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# Come the Destroyer

By

Samuel L. Chatman

Seven fell through the doorframe. As he fell, he saw thousands of imps scattered like roaches just before his orb's light went out. From the quick glimpse, he noticed they had green skin, big heads and beady yellow eyes with serrated teeth. He could hear their growls all around him. Seven shook his head and thought about how he had found himself in such a predicament.

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It had all began when the Arch Bishop of Toledo invited Bishop Shepard to Spain. Seven had accompanied him. His Spanish was so-so, but he understood enough to know that the Spaniards weren't happy about having to receive help from Protestants. However, they had no choice. Princess Juliana of the House of Bourbon had been snatched from a convent by an occult bent on bringing the Antichrist into the world. By all accounts, Juliana was to serve as the vessel. The Spaniards had appealed to the Vatican, but it was powerless against these forces. Thus, the Spanish royal family contacted a secret protestant sect, known as The North Star. The sect was over a thousand years old and an offshoot of the Ethiopian Coptic church. The North Star was known for its supernaturally endowed hunters.

Seven had argued with Bishop Shepard. "It's a fool's errand," he explained. "The Antichrist's birth aligns with prophecy."

Bishop Shepard had sighed, leaned back in his chair and tapped his index fingers together as he was prone to do when lost in thought. "Nevertheless, an innocent is involved. We must reclaim Princess Juliana. If in the course of that we prevent the birth of an abomination, then we've done a good thing," Bishop Shepard retorted. He smiled. Seven had seen that look so many times. It was a look that always spelled trouble for him.

Bishop Shepard had sent him along because Seven had a particular set of expertise that he felt would be useful for Princess Juliana's safe return. Seven sighed as he thought about his comrades on this mission. He had done his homework on each of them because he hated surprises. Brother Blood was a colossal figure. The word megalith came to mind. He donned a cross on a chain that transformed at will into a massive twelve-foot sword. The Mad Deacon carried two Desert Eagles with blades attached to the barrels that fired bullets he infused with spirit energy. He was called mad because he went into berserker rages when he fought. Apostle Payne, the chosen to carry the Spear of Destiny, had heightened speed, strength and stamina. The spear's original form was Roman, but Apostle Payne was descended from the Zulu. The Spear of Destiny took whatever form its wielder desired. Thus, it held the traditional form of a Zulu spear. It had a short shaft and a long flat head, which made it similar to a sword. Seven moved his thoughts to Tobias, the Zealot. He was an austere man who constantly carried a leather-bound sacred text that he read from. Everything in Tobias' file had been expunged except for the fact that he nearly killed a man, who he deemed a heretic. Seven sought to avoid Tobias at all costs. Next was Lady Angelica, known as the Evangelist of Death. Her deadly skill with spirit blades was unparalleled. There was a lethal elegance about her. As Seven looked at her, she glided along, effortlessly, as though ethereal. Her wheatish skin against the moonlight seemed more golden as her long black tresses shimmered. She was the only one in the group of royal blood. As the last descendant of the last emperor of Ethiopia, her bloodline went back nearly two thousand years to the first hunter, Queen Makeda. Finally, there was the one who led them on this mission. He was known as the Blind Seer. He looked harmless enough with his long, gray beard and bushy, gray eyebrows. However, Seven knew better. The Blind Seer had been Lady Angelica's

guardian, protector and teacher after her father's death, when she was a child. The North Star had welcomed Lady Angelica with open arms because of the Blind Seer's usefulness. It was said that he had killed one thousand men while in the service of The North Star. But the records didn't say how. Seven knew whatever the Blind Seer's skills, the intrepid group would need them in the upcoming battle. The old master had masked the small group's presence since they entered the Blood Forest.

