

The Fall of Hate

Book 3 of



By Charles W. McDonald Jr.

This is a work of fiction. All characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to real people, entities, or events is purely coincidental and only included for dramatic effect. This book does not represent the views, opinions, or positions of any real company, entity, or person—even those of the author.

The Fall of Hate © 2018 Book 3 of
A Throne of Souls®© 2018 Registration claim(s) #1-6325231991,
1-6396057641, 1-6592795791
(www.copyright.gov)
ISBN 978-0-9981177-8-2 Available on Apple iBooks

All artwork, illustrations, and maps have been filed as part of this associated copyright and are protected under USA Federal Copyright laws.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or portions therein, in any form.



® is a registered trademark (serial number 87178577) registered with www.uspto.gov and may not be used by any person, entity, or company without express written consent of the mark owner and only in association with this story. Any unauthorized use of *A Throne of Souls*, by title, content, or logo, will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Credits:

Very special thanks to the following for their feedback and contributions:

John Armond Howarth for the initial creation of Kellen, Goldenbow, Aaramus, Evanyil, Banthis, Rena Rectovich, and a few other characters important in the telling of this story. John helped awaken my creative thinking that further developed these—and other—characters, making the delivery of this work of fiction to you possible. With all my most sincere and best wishes, thank you, John.

The following Beta Readers:

Brandy L. McDonald

for their very honest and constructive criticism in reviewing early editions of this novel.

Story by: Charles W. McDonald Jr.

Written by: Charles W. McDonald Jr.

Cover by: Steven J. Catizone and Anthony DiPaolo

Edited by: Zora Alexandra Knauf

Proofread by: Jessamine Julian

Cartography by: Charles W. McDonald Jr. and Wes Rand

E-Book Conversion by: Charles W. McDonald Jr.

Interior artwork by: Wes Rand, Anthony DiPaolo, and Shady Curi

Research-related: While I do include and credit some specific concepts in the glossary, I wanted to specifically call out and credit the incredible scientific contributions done on behalf of Humanity by **Nassim Hamein**. My research into his work aided in fueling my illustrative examples of *The Connected Universe*. I would encourage everyone who reads this to research and read his work—especially that around proton radius calculations, quantum holography, and Planck density of protons. It is truly exceptional, and when you dig into it, you will begin to see the true genius in the symmetry and the mind of Creation!

Dedication:

Forever, for Emrys...



When all that is left of great miracles are the waning memories of distant accounts, now questioned by men, shall I come to you in the one undeniable breath of God that your tattered faith be renewed. For in the final moments shall you need it.

Preface: A Reader's Guide to A Throne of Souls

The complexity of weaving the intricate plot lines of this story required the breaking of a *lot* of rules to bring this product to you. Some of those rules involve capitalization and emphasis strategies. So, for example, there are many reserved words in this story (Humanity, Creation, Man, Mankind, Humanoid, etc.). Those reserved words will be consistently either capitalized or emphasized for this story and you might think *hey, that word shouldn't be capitalized*, but I assure you everything is done with deliberate intent.

The bottom line is this: I'm not here to write like everyone else. I'm not here to rigidly adhere to boundaries not established by me. I'm here to bring you something groundbreaking, and I'm going to do just that—but in my voice and my style. If that troubles you, perhaps you should find something more mainstream to read. But you're not going to find anything this thought-provoking written in the mainstream in the voice of the status quo. Groundbreaking content doesn't follow the status quo; else, it wouldn't be groundbreaking.

A brief comment about pace... It took some twenty-one and twenty-six years (in parallel) to deliver *A Kingdom Forgotten* and *Black Mirrors of the Soul*. Please do not think that a mere year spent on *The Fall of Hate* would make it one-twentieth the story or novel of *A Kingdom Forgotten*. That would be an inaccurate measure of this book's content or any of the books that follow. It would stand to reason that each of the remaining three books in the series would have a far shorter build-time than that of their predecessors because I did not have the time to think much further than the first two novels until 2016 when I diagrammed the entire series on a whiteboard. My point being that each of the books that follow *Black Mirrors of the Soul* will have a much shorter time to delivery, but when you add up all the time brainstorming, writing, editing, proofreading, beta reading, illustrating, and so on, each will still be at least of the same caliber as the first two books in the series if not greater than. After having spent the last fourteen months developing *The Fall of Hate*, I can say, with confidence, that it is my best novel yet—as it should be.

