and she was serving in the army. Asher was born and raised in New York City on the upper west side. Most people when they see him they think he is a rabbi with all the religious books he walked around. His actual work was far from his religion. Debra was born in Gaza and wanted to be a teacher. They met in a disco near his hotel. He was in his room when he heard an explosion. She was nearby when she heard the same. They met over the bodies as they helped rescuers deal with the aftermath of a suicide bomber. That night they spent it in his room. Whether it was the adrenaline of the bombing or the need for human contact, they spent the next day in the room as well. At one-point, Asher watched Debra as she closed her eyes while on top of him. He knew right there, and then he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her.

Three years later and they were married. Asher was the official Israeli representative to something called the Order. That was all he could say to her. When her service was up, she had moved to New York. They eventually moved to a small house in Arlington Virginia so that he could be close to the capital. Debra went to college to earn her teaching degree. She did this during her pregnancy. Rachel was born in a classroom on the grounds of Marymount University. Rachel had said, "*she was born on her own time and as public, as she could make it.*" Rachel was someone who wanted people to see her. From the time she first started to walk to her first

day of school, Rachel had to have all the attention. Asher could see his daughter being a singer or actor. Debra just hoped this was just a phase.

Asher and Debra would fight. To them, this was almost foreplay. They fought over everything from politics to music. After every fight, they would make up as loud as possible. This was true until their daughter asked her, “*why were you and daddy playing horsey like that. You need to be on his back, not the front.*” At six Rachel started to call her father Ash instead of daddy. But when she said it, the word sounded like ass instead of Ash. Rachel had to tell her to stop calling her father an ass. It was around this time that Debra found the first lump. The cancer was aggressive, and two years later she was dead.

Asher told Helena that she would no longer be needed. He would pay out her contract, but Rachel was going to a special school out of the country. He had hired her to act as a nanny for Rachel. After the first couple of weeks, he learned not to call Helena a nanny. She was Rachel’s assistant. He learned this in one of the many screaming sessions Rachel had just after her mother’s death. Over the last two years, Rachel had grown up and was forcing new-found independence on Asher. She had to do everything for herself. The solution was to let her then fix anything later. Also, Helena would act as an assistant rather than a substitute parent. He knew he was spoiling her with this freedom, but she was all he had left from Debra.

Rachel saw this as an opportunity to be someone. Her father said it was her choice. If she weren’t ready for this, then they would find someone else. He also said, “*this will change your life forever.*” There was going to be several other girls there. It might not be her, but he also had no choice. Far too soon someone came for her. A woman came to Rachel and told her she was there to prepare her for the test. Rachel felt it was odd that she didn’t say her name, but she wanted this opportunity. The woman brought her into a room with three other women. They told her to take her clothes off. One of the women said, “*we are all girls, so you shouldn’t feel nervous.*” Rachel did as she was told. One of the women took a warm wet washcloth and cleaned her up from top to bottom. Then two of the women went on either side of her with paint brushes

and a special paint like henna. They proceeded to do a full body design that Rachel didn't understand. After two hours the pattern was made. She had to wait until it was dry before she could get dressed.

An hour later and the first woman came back with a basket of silk strips. They wrapped her in the strips covering her where she should be covered while leaving enough skin to be more than a little risqué. Staring into a mirror, she saw something both wrong and wonderful. She was an exotic wonder. The fabric did little to hide her body. Her nipples were dark and showing. She felt uncomfortable even with everyone there being a woman. One of the women said, *"it has to be sheer, so the tattoos show through."* Rachel asked, *"where are the other girls?"* The first woman said, *"there are no other girls, we knew it had to be you."* The first woman stood behind Rachel and said, *"you look like someone born to be special."* The other three watched but said nothing.

Rachel was led into a room shaped like an octagon. She could hear her father screaming about something. The door closed, and she was ushered into the middle of the room. The room was covered in stone and had a wet smell. Rachel looked up to see there was no roof. The night's sky was clear, and she could see a full moon. Doors opened all around her then they closed. She saw that each side of the room had one person in it. Five men and three women. It was still kind of dark, but Rachel still thought about her near nudity. A strange murmuring started in the room. The paint on her body started to heat up. The blackish art slowly turned white. As it turned, it started to glow. Soon her whole body was glowing. She felt warmer and warmer as the glow grew. A gust of wind came down from the open ceiling. She felt the strips slip away, but the glow was now covering her body. The glow grew until her form was gone and all that was left was a glowing oval where Rachel was. Then the glow went out. In its place was a black oval shape. A void where she should have been. The room went silent. All that could be heard was Asher screaming his daughter's name.

In the center of the void, a new glow appeared. A silver light filled the void replacing the darkness. The light died down to a shimmer of liquid. The liquid smoothed out and reflected the room then solidified. The places where the eight-people stood were now smeared with the blood and gore of the people who worked the spell. When it was finished, it was a silver mirror. The reflection was not from the room it was in but one from another world. Rachel was sacrificed to create a portal between the two worlds. Outside the chamber, one of the heads of the Order told Asher his daughter would serve mankind in a role that made her the most important person in the world. Then one by one each of the members of the order stabbed him. After the final stab, they allowed him into the chamber. He staggered to the mirror that was his daughter. He fell and looked up at it. He said, *"I am sorry."* Rachel said, *"daddy I can see forever."*

## Reflective Surfaces

Jack watched as they cleaned up the blood from his friend. After they stabbed Asher to near death, they drained as much blood as they could and coated the mirror with it. The blood fused with the silver and took some of the reflective quality away. Within three days the blood color would be gone, and the mirror would be set. They chose Asher's daughter because she was an only child with one living parent. She was young, so she was pure of spirit and contained an infinite possibility to do evil things. Most of all she was someone they could get their hands on without too many questions. Rachel would see everything. From the beginning of time to its end. She would see far away galaxies and microscopic universes that only existed for a fraction of a second but in our time but billions of years in theirs. She would outlive everyone if the magic were still in this world. No one knew how this worked. They knew the spell. The ones that did the chant knew that they wouldn't live to see it finished.

The metal doors to the octagon mirror room were replaced with glass as well as a glass roof over the top of the opening. No one would go in. It was unclear just how you ask it a question. Three hours later and a door opened. A ball of light jumped out of the mirror. It went out the open door and down the hall. At the door to the main hall, the light took the form of a young girl. The girl passed through the door. On the other side was an old man. He sat on a leather couch with a glass of bourbon and a look of frailty. He sold his remaining son and only granddaughter to something that might not work. When he saw the girl, he dropped his glass. She said, *"I sense you have questions. There are many answers to have and many questions to ask. But do it soon you don't have eternity as I do."* The girl turned back into the ball of light then it faded. The old man said, *"Rachel."*

In the mirror room, the old man found the blood-stained mirror. A voice came from the mirror. It said, *"I was once Rachel, but now we are infinity. All magic mirrors are one and linked. Your people can call me Providence, but you can call me granddaughter. I will answer as much of your questions that won't hurt or change the outcome of things meant to be."* He asked, *"Rachel you won't help us?"* The mirror said, *"never Rachel. She is gone. Too much information"*

*will lead to the fall of man. Humans must shape their outcomes not let them be dictated by us.”*

The mirror flashed then in its reflection the old man could see himself with his soon to be wife in front of the courthouse just before they were married. It was nearly fifty years ago in 1968. He was on his way into the army and eventually Vietnam. Her name was Janice. They didn't know it at the time, but she was pregnant with the first of what would be three children. Janice turned to him and said, *“Isaiah we are only going to do this if you promise to come home to me.”* He had said, *“my life is yours as is my soul.”* The mirror changed when he saw her on her deathbed. She had been suffering after three consecutive strokes left her nearly immobile. Even then seven years ago most people called him Old Man rather than Isaiah. She couldn't speak. He remembered this moment, but he had no idea what was really happening. Off to the side, he could now see his long-lost son and daughter. He had died in a fire when he was six and Ruth was beaten to death by her husband when she was twenty. He had remembered her putting her hand out then it falling to her side. Now he saw her going with their children. The mirror flashed then it went back to its usual state of idleness.

Isaiah asked, *“granddaughter why would you show me these things?”* The mirror replied, *“you fear death and suffer from loss, but you have lost nothing. Death is not an end. We say that because your time is drawing near and soon you will see what is waiting. We just want you to not waste these last moments in this reality on regret and loss.”* The mirror shimmered again. It said, *“We are waiting for someone to come to the mirror in the reality you are in conflict with. When they come, we will call you, but until then, please make sure that no one comes in. Not even you, grandfather.”* He knew the protocol and knew its wishes her law. He got up and bowed to the mirror. He said, *“we wait for your word, and until then you will be left in contemplation.”* The mirror said, *“grandfather, a contemplating mirror that's kind of funny.”* The mirror went dark as did the room.

Isaiah left the room feeling better than when he went in. He still missed his family and all those he lost along the way, but he no longer felt alone. He could almost feel his wife alongside him. Jack met up with Isaiah in the hall. He could see a difference in his face. The usual scowl and look of disappointment were gone. Replaced by what was almost a smile. Isaiah sent the

remaining part of his family to their deaths. His family line would die with him, but this was no longer a weight on his heart. He could see that there was something more to life than just loss. He looked up seeing Jack as if for the first time. He said to him, “*Jack go home and tell your wife you love her before she leaves.*” Jack had told him that she was unhappy with all the secrets and lies about what he did and where he went while working. Isaiah said, “*bring her here, and she will understand. Bring her to my granddaughter then she will see.*” Jack went to the black hole that was a glass door going to the mirror room. He mouthed the words “*granddaughter.*”

## Explaining Neglect

Linda's car pulled into the parking lot of her husband's work. She hated this place. Jack spent their marriage here. Now that she was ready to end it he was still here. When they first met in college, he was there to help her with her class work as well as be there for all the tough times. When they got married, they had a month-long honeymoon. All this time he was working for this company. They call themselves the Order. She looked up at the glass and steel building with the white "O" on the side. The order paid for his college. They paid for the honeymoon. She found out later he was also there to work. He would never say what he did. On her way in she passed a small child. She seemed out of place holding a scroll of some kind.

At the door, she found security that rivaled an airport. Two metal detectors, a body scan, and armed security guards. At the first security desk, they took her purse. After the second and a body scan, she met up with Isaiah. He was like every grandfather in every television show and movie. He looked worried and somehow even older than before. He smiled then took her by her hand. He said, *"welcome to the order. We need to talk."* Linda pulled her hand away. She wasn't sure if it was the security or the remoteness of this office building, but she started to worry about what she was in for. What did Jack do? Isaiah smiled and said, *"we want to explain what we do and why. Then either Jack or I will give you a tour."* She looked back at the security then back to him. She said, *"I'm not sure I want to know."* Isaiah said, *"make sure. Once I tell you then you can't ever unknow."*

Isaiah took her down a hall to an elevator door. Unlike the ones in the lobby, this one had no markings or buttons. The door opened to an armed security guard with a scanner. Isaiah said to the man, *"Roses on the floor."* He then gave him a card, and the guard scanned it. Isaiah then said, *"were off to see the wizard."* The guard stepped aside and let them on. He inserted a key in an unmarked lock then another in a lock marked "9." The door's closed then a woman's voice over an intercom said, *"hello Isaiah. Are we off to see the wizard?"* Isaiah didn't answer. The elevator started to move, but it went down instead of up. When the doors opened, they met up

with Alexa Kurdish. She was a long-time friend of Linda. Seeing her here made her feel betrayed.

Alexa said, *“Linda I know you have a lot of questions and I also know you are a little angry. All I can say so far is keep an open mind and understand that we do what we do to protect everyone.”* Linda said, *“protect? You work in an office downtown routing trucks on a computer. What do you protect?”* Alexa replied, *“it would be better to show you.”* They led Linda down a hallway to a set of steel swinging doors. On the other side was a glass observation room overlooking another room. In it was a young man with bright orange hair. He was sitting with his legs crossed and arms up in the air. He had circle tattoos on his hands, and they seemed to glow orange. In front of him was a large globe made of what looked like a solid piece of rock. The globe turned slowly. On it was little lights that lit up near places that Linda knew where cities.