The group moved quietly through the darkness. It did not seem to bother the others, but it clawed at the recesses of Seven's mind. Though he tried hard to dwell on other things, it was to no avail. The chirps and whispers of demons surrounded them. Although it was summer in Chiapas, when they entered the Blood Forest, an unnatural chill hung in the air. The smell of rotting flesh accompanied it. Seven fought to keep his dinner in his belly. The ground, thick with blood, guts and entrails, made sloshing sounds as the group trudged through it. Seven nearly tripped over a human skull before the fog rolled in. He was thankful for the fog, so he no longer had to witness the horrors that lay beneath his feet. The remains of human sacrifice, they had been the poor souls the Occult of the Beast fed to the Blood Forest in exchange for protection from outsiders. Now that Seven had no need to look at the ground, he could not take his eyes away from the vile demons that floated amongst the trees. His heart pounded with a ferocity that made his head throb. Seven rubbed his temples and longed for the safety of the library, where only his books held such perilous adventures. Though he had supernatural gifts, he was just a librarian. And he was sure a librarian had no place in this hell.

Seven tripped over something. He fell headlong into the innards of a corpse. Some of its rancid fluids found their way into his mouth. They covered his face, hands and clothes. Seven couldn't escape the taste and smell of the rotting human flesh. He gagged and vomited loudly.

If he spews any louder we'll be discovered," Brother Blood hissed.

Tobias moved towards Seven. "Weak resolve drips from your pores. Imperfect faith—"

Lady Angelica moved between Seven and Tobias. "I'm sure his resolve is ever bit as adamant as ours, else he would not be here," she offered.

In the distance, the group heard a shrill cry, which resembled that of a woman. Another followed in response.

"The princess?" Seven asked as he wiped his mouth with a sleeve.

"Not likely," Lady Angelica answered. "Those were the cries of two chupacabra."

"Chances are we've been discovered." Apostle Payne narrowed his eyes at Seven.

"Humph—chance always finds itself in direct correlation with the prepared mind, brother," Tobias commented.

The Blind Seer stroked his long, grey beard. "I didn't expect one... let alone two. Chupacabra are very skilled at detecting the presence of others," he explained.

"We've bigger problems than that. Only one witch has chupacabra as familiars—the beast witch, Deniva." Lady Angelica explained. "Her sisters, the blood witch, Malita; and the poison witch, Acolito won't be far behind." The group fell silent. Their Intel had suggested that there would only be one witch at the compound.

"Since we've already been discovered..." the Blind Seer began. He held a flat hand perpendicular to his face. An enormous eye formed above the compound. An image of the compound and the princess' location appeared on a three-dimensional blue map of spirit energy that floated in the air before the group of hunters. The compound sat in a clearing five hundred yards from their current location. The Blind Seer pointed to a green dot that represented Princess Juliana's location in a house at the front of the compound. Several red dots surrounded her green dot in a room on the second floor. "Enemies appear in red," the Blind Seer explained. Thousands of red dots appeared in other areas of

the house. They took note of the thousand-armed guards outside the compound. “They won’t be a problem,” the Blind Seer explained. “However, the enemies in the house—I can only see their number not what they are.”

Angelica sighed. “Our time is short, brothers. They will surely speed things along now that they know of our presence. We must get Seven to the princess’ location. We may have to catch up later.”

Seven swallowed and took a breath. Tobias narrowed his eyes. “Are you sure you’re up to the task, brother?”

Lady Angelica whispered in Seven’s ear, “Live or die, win or lose—worry and fear will not affect the outcome,” she explained and gave his arm a reassuring squeeze. “I believe in you. Princess Juliana will need your power. We do not know what condition she’s in. The rest of us—we can only do so much in that regard. Do you understand?” she asked. She pulled back and looked at him. Seven clutched his stomach. He trembled but nodded his head. Lady Angelica moved towards Tobias.

Seven imagined sinking so deep into the bloody muck on the ground that he couldn’t breathe. He shook his head to clear away such thoughts. He needed to get his mind off this situation if only for a moment. He remembered his training and slowed his breathing. He knew he was there for a reason. Bishop Shepard believed in him. So did Lady Angelica. He had to make sure that their faith in him was not misplaced.

He turned his attention back to Lady Angelica. He could hear her whisper to Tobias.

Lady Angelica leaned forward, so she was in Tobias’ face. “You will look after him and get him into that house. If he gets so much as a paper cut while you are near, you will discover why I am called the Evangelist of Death,” she hissed under her breath.

Tobias’ mouth turned up in a sinister smile. “Your wish is my command, my lady.” Tobias inclined his head.