What to expect going forward... I'm currently writing *The Rise of Hope* and *The Veil of White* concurrently. Why? Because I have to. After you read this novel, you'll see why and understand that the continuum threads are highly complex and one little mistake can have drastic consequences in the integrity of the overall story. What does that mean for you, the reader? It means that *The Rise of Hope* might take a little longer to release (say,

another sixteen months or so) and *The Veil of White* might take a little less than you might think to release (say, another eighteen months or so). I can't give you exact numbers because it's not an exact process and writing isn't my only profession, but I would anticipate *The Veil of White* to be released within a two-to-four-month period after the release of *The Rise of Hope*. If I can release them concurrently, I will, but I expect the difference between the two release dates will be pre-production related.

Other uncommon standards to this story involve handling of scene breaks. So, for instance, you'll see the following types of scene breaks in *A Throne of Souls* to which I'll try to stay as consistent as possible:

* * * *

The four-star mark (above) will be used denote a scene break of a brief period of time without switching locations or switching locations (roughly the same time) but staying on the same planetary body.



The flourish bracket (above) will be used to denote a scene break of a large time difference and/or a planetary body shift in location.

A simple carriage return of white space will be used to denote a change in perspective within the same scene. For example, in a large battle sequence, it's important to understand the perspectives of multiple key players as they are engaged in the fight—to see the same event from multiple camera angles if you will.

I want to be as assertive as possible here: ***please*** pay careful attention to the time and location markers when and where they are provided. It will greatly help you as the timelines begin to cross over one another, and I promise it will contribute substantially to the whole story making perfect sense to you. I'm not saying you need to take notes, nor have an eidetic memory. I'm just saying it will greatly help you deduce the clue drops and critical 'ah hah' moments I've woven into the story. I've tried my best to standardize the following format for the time/location markers throughout:

(Specific Place, Planetary Body, Specific Time if Applicable, Timeline)

I want to also comment on the timeline distortions and how these will impact your reading experience. There are going to be times when you read about a character who is beyond or behind “Present Day” and yet the time marker in the header clearly states, “Present Day.” Realize and remember when Damon first saved all those people on all those worlds, he did so in the “Near Future,” bringing them to Eden’s “Present Day,” which at the outset of this book would be two years forward in their timeline continuum. Please keep that critical piece of the story at the forefront of your thoughts as you continue reading because the continuum will become spaghetti if you don’t.

You would have figured out all of the above as you read the story, but I thought it would be nice not to exhaust your effort figuring out mechanics of telling the story. Now, we can get to *A Throne of Souls*—Book 3...

Contents

PREFACE: A READER'S GUIDE TO A THRONE OF SOULS

MAPS:

PROLOGUE: DURAL'S JUSTICE

CHAPTER 1: THE PATIENCE TO ERASE HUMANITY

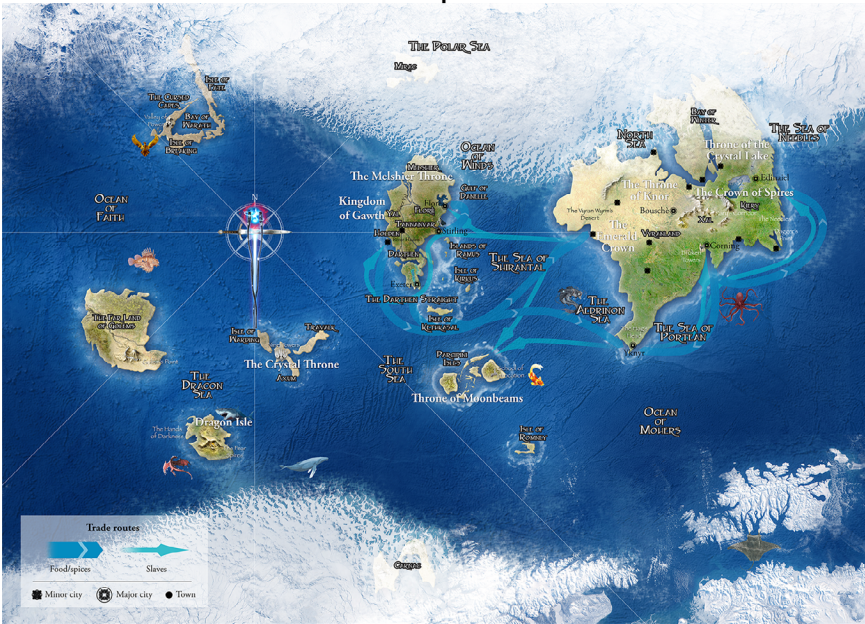
CHAPTER 2: THRICE BROKEN

PART 1: WHAT WAS, WHAT IS, AND WHAT MUST BE

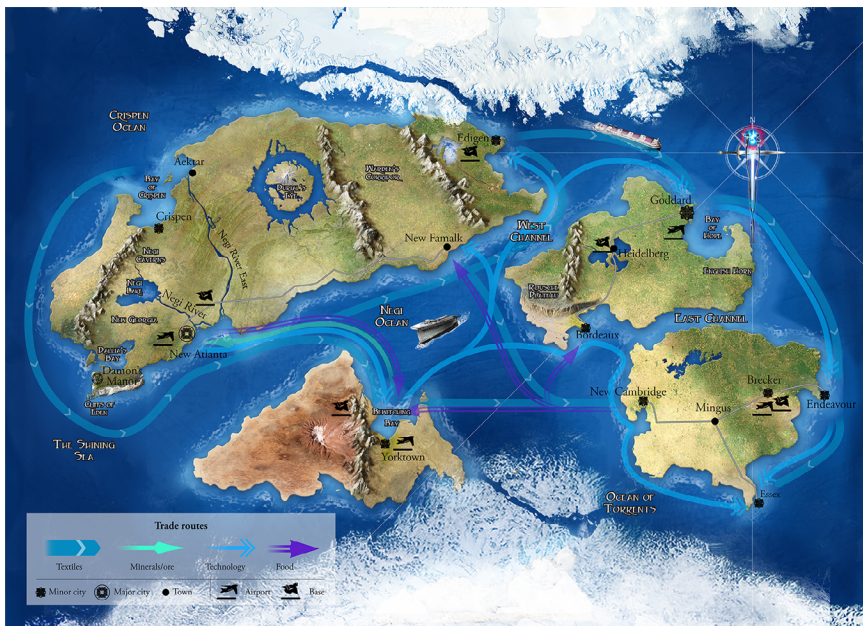
CHAPTER 3: WHEN EVEN LOVE IS LAID DOWN

This Edition's Last Modified Date:
May 18, 2018

Maps:



Erion



Eden



Damon of Basrat - The Dark Knight of Magic



Prologue: Durial's Justice

(South of the Aegen River, Kaleion, A Very Long Time Ago)

The twin moons of Kaleion—both in full repose—tugged at the planet's crust in opposing directions, swelling the diameter of the great planet, causing all manner of hateful acts of man and beast. Yet the twin moons held nothing on the instrument of *hate* currently at work.

Another lashing of Keirill's Telekinesis brought Seren to her knees; another welt stung on her beautiful but scarred collarbone. This was not the man she married!

Brilliant fire-red hair framed soft pale skin. Seren's emerald-green eyes begged forgiveness—for what, she couldn't know. She dared not rise to her feet with him like this. Keirill was far more powerful—both physically and in arcane—not to mention his natural abilities. Another blunt, brute-force strike of his Telekinesis-borne fist crushed her jawbone, shattering it in three places, and she collapsed to the dirt, no longer recognizing the husband who now lorded over her.

"Please..." The word came out jarred, shaky, and barely recognizable as she'd all but lost her ability to enunciate with her jaw now shattered.

"Don't get up until you've learned your lesson," Keirill demanded—his right-hand index finger pointed straight at her, though she dared not look at him. "I told you I never wanted a child. That was your responsibility to make sure that never happened!"

Even now Seren huddled over her womb, crouched on the ground on all fours, trying to guard herself from an attack that might kill what she knew to be her beloved unborn son.

It was true. He had warned her—many times, but she was lonely with the hate-filled isolationism of her husband and longing for something and someone beyond herself and a husband she no longer recognized. She thought he might change his mind when he found out, or maybe when the boy was born. At the very worst, he might learn to appreciate his own flesh and blood—surely.

A giant glob of spit landing right beside her clenched right hand in the Kaleion soil told her otherwise. Her son would never be welcomed—not by him. “Whore! Stay outside tonight. If I find you went anywhere...”

Holding up her left hand in surrender, Seren motioned to him in acknowledgement. She’d stay outside all night to prevent more of his wrath. Her tears fell to the soil, muddying the ground around her as she tried to find a measure of comfort, so she could attempt to *Heal* her jaw before it became permanently damaged.