Linda pointed at the globe. She asked, *“how are you doing that.”* From the back of the room, Jack answered, *“we aren’t he is.”* Jack pulled up his sleeve. He had this strange tattoo that Linda never liked. He waved his arms then turned his palm up. When he did a blue flame appeared just above his hand. The flame gave off heat and a smell of ozone like electricity. Linda could see that a light shimmered up his arm in the tattoo. Jack said, *“before the events of the last few days I had to use a battery of sorts to do anything like this, but now that magic is back I can do so much more.”* He waved his hand up. The blue flame curved and turned into a sort of shield. He lowered his hand, and the shield stayed up. Jack said, *“touch it.”* Linda instinctively put both hands on either side just below the construct. It turned silver then fell into her hands. The blue flame had turned into a large silver oval plate. She looked at it then turned to Jack and asked, *“Magic?”*

They told her that magic was once an element much like air and water. Ancient man used it in their natural lives much like people use electricity today. Magic its self-was just power, and it was how that power was harnessed that made it what it was. Jack said, *“the tattoos are like applications. When they are powered by this energy, it activates what the tattoo stands for, and it*

*does the rest.*” He pointed at the young man in the room. Jack said, “*Liam has the prophecy tattoos. With the power, he can see what can be.*” Linda asked, “*he can see the future?*” Her voice cracked like she hadn’t spoken in weeks. Jack said, “*no he can only see the possible futures. There is no set future, and with every vision, the possibilities change.*” Linda turned to them and asked, “*why to keep this a secret?*” From inside the room, she heard Liam say, “*I knew you were going to ask that.*” Isaiah said, “*to understand why we need to show you some things that are a little disturbing.*” Linda pointed at Liam and asked, “*more disturbing than that.*”

In another room, they turned on a series of monitors. Jack said, “*this happened about two days ago.*” On the center screen was a shot overlooking a cockpit. The captain was staring out a window. Then the copilot. There was no audio, but it was apparent that something was wrong. Another screen overlooked the passengers. They seemed to panic as the flight attendants tried to calm them down. Another monitor seemed to be black, but then a flash of light illuminated something in the clouds. Something much bigger than the plane. The shape turned towards the plane. It banked trying to get away from the shape. Without warning the shape grabbed the plane and slowly bit it apart. The back camera showed the end of the plane falls away from the largemouth in the air. The cockpit camera caught the image of another shape coming up to catch it. Then all the monitors went blank. Jack said, “*there is more.*”

The monitors flashed then all of them were showing different angles of a museum. It was one in Berlin that was based on the art of the Berlin wall. Linda remembered it from one of the many trips they took. Nothing seemed wrong with the image of a small Japanese girl came on. She seemed to glow on the screen. The young girl went to the middle of the room and turned toward the door. A security guard approached the girl. As he did the girl seemed to glow brighter. The image slowed down. A bright light flashed out from the girl. Everyone that the light touched was vaporized down to the bone. Linda thought about the girl just outside the building. Jack said that some tattoos act as capacitors. They build up a charge and release them in one burst. A sort of suicide bomber. Young children were used throughout history like this because they would do as they were told and didn’t understand they were being sent to die. Linda asked, “*who would do that?*”

Jack said, *“there is a lot we don’t know. Much of history was rewritten when magic was purged from this plane of existence. What we do know is that the once great nations had magic and used it to wage war on each other.”* About a thousand years ago there was an island named Atlantis. It was the pinnacle of magic in the known lands. It was also on the verge of taking over. All magic was concentrated in that one place. They had built a battery that was drawing the energy to it. This would make them the most powerful force on the earth. They planned to enslave everyone that had no magic abilities. Because of this the rival clans came together and forged an alliance to stop them, but after a year of the war, most of the magical warriors were lost in the clans. A plan was created that would eliminate Atlantis, but it might also take all magic from the earth. A magician only known as Z went onto the central battery of Atlantis and turned it up. It gathered all the magic and turned it into a bomb. The bomb charged everyone with the tattoos but instead of blowing up it ripped a hole in reality and pulled all the magic into it, or that was what they thought.

Jack said, *“some magic survived. My job was to go to these places and gather the magic when it was found.”* He hit a button on a remote and pictures from their many trips came up. Jack said, *“magic is a weapon that could change the balance of power in the world. It is a weapon that can eliminate people but leave the structures in place. One child could eliminate whole communities. No one could know about all of this.”* He told her that some governments knew but only a few. Russia, America, China after the revolution and most of Europe didn’t know about any of this. Isaiah said, *“any of these countries would eventually try and weaponize magic. It would be like giving a toddler a stick of dynamite and a lighter than walking away.”* Alexa said, *“about the same time as the flight other magic artifacts started to work again. Items that were dormant sprung to life.”* Isaiah said, *“There is so much we can show you, but you should take some time to digest what you have seen.”*

Linda thought about the girl outside again. She remembered seeing what looked like a mark on her hand and the scroll. She didn’t know if she could accept what she just learned or that

there is more, all she knew was something was wrong. Linda said, “*there was a little girl outside with what looked like a scroll and some markings on her hand.*” The three looked at each other than Isaiah ran and picked up a phone on the wall. He said, “*code black front door.*” The room turned from white to red. Out in the observed room, they heard the globe fall. Liam came running in. He said, “*the war is here.*” The four ran to the elevator. Liam stayed behind. At the ground floor, they found every person who has the tattoos standing by the windows and doors. Their tattoos were glowing and what looked like a shimmer like a heat mirage was just outside of the building. Alexa walked out the door and through the mirage. The girl was standing. The scroll was nothing more than dust down the front of her clothes and on the ground. She said, “*my mom will be mad at me.*” Her eyes gave off a blue light. Alexa realized she was too late and wouldn’t make it back to safety. She also didn’t want this girl to die alone. She got down on her knees and hugged the girl. She said, “*it’s all right. Everything is going to be alright.*” The energy dispersed vaporizing both the girl and Alexa. The wave hit the heat mirage. It stopped. Two of the people screamed as their tattoos caught fire and they were consumed in flames.

## Long Distance Call Backs

Linda sat in the lobby on a bench that overlooked the parking lot. The two dead lay on the floor with the smell of their burning hair and clothing filling the room. She realized she could never eat pork again after that smell of cooking the flesh. Just outside she could see the remains of one of her best and oldest friends. A woman she now knows she didn't know at all. In her arms was the skeleton of a young girl sent to kill everyone in the building. Another body was near the two in the parking lot. A guard had stepped out before it was clear. He was struck by a magic wave that vaporized everything on his left side. It still took him five minutes to die. The magic kept him alive. He lay there with one side being nothing but broken bones watching his life drain away. Jack waved his hands over the door to prevent anyone else from going out. She realized she didn't know the man she married either.

A page came running up to Isaiah. He said, "*she's asking for you.*" He then pointed at Linda and said, "*and her.*" Jack got up and said, "*I don't know about that.*" Isaiah said, "*if she is asking for Linda then there is a reason.*" The page said, "*no, she isn't asking she is saying bring her and you or no one.*" Isaiah turned to Linda. She was still staring out the window, but he could tell she was listening. He said to her, "*there is so much we need to explain and if we had time we would.*" Linda interrupted him by asking, "*who is she?*" Isaiah replied, "*it would be better to show you then tell.*" He hesitated then looked at his wedding ring then back to Linda, "*let me take you to something you will never see again. Something wonderful and terrible.*"

They led Linda to the center of the building. There was a courtyard of some kind with a glass roof and surrounded by glass doors. The room was made of stone and seemed much older than the rest of the building. Isaiah said, "*this part is nearly a thousand years old. It was taken down and rebuilt here back in the 1860's. Eventually, the building was built around it.*" An oval silver disk was hung just above a small pond. There didn't seem to be anything touching the mirror. It just seemed to hang there in the air. A light emanated from the mirror. Isaiah opened a set of doors, and they walked in. Jack stayed back on the other side. He wasn't invited. The room

smelled of lavender and another scent Linda didn't know. Around the pool of water were candles.

A voice seemed to come from either the water or the mirror. It said, *"Hello grandfather. Hello Linda James, how are you?"* Linda thought she knew the voice. It was that of a child. A little girl. It called Isaiah grandfather. Linda looked at Isaiah then back to Jack. She asked, *"Rachel?"* It seemed absurd but so did human magic suicide bombers. The voice said, *"I can see that you have any questions. I can answer some of them but not all. You may call me Providence. I am going to show you the truth."* Linda looked at Isaiah. He had his eyes closed. The voice said, *"grandfather I am about to show her things that are not your concern so kindly leave."* One of the glass doors opened. Isaiah went to the door, but before he could go the door closed. The voice said, *"I can see what you are thinking about. Let me show you."* Isaiah closed his eyes again and said, *"no."*

The mirror flashed then the image of a little girl appeared. It was Rachel but at a teenager. She was in a prom dress on the way to the dance. The image shifted then Rachel was in a cap and gown. She stood there waiting to receive her degree in education. She got up and turned away to show a wedding. She was walking down the aisle to her waiting bride. They kissed and exchanged rings. In the front row was both Isaiah and her father, Asher. The image changed, Rachel was in a hospital gown being told she couldn't have children. Two years later and a red squished face. Rachel's wife could have children, and they were having their second with the help of a friend. Rachel looked down at the ring on her hand. Forty years had passed. She was on her last day before retiring. Her class was filled with past students who came to say goodbye. Rachel closed her eyes then opened them in a hospital bed. She was surrounded by her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. The mirror flashed and went dim.

Linda looked back to see Isaiah was gone. She asked the voice, *"what was that?"* The voice answered, *"that was one possible future. The one that best met what he wanted to see."* The mirror flashed then it showed an image of the teenage Rachel lying dead in a room with a needle

still in her arm. It said, *“this was also a possibility.”* The image changed. Linda saw her first date with Jack. It was at the end, and he just dropped her off. The image followed him to the car then back to the place he shared with Asher. That night he told his friend that he just met the woman he was going to marry. Asher said, *“maybe you should wait for a second date.”* The image changed to Jack before the day he proposed. A flash of light and the image changed quickly to a young Jack and his grandfather. He was giving him a pocket watch then the light flashed again. He was selling his watch to buy the ring. The voice said, *“I can see that you are confused about him. How you don’t think you know him. Don’t let that doubt blind you to the facts.”* The image shifted. She saw the face of a small child. He was maybe one year old with her reddish hair and Jack’s eyes. A hand came out of the mirror. Rachel walked out. She was just a ghost image. She said, *“Linda the image I just showed you is real and in eight months will happen, but only if you let it.”*

Linda sat down and thought about what she just learned. After what felt like an eternity she turned to the ghost in the room and asked, *“can you show me his future?”* Rachel said, *“no. No one can see the future all we can do is see the possibilities. By showing you a possible future then we will only ensure it won’t happen. Every time we see the possibilities we risk the possibility of them not coming about.”* Rachel faded away then the voice said, *“come and see.”* The image was of how Rachel became the mirror. How Asher was stabbed to death and how they had to hold Isaiah back. The image shifted then the mirror reflected Linda back. The voice asked, *“tell me, Linda, with what you know how can you really go back to your old life?”*

## Little Yellow Corvette

Linda sat in a car staring out at the building. She wondered if it was safe to go home. She also wondered if it was safe to be here. She told her husband Jack not to come home. She added the word “yet” giving him the idea that he might just have an opportunity to make up for everything. The car was a loaner from the Order. They said they would replace her car as soon as they could. Her 2001 Chevy Corvette convertible was caught in the blast. The front half was melted into the pavement. Her father gave her the car when she graduated. It was the last thing he did for her. He died a month later from heart failure. He had gone to five dealers looking for the yellow with gray interior. The loaner was a Honda Fit. Jack had offered her his car, but she wouldn’t drive a Ford.

She made it all the way home in the little box cleverly disguised as a car to find a 2017 Chevy Corvette Stingray convertible sitting in her driveway. It was yellow, but the interior was black, not gray. Someone took the little boxcar back to the Order. She got behind the wheel of the car. Jack had remembered she liked having a manual transmission. She looked at her house then back to the dash. Without thinking about it, she started the car and drove it back to the Order. She beat the Honda Fit back. At one point she clocked out at about a hundred and twenty miles an hour on the highway. That was something her old car couldn’t do. Back in the Order, she understood what the mirror meant when it asked: “*now that she knows what the truth is she just can’t go back.*” She and Jack might be over, but her part in this wasn’t.

Stanley Smyth stood there by the door. She wasn’t surprised to see him there. For a while, he and Jack seemed connected at the hip. At one point she was almost convinced the two were having an affair. Stanley mimed looking at his watch as she walked up. She looked back to the car and said, “*it will do.*” She said it with a smirk on her face that gave away just how much she liked the car. Stanley asked, “*are you sure you want to do this? Once you join, then you are in for life.*” Linda’s smile faded. She said, “*I can’t see a way to un-see what I saw. To unknow what I know. I was in from the time I walked into the building. I think you already know that. I think she already knows.*” Stanley said, “*there are a lot of things she knows. It comes down to*

*what she is willing to say.*” He gave her a badge with her picture on it with a nine on the back. He said, *“this will give you unfettered access to every part of the building as well as access to every location we have. Don’t lose it. if you do, you must report it right away.”* She looked at the key. It had a seven and nine on the front corner. Before she could ask what the card was Stanley said, *“that number is the location of your office. Suite nine on the seventh floor.”*

In her office, she found the typical furniture. A desk, bookshelves, an office chair and two other chairs. On the desk was a series of loop bound books that had to be manuals. There were a ruggedized-laptop computer and cell phone. A folder on top had what looked like a resignation letter for her old job. There was also a paper spelling out the terms of her service. As an active employee, she wouldn’t be paid a salary. All her expenses for work and personal would be paid by the Order with fifty-thousand dollars being put into a retirement account every year. There was a white card she was to use for her everyday expenses. A note said to try and keep it to under five thousand a day. A blue card was for travel and those expenses. She recognized it from her many trips with Jack. The final card was black. It was for purchases for the Order. The note said it had no limit, but she should call before spending more than ten million dollars. After she read the note, the card felt heavy.