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Two witches stood in front of the compound. Deniva, with brown skin and white hair, donned a white dress. Long white feathers jutted out around the shoulders and back of it. She stood between two chupacabra. They had no fur. Instead, they had leathery brown skin. With elongated necks, short back legs and long front ones, they resembled a mix between dogs and hyenas. Crazy, orange, luminescent pupils decorated the beasts’ large eyes. Long snouts gave way to mouths adorned with rows of long, sharp, yellow teeth. Malita, covered in red, with red hair, red lips and porcelain skin, smiled wickedly. “Sister, must you bring those mutts with you everywhere we go?” she asked.

“Shame on you,” Deniva rebuked. “She didn’t mean it, my pretties,” she said as she stroked her pets. Then she kissed them both on their heads. The beasts’ bones snapped, and their flesh tore as they turned into massive versions of themselves. They towered above their mistress. She gestured at the intruders. “Now get them, my pretties. Let their blood join that of the sacrificed.” Then Deniva’s body contorted, broadened and lengthened. Her mouth became a long massive beak. Her eyes multiplied until she had eighteen: six on her forehead, six on the left side of her face and six on the right. White bladed feathers sprouted from her body. Her dress became a strange mix of skin and feathers. Her feet transformed into talons. She took to the air. Her demon beasts bounded towards the small group of warriors.

“Apostle Payne and I are the most swift. We will take the chupacabra,” Lady Angelica explained.

“The rest of you get to that house!” the Blind Seer ordered. “I will hold Malita.” Brother Blood, the Mad Deacon, Tobias, Apostle Payne, Lady Angelica and Seven

charged into the clearing. The Blind Seer still controlled the eye that hovered above the compound. Some of the armed guards opened fire. Multiple beams fired from the eye. They struck down the guards. Deniva dodged them. The chupacabra followed suit. Malita's demonic shield protected her as the beams bounced harmlessly off. The Blind Seer clenched his fist and focused on Malita's shield. The force of the massive eye's gaze shattered the shield. It broke up the ground beneath her. She fell to her knees.

Yet she smiled. "Insects. Away from this place your chances were slim, but here I am a god," Malita gloated. She slowly brought her hand to her mouth. She bit her thumb. When her blood dripped to the ground, it mingled with that of the sacrificed. "Blood Puppet spell!" she shrieked to the top of her lungs. Bloody corpses dragged themselves up from the ground all over the Blood Forest. The image of an eye formed in the Blind Seer's other hand. He released a wide beam from it, disintegrating ten blood puppets at one time. While his concentration was on the blood puppets, he didn't notice the white crow that flew through the hovering eye. Blood poured from it like a waterfall. The eye disappeared. The Blind Seer clutched his face. Blood Puppets surrounded him.

Malita laughed. Some of the blood from the ground flowed up and onto her gown. She was affixed as though she had sprouted from the horrid muck. She beckoned the hunters to her. A rotten hand came up from the ground. It tripped Brother Blood in mid stride. He fell headlong into blood and guts. The hand belonged to a large blood puppet with half a face. Its intestines dangled from its stomach. Brother Blood swung his sword from the ground, decapitating the blood puppet. The head fell to the ground and rolled next to him. He put his fist through the skull. The blood puppet's body kept coming. Brother Blood hurried to his feet. He shouldered the remainder of the blood puppet to the ground, where he hacked it to pieces.

The Mad Deacon continued his charge, firing all the while. However, the blood of the sacrificed leapt up and blocked each of the projectiles as though it were one of Malita's appendages. Soon blood puppets blocked his path. As Seven and Tobias approached to Malita's right, she formed blood into blades and struck at them. Tobias raised his book. Letters flew from its pages as projectiles. It cut the blades to ribbons. Seven rushed past Malita. As he reached the front door, he was greeted by a circular figure painted in blood that sealed the door closed. Seven formed a blue orb of spirit energy in the palm of his hand. He used it as though it were a spearhead, shattering the image like glass. The orb's power splintered the door.