She heard the heavy door to their farm cottage slam shut as Keirill retreated into their home. “I’m sorry, Kaylan. I never meant to bring you into this. Please forgive me.” Rubbing her barely showing belly, she felt the boy the size of an onion kick back. *What have I done?* She couldn’t stop the tears from their relentless condemnation of her selfish act of love.

* * * *

(South of the Aegen River, Kaleion, A Few Years Later)

“If you think I’m going to let this continue, you’re mistaken,” Daedrin informed his sister. His black hair already silvering, beginning to match his dark gray robes with decorative vertical flutes of royal blue—a symbol of his lineage, and hers.

“While I can’t make excuses for Keirill anymore, I forbid you from taking any action against my husband! I forbid it! Tell me you understand.” Her red hair and emerald-green eyes shimmered in the dusky hues of sunset whilst her beloved son played some distance away.

Daedrin paused, scratching his chin in contemplation of a promise he could adhere to without prohibiting doing what needed to be done. “What would you have me do?”

“Stay out of it...” Seren paused, thinking now beyond herself. “Do what you must to protect Kaylan but stay out of my marriage. I can handle Keirill. He’d never harm me.”

“Really,” he chaffed, reaching up his hand to caress the jaw her husband had shattered only a few years before.

Brushing away her brother’s hand, Seren pulled back from him. “Promise me you’ll protect Kaylan but stay out of my marriage.”

“Fine,” Daedrin bristled, furrowing his brow at his sister.

“Is that your word, Daedrin?”

“As much as I’m willing to give,” Daedrin barbed again with his sister, knowing she wasn’t the relenting type. “The boy looks like Keirill. Why does he hate his son so?”

“I can’t say. He’s been unrecognizable as my husband for years. It’s as if he’s being influenced by something, but I’ve checked and checked, and checked again. There is no magic influencing him—that I can see.” She thought about it again. “...Yet his behavior is so erratic. It’s as if it’s beyond his ability to control.”

“And you don’t see that as cause for my intervention?”

“I LOVE HIM! What part of that don’t you get?”

“Fine,” Daedrin capitulated, knowing better, but also knowing this was not the battle that was worth dying over. There would be others. Of that, he was certain. He’d known Keirill nearly as long as he’d known his sister. And, much like his sister, he no longer recognized the man. But he also knew, sooner than later, he’d have to be dealt with—one way or the other. Watching Kaylan play in the barn from afar, Daedrin kept his distance from him per Seren’s instructions. She didn’t want any family influence over him save her own. She had wanted a normal life for Kaylan. To live, laugh, play, and not have anything to do with magic. The less magic had an influence in his life, the better. After seeing what Keirill’s pursuit of magic had done to him, she’d assumed arcane would come for her, too, and she feared the toll. She’d seen the price paid by many an archmage and wanted a better, more mundane life for her son. She’d even refused to cast around Kaylan. Daedrin didn’t understand it, and certainly didn’t agree with it. If the boy had abilities—and being the son of Keirill and Seren, he most certainly would—he would cast one way or the other. Better to cast with training and discipline than without. No, he could never agree with his sister on this one, but he respected her wishes so stay away he would. Watching Kaylan chase the black and white, long-haired, medium-sized, shepherd dog around the barn, Daedrin wondered what future beheld this boy of genitors most profound.

* * * *

(South of the Aegen River, Kaleion, A Few Years Later)

“You’re not going to tell me how to parent *my* son, Bitch,” Keirill shouted at his wife.

“I’m just asking you not to cast around him. That’s all. I’m not telling you anything. I would never disrespect you, Husband.” Seren half-bowed to Keirill, hoping the carrot worked since she didn’t possess the stick with which to manhandle this brute of a man.

Keirill’s eyes worked in contemplation—an obsolescent compassion immediately dismissed as weakness—considering how to respond to his ever-testing, ever-probing, ever-prodding, ever-manipulating wife. “*You* brought him into this world against my wishes. *You* don’t have a say in how I act around him.”

“He is *your* son as you say. He’s mine too.” She stopped, pursing her lips seeing and immediately recognizing Keirill’s death stare now fixed upon her soul. “Would you really have him following in your footsteps? Or mine? What good would that do? You’ve never been the same since your enhancements. Admit it!” There it was. She’d called him out. Now she could advance or retreat, but the element of surprise had been spent. “You think I didn’t know? That I wouldn’t find out? How stupid do you think I am?” Shields fully up, she advanced, casting the strongest protection spells she possessed as she closed the few paces between them in their kitchen.