She sat down and started to read the manuals. She wasn’t sure what she was supposed to do. A knock on the door then Jack came in. He could see she wasn’t happy to see him. He said, *“I have to go to Germany to oversee the recovery of the rock marker.”* She just stared at him. He said, *“Providence wants to speak with you.”* She said nothing back to him. Jack tried to say something, but he stumbled and stalled. He exited her office without saying another intelligible word. His absence felt wrong to her. She wondered why he wasn’t fighting to stay together. He was off to Europe to watch them take a rock out of the ground. Somehow that was more important than her. No form of electronic equipment was allowed in the chamber, so she left the phone and laptop back in her office.

The doors parted, and Linda walked into the room she now knows as Providence. The whole room was an extension of the little girl trapped in the mirror. Providence said, *“I can see what you are thinking. Please understand I sent Jack to Germany. He will be needed there.”* Linda looked around the room. She noticed that the ivy that was climbing the walls was all moving around. The voice said, *“we think it’s time the two sides spoke to one another.”* Linda asked, *“we?”* The voice said, *“all mirrors are connected, and we all speak with each other.”* As the voice spoke, Isaiah came in. He came over to Linda and asked, *“are you ready?”* She asked, *“for what?”* He said, *“I am not sure. We have never done this before.”* The mirror rose up and widened to the size of the reflecting pool. Then the mirror turned down, so it faced down at the pool. A light emanated from the mirror then the pool. The two lights met and merged. The voice said, *“come and see.”*

Inside the light, they saw a beautiful young woman. She was naked from the waist up and covered in loops and swirled tattoos. Another woman became visible. She was also topless with tattoos. The second woman looked like Elvira from the late-night television show. Linda looked over at Isaiah. She said, *“there is no way I am taking my shirt off.”* He just put up his hands and said, *“me neither. Trust me you don’t want to see that.”* The voice spoke. When it did, it seemed to have two distinct tones. One of a girl and another that sounded like a little boy. It said, *“step into the water so we can begin.”*

## There are Dragons?

Linda stepped into the water. It was warm and tingled like soda. As she went in, she felt the water rising. She was sinking into the water. The younger of the two bare-breasted women in the water said, *“either take off your shirt or step out of the water. You can’t enter the pool with your heart covered.”* She didn’t want to let this old man see her naked, but she also wanted to be here. Linda took off her shirt then her bra. The two women smiled when they saw the cartoon eyes she had tattooed on the outsides of her breasts. A surprise from a drunken bachelorette weekend in Las Vegas. Linda could feel the others in the room. Somehow, she also knew the names of the two women. The younger was named Iris, and the woman that looked like Elvira mistress of the dark was named Alaya.

Isaiah walked into the water. He was covered in scars that showed what must have been a hard life. He tried to be a gentleman and not look at Linda’s chest. As he walked into the water, he felt himself sinking. He soon realized it was his pacemaker. He had no way to take it out, so Isaiah stepped out of the water. He told Linda, *“you are speaking for us now.”* The younger one named Iris came to Linda and kissed her on the mouth. For a second Linda thought she could feel the woman’s tongue. Iris said, *“let me be the first to welcome you to our reality.”* Linda felt that something was off between the two as well as the three just out of view. Alaya asked. *“are we ok?”* Iris nodded. Linda asked, *“so the kiss is a security check?”* Iris said, *“this mark lets me see people’s intentions. But I have to kiss them to see.”* She pointed to a tattoo of an open eye on her hip. Linda felt a little violated. She also couldn’t help but stare at the many tattoos covering this woman.

Linda looked at Isaiah who just shook his head. She couldn’t help but notice he put his shirt on. Also, his gaze was just a little below her eyes. She turned back then said, *“well I’m not sure what we are supposed to do here. Before today I thought that magic was just so much mumbo-jumbo.”* Alaya said, *“I know what you mean. Before a week ago I would have said the stories of the old world were just that, stories.”* Isaiah said, *“ask what happened a week ago.”* Linda repeated the question. Iris turned to the forms just out of view. To Linda’s surprise, a

Japanese supermodel walked into the water. He was one of the most handsome men she had ever seen. Behind him was a man that looked like a gang member and a busty redhead. He said, *“I am Captain Akio Saito from IGT 1564 flying from Los Angeles to Tokyo. This is my co-pilot Jesus Tomas Fernando and head flight attendant Margaret Champ. We came here about a week ago.”* Isaiah said, *“that’s not possible you died in a fire over the water.”* Linda touched the man claiming to be Captain Saito in the chest. He had rock hard abs. She realized what he said. She said back to him, *“hold on, Jesus was your co-pilot?”* The man named Jesus with the gang tattoos said, *“oh god, not another one.”* Linda figured he heard that one a lot, so she let it go. Linda said, *“the three of you are dead. They found the charred wreckage in the ocean.”* Akio said, *“my guess is they found what the dragon left after it was done.”* All Linda heard was a dragon. Isaiah said, *“Ask about the location of that dragon and the other one.”* Linda tried to find a way to get a description of the dragon. She said, *“Game of Thrones dragon or Dragon Heart?”* It was the only two she knew that wasn’t cartoonish. Margaret said, *“think the dragon from the end of How to Train your Dragon. The one the size of an island.”* Isaiah said, *“ask about the other dragon.”* She repeated his question, *“what about the other dragon?”* Iris said, *“he is on our side and was sent to try and protect the machine.”*

Linda could tell something was wrong with this answer. The woman named Margaret seemed to feel like the answer was not true or not totally true. Isaiah tried to go back to the topic of war. He said, *“ask why we are being attacked.”* Linda asked, *“why are you attacking us?”* Alaya said, *“no that’s not us. Those attacks are coming from Atlantis.”* Isaiah was shocked. He said, *“Atlantis survived.”* Linda asked, *“Atlantis survived the war?”* Isaiah said, *“that is not good. No, not good at all.”* Alaya and Iris looked at each other than Iris said, *“yes, they rebuilt and nearly took over this side with the help of their emperor Zed.”* Isaiah asked, *“the guy that saved the world from Atlantis?”* Linda asked, *“the one that saved the world from Atlantis?”* Iris said, *“that wasn’t his plan. He wanted all the power for himself. It made him immortal.”* The voice spoke. This time it was just Rachel. She said, *“we are losing the connection. Nothing that’s good ever lasts.”*

Linda got out of the water and put her shirt on. She lost her bra in the water and didn't want to go back for it. Isaiah stood staring at the mirror as she shrunk and went back into place. The mirror said, *"tell me, grandfather, did you learn what you expected?"* Linda started not to like how the mirror taunted Isaiah. The mirror seemed to see what she was thinking. It said to her, *"why would an all-seeing magical object built on the soul of this man's granddaughter treat him like that?"* Isaiah said, *"because it's what I deserve."* Linda turned to the mirror and asked, *"will you show me why?"* The mirror answered, *"no."* The mirror flashed then she said, *"things will be changing for you soon. I just wish I could have given Jack a better last few days before he died."* Linda asked, *"what did you say?"* Rachel appeared in the mirror. She said, *"I sent him to Germany to die."*

## Widow's Remorse

Linda screamed at the mirror, *"what did you mean by that."* The voice was silent. Isaiah came running in. He saw the look on Rachel's face in the mirror. He said, *"she won't answer you if you yell at her."* Linda turned to Isaiah and asked, *"did you know about any of this?"* Isaiah said, *"she told us that the marker in Germany needed to be moved. She said it had to be Jack."* The voice said, *"after seeing all the possibilities I determined that only Jack could successfully move the marker. In all the scenarios he dies."* The mirror pulsed. In it, they saw the marker in Berlin. It pulsed then a blast of magical energy radiated out and cascaded over Berlin. The voice said, *"because this marker was exposed to a direct jolt of magic it is charged and just like a bomb it is waiting to go off."* Linda turned to the mirror. As if it read her mind it said, *"because he has the markings that would allow him to move the marker and contain the blast when it happens."*

Linda went to the door, but it wouldn't open. The Mirror said, *"it's pointless to try and prevent. All the possibilities lead to his death."* Isaiah said, *"open the door granddaughter."* The mirror said, *"no."* After a few seconds of silence, it said, *"why won't any of you listen. I am trying to save you and your baby. If you go, Linda, you will be hurt losing the baby and after all that Jack will still die."* Isaiah asked, *"what about me? what if I go?"* The voice said, *"it won't work. Also, you don't get to be a hero. There is no room for your redemption."* Isaiah looked at Linda and shook his head. Linda said, *"he tried to stop them."* The voice interrupted her saying, *"ask him about my mother."* An image of a pill bottle came into the mirror. Then the same pill bottle in Isaiah's hand as he walked out of an office building with the Order logo. The voice said, *"they made her think she had cancer. You see for the magic to work I had to be an only child from a single parent household. My mother was pregnant. My father didn't know. They made sure of it. Grandfather made sure of it."*

The site was still blocked off. Jack used his identification to get past the security to the center of the hall. Most of the art was untouched. The tape marking the places where people died gave the museum an eerie vibe. They all came together to create an art installation that simulated

a crime scene, except this was a real. The team they sent to prepare the site had dug around the stone. It was a large black stone, flat on top with a metal plate bolted into it. Like so many of the artifacts, this one was now pulsating with energy. They knew not to touch it, but one shovel struck the stone. It pulsed, and a new crew was sent to finish the work as well as clean up what was left of the first. Jack circled the stone. It was maybe seventy pounds, but it was hard to say for certain. As soon as he touched the stone, he would be able to move it or be killed by it. They dug a ramp going from the stone up to the floor. Jack cleared a path going from the ramp to the door. The others would make sure the path stayed clear. All that was left was to get the stone, load it into the truck and get it to the plane.

The doors to the chamber opened. Linda went running for them when the voice said, *“yes you can go, or you can stay and watch what happens.”* The mirror flashed then Linda saw Jack staring at the stone. The voice said, *“as soon as he touches the stone he will form a bond with it. The tattoos on his arms will stabilize the magic in the stone, but as soon as he pulls away, the magic will give off a pulse that will kill anyone within three miles.”* Linda walked closer to the mirror. The voice went on saying, *“if everything goes on this path they will be over the ocean when it pulses.”* Linda looked in the mirror then to Isaiah. He was sitting on a step staring at the mirror. She realized she would never see him as she did before. She looked back to the mirror and asked, *“is there any chance at all?”* She answered, *“there are no certainties but every possibility I can see ends with either their deaths or the destruction of Berlin.”* The doors closed, and the mirror flashed.

Jack walked out with the stone in his arms. His tattoos glowed and pulsed between blue and gold. The stone was lighter than he thought. It was his first break. He crossed the ramp set up so he wouldn't have to go downstairs. They helped him in the back then down. He could feel the pulse emanating from the stone. He could feel the magic from the bottoms of his feet to the top of his head. The pulse echoed in his head. The truck stopped, and they carefully helped him out and into the plane. They did this while trying not to touch him. None of them wanted to look him in the face. Jack's eyes and ears were bleeding. The plane took off. It would be a few hours before it was over the North Sea.

The voice said, *“this is where your husband tells the pilot to jump before they go over the sea.”* The mirror showed the pilot set the autopilot then setting a timer. The voice said, *“he just set the bomb that will destroy the controls and force the plane down. Isn’t that right grandfather?”* Linda turned to Isaiah. She asked, *“you knew about it?”* Isaiah said, *“she told us it could come to this. Jack thought he could find a way, but he also knew it had to be done.”* Linda turned to the mirror. She said, *“he didn’t say anything to me.”* She reached out and touched the mirror. Jack turned to her. He said, *“I’m sorry. I wanted to tell you for so long, and when it all became so real, I just wanted to protect you.”* She asked, *“Jack?”* A bolt of energy shot from the stone, up his arm. It left a trail of blood in its wake. He turned to her and said, *“don’t let them mark our daughter. It will seem harmless, but nothing they do is harmless. I love you.”* A flash of red and orange flames filled the mirror then the image was gone. Linda stared into the void where her husband just was and said, *“I love you too.”*

## Bang the Soccer Mom Slowly

The door opened, and a woman walked in. Sally Dolan, the casting director, stared at her trying to pin down her ethnicity. In some ways, she looked Indian, but in others, she could be Greek or Italian. Maybe even Egyptian. The one thing she did know was this was the most beautiful woman they had ever had at a casting call. Tall with long black slightly curly hair and an olive skin complexion that just made it hard to tell her ethnicity. It was clear she was ready for the interview. She had on what had to be the best cosplay costume of a mythical Atlantis female warrior Sally had ever seen. She had on a purplish cape with a dark grayish skirt covered by thin chainmail and a metal breastplate made up of several overlapping plates. Her skin seemed to have an elaborate tattoo of what looked like a spider web. Jay Hay, the art director, said, *“I don’t think we have the budget to make copies of that for the rest of the cast.”* Jay’s brother George said, *“I don’t care what kind of budget we have. I am directing this, and I want her.”* Sally said, *“we really should talk to her first.”* George asked, *“does that tattoo cover your entire body?”*

The woman looked at the three sitting behind a table then in one motion she took off her cape. More of the tattoo was visible. It seemed to radiate from her back and was indeed a spiderweb. There were little spider tattoos placed randomly on the web. She started to take the breastplate off when Sally said, *“no, this is just an interview we won’t need the nudity yet.”* The two men at the table just looked over at Sally then back to the woman. George said, *“do whatever comes naturally to you.”* Sally asked, *“do you want to be sued, George?”* As they spoke, the woman took the breastplate off then a layer of chainmail. Underneath the chainmail was a very loose tank top. All three at the table stopped talking. The Woman pulled off the top. To everyone’s surprise, she didn’t have the usual nipple piercings that are now common in their industry. Sally knew that it was hard to find a porn actress in their early twenties without them. She turned around to show the apex of her tattoo. It emanated from her upper back and near that central point was a black widow spider.