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Everywhere Seven looked he saw an imp's hungry eyes. As he hit the floor, his orb's light faded. Seven shuttered as he felt something brush past his leg. This supernatural darkness swallowed the natural light of the moon so that none shone in through the windows or the doorframe. Further, Seven could hear nothing from outside. He tried reforming the orb, but it just flickered. He saw flashes of monstrosities that could never be unseen. He wasn't sure he wanted the orb's light to rekindle. This was the stuff of nightmares. He felt the hot breath of one of them on the back of his neck. Imps had ravenous appetites, but it was the fear of Seven's light's sting that caused their hesitation. Seven knew they would not hesitate for long. *I have to get it together, or I'm going to die.* He felt teeth on his arm. He jumped and snatched his arm away. It bled into his hand. It was just a test bite to discover the strength of their quarry. Seven steeled himself. He reformed the blue orb in the palm of his hand. The imps retreated to the edges of the light. He could make out thousands of them. And they surrounded him on all sides. They even clung to the ceiling, but they dared not enter the light. Instead, they moved as he moved along the light's edges. Those in his way hissed and scurried when

the light threatened them. He moved towards the stairs. "Dear God, give me strength," he prayed as he took each step.

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The massive chupacabra attacked with supernatural speed. Lady Angelica couldn't see it with her naked eye when it moved. She had to sense it. It was all she could do to match its speed. She grew more tired by the minute. On top of that, she expended even more energy having to put down the random blood puppets that interfered. Lady Angelica closed her eyes. *Calm down. Think. What could give me an advantage here?* Unlike most opponents who couldn't see her spirit blades, the chupacabra could sense them and dodge at the appropriate time. She was without her greatest advantage. Then she got an idea to set a trap. She could use the chupacabra's ability to sense her spirit blades against it. Angelica waited for the vile beast's charge. She formed spirit blades and spread them out horizontally twenty feet across. The blades hovered five feet off the ground, which was the creature's chest level. Just as she anticipated, it leaped above the blades to get at her. However, Lady Angelica was ready for that. While the chupacabra was in the air, Lady Angelica got beneath it with lightning speed. She forced some of her spirit blades up at the chupacabra's throat. It dodged so fast that it left an after image. However, Lady Angelica had more blades waiting on each side of her. Thus, no matter what side the beast took, it spelled doom. The chupacabra's momentum, as it landed to the right of Lady Angelica, forced the blades through its chest and belly. It landed, dead, in a heap. Lady Angelica jumped back as snakes slithered out of its corpse.

Meanwhile, Apostle Payne was locked in mortal combat with the other chupacabra. The beast charged. As it reached him, the spear's shaft elongated. Payne slammed the spear's butt against the ground as the chupacabra approached. Apostle Payne vaulted over it. The beast moved so fast that by the time Payne landed, it had circled around for another attack. It opened its mouth to take a chunk out of Payne's side. But Payne blocked the beast with the spear, ensuring it only got a mouthful of the spear's shaft instead. Payne surged spirit energy through the shaft. The creature let go with a yelp. Payne jumped back. At that same moment, the white crow swooped in. It grabbed at him with its deadly talons. Payne went to his back on the ground to avoid them. He leaped back up to his feet. The chupacabra made another charge. Payne greeted it with his spearhead, but at the last second, the beast dodged to its left. It avoided the spear and took Payne's right arm in the process. Before Payne could do anything, the white crow swooped down. It relieved him of his head with one of her bladed wings.

"No!" Angelica yelled. The crow came back around at her. Angelica dashed for the spear. She dove head first for it. The crow missed her with its talons. She took the spear up in her right hand as the chupacabra moved towards her. The spear changed back to its original Roman form as Angelica flung it. The chupacabra dodged to its right, but Lady Angelica had blades waiting. Its own speed betrayed it. The blades cut the beast's front legs from under it. It crashed to the ground. It writhed and kicked with its back legs. Angelica formed a spirit sword. She pinned the monster to the ground with it, ending its misery. The crow, enraged at the loss of her familiars, circled in the sky and made a dive directly at Angelica. Angelica stood her ground. She formed one hundred of her invisible blades and placed them a few feet in front of her. The massive bird came in headfirst, her beak open to take Angelica's head. Now that the chupacabra were down, the crow had no way of detecting where Lady Angelica's spirit blades were. At the last second, Angelica dove to the side. The bird's bladed wing cut a few strands of her hair as she fell. Some of Angelica's blades went inside the crow's mouth and tore through its insides. Other's blinded the six of her eyes that rested on the front of her head. The wounded foul crashed

into a tree near where the Blind Seer had been surrounded by blood puppets. The white crow transformed back into Deniva. Blood stained her white hair and garments as she sat, crumpled, against the tree. Deniva groaned. Angelica dashed from the clearing back into the Blood Forest. She spotted Deniva in the midst of felled trees. She stalked towards her.