Keirill’s starry, bright-blue eyes roiled with gold rims of fire as his first volley of Telekinesis smashed into his wife, crushing her against the kitchen wall from her left while he stood motionless, bringing all his protections up to snuff. “You *dare assault me*. You *dare defy me*. You *dare disrespect me*.” Another smashing blow of his Telekinesis had Seren on her knees—ribs shattered as she struggled for air.

Determined not to go down without a fight, Seren gave him her best shot, simultaneously casting *A Bliss of Fire* right behind *A Cone of Ice*, causing a massive cone of ice to erupt from the floor, engulfing her husband floor-to-ceiling, immediately followed by piercing, flaming arrows that swelled in intensity and size as they shot forth from her gold fingernails, racing toward her now-frozen husband. She hadn’t started the day intending

to harm her once-loved husband, but she knew that look in his eye and she knew she wouldn't survive the day if he did.

The flaming arrows shattered his best protections—as they should. He knew Seren a great and powerful archmage, but the *Cone of Ice* had only worked on his protections, failing to pierce. Naked and without protection or not, he was unscathed underneath. The flames in his eyes said nothing of the life he squeezed out of his wife with his Telekinesis constricting around Seren's throat with only the pinching motion of his right index finger and thumb.

She had only an instant of breath remaining as she made a sweeping motion with her left hand, knocking her husband to the ground as she knocked his feet out from underneath him, causing him a momentary release of his iron grip on her throat.

Now knocked to the kitchen floor, laying on his right side, he heard his son come to see what the commotion was as he called forth the greatest bolt of lightning he'd ever summoned, blistering through the roof of their ranch home, searing his wife to oblivion and beyond. Only a smoking crater remained.

Struggling to right himself against the great commotion threatening to rip the house to pieces, Kaylan rushed from his bedroom down the hallway toward what he could only assume was another fight.

“Pa. What's happening? Where's Mom?” A ten-year-old Kaylan stood shocked there in overalls and grey shirt, black bangs swept down over starry, bright-blue eyes.

“GET OUT! It's not safe for you here.” The ever-so-briefest of moments of clarity and truth escaped Keirill at the death of the woman he once loved.

Kaylan just stared at the smoking hole in the ground where ashen tatters of his mother's clothes remained. “Where's Mom?”

“GET OUT,” Keirill demanded, pushing his son out of the room and all the way out of the front door of the house, using his Telekinesis as he uprighted himself, looking at the result of his hate smoldering in the blistered flooring of his kitchen: singed wood planks—shattered, broken, and darkened with ash. He looked up through the ceiling and

through his roof now in need of repair. His mouth worked, in search of words of remorse that would never come. *Who, or what, am I now?* Now left alone with a troublesome boy he didn't want in a life he no longer understood. This was no longer the life of the greatest mage of all time, and he felt robbed. He wanted to walk away—to abandon the boy who was never his choice. But, something wouldn't let him leave. Frowning, looking in the direction his boy just left, Keirill tried to reconcile an unrecognizable instinct telling him to stay against his burning desire to be free and to claim a title still within his reach.

* * * *

(South of the Aegen River, Kaleion, A Few Days Later)

Kaylan scurried about the barn, performing chores at the fastest pace he could muster, not wanting to disappoint Pa again. Keirill warned the boy he had plenty to do to prepare for Mom's funeral and he didn't have time to deal with Kaylan disappointing him. Kaylan needed to be extra careful because failing his father meant failing the remembrance of his mother. He still didn't understand what happened to her. One day she was there, and the next she wasn't, and he had never been given any explanation—only, “Don't disappoint me,” from his father.

“I was wondering if we might have a word with each other.” Daedrin's voice had only come as a partial surprise, as had his sudden appearance on his front porch by methods other than *Portal* or *Gate*.

“And what word would you prefer,” Keirill bristled in reply, bringing up all his protections in an instant as his eyes brimmed with hate for Seren's meddlesome brother.

“*Justice.*” It was only one word, but the plain silver rod barely half the length of his forearm instantly snatched by unseen hands into Daedrin's right hand caused Keirill's eyes to swell in stark and fulsome terror.