The woman said, *“I saw your sign, so I am here.”* Sally found her voice. She asked, *“and you are?”* The woman said, *“I am Devi Makadee, a warrior of Atlantis and your new master.”*

Jay said, “*goddess spider? I think that could work?*” George turned to Jay and said, “*you know Greek?*” Jay replied, “*yes and that’s not Greek.*” The woman said, “*that’s enough of all that nonsense. I am here to see the quality of your people. Your metal.*” She pointed at Sally and said, “*you, girl come here.*” Sally didn’t know why she started to move. It was like she had no choice. The woman grabbed the front of Sally’s shirt and ripped it off. Her bra came off with it. She tossed the shirt to the side then inspected her. Sally started to scream, but nothing came out. The woman said, “*not a single marking. How weak.*” She spun Sally around where she saw that the two brothers had got up and were on their way to her when they stopped in place. The woman pulled Sally back as she wrapped her arms around her and cupped her breasts. She said, “*you will make excellent dragon food.*” She turned Sally around then pushed her into a chair. She still couldn’t move.

She pointed at George who went down on his knees and crawled to her. She picked him up and did the same to his shirt. Like Sally, he had no tattoos. George was in shape with a well-defined upper body. The woman pulled a knife and cut his jeans away. Without a word, the woman grabbed him by the genitals. He made an auditory yelp but not the scream his throat was trying to do. The woman said, “*pity you have no marks.*” She tossed him down to the floor where he landed at Sally’s feet. She turned to Jay who did the same crawl. Like George, she stripped Jay. He had several tattoos. On his upper arm was a spiderweb tattoo with a dangling spider. A black widow. The woman smiled, but there was no warmth in that smile. Sally gasped as she thought she saw the spider on Jay’s arms move. The woman said, “*now this is just what I wanted. You will serve me as I conquer this new land for Emperor Zed.*” She pushed him onto the table then mounted him. Then out of nowhere, there was a knock at the door.

The door opened, and a woman in her mid-thirties came in. She had a pixie style haircut that was dyed blonde. Despite the events of the last twenty-minutes, Sally thought to herself, “*no we aren’t casting Bang the Soccer Mom slowly until next week.*” The woman at the table stopped having sex with Jay and turned to the new woman in the room. She said, “*fresh meat.*” Linda pulled a Glock 26 from her purse and held it at her side pointing it down. The woman on top of Jay cocked her head at the gun. She said, “*bring that thing to me.*” Linda didn’t move. The

woman said, *“bring that to me now.”* Linda pointed the gun at the woman. The woman got off Jay and back to her feet. She pulled her dagger out. She said, *“I will cut that thing out of your hand and beat you to death with it.”* Linda fired. One of the spider tattoos came to life and caught the bullet before it could hit the woman. The now three-dimensional spider fell to the ground wrapped around the bullet. The woman dropped the dagger and in one clean motion kicked up and drew a sword she had dropped when she first came in. The woman said, *“defend yourself a witch.”* A shot came from the hallway and through the drywall. It hit the sword and shattered into pieces. One of them hit the woman in the shoulder. The shot caused her to drop the sword. Three men with rifles drawn came in behind Linda.

The woman leaped over the table then using a chair busted a window out. She leaned in and whispered something into Jay’s ear then she jumped out the window. Sally suddenly found she could move. She got up and ran to the window while trying to cover her chest. She said, *“the window is fake there is no other way out that way.”* Linda and Sally stared into an empty room with broken glass but no woman. Sally asked, *“where did she go?”* Linda took her jacket off and gave it to Sally. She said, *“that is a good question.”* Sally looked at the two men with her and asked, *“maybe we should help them find something to cover themselves?”* Linda looked at them and asked, *“why?”*

That night Linda gave a full report on how this woman was abducting men and women from up and down the valley. This was the first time she left witnesses other than a few video shots. Linda said, *“she seems to have a fondness for porn actors of both sexes and tattoos.”* She detailed how the woman said she was taking people to feed the dragons. She said, *“I think it’s safe to assume that all thirty plus people she took are either now enslaved or dragon chow. She whispered something into a mister Jay Hay A.K.A. Jason Henderson, but he claims he doesn’t know what she said.”* She noted how a surveillance team would follow Jay. She inventoried the items the woman left behind then packed them, so they could be shipped back to the Order. She asked herself, *“Bang the Soccer Mom Slowly? Who the fuck would watch that?”*

## Across the Electric Divide

A bolt of lightning struck across the sky then hit the ground near the town of Hope Arizona. The strike turned the sands to the glass as it set the low grass on fire. A form walked out of the rising smoke. He looked to the sky then to the east as electric bolts emanated from his hands. The form took to the air as the electricity ran from his hands to the ground. It traveled east until he came to a house that was many years past being abandoned. He came to the ground then waved his hands and the walls of the building peeled away. The long dead bar sat in disrepair. The figure walked up to the bar. He turned to see the bar back in its heyday when men traveled on horses and drove cattle to market. None of the people were real but he didn't care. He drank his imaginary drink among imaginary people and wondered if existence was just someone's imagination.

Linda was in her office typing out a report on the events in California. She was waiting for the blood tests and DNA. As she typed into her laptop, she saw a woman in her office. The door was closed, and she was sure it never opened. She was a young, and petite in a brown silk Qipao with little pink flowers. Her hair was tied up with chopsticks. Linda didn't recognize her at first. Then she said, *"Hello Linda I think we have a problem."* She caught herself from saying, Rachel. Linda asked, *"what kind of problem do we have Providence? Should I make sure my will is ready?"* Providence said, *"that is always a good idea Linda. I need you and the one named Stanley in the mirror room now."* Linda asked, *"what about your grandfather?"* Providence smiled then said, *"I don't think he will be joining us."*

On her way down, she called in a team to go check on Isaiah. She would find out later that he had killed himself in his home when she was in California. He had taken three days off, so no one knew something was wrong. That is almost no one. She met up with Stanley Smyth just outside the door. Together they walked into the chamber. Providence was there in her new look. Stanley started to say she didn't belong there when Linda said who she really was. By accident, she said, Rachel. Providence glared at Linda. For a moment her eyes darkened as her skin changed from pale skin to a gray. She quickly returned to normal then disappeared. The

mirror changed shape. It widened to four times its size. On the mirror, they saw the man in the desert. How he used the lightning. The mirror said, *“what you are seeing is an anomaly. Something that does not exist in any of the known timelines. When something that cannot be predicted shows up, then all predictions are tossed into chaos. As long as this thing is then we are blind.”* Linda asked, *“just what do you expect us to do about that?”*

The mirror spun around, and the light returned signaling a connection with the other side. A tall man with shockingly ginger hair walked into the water. He was completely naked. Linda looked to Stanley who was taking off his shirt. The mirror said, *“no not you. Only Linda.”* Stanley stopped then the mirror said, *“leave now.”* Linda looked at the man in the water. He was tall and handsome. He also emitted a power that she never felt before. Linda took off her shirt then her bra. She looked at him then took the rest of her clothing off. She thought it would be a sign of good faith. She had no idea she was about to meet with the emperor of Atlantis. He watched as this woman walked into the water. She looked older than his usual women. He knew that she wasn't here for his fun, but he had to look at her.

They stood there and stared at each other. Zed said, *“we are following that thing on your side. He is pure magic. As something with access to such power, it could destabilize both worlds. We could draw that magic out with a battery.”* Linda asked, *“what is he?”* The emperor wasn't used to anyone asking him questions. He also caught on to the word “he.” The emperor Zed said, *“it's best not to think of it as him or her. This thing is more of a manifestation of power. An echo of magical energy trying to take form.”*

Linda watched this man walk a little closer to her. She looked at the door then back. He was now near enough to touch her. The man waved his hand, and an object appeared on her side. He said, *“this is the battery. They will know what to do.”* He grabbed her and forced her down. Linda tried to fight back. His touch was like an electric shock that made her immobile. This man

held her head up out of the water. She could feel his erection on her skin. It burned every place it touched. Zed said, *“you should feel honored. I usually don’t touch someone as old as you. I will take my rightful place as the ruler of both worlds. Yes, you should feel honored to give your life for my entertainment.”*

The rooms on both sides filled with blue light. The mirror shook as lightning struck the floor. The form appeared above the water. Zed dropped Linda and jumped back. Linda came out of the water and tried to get out of the circle. Zed grabbed her and put her in between him and the form. Linda was surprised to feel that he was still hard. The force waved his arm. Linda closed her eyes. As she did the feel of the water and the electrified grasping man went away. She opened her eyes and found herself in her office. She fell to the floor. She had burns all over her body. Her heart was racing. She watched as chaos took hold over the building. She crawled over to the window.

Outside the naked man and the force fought in the parking lot. Zed picked up a 2018 yellow Corvette and tossed it at the form. The car passed through it like it wasn’t there. She watched as her new car smashed upside down on the asphalt. The force raised its hands, and electrical bolts emanated from its hands and picked up the five cars around it. The force pushed his hands forward, and the cars were tossed at the emperor. The cars crashed all around the emperor. They struck other cars and exploded as the electrical bolts hit the spilling gas. The emperor walked out of the flames. Finally, the force struck the emperor, and he flashed out. The force looked up to her window. He lowered his hood. Linda whispered, *“Jack?”*

## It's Cold in Alaska

Linda searched the archives as well as the new footage for images of the form. She was certain she saw her late husband's face. Jack died in a magical explosion over the water. He died to save lives. The order had connections to every part of the world. They had links to traffic cameras, satellites, and people's cellphones. She found some images of the form but nothing that showed a face. Providence appeared in her office. She was in the form of the young woman she might have grown to be rather than the little girl she was when she died. She said, "*I know what you are thinking, and that was not Jack.*" An image appeared on her screen. It was inside a plane. Jack was there with the rock in his arms. The plane was rocking and swaying in the rough turbulence. A bump and the rock slipped. A ball of energy shot out from the rock. The image slowed down, and Linda watched as the wave slowly incinerated his body. The image followed the wave as the plane vanished.

Linda just sat there with the image of her husband being atomized by magic in her mind. But she knew what she saw. Linda asked, "*I know what I saw.*" Providence asked, "*do you now?*" Another image appeared showing the form. This time it had the face of Asher, the father of Rachel, the little girl that became Providence. Then the image changed to the face of a Japanese man Linda met in the mirror room from the other side. Providence said, "*I guess that the aberration takes the form of anyone that meets magic.*" Linda brought up a picture of the man with ginger hair. She asked, "*who was that and did you know what he was going to try?*" Providence said, "*that was Emperor Zed and while there was a chance he might try that, but it was worth the risk.*" Linda got up and put her finger in Providence's chest. The image of the woman slightly shifted then vanished.

Linda was on her way to the mirror room when her phone rang. She had a couple of analysts watching for signs of the form. A woman named Helena Guise was on the line. An hour later and Linda was on a plane on her way to Alaska. She hoped that the airport would have winter weather gear for sale. She left The Order and went straight to the airport. Her clothing was more fall than winter. While on the plane her dealer called her. She was looking for her new

fix. Most people are hooked on drugs or alcohol. Linda had a dealer that specialized in Corvettes. He had a line on a yellow 1968 Corvette Stingray convertible. Her brand-new Corvette Stingray was pancaked on a 2013 Fiat. While she liked the car, she wanted one more like the one her father bought her. The new cars were muscular, but the old cars were sexy.