“Y...you think I’ll beg?” Deniva spat. She coughed up blood. “Can’t you see... you’ve lost. Those of you who remain will become sacrifices to the Blood Forest as well. Soon my master will be born into—”

Angelica formed two blades and sent them through Deniva’s cheek. They severed her tongue from her mouth and throat. As the witch screamed out in pain, her tongue spilled from her mouth and fell into her lap. Blood streamed from her lips. Angelica took the witch’s face in her hand and squeezed it. “Fitting that you will die in the very forest where you sacrificed so many innocents,” Angelica chided her. “That demon seed will be put to the sword. Now answer this riddle for me. How will you beg God for forgiveness without a tongue? Think about that as your life force drains and you pass from this existence.” Angelica headed back towards the clearing but stopped next to a tree. “Are you going to nap all night and leave the rest of us to do all of the work, old man?”

The Blind Seer’s camouflage fell away. He lay on one of the tree’s lowest branches “How rude you young people are these days.” The Blind Seer moaned. He sat up and stretched before he jumped down. He stroked his beard. “Were you worried?”

“Hardly. I know you’re much tougher than you look.” Lady Angelica started back towards the clearing but paused for a moment as blood puppets moved towards them. “I trust when I next see you it will be among the living,” Angelica said over her shoulder.

Eyes appeared all over the Blind Seer’s body. “Then your trust is well placed,” he assured her.

Lady Angelica sprinted hard for the clearing. Behind her, she could hear the Blind Seer’s Omnipresent Eye technique as energy beams blasted out of each one, as it mowed down blood puppets in every direction. He was trying to stem the flow of blood puppets to the compound. A truly devastating technique, but it had its drawbacks. It could rob its user of their spirit energy. If that happened, the Blind Seer would be defenseless against the remaining blood puppets.

Lady Angelica knew she had to move quickly to take out the source. Angelica scooped up the Spear of Destiny when she returned to the clearing. Momentarily, she puzzled over why it had not rejected her. Then she pushed that out of her mind as she took in the sight of thousands of blood puppets already in the clearing. *Did not want to have to do this. But it looks like I need to go all out.* Without breaking stride, she formed one thousand blades upon the words, “Blade Storm.” The spirit blades swarmed around her in every direction, cutting blood puppets to pieces. The blades moved with her as she ran, safely, in the eye of the storm.

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As Seven turned the corner, a red light from a doorway pierced the hallway’s darkness. But there was something strange about the light. While Seven gazed upon it, his legs became heavy. It felt like he walked in quicksand. Sleepily, he stared down the hallway as it seemed to elongate. The imps grew bolder. They dogged each step, searching for an opening. Seven stopped. He leaned against the wall. *Maybe I just need to rest a little bit.* His eyes closed. His light flickered. But when he heard a woman moan in pain, he awakened. Seven’s adrenaline kicked in. He felt a surge of energy. His blue orb expanded, so it lit the entire hallway. Some of the imps disintegrated. Others retreated back downstairs. Seven could see that the darkness was the result of the black miasma that wafted out of the doorway from where the red light flowed. He surmised that the

miasma swallowed the natural light in the house. *Even in the light of day this house would be dark.* With his blue light, he pushed the miasma back. Now that he had stopped the hallucinations, he could see that the doorway was no more than fifteen feet away. The woman's moans echoed throughout the hallway again. He dashed for the doorway.

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Hordes of blood puppets surrounded Brother Blood. He swung his great sword. But as soon as he dispatched one, two others would attack. "For the sake of Saint Peter!" he roared as he stomped on one-half of a blood puppet's head.