It was all said and done in an instant as Keirill's protections crumbled all around him like a shattered wall. He reached out for the lifeblood arcane required to rebuild that which Daedrin had so easily destroyed, but it was void—its chalice of life broken. He opened his mind to the Telekinesis he'd known since he was a child. Again, empty and unresponsive to his will. Unable to form even a fist with which to strike back, Keirill's vast power was suddenly impotent. Rising from his wooden rocker to face down Daedrin with

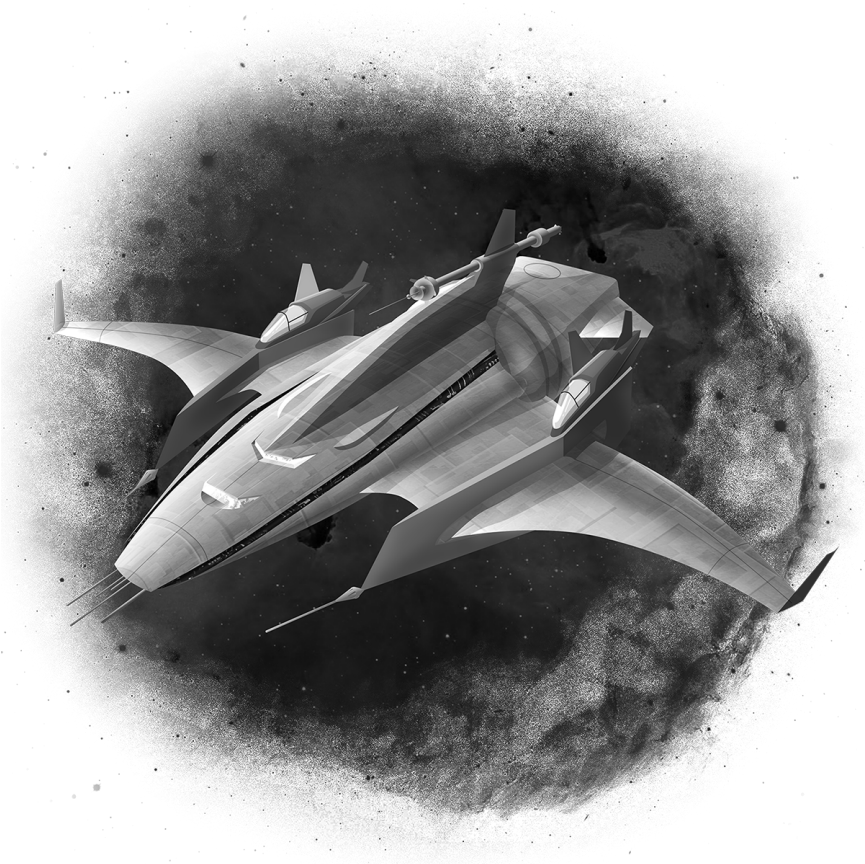
all he had left—his physical stature—Keirill closed the few spans between them, staring the judge and executioner of his powers directly eye to eye. “You think you’ve won.” It rivaled a memory of a memory, but Keirill somehow knew otherwise.

“I think Seren *deserved* better... I think Kaylan *deserves* better. And, I think this will cause you the greatest suffering. I could have easily killed you, but that was not Durial’s way and it’s not mine either. I gave you *Durial’s Justice*, and you shall have to learn to live with it.”

A physical fist clenched and readied where a Telekinesis one could not form, taking a swing at Daedrin, only hitting his transparent shield in futility a full span from Daedrin’s actual flesh.

“Don’t make me come back for you, Keirill. I won’t be so kind to you next time.” Daedrin’s words floated on the dust-laden air of his porch as Daedrin himself disappeared the same way he’d come—without aid of *Portal* or *Gate*.

Now castrated from the manhood of his great power, the once-great archmage sat back down in his rocker, watching his son scurry about the barn, trying to please him. Contemplating all that had been and all that could be, Keirill clenched his fists till he drew blood in both hands, staining the arms of his rocker in his hatred of Mankind. A heavy sigh as he considered taking his life, but the *Instrument of Humanity’s Hate* wouldn’t allow it. There was still work to be done as he watched his son from afar. Still work he *could* perform. Still work he *must* perform.



Chapter 1: The Patience to Erase Humanity

(Kaleion, Tens of Thousands of Years Ago...)

“**N**OOOO,” Pierio shouted at the lead Sentinel whose eyes glowed a dispassionate molten-amber, removing its extended digit from the transparent control panel it had just used to sentence the once-great Durial to exile—and with him the exile of Humanity. “Why?!” Pierio struggled against the unseen power of his handcuffs, taunting the bat-

tle-scarred Sentinel currently ignoring him. “Why not just kill us? You think your laws and your cause *so righteous*?!”