The plane touched down, and soon she found herself in three feet of snow. The airport sold plenty of Hawaiian shirts but nothing for snow. An agent was waiting for her with a coat and a pair of boots. She looked Linda over and said, *“no that just won’t do.”* They made their way to a store and local winter gear. On the way, she introduced herself as Sandy with an A. Linda wondered just how do you spell “Sandy” without an A? Sandy asked, *“so you just dropped everything and jumped on a plane?”* Linda said, *“I go wherever it goes.”* Sandy went back to driving. She then asked, *“you were married to Jack?”* Linda was worried that she would eventually find someone that had an affair with Jack. It seemed to be the norm for these people to sleep around. Linda looked at her and said, *“yes.”* Sandy nodded then said, *“he was a good man.”*

In her new gear, she felt as comfortable as a person can be in subzero weather. They were off to a plane that would take them deep into the wilderness. Sandy had a large rifle as well as a 50-caliber handgun. Linda said, *“I don’t think that would help if we come face-to-face with it.”* Sandy said, *“no this is for bears.”* The plane came down in the snow. Something Linda didn’t know they could do. There they met up with an Inuit guide and dog sleds. The guide said don’t touch the dogs. Sandy said, *“they are working dogs, not pets.”* The dogs proved this by tackling Linda and licking her face. While out in the middle of nowhere they found a camp made of several buildings. They were abandoned, but at one point they held several families. Linda found a Quran inside as well as empty brass for a rifle round. Both AK and AR. They set up camp in the main building and waited for morning.

In the morning they found where the form was. The snow was cleared away from the ground. The guide said, *“this part of the country never loses the snow. Some of that pack was*

*there from the ice age.*” On the warm and clear earth was a doorway made of stone. The guide said, *“even the permafrost is gone.”* The permafrost is a permanent layer of frozen ground. The dogs wouldn’t get near the opening. Linda took off her glove to find the ground warm. She looked to Sandy than to the guide. They both just stared at her as she walked into the opening. A ladder went down five feet to a steep spiraling path downward. The path was lit with torches. About twenty feet down the path opened to a chamber lit with more torches. In the middle of the chamber was a Roman column and about a foot over the column was a black glass ball. The ball hovered over the column and emitted a cold mist. In the center of the ball was a hand print. The form tried to take the ball, but the ball resisted him or it. Linda took pictures of the ball. She would link the phone to the satellite phone and send them back, but she knew that as soon as she left this chamber, Providence would know.

Linda came back to the surface to find Sandy and the guide building a structure around the open ground. They used parts of one of the small buildings from the abandoned camp. About three minutes after she came up the phone rang. An agent said they were sending a team to secure the site. Providence appeared to Linda. She said the ball was one of the original Providences. It was pure magic without the human soul to control it. She said, *“the ball is dangerous and needs to be protected. We also need to be protected from it.”* This was the first time she saw fear in her eyes. She wondered just what could make an immortal afraid? Providence smiled then said, *“your little yellow sled was in the parking lot and waiting for you. Just maybe you can keep this one just a little bit longer.”* In the chamber, the ball pulsed, and an eye appeared.

## Great Ball of Magic

The man walked over to the strange pool of water. It glimmered and shined in the sun with a reflective quality that mirrored the sky. As he stared into the water, he could see his reflection. Not knowing what to do he poked at it with his spear. He made the spear for hunting, but it became his world. With a weapon, he became a leader in his tribe as they hunted the land gathering food moving with the herds. They had no name for nomad or home. Hunting and gathering would be labels put on them long after they were gone. They didn't live lives of introspection. Keeping safe and feeding their tribe was more important than life's deeper questions. They didn't even have a real language or even names. The man looked deep into the pool of liquid and stared at himself until the image moved. His image smiled then looked at the center of the pool. The pool receded to a smaller size. When it was about a foot around it formed into a ball and raised into the sky.

The silver ball turned to black glass. An eye formed in the ball. It gazed at the man's tribe then it came down to the man. A beam of blue light shot out from the ball and struck him. The light shot out from him and hit everyone within the tribe knocking them to the ground. When the man got back up, he felt different. He wanted something; he just didn't know what. Off to the left, he saw a woman. For the first time in his life, he wanted something more than a quick fuck. He wanted to be with her. He wanted to stay in one place and build something permanent here where they were. The man walked over to the woman. She smiled as he approached. She too wanted to be more than a gatherer or existence as an object to use than abuse. Not knowing why the man pressed his lips to hers and society was born.

Three seasons later and the man was calling himself Cal, and the woman called herself Gal. They had one child that lived a season they named Gail. The ball showed them how to build a primitive house and how to grow primitive crops. The other members of the tribe emulated them, and soon a village was formed. The first in this part of the world. At night, the ball would show Cal and Gal images of things to come. A future with fire and flying machines. The ball showed Gal and her daughter Gail how to manipulate the strange blue glowing light it called

magic. As Gal and Gail trained with the glow, tattoo-like marks formed on them. The other tribe members made marks on themselves to emulate Gal and Gail hoping to use the blue light. Most failed to do so with many of them dying in the attempt. A vengeful tribe killed Cal and Gal. Gail escaped and made her way south to meet another tribe and show them magic. The ball went to find another tribe to train.

Over time Gail could see how the ball was not educating her, it was building an army of followers. The ball wanted to be a god to the people. She formed a new tribe with a goal to hunt down the ball and bury it. She didn't know it at the time, but the tribe would eventually be called the Order and live longer than every civilization it met with. The Order tracked the ball across the continent to another one then across to a third one. There in the snow, Gail and her hunters found the ball and trapped it underneath a magic ring. Her last act was to close off the land bridge between this new land and the land that would be known as Asia. When she was done, she went into the chamber, and the two stared at each other. Gail eventually died, and her body slowly broke down. The ball watched this and waited. It knew that someone would call on enough magic to one place that it would break the ring and free it, so it could go back to becoming a god.

Thousands of years went by, and the ball watched everything. It watched the rise and fall of many civilizations as well as the use of magic. Many of the ancient peoples used magic in their everyday lives. Then it became the providence of the wealthy or the religious. Over time factions formed and warred amongst each other. The ball watched the people of Atlantis gather up that magic. It felt the pull as the people of Atlantis called all the magic to this battery they made. It thought that soon it would be free until the one named Zed broke the battery and exiled magic to a closed realm. When the island nation took to the air, the ring shifted. This gave the ball a chance to slip a piece of itself out. That piece went out to rebuild magic in the world. For a thousand years, the ball watched as the magic on the other side grew. It knew that it would gain its freedom if that magic were able to cross over, so it sent the piece of itself to the place Atlantis was, and it opened the doorway. The ball knew that this Emperor Zed would want to conquer the world.

When it was done the piece merged with a magic stone in what was called Germany. When the man named Jack picked it up and carried it to the flying machine, it studied him. He was a member of the Order and an enemy of the ball. His life wasn't worth saving, but his memories were. The piece merged with Jack and took over as the magic decimated his body. Together they became the Form. With the knowledge of this man, the Form was able to locate a magical object to free the ball. As the Form went to free the ball, it saw that someone important to this body was in trouble. Not knowing why the Form went to defend the woman named Linda even as her own people seemed to sacrifice her to Zed. The Form fought and beat Zed despite how its victory was against its plans. When it was finished, the Form went and opened the way to the ball. With the door open, the ball was free. The woman named Linda came and left. The Form stared at the ball. It saw a man staring back from thousands of years ago. The Form saw Cal back on that day when he found a strange pool of liquid that would change his life forever.

## A Sky Filled with Stars

Linda sat behind the wheel of her Canary yellow 1968 Corvette Stingray convertible. The light was red and had been for about twenty seconds. The car was lean and sexy with curves and an engine that was built for speed. The light turned green, and she was off. She had the car up to near a hundred miles an hour when she saw the flashing red and blue lights behind her. This would have been her third ticket and most likely her third strike. At best she would lose her license at worse something much worse. As she slowed down, a thick black smoke surrounded her car. She thought how she not only got caught she blew the engine. The car came to a stop and the smoke dissipated. She found herself alone on a strange road with no sign of the police.

She drove for about a mile when she finally found a signal. Her cell had her in Nevada near the place where three states meet. She had traveled fifteen hundred miles in seconds. After driving around, she found a guy on the side of the road selling a bootleg agave moonshine. She bought a milk jug and took a long pull of the homemade tequila. The liquor burned her throat and cleared her head. She called in and told them what happened. She was told to drive to the nearest small airport and wait. They would pick her up and have her car shipped back. She was also told to pick up some more of the booze. She bought the booze and made her way to the airport. There she gave the jugs to the plane's crew. She got behind the wheel of her car and drove it to a waiting truck. As she approached her car was surrounded by the black smoke. When it cleared, she was right back in the desert where she was first dropped off.

She looked around and realized what just happened. Something wanted her here. It was still dark and would be for a few more hours. She turned the engine off and looked at a sky filled with stars that seemed almost alive. She put the top down and watched the stars. It was cold, but the open air made the whole thing seem even more real. Off in the east, she saw the first rays of sunshine. The sun seemed to swim in a sea of blue sky. As the sun arose striking a shadow of a pyramid across the sand. At first, it was pitch black, but as the sun went higher, the color changed until the sun reflected the white of the stone covering it. Linda put the top back up and grabbed her go bag from the back. The bag had something for every occasion from a flashlight to

a Glock 19. It was also a backpack. She put it on and made her way to the alien structure. That was how she saw it. The pyramid was alien to the location.

It took her about twenty minutes to get to the pyramid. It was bigger than she thought. Maybe fifty feet from the base to the tip. Unlike the Giza pyramids which were sandstone covered by limestone this one seemed to be covered with quartz crystals. Large sheets of the material that was bigger than any quartz she had ever seen before. The pyramid seemed to go further into the ground. Linda walked around it until she found the top of an opening with the rest of it buried in the sand. Linda unpacked her trenching tool and started to dig the opening out. She looked at her watch only to see it had stopped working. She checked, and everything electronic was dead. The flashlight worked, but that was it. Linda looked at her car. She knew that she might be stuck there with no way out. Either way, she was there for the night.

She unburied the door and opened it. The door opened outwardly making it necessary to clear the sand out. Inside the pyramid, it felt at least thirty degrees cooler. If she went in, she risked getting stuck if the sand filled in the opening again. If she stayed, she might die from sun exposure. Linda jammed her trenching tool into the sand at the door hoping it would hold it open. She put her backpack on and drew her gun and flashlight. About ten feet into the corridor it turned to the right then it went left and down. The passage had the same feeling like the place in Alaska. But unlike Alaska, torches did not light this place. But there was a light just ahead. Linda turned a corner than another. The downward path followed the lines of the pyramid. About twenty feet down the path leveled off with an opening to the left. She found a square chamber with a strange glow coming from the ceiling. She guessed that the top of the pyramid was refracting light down a shaft illuminating the space.

The room was cold to the point that she could see her breath. The light from above gave it an eerie feeling. In the center of the room was a raised platform and what looked like an embedded vessel of water. As Linda approached, she could see that it wasn't water. It had the look of mercury. The liquid seemed to be moving and following the contour of the vessel rather

than just filling it. The light reflected from above in the liquid and filled the room. Somehow the light coming off the liquid was brighter than the light coming in. Linda stared into the liquid. It stopped shifting and went still. Then a shimmer went across it, and it shot up to the opening in the ceiling, and all the light went out. Linda went for her gun and flashlight. A voice came from behind her. It said, "*that won't be necessary.*" Although it made no sense, she knew the voice. She knew the sound of her late husband even in the dark. The voice told her she should wait here for now. The form said, "*changes are coming.*"

## Reflections of a Past Lover

Linda looked at the form then to where the entrance to the room should be. She pulled out her flashlight from her pocket and went to the opening. The light flashed then went out, but Linda was able to use what she saw in the light to find her way out. She went out and turned to the right to where the stairs should be but instead she just found a level corridor. Linda put one hand on the inner wall and one out, then she felt her way down the corridor. She made her way around until her hand found an opening. She went into the room and ran into someone. The person somehow felt familiar. She brought up her hands to the face. The feel and smell were that of her husband, Jack. She had gone all the way around back to the chamber with the form. Linda backed away from him until she hit the wall.