"These aren't what you think they are!" the Mad Deacon yelled above the moans of the blood puppets. As the Mad Deacon dropped his empty clips, his mechanized tactical belt turned. Two full clips jutted out on both sides of his waist. He slammed the butts of his guns on each side of his tactical belt and reloaded as a blood puppet charged at him. He brought both of the blades on his guns together at the blood puppet's neck, slicing its head off. He kicked the body back. "I'm going to have a word with Malita!" he blurted out.

"Fine by me!" Brother Blood returned. "Give her a good talking to." Brother Blood swung and severed a blood puppet's torso from its legs. The upper body landed upright. Brother Blood ran his sword through the crown of the blood puppet's head, past its neck and into its torso. He put a foot on its shoulder and pulled his sword free. It still grasped at his leg. He kicked it over and stomped its torso. Another came at him. He swung his sword and cut his legs out from under it. He was about to sever the blood puppet's head from its shoulders when another caught his sword arm. The blood puppet at his feet lunged to bite Brother Blood, but he caught it by the neck. His fingers pierced through the rotting flesh until he completely wrapped his hand around the blood puppet's cervical bone. Brother Blood wrenched the blood puppet's neck and tore out its entire spinal column. He flung it to the ground where its spinal column moved like the body of a snake and propelled its head towards Brother Blood. He shattered the skull with his foot. The blood puppet on Brother Blood's sword arm bit the back of his hand. He gripped its hair to pull it off, but the rotten scalp came off instead. Another of the blood puppets leaped on Brother Blood's back. The blood puppet bit into Brother Blood's neck. A scarlet fountain flowed from the colossal figure's carotid artery as he fell to the ground.

Angelica witnessed him fall, but she kept moving. *If we do not accomplish our mission, he will have died for nothing.*

Now, directly in front of Malita, the Mad Deacon fired a barrage and struck at her shield with his guns' blades. However, no matter what he did, the shield refused to break. It rose up and blocked any threat to her. She looked comfortable with her arms crossed and a smug grin on her face. Tobias continued his defense against her blood tendrils with the book in his right hand. He had tendrils of his own made of words that flowed from the book. Three of the tendrils cut surrounding blood puppets to fine pieces. The other four attacked Malita's shield. Her blood tendrils, his right arm and word tendrils moved with blinding speed as both combatants sought an opening to bring the other death. The iron in the blood tendrils clanked off the black, metallic words.

The Mad Deacon leaped so that he was above Malita. He fired down on top of her. The witch's shield deflected the bullets. Another tendril shot up and grabbed the Mad Deacon by one of his legs. It slammed him through one of the beams that supported the house's porch ceiling, putting him through the front wall of the house.

Lady Angelica's Blade Storm, finally, reached Malita's shield. The blood tendrils struggled to keep up with so many blades and Tobias' tendrils. In the midst of the melee, Lady Angelica ran Malita through with the Spear of Destiny. At the same time, one of

Tobias' tendrils severed the witch's head from her body. Lady Angelica's Blade Storm disintegrated the head before it could hit the ground. The rest of Malita's body collapsed as the sacrificial blood poured from her gown. All of the blood puppets dropped. The Blade Storm dissipated. Lady Angelica dropped to her hands and knees. She panted.

"That's not very ladylike," Tobias commented. She rolled her eyes at him.

The Blind Seer watched all of the blood puppets around him fall. *That's my girl. Better get to the house.* The Blind Seer stared at the clearing from where he stood and teleported there.

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The Mad Deacon lay on the floor unconscious. The imps descended upon him like a pack of piranhas. In moments, nothing of his flesh or bones remained.

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Seven entered the room's doorway. He saw Princess Juliana lying on her back in the middle of a circle of blood on the floor that glowed so that it lit the room. Red and black-clad Acolytes sat outside of the circle, where they chanted.

