



September 22, 2069. 12:00 a.m.

The silver haired man emerges from the forest path, crosses the moist sand and sits down on a large egg-shaped rock by the water's edge. The air is so still and the lake so smooth, the reflection of the sky makes him feel suspended once again, floating in the infinite and the vast. A meteor flames across the midnight sky, streaking in the water a few feet away from his muddy boots.

He opens his laptop as if a great omen might blaze across the screen, and when it blinks on, the computer's glow paints his wise face sterling blue in the perfect dark. He takes a deep breath, and speaks into the built-in microphone.

“My son, I am very proud of you and how you completed the final part of your intensive studies. You have learned from the so-called experts about the extraordinary events that came before your birth and compared all their opinions and theories. So now, on the eve of your departure, your mother and I feel it is time to share the truth with you, my first-hand account of that incredible time. To many it seems like centuries have passed, and nothing from back then matters anymore. But when I look into your eyes, I see promise burning brighter than all the

stars that surround us.

“It is true that I have witnessed powerful evil, and some things I must tell you will horrify you and disgust you. But, in the end, I know you will agree, that somehow all of us were truly blessed during those four miraculous days.”

* * * * *

1

December 21, 2047, AD, 11:58 p.m.

A single naked light bulb dangles by a bare electric cord from the center of the ceiling in a large barrack-size room. It is the only light in the large windowless area, but the bulb glows with a rich golden radiance that can almost be touched, like a soothing ointment gently blanketing the convicts, who lie asleep on small cots arranged in orderly rows. Rikers Island Jail is home to New York City's worst criminals and terrorists, but all the cell doors are opened and unlocked, and there are no guards in sight.

The only sounds are men breathing, unsullied, sonorous in the same category as infant water running in a mountain stream, joyriding on its journey to the sea.

A door slowly creaks open at one end of the hallway, cracking the unruffled hush. A black-hooded figure steps in, its bony feet click on the hard tile floor, marching to the steady beat of a dark netherdrum. Malefic whispers and giggles bristle from the fledgling goblins fluttering behind the horned one. Their caustic sniggers turn into cackles, which morph into gruntings and gutturals of lizard beasts, and crescendo into the screaming

of the eternally enraged preparing for ultimate combat.

A small wooden door at the other end of the hallway opens with reluctance, as if upon a silent, irrefutable command, and a slim shaft of the deep golden light manages to reach the calm, youthful face of the lone inmate sleeping inside.

The hooded one and his hungry demons hobble in and cluster around the cot in the center of the cell. At the peak of their unworldly din, the black wraith extends one bony finger from the dank of its filthy, rotting sleeve and points at the face of the young man lying there.

Just then, from up high, almost imperceptible, a soft celestial vibrato invades the demonic chanting. The unblemished music gains momentum whirling through the discordance; a soprano tonic resonating up to its major third, up another octave and then down a fifth, and on it goes, repeating mantra-like yet never the same. The endless melody swells and surges drowning out the baneful fugue below.

The monsters beneath cringe in agony, grabbing their grotesque ears with their gnarled and deformed claws, trying to keep the beautiful song out of their heads. In anguished torment, they flee in defeat, bellowing with an unholy rage.

A moment of silence reverberates. The prisoner opens his eyes and rises to a sitting position. He detects ghostly echoes of the phantasmic battle rebounding off the hard walls that seemingly pen him in. For the last time, Salem Jones scans the blessed stillness of his barren prison cell, where he has often witnessed the bounty of so many incoming glories.

* * * * *