The form waved his hands and a fire formed in the empty bowl. The room filled with an orange glow. Linda could see the face of the form. Jack stared back with eyes as black as the room once was. Linda asked, “*why are you holding me here?*” A voice came from the fire saying, “*we aren’t holding you. You could leave whenever you want just as long as it’s what you want to do.*” The form walked to the other side of the room away from Linda. The fire said, “*something inside you is keeping you here.*” Linda looked at the form wearing the face of her dead husband and said, “*I don’t know what that could be.*” The form pulled back its hood to reveal just how much it looked like Jack just without hair. It said, “*I took this form because he was the last person to touch the stone I was trapped in. I am not him. I don’t have his consciousness.*” Linda asked, “*why did you save me?*”

A light formed in the corner of the room. It grew brighter and brighter until Linda had to shield her eyes. When she lowered her hands, she was in a field with blue skies and trees. It was the park where she would go and have lunch when she was in college. The form looked like Jack did when they first met way back when. He said, “*I can remember this. He was watching you trying to find the courage to talk to you.*” Linda said, “*yes, I knew. It took weeks of him staring before he would find the nerve to speak and I shot him down.*” Linda looked down to see she was dressed in the same style she wore back when she first met Jack. The form said, “*he was hurt,*

*but he thought that it might be for the best. He was already on his way to becoming an agent.”* The image changed, and she was in the crappy little apartment Jack shared with Asher. Jack came in and said to Asher, *“I just met my future wife.”* Asher said, *“maybe you should wait for a second date. If you really like her, you should walk away. You know the rules. As an agent you can’t marry someone they don’t approve of then there is the fact that they will own your first child. Could you stand by as they kill your son or daughter? I know that if it were me, they would have to hold me back or just kill me.”* The form said, *“they did both.”* Darkness bled down from the walls until they were in the chamber again. The Form said, *“I have his memories, and those memories saved you. When I leave here, I will find a new form and purge the memories.”*

Linda and the form looked at each other. She was on the verge of losing her husband again. She knew that this wasn’t him. Jack died in an act of courage, and this was just a reflection of him. The form dropped his robe, went over to Linda and kissed her. She looked around to see they were in the bedroom of their first apartment. Both she and Jack were naked and walking back to the bed. She hit the side of the bed and fell back, and the form climbed on top of her. Linda said, *“you aren’t my Jack.”* She then kissed him saying to herself, *“he doesn’t have to be.”* The form parted her legs and entered her. The feeling was more than just sex. He gave off an energy that coursed through her. Her nerve endings felt like they were on fire with the top of her head feeling like it was going to explode. Linda closed her eyes and tried not to scream out. Somehow this alien thing became Jack to her at that moment, and she felt every bit of her love for him. Then the feeling was gone. It ended as quickly as it started. Linda opened her eyes to find herself in her own bed.

Linda got up and ran to the garage and found her car parked inside. The odometer hadn’t moved from the time she parked in the desert. She went to a place where she had a gun hid and searched the house, but she didn’t find anything unusual. She looked out the window and saw two teenage boys staring at her house, that was when she realized she was still naked. Without thinking about it, she brought up her gun and pointed it up in the air causing the two boys to run. Linda grabbed a robe and went into the bathroom. She started a shower and got in. The water felt good after her time in the desert. As she washed, she thought about what Asher said about how

the Order would own their first child. She knew what happened to Asher and his daughter. She also knew how Asher's father poisoned his wife to death in the name of the Order. Her shower door opened and the form in the shape of Jack walked in. Linda put both her hands on his chest at arm's length. She said, "*you aren't him and whatever that was it can't happen again.*" The form ran his hands down her arms then gently pushed them aside. He moved in gently pushing her back while touching her. When her back hit the shower wall, she wrapped one leg around him then mounted him with the other leg wrapped around. He was just a reflection of her husband, but he felt real to her. As before she felt something more than just sex, but this time when they finished, she was still in her house.

Linda got dressed and tried to call the office, but there was no answer. She tried every number she had but nothing connected. She checked her accounts, but the money was still there. Then she tried to log into the company server but nothing. She turned on the television and saw the office on the news. They were saying it was a gas explosion with the entire office building gone. Everyone she worked with was nothing, but guts mixed in with rubble. It would also mean that Providence was most likely gone. Linda heard a sound in the next room. She looked out and saw the teenage version of Rachel. She was dressed like a teenager from the 1950's in a long poodle skirt and a letterman's sweater with bright pink horn-rimmed sunglasses. She had on white gloves with pink trim around the wrist and was sucking on a lollypop. Providence turned to Linda, pulled out the candy and said, "*one of the benefits of seeing everything is knowing when to leave.*" Linda asked, "*did you warn them? Did anyone get out? Why are you dressed like that?*" Providence put one finger up and said, "*no I didn't.*" She extended another one and said, "*I hope not.*" Then another finger and said, "*because I want too.*" Linda didn't know what to say. Providence said, "*they were no longer relevant to the fight. The war is here, and so is the emperor.*"

## **Invasion (part 1)**

The emperor walked into a circular room lit by torches. The center of the room was sunken and made of a highly reflective black marble. Two men brought in a young woman around the age of eighteen. Inayah was trained from birth to serve the emperor. She knew that at any time he could call on her and she would have to give her life for his pleasure. He said, “*stand in the middle of the room.*” She got up then went back to her knees. The Emperor went over and pulled her up to her feet then said, “*no, stay on your feet.*” He looked from her face down her body then he ripped the robe off her. He stepped back and looked Inayah over saying, “*my, my, my, where have you been my little pretty.*” He caressed her left breast leaving red marks where his fingers touched. She winced trying not to show emotion. The emperor said, “*if I had more time than just maybe I would send for another and take you, but the time is here.*” He walked to a table and produced a short, thin sword. She knew what was coming, but it still was nothing she was ready for.

With the sword on his shoulder, he came back to her. Once again, he ran his hand across Inayah’s chest then down her body. The hand left a red mark like it was covered in red paint. She could smell her burning flesh then the hair as he found his way between her legs. He said, “*like all that serve me you are a virgin, and it’s a waste of such good flesh, but I need you to remain so.*” He walked behind her then said, “*I need you to stand as long as you can. If you drop early, I will need to do this again, and if I understand it right, you have a younger sister.*” Inayah thought about her sister. Hiba was thirteen and just learning how to work in the castle. Not knowing if it was her place to speak to her god Inayah just nodded her head. With a flick of his wrist, he cut her on the back with the sword. The blade was sharp, and her skin parted quickly. Blood welled up and ran down her back. Inayah winced but didn’t scream out. The emperor ran the blade up one arm then down the other hitting arteries causing the blood to pulse and pour out. Her pain jumped as she bled out. A few more cuts and the floor was a pool of blood. Inayah started to stagger but caught herself and remained standing even as half her blood supply was now gone. The emperor held her head back and kissed her. His kiss burned her lips till they were blisters. He stuck the long blade into her chest between the ribs into her heart. He said, “*you did well, and I have enough to finish the task. I will release you now.*” He slightly twisted the blade

ripping the heart. Just before Inayah dropped, he said, *“I think I will find that sister and see if she is half as good as you.”*

He caught her before her body fell into the blood. He needed as much of it as possible. He picked up her body and tossed it out of the sunken ring trying not to disturb the blood. Two servants closed the door. The emperor disrobed and walked to the edge of the rim facing the black marble slicked with blood. With the sword in his right hand, he cut his left palm and let the blood fall to the blood covered floor. The blood hit but didn't mix. It just sat on top of the pool. The woman's blood moved away from the emperor's blood-forming circles around the drops. As the blood moved it filled the circle. The emperor's blood migrated to the center of the circle. When it reached the center the blood mixed. The center of the pool started to bubble then fountain up as the volume increased until it met the rim in the floor when it stopped. He picked up the Inayah's body and tossed it into the blood. The blood bubbled up around the body and started to consume it from the back to the front. The flesh parted from the bones and slipped into the blood then the skeleton sunk in. The blood turned black then solidified into a glass-like substance. The emperor said to himself, *“I have a little time before it's ready. Maybe I'll find the sister.”*

The emperor pushed the smoldering body off himself. When she fell, she hit the body of the other servant he burned. The emperor turned to the young girl standing in the room. He said, *“after having a woman that can withstand my touch this sort of gratification just isn't good enough.”* Hiba stood in the corner of the room and watched as the emperor burned through his servants wondering if she was next. She was dressed in the traditional robes of the junior serving class with a top that was sheer to the point of being transparent. Hiba tried to cover her nearly exposed chest as she waited to find out why she was there. The emperor said, *“put your arms at your sides, or I'll cut them off.”* The emperor smiled and said, *“I told your sister I would find you and you are every bit as sweet as she was.”* A tear ran down her cheek at the mention of her sister. She knew she was next and like Inayah, she wouldn't last long. He saw that she was shaking and said, *“no my child, don't worry I don't eat a peach before its ripe.”* The door

opened, and another woman came in. The emperor looked at her then fell back into the bed saying, *“let’s try this again.”*

Margret sat in her locked room listening to the screams coming from the emperor’s bedroom. She wanted to get as far away from this place and that man as she possibly could. Alane came into the room and went to her knees. She was a thin woman with a deep reddish head of hair and a figure that would have made her a model back on earth. She was assigned to act as Margaret’s servant, but Margret didn’t want anything. Alane said, *“I know this isn’t my place to say this, but the great master could use your company.”* Margret looked at her without saying anything. Alane said, *“the great master won’t take something not offered but the ones that are willing wither to his touch.”* Margret said, *“so what you mean is I have to let him fuck me, or he will keep killing those other women.”* Alane said, *“no and yes. You must show him you want him, and he is already looking to the girls. He has a young one right now in his chamber. Hiba is thirteen by your type of calendar.”* Alane looked to the window then back to Margret and said, *“I was to be next, but I was assigned to serve you. Hiba is in my place.”*

Alane told her how the emperor’s magic was growing. When he came to this new land his power adapted to it and grew to the point that it was no longer compatible with her side. He could send parts of himself as astral projections, but he couldn’t go. So, he devised a plan to split himself into two. One would be what Alane called a reflection, and the other would be the emperor in a new body. Alane said, *“he will take over the body of the child you carry and make it his new vessel to rule both worlds. The reflection will attack your world and destroy most of it. that is when he comes in and destroys the reflection and takes over.”* Margret asked, *“he can’t think that will work?”* Alane said, *“the great master has watched your world and has seen the chaos of your existence. He knows you need him.”* a scream from the other room seemed to wake the two women up. Alane said, *“that was Livonia, she was just sixteen. The youngest so far.”*

The emperor lay on his bed with a pile of smoldering corpses next to it. He still had a stiff erection and seemed nowhere near satisfied. Hiba stared at his manhood knowing it would soon

be her job to satisfy him but in reality die harpooned by a fleshy lightning rod. The door opened, and Margret walked in. He didn't see who it was. The emperor lay on his bed with a pillow over his eyes and said, "*just climb on and let it happen.*" Margret looked at the young girl in the room. She was pretty and very young looking. Margret dropped her robe and got on top of this man she wanted to beat to death with a hammer. When she did, he felt the change. Margret was a real woman, not the young women he was burning to death. He moved the pillow and saw Margret on him as she eased him into her. Like before he was like riding a bike in a hailstorm. She could feel the energy build in him as she shifted up and down. When she felt that she just might get lost in this feeling, he came inside her, and the storm ended. The emperor said, "*I waited so long to have something that can serve me.*" Margret wanted to cut his manhood off when he called her a thing, but she knew many would suffer and she also knew that to save this girl and the others she would have to fuck this monster whenever he wanted.

## **Invasion (Part Two)**

Two days ago.

Nancy Kelley was having a bad day. Her phone died sometime in the night leaving her with no alarm to wake her up. She went to her car and found it was dead. A ninety-dollar taxi took her to work where her boss first threatened her then hit on her in the same conversation. Because she wasn't the first person in someone made a thick, viscous substance that should have been coffee. Their attempt burned the pot and shorted the machine. On her first keystroke, she broke a nail. Nancy looked at her clock and wondered to herself, "*just maybe I should set the phones to auto and just go home.*" From her desk, she could watch the men setting in the new glass in the front of the building. She thought how one of the men looked like a young Tom Selleck from his Magnum P.I. Days mustache and all. Just outside she could see the ruins of a brand-new Corvette. Working for the Order wasn't the safest job, but Nancy was a receptionist. Greet people as they come in with no gun needed.

Nancy decided to stay and watch Magnum install the glass. At the door was another handsome man or he appeared handsome at first. She watched this man walk to the door and as he opened it his face changed just a little. The face shifted like it was made of glass. He walked up to her desk and stopped. Nancy thought that something was wrong with his face. It was too perfect as an artist rendering of what the ideal man would be. He looked down and smiled a smile that in no way was warm or inviting and showed way too many teeth. He put his hands on her desk. As he did her desk started to burn. Nancy's last thought just before her life ended was, "*I guess this day could actually get worse.*" In two seconds, the man turned to a red glass and energy expanded from his body in a wave that destroyed the building killing everyone it touched. When the energy filled the lower half of the building, it blew out, and the building exploded sending shrapnel out for miles leaving a black crater and a mushroom cloud. In the center of the crater was the man. He was all red and angles looking like a man made of red glass.

The same event happened all around the world in the many different sites owned and operated by The Order so that by the end of the day they were effectively crippled. Meanwhile,

out in the Pacific Ocean, a storm was approaching a small island with a population of around three thousand people. The category three hurricane jumped to a category five with a tsunami-sized wave following it. The population had little contact with the outside world with little value to any world power. Loto sat in the remains of an airplane that crashed during a war watching the rainfall. It was from a war his island didn't fight in for a world he would never see past his little corner of it. Loto was fourteen and in the last years of adolescents. He was already working the nets fishing for food, but soon he would join in the profession that his family did for centuries since the time they first came to the island. Loto was in an interesting position. He was one of very few boys born to the island with a near four-to-one girl to boy ratio. A law was put in place that women needed to marry a male in the community or leave. Vailea didn't want to leave. She was happy with her life and with her island. She was also lucky to be in love with a boy who loves her back. When Loto comes of age, they will marry, and she would be safe. Or so she thought.