Near the far wall, Acolito floated in a miasma-like black smoke. "You're too late," she snarled. Seven noticed, for the first time, a small boy who looked like he was two years old with black hair, porcelain skin and piercing blue eyes. The boy glared at him. Suddenly, all of the acolytes stopped chanting. They grabbed their throats as they struggled to take a breath. Dark blood flowed from their eyes, nose and ears. Princess Juliana convulsed. Dark blood flowed from her eyes. Seven stretched out his hand and a blue bubble of spirit energy encapsulated Juliana. Her convulsions stopped. The blood flowed back inside her eyes while the bubble pulled out the impurities. The acolytes lay still on the floor, their dead eyes staring at nothing. Telekinetically, the boy tore a cloak from one of the acolytes to clothe himself. He now looked like an eight-year-old.

"Who told you to interfere?" Acolito demanded. "The princess is to be a sacrifice to The Blood Forest." Her miasma hand reached out and slammed Seven against the wall. *What's this? I was trying to penetrate his chest. Why didn't my hand go through him? No matter.* The witch's miasma entered his nose and mouth, invading his lungs. Seven gasped for air. But it was Acolito who screamed. She withdrew her hand. Her arm hung limp. It became flesh and blood again. Her voice trembled. "He's a purifier."

The Spear of Destiny flew through the air. It pierced Acolito's stomach, pinning her to the wall. Her miasma form changed to flesh and blood. She grasped at the spear that held her in place. She bared her teeth at Angelica, the one who had thrown it from the hallway. Angelica knelt down beside Seven, who was finally able to take a breath. He gasped as though his head had just risen to the surface of some aquatic abyss. Acolito looked at the boy who was now a full-grown man. "Master, he poses a grave threat. You must flee," the witch admonished.

The man held up his hand. His index finger elongated with incredible speed. It pierced the witch's temple, his finger coming out the other side of her head. "Be silent, woman." The man's finger retracted, leaving the witch's head to slump on her chest. "As if a son of fire would ever fear a son of clay."

Angelica stood. She formed spirit blades and hurled them at the man. He held up a hand and stopped their momentum. *Impossible. He's controlling my blades.* Lady Angelica's eyes grew wide. He turned the blades back at her. Before they could reach their new target, she forced them to dissipate. Angelica formed a single spirit blade into a sword. She charged at him. When she got near enough to strike she swung the sword, but

he caught the blade with his bare hand. He shattered it. Angelica started for the Spear of Destiny. With a wave of his hand, the man's telekinetic energy flung her against the wall to his right and pinned her there. She remained unconscious against the wall.

Seven fired a blue beam at the man. It put a hole in his chest before it went through the wall behind him. Angelica dropped, crumpled, to the floor.

The man clutched his chest. He staggered. He glared at Seven with murderous intent. "Purifier indeed." He drew back his hand and stared at the blood. The hole in his chest closed. "In your current state, you don't have a prayer of defeating me. But I will not tarry for you to grow. I will wipe away this threat now." He held out his palm towards Seven. A red sphere of energy formed.

A group of words attached together as a tendril shot into the room and attacked the man. They swiped at him, forcing him to dodge every blow. The man spewed black flames from his mouth at Tobias, who stood in the hallway outside of the room. They also threatened Seven. Seven closed his eyes as the flames raced towards him. Red, leathery wings burst from the man's back. With one powerful flap, he exploded through the roof of the building and darted away. Though the flames had taken out the wall behind Seven, the words Tobias wielded had acted as a shield for himself. The words retracted back into the book. When Seven opened his eyes, he was across the room next to Lady Angelica. He looked up and saw the Blind Seer standing next to him as the old man stroked his beard.

"Shame on you, young one—forcing an old man to hurry just to save the likes of you.

"Did you just tele—"

"Never mind that. I think she is in need of your assistance."

Seven rolled Lady Angelica over. She lay still. He checked her pulse but felt nothing. He sat her up and hugged her. Blue spirit energy emanated from his body, but he still felt no pulse. "Lady Angelica—c'mon—you're tougher than this."

Lady Angelica moaned. She grabbed her head. "You, sir, have grown too familiar."

Seven let her go. "Apologies." He smiled and scratched his head.

"The Princess?" Lady Angelica asked.

Seven looked over at the princess, still encapsulated in the blue bubble of spirit energy. "She'll make it," he answered. Seven looked at the hole in the roof. They had saved the princess, but the abomination of abominations had come into the world on his watch. He knew he could never rest again unless he played some part in vanquishing it. But one thing was for sure. He needed to become stronger.