None of them knew about the massive wave coming to wipe their island away. The island was devoid of power with the only connection being a boat ride to the nearest island and a radio that was powered by solar cells in the community hut in the center of the village. A voice over the radio was the first to talk about the wave as it wiped out the community on the other side. The leaders of the island called everyone to the village center to tell them that the end was near and that even trying to leave by boat wouldn't help. As he spoke the storm let up and the full fury of the hurricane was on display as they stood in the eye. Off in the west, they could see the storm and the growing wave of death. Then the storm came to a stop. The rain and wind spun around the island, but the storm didn't move. Just outside of the center of town a bolt of lightning struck the ground. In the lightening was a man. He was white with curly red hair and a presence that was as electric as his arrival. The emperor said, "*my children, today you find yourselves on the precipice of either a tragic end or a new beginning that will make this wonderful place the center of the world.*"

Loto watched this, but he couldn't hear over the sound of the wind and rain. Vailea quietly snuck away from the meeting and found Loto. She said, "*please help me get away from*

*this horror.*” She told him that this man was promising to save them if they follow his rule and bow. She said, *“he wants to make us his slaves or die in the wave. He said he would own any unmarried women.”* Loto brought her to his plane, and they went inside. She said, *“Loto I don’t think this will fly.”* He said, *“fly, no but it will float.”* Loto went to the back of the plane and pulled on a rope. The plane shifted, and two pontoons moved away from the wingless seaplane PBV Catalina. He said, *“when the water comes back in it will push the plane out to sea, and without the anchor, we will float out.”* Vailea leaned in and kissed him. It was his and her first kiss. She asked, *“then what?”*

The storm parted and reformed just outside of the island. The tsunami also parted and dissipated harmlessly in the deep Pacific Ocean. Back in the center of the village a palace made from lava rock formed. The emperor said, *“I will soon return, and as your new god you will be my first in a series of many followers making you my first children.”* He then picked two of the women and told them they would come to the afterlife and serve him. The emperor waved his hands and an opening formed. He then took the two women who were more teenagers at eighteen and seventeen than women back to his realm to what would be their deaths. Margret was able to watch all this from the mirror the emperor had in his castle. With her willingly giving herself to him she was free to walk around. She saw the two teenagers in the ancient plane and hoped they would be ok. She also saw how this copy or as they were calling it reflection killed hundreds of people.

Linda also watched the island and how the emperor was taking over it to remake Atlantis in the Pacific. The form said, *“neither of them can see me or the source.”* He wiped out the order because of the magic they were stockpiling as well as the fact that they were the only ones that knew what was about to happen. Linda looked at her dead husband’s doppelganger and asked, *“so what’s your angle in this? I am speaking with the source, right?”* The form said, *“no. I am what you would call a child of that source as well as the memories of Jack. I couldn’t let them go, so I merged with them.”* He brushed a tear from her face then put his hand under her chin. He asked, *“I know I could never be your Jack, but just maybe I could be something new to you?”* Linda knew this thing wanted something from her. She also knew she would have to use this

thing to stop the emperor from whatever monstrous plan he has. She asked, “*Jack’s middle name was Charles so how about Charlie?*”

Charlie poured some water into a large bowl then said something in a strange tongue over it. An image of a castle appeared. Then the Image of Margret. He said, “*her and six others. You will need their help to stop his plans, but this one named Margaret will be the key. You must either rescue her or kill her. She carries a seed in her that will bring doom to your world or its salvation.*” He then put his hands on her stomach and said, “*this one is also important, but I can’t see why. When I try to see its fate all I see is you.*” Linda asked, “*how can I help them?*” Charlie replied, “*I will take you after we prepare for what will be a very long trip.*” Linda took a deep breath then asked, “*what will we need?*” Charlie said, “*guns, lots and lots of guns.*”

### Invasion (Part Three)

Loto set the sail as the storm moved away. He and Vailea checked for damage while looking for any signs of their home or another ship. A few hours after they left their home a storm moved in, and they found themselves in a new hurricane. With no instruments or even a compass, they had no idea where they were or which way to go. The plane was still afloat, but it took on a lot of water. Loto worked a makeshift pump, and the water slowly was going down. Vailea checked their food and other supplies. Loto said, *“we will have to wait for tonight and the stars to see where we are. For now, we will track the sun for west and east.”* Vailea turned her back to Loto and took off her shirt then she put on a bikini top. She turned to see he had stopped pumping and was just staring at her.

The sail caught the wind, and they were off in the direction Loto thought was east. Finally, the sunset and the stars came out, but Loto didn't know the stars. All he could recognize was the north star. The wind died down and the plane stalled in the waves. Loto and Vailea slipped into the cabin for the night. He said, *“I am not sure if we are going to make it.”* Vailea said, *“I can't believe we made it this far.”* Loto said, *“I'm not sure just how far we can go.”* She said, *“I think just maybe we should go all the way.”* She brought his hand up to her chest then went to kiss him. At first, he didn't do anything. Loto was never kissed on the mouth before and didn't know what his role was. He soon found his footing and was engaged with her as she slowly pulled him back to her. She said, *“I wanted this to be something special and a first of many, not the last thing we ever do.”* Loto went to speak when a loud sound came from outside. A foreign language accompanied the sound.

The USS Hope a new destroyer based in San Diego was out on deep water trials when they saw what looked like a wingless plane in the water. Captain John Warren knew the type of plane from the many history-shows he watched on world war two. As they got closer, they could see it was modified to act like a sailboat. The captain said, *“as far as I'm concerned until we know better that plane is navy property.”* The captain launched a recovery crew to see what was going on. Inside they found two teenagers that didn't seem to understand the marines. The lead

on the crew said that the plane had no navigation equipment and very little provisions. He said, *“I think they went for one of those three-hour tours.”* The captain said, *“yeah that show never made any sense to me either. Who goes on a quick tour with that much luggage.”* The captain looked at the two and said, *“I don’t think we found a terrorist cell.”* He pointed to them and said, *“lieutenant see that the doctor sees them, and they get some food then we will see just where home is.”* Vailea nodded to Loto and said, *“just play along, and maybe they will feed us.”*

After a meal of chicken coated with some sort of crust, they called fried chicken Vailea, and Loto were brought to a room with a long table. On the other side of the table was the captain and another person they had not met yet. She was maybe in her forties with graying hair tied in a knot in the back. The Knot was tight and seemed to pull her face back along with the hair. The captain asked, *“do you understand English?”* The woman said the same thing in Spanish than Japanese. Vailea said, *“my name is Vailea, and this is Loto, and we need your help.”* The woman said to the captain, *“it sounds like one of the Polynesian languages, but I am not sure.”* The Captain asked, *“so you don’t understand us at all?”* Loto said, *“I just don’t understand what they are trying to say. How can such a people who can build such a boat not be able to speak a real language?”*

Linda opened the door to a secret bunker the Order kept for emergencies. Inside she found what they lovingly referred to as a grave filler. It was a hardened plastic container on wheels big enough to fit a standard coffin. Inside was the equipment for a six-person tactical team from the standard P90 and FN Five-Seven pistol, a squad automatic weapon or SAW, an M32 grenade launcher with grenades and enough ammunition to fight off an army. It also contained body armor, radios, and other essentials for a six-person war. Linda stopped and opened the case. In the top was a place for a rocket launcher which wasn’t standard. She grabbed two MK 153 Shoulder-launched Multipurpose Assault Weapon or SMAW with two of what the armaments people called party favor packs. She closed the case, and they were off.

The form now going by the name Charlie made a slit in the air with his finger, and he pushed the case through it. Charlie looked at the sky and realized something was different. It turned to Linda and said, *“the emperor has set a foothold on a small island in the Pacific. He is building a palace for himself, so he can launch his invasion. He will first enslave the natives of that island and the surrounding islands then he will start attacking cities starting with the closest to his new kingdom first.”* He pulled her in close and kissed her. Linda felt that same electric pull to him as he held her. She pulled back as she felt her skin starting to burn. She looked down at her arms and saw a line of bluish light just underneath the skin. Where the lines form a corresponding mark was made on the skin until she had what looked like a full sleeve tattoo going down both arms. Charlie said, *“if we separate this will protect you.”* He pulled her back into the bunker and pulled her jeans down with the panties as he opened the robe he wore. He pushed her up against the wall and entered her all the while Linda said to her self how this wasn't Jack. The feeling was intense and immediate. Soon she didn't care who he looked like she just didn't want that feeling to end.

Linda pulled up her jeans noticing how they were tighter than before. She remembered how Providence told her she was pregnant, but it was too soon for anything to show. She wondered why she didn't see a doctor or even take a test but with everything happening, her life went from a crawl to a run with little time to contemplate. She went from having a husband that was slipping away to be a widow having an affair with something that took her dead husband's form. She looked back at Charlie. He was in his open robe staring out at the parking lot. Linda pulled the robe off him and said, *“I think we need to find you some clothes that will work in a fight. Maybe some pants.”* In a corner just out of the perceivable light, Providence watched Linda. She could see that Linda was having sex with something, but she couldn't see who or what it was. What she could see was that Linda's fate was in flux changing from living through the next few days to not making it to tomorrow. Even the sex of the child Linda was carrying changed from boy to girl then back again. As she watched a light formed in a line and Linda walked through then she saw the form for the first time as he became a true part of the timeline.

## Invasion (Part Four)

The seventh sword was put on the pile signifying the meeting of the unaligned clans. They met every year since the man that calls himself the emperor took control of this new land. The other clans took a knee to him and sold their souls for a safe place from the dragons. Callous Theos, the leader of the unaligned clans, stood up. He was one of the last of the Roman Generals who joined the fight with his legion. He looked down at the sword he carried into battle in the times of the wars with the Gulls and said, *“the butcher of our children is planning on going back and starting his war again. He raped our women and children, he fed your soldiers to the dragons, and he thinks he gets to go back.”* The crowd stirred and murmured. Theos knew his audience, he gave a similar speech every year since they came to this place. They came out of hiding every year to meet, share supplies, tell stories and plot their revenge on a man they had no chance against.

A fissure opened in the middle of the meeting as a large case of some kind rolled out of it then two figures. The members of the clans drew their weapons leaving the seven swords in place. Linda drew her FN Five-Seven pistol while Charlie produced a Colt Python from seemingly out of nowhere. Linda said, *“nice job jackass you put us right in the middle of his army.”* Charlie said, *“no they’re our army, assuming they don’t kill you.”* Theos asked, *“and why would we side with a monster and this soft woman?”* A blue bolt shot from Charlie’s foot up to the Python. The rounds in the cylinder started to glow. Linda said, *“I am Linda of the Order, and this is the only force that could kill the one you call the Emperor.”* Another man walked up and said, *“we fought to lock that thing up costing us many people, even more than Zed killed.”* Charlie turned to the man and said, *“well hello Cal it has been a very long time. Do your new friends know who you are and just how old?”*

Three juvenile dragons sat around the bodies of seven people and a deer. As they watched the dragons one of the bodies moved. Linda turned to the others and said, *“stand back and let me show you what these bladeless weapons can do.”* Linda stepped out of the woods and yelled, *“hey ass holes why don’t you eat me.”* The largest of the three turned and charged her. Linda

raised the grenade launcher and fired. The grenade hit the dragon in the chest fragmenting and pushing it back. The fragments opened the dragon up and burst the two fluids the dragons generate to breathe fire causing the dragon to explode. The next dragon jumped through the falling body of the larger dragon at Linda who fired another round. The grenade caught the dragon in the face liquidating its head and setting the fluids in the neck on fire. The flames jet down and hit the organs that generated the fluid causing the body to explode. The last dragon turned to run when Linda hit it in the back with a grenade causing the wings to fall away with the dragon breaking in half at the point of impact. Linda turned to the others and said, “*and this isn’t the largest of my bladeless weapons.*”

Akio was up in the clouds when he heard the three explosions to the south. He touched down to let the others know he was going to fly that way and see what that was. Iris said, “*I don’t know if that’s a good idea. There is nothing to the south but dragons and the seven unaligned clans.*” JT just growled. Jenee explained how when they first came to this new land not all the clans fell into line with the emperor. Those that didn’t were disowned by the others and had their names stripped and histories erased. She said, “*the seven clans hide in the mountains and brag about how they will one day take over, but brag is all that they do.*” Iris said, “*brag and die.*” Akio said, “*well those unaligned clans have what sounded like a grenade launcher.*” Iris looked at Jenee then back to Akio and said, “*I don’t know what that is.*” Akio explained how it was a weapon from their side and something that would be hard to get a hold of.

“*The monster approaches fire, fire,*” and another one said, “*don’t let it win.*” Linda looked up and saw a shirtless man with large glowing wings. She didn’t know who it was or if it was friend or foe. Linda took out a flashlight and shined it into the sky flashing it on and off. Akio saw the flashing light and followed it down. When he touched down the men of the clans, all went to their knees then further bowing to him. Linda walked forward and said, “*Captain Saito, its good to see you again.*” She smiled then said, “*a pilot with wings. That somehow just sounds right.*” Akio looked at Linda then at the firepower these men had. He asked, “*we met in that mirror pool thing, right?*” His eyes lit up as he said, “*you are from our side.*” His wings

vanished as he walked over to Linda and they embraced. Charlie said, *“We are here to deal with the emperor and bring you and your friends home.”*

After Akio came back with the others, Linda and Charlie told him the plan. How that the emperor was going to split himself in two cutting his power and making him vulnerable to attack. He would travel to the other side to start his invasion with his conscious in the body of the child he would have with Margret. Akio said, *“we’re not going to hurt her.”* Charlie said, *“no and we won’t hurt the baby. We need to separate the emperor from it so we can eliminate him forever. As long as he is in human form, no one can kill him.”* He said how when the soul was dead the mirror image on the other side would fade. Cal asked, *“then what? Are you going to try and take us all back to your world? Are you going to take this one over for your master? What does the first magic want in return for our blood?”* They all stopped and looked over at JT. He was still a wolf and licking his own balls. Iris asked, *“he’s been at it for about twenty minutes now, why would he do that?”* Akio and Cal said at the same time, *“because he can.”*

## **Invasion (Part Five)**

Hiba lay next to Margret as she stared up at the ceiling. The emperor had banished her from his bed and was preparing for his trip to the other side when his power was split. It was just a day since she gave in to him, but Margret was already showing. Hiba told her that the emperor was using his force of will to bring about his new vessel as fast as possible. The result of what he was doing left Margret both weak and in pain. The emperor was growing the baby with magic that she wasn't equipped to handle. She could feel the struggle inside her as the baby fought for its life. The baby's will surprised the emperor. He wanted the body, but he also wanted a child. His focus on the red reflection on the other side was splitting him in two. Soon he would be out of this body and into the baby and the reflection on the other side. The baby will be his new form while the reflection degraded with the amount of power he was force feeding it, but that wouldn't matter. The reflection would start a war with the other side, and he would finish it saving humanity, so it can serve him.

Zed found himself split into three parts with one part in the old world, one part in the womb and the last part in his room. He could feel that something was wrong. Three dragons just died while in the old world a warship was approaching his new kingdom. He could also feel his grip on the baby slipping, somehow the baby was winning the fight even before it was born. Off in the distance, he could feel a presence that he hadn't felt in a thousand years. The first magic was here and on its way to him. Emperor Zed knew that it was the only thing that could stop him and his plans. He also knew that it wanted something other than revenge for its imprisonment but what that is he couldn't see. It had attacked him on his first trip across the void, but that might have been the vessel of the first rather than its will. He could also feel the vessel as it approached with an army. Zed got up and opened his doors saying, "*guards there is an army approaching from the east and south prepare for war.*" The guards just looked confused. No one had ever attacked the castle in their lifetimes or their great, great-grandparents lifetimes. Zed watched as his Army bumbled around in what would have been funny to him except that these people were here to defend him and his new form.

His troops sealed the castle doors and took up positions on top so they could fire arrows. Zed tried to summon his dragons, but the first was blocking him. He figured that the invaders would have a hard time with the walls until someone let off a rocket that struck a wall knocking it down along with a tower. Zed watched as his loyal troops surrendered without any kind of fight. Some of them embraced the invaders. Those that remained loyal were soon cut down with the strange weapons from the old world. He then saw a man with glowing wings flying overhead firing into his men. Zed knew that with his power split in three places he couldn't fight what was happening. It didn't help that the warship on the other side was attacking. He had to decide, stay and fight or go to the old world and find a way to save himself in the reflection's body. Part of his choice was made for him when he was forced out of the baby's mind. He gave the baby unimaginable power, and it used that power to save its self.

The castle shook as Margret felt the emperor's grip on the baby slip away. The castle shook again, and a door opened. In the open door was a large wolf. Margret had never seen anything like it. The wolf was the size of a horse with black and electric blue fur. The wolf saw her, and its tail started to wag then the wolf seemed to break out in a dance. Margret asked, "*what the fuck does that mean?*" The wolf shrunk down into the form of a man then he stood up. JT said, "*we've been looking for you.*" Margret and JT came together and embraced. JT looked at Margret and said, "*Jesus Christ.*" Margret said, "*yes I know that monster did this in just two days.*" JT said, "*the emperor was seen going into a tower at the top of the castle.*" Hiba said, "*the tower was built so he could travel from this world to the old.*" At the top of the tower, Zed pulled a dagger out and slit his wrists. Instead of blood a bolt of blue flame shot out and struck the sky. The blue flame started to consume his body as a hole opened.

Akio went to land on the balcony near Margret's room when a gust of wind caught him, and he found himself falling into what looked like a hole in the sky. As he entered that hole, he could see what looked like a stretched-out form of a man with red hair. He came out on the other side near an island in a place much warmer than the one he left. He could see a destroyer firing at what looked like nothing except all its ordinances were exploding in midair. Akio looked back and saw the hole close. He landed on a smaller island near the battle with the unseen wall. He ran

to the beach and watched as the destroyer fired. Ten minutes later they ceased fire, and all went quiet. Akio could see the waves and debris strike against the unseen wall.

Everyone in the castle could see the blue bolt shoot from the tower. The fighting stopped as they watched the emperor's body catch fire then fall from the tower. Those loyal to the emperor dropped their weapons and surrendered while the invading army let out a cheer that could be heard as far as the cradle where Margret, JT, and Akio first learned about this new world. Charlie dropped his weapon then he fell to the ground. Linda went to him trying to help him back up. He looked at her and asked, "*Linda, what's going on where's the plane?*" Charlie fell over. Linda looked at the body then asked, "*Jack?*" Cal asked, "*who's jack?*" Linda said, "*my dead husband.*" The two carried him to a room with a bench. Cal said how they needed to search the castle to make sure Zed is gone and find the first magic. He went on saying how the first magic was worse than Zed and couldn't be trusted. Overhead the hole in the sky closed, and the sky immediately started to lighten.

## Invasion (Part Six)

Zed woke up knowing something was wrong. He could see his hands, but he couldn't feel them. His hands and skin were all angles and glass. He also lost a great deal of power as he crossed over. Out in the distance, he could see the wall he put up, and it was holding. The warship was still on the other side, but they had no chance of breaking through. He replayed what happened in his head, his passing over from his kingdom to the new one and how the first magic followed him. He went from the ruler of a thousand miles of magical lands to the ruler of a small island with people who need to be controlled to obey him. He got up to his feet, and the Islanders went to their knees. Among the people was a man in his twenties with a bodybuilders physique. He had a body that Zed could pull in and use to help prolong his life until he could find a way to save his own life.

Akio took off and went east hoping to find a larger land mass and just maybe someplace he could recognize. As he flew, he went higher into the sky. The higher he flew, the colder it got, but he didn't mind the cold. The combination of the warm sun and the cool air made the whole situation feel real. Underneath him, he saw a cargo ship registered through Hong Kong. He didn't know where it was going he just knew that this meant he was home. The ship didn't react to him. He followed the ship for miles until he started to get tired. He flew down to the bow of the ship and landed. The ship was covered in cargo containers with a small crew that didn't seem all that interested in the front of their ship. He found a tarp and went to sleep. The pilot of the ship turned to the captain and asked, "*did we see that?*" The Captain said, "*no we did not.*"

The sky was a bright blue that most if not all the people in the valley had never seen in their lifetimes. Iris thought that Zed was leaching the power out of the world for his own gain. Margret noted how everyone stopped calling him the emperor as soon as he was gone. She looked over at Jack who was just sitting on a stool staring at the sky. They hadn't spoken since he woke up as Jack and not Charlie. What little they said to each other made her think that he wasn't all there. He kept asking about the plane and the stone, but he didn't seem to know about anything else. Charlie was just gone. Cal said that the first magic went through the hole in the

sky and it most likely took its servant with it. Off in the distance, she could see the others dismantling the castle stone by stone. Many of the people just wanted to start a new life in a free world using stones from the castle to build homes. They knew that some of the clans sided with the emperor and some of them thought that when he left, they would rule the land. Iris said, *“unless we can come to an understanding we might see a long war in the future.”*

A helicopter took off from the USS Hope with a small crew, Loto and Vailea. Captain Warren ordered them taken out of danger as they set up for another run against this strange force. When they called in the findings to Washington, they were ordered to breach using all force necessary. After an hour of salvos, they had no progress. The chopper turned as they flew away just in time to see the destroyer cut in half and explode. The shockwave bounced off the unseen wall and struck the chopper knocking it down into the ocean. The lieutenant placed in charge of Loto and Vailea pushed them out of the chopper along with an inflatable raft. She joined them, and they tried to pull in one of the pilots into the raft. The chopper slipped into the water, and the four found themselves alone. The Lieutenant turned to Loto and Vailea and said something they didn't understand.

The raft washed ashore on a small island near Loto and Vailea's home island. Loto knew the island as one his father used to store supplies that he wasn't allowed to have from alcohol to some sort of phone he could use to contact something he calls a satellite. Vailea and the lieutenant pulled the injured pilot onto the shore while Loto went to his father's hiding place and pulled a bottle and the strange phone. Near the place, Loto found a strange pool of shiny liquid. He passed it and found what he was after. As he went back to the others, the liquid followed him. He came back to see the pilot covered with the lieutenant's jacket. She said something he didn't understand in a slow almost mocking tone that neither Loto or Vailea appreciated. The pool of liquid moved in and covered the pilot as the others moved back. The pilot stood up and looked at them with shining orbs where his eyes should be. He spoke to them without moving his lips, and somehow, they understood him. The first magic said, *“if you stay here you will be killed, but I can only send you to a place on the other side.”*

A hole opened in front of Linda, and a woman in a navy uniform and two teenagers walked through. Vailea asked, *“where did the ocean go?”* Linda said, *“that’s a long story.”* The Lieutenant turned to Vailea and asked, *“you speak English?”* Loto asked, *“what’s English?”* Linda said, *“it’s a long story, and I know you three will have a lot of questions, just understand that you are safe and well here now.”* The Lieutenant said, *“my name is Lieutenant Janice Decker of the United States Navy, you have no right to hold me here and.”* She stopped speaking as a dragon flew overhead. She didn’t speak again for a while. Linda took Loto and Vailea to a small hut near the castle. She told them they could stay there until something could be arranged. Linda asked, *“so you two are brother and sister?”* Vailea said without a beat, *“were married.”* Linda looked at the two and just shrugged her shoulders saying *“whatever.”*

Outside the hut, Linda found Jack. He was standing there staring at the sky. He said, *“with that, we are closed to the other side.”* Linda looked to where the hole was. Jack said, *“everyone that could open a doorway is on the other side, and the first one was ready to kill the former emperor.”* He then turned to the ruins of the castle and said, *“their friend is on the other side. Somebody needs to tell them, maybe after she has that baby.”* Linda looked at Jack then she ran to where Margret was. Inside a part of the castle, she found Iris with Margret and JT. Margret was in labor. Iris asked, *“does anyone know what to do?”* Lieutenant Decker said, *“I helped with my sister’s baby as well as my sister’s birth.”* Linda asked, *“I need to know that you are here and not off on some head trip?”* Decker asked, *“what do you mean?”* Linda said, *“you just spent the last two hours staring at that dragon.”* Decker looked to the sky then back to Linda and said, *“I don’t know if this place is real or I’m dead in that helicopter, but as long as I am here then I will help.”*

Dennis sat on his balcony with a bottle of wine and the papers from the airline. The airline was ceasing their search while they were not admitting the loss of the plane. The papers also seemed to suggest that it was pilot error. Dennis knew that there was no way Akio was responsible and that the airline just didn’t want to pay out for the loss and damages. He sat

staring at the moon on the balcony where he made love to his husband now saying goodbye to him when he saw something coming his way. It was flying to him. It was larger than a bird but smaller than a plane. The form fell below the balcony then came up and landed in front of him. A tall Asian man with tattoos and large wings on his back stared back at him. Dennis asked, “*Akio?*” Akio stepped down, and they met in the middle with a long embrace. Dennis asked, “*what does this all mean?*” Akio said, “*I don’t know how to explain what happened, but I am here now, and I’m never going to leave again.*”

The sky lit up with blues and purples as lightning struck across the sky with the sounds of thunder. The first took over the body of the dead pilot, and he went to war with the wall. As he struck, the wall became visible. On the inside of the wall, Zed consumed the islanders to use their life force to power the wall. He could feel his grip on this reality slipping away as cracks started to spread across the wall. The first magic grew and as he grew the pilot's body broke apart. When the final piece fell away, the first fell into a puddle again, and the sky turned back to blue. Zed dropped to the sand, and the wall fell. The falling wall pushed a wave across the island pushing the first magic into the water and under the sand. Zed saw this and screamed, “*I win.*” Then he looked at his skin. The red lines were spreading across his body. He was breaking apart, and with all the Islanders gone he had no one to use to save his life. Zed put his hand up to the sun and watched as his hand shattered and fell to the sand. Eventually, his head fell into the broken remains of his body as he watched what was left of his immortality end.