We are killing you! That thought forced into Pierio’s mind by the battle-hardened Sentinel, its dark, acid-etched alloy legs now extending so as to allow itself to walk rather than float toward the hardened criminal. *You and all those like you will surely...die. It has been foreseen.* It showed no emotion—only certainty—as it moved closer and closer to Pierio until it stood upon Pierio’s feet, crushing them under the weight of its alloy chassis.

“We’ll come back for you! You have to know that...” Pierio fought back the tears of the pain rushing throughout his body in wave upon wave.

Lifting its foot only a span or more, the Sentinel slammed its great hardened metal foot down atop Pierio again, this time shattering every bone in both of his feet. This time *it did* laugh, turning to head back to the bridge where it would ensure the criminal’s swift and certain exile. This one was too important to kill. He and Durial had to survive. The others, perhaps not. To *erase* Humanity required letting *two* live—for now.

Programmable matter formed a doorway for the battle-scarred Sentinel to exit into a smooth metal corridor with transparent digital readouts and displays adorning both sides. Pausing mid-stride as it walked toward the bridge, the Sentinel extended its right hand, turning it palm up as a holographic quantum-tunnel message appeared in a sphere just a few millimeters above the surface of its alloy palm.

Wavelengths of prismatic colors scattered about a field of stars pulsed with each command intonation from *The Eye of Time*—each vibrant wave vibrating like a musical chord struck by its musician. These waves more analogous to dimensions and causalities being struck with each command from the great *Eye*. No words were spoken. Verbal language was *far too crude* for such advanced lifeforms.

Even with its ever-present dispassionate appearance, the battle-hardened Sentinel nearly appeared to laugh as it processed the latest commands from *The Eye of Time*. A command that had transcended time itself, for surely, *they* possessed means and the patience to erase Humanity.

(Graelon, Tens of Thousands of Years Ago...)

A great plateau before him greeted Pierio as he materialized handcuffed and broken on the surface of the virgin and alien world. Dropping to the ground in agony—his feet

utterly shattered—his handcuffs disengaged as a beautiful woman in a grey bodysuit appeared handcuffed to his immediate left.

Her handcuffs now disengaged, she ran to him. “I don’t understand. What’s happening to us?”

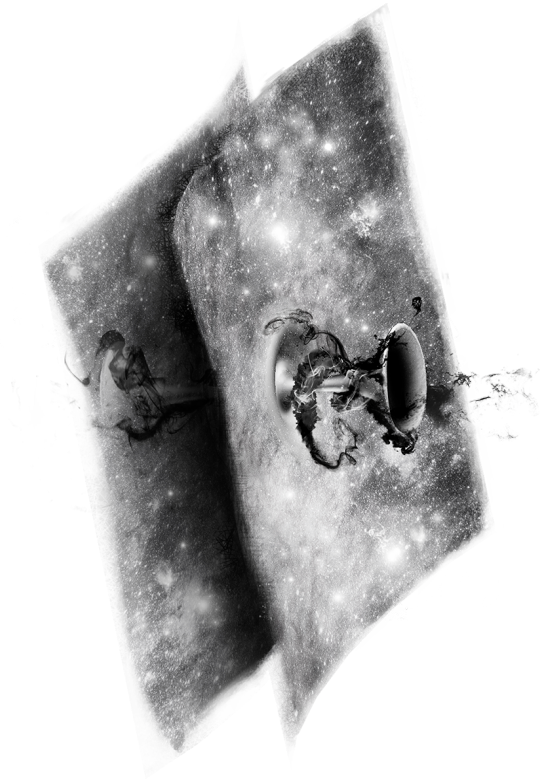
“I don’t know either, but we’re going to fight back,” Pierio proclaimed, *Healing* his feet as he looked at the great mountain range behind him and the massive drop off to the beautiful, lush, green plains below. “We’re going to fight back, and we’re going to kill them all.”

“I don’t even know your name.” With swept brunette bangs covering bright green-gold eyes and soft, supple cheeks, she looked into his starry, bright-blue eyes, seeking a level of comfort, knowledge, and understanding. Never the dependent type, she was far out of her element here and she knew it. She needed his help. She needed them to work together.

“Pierio,” he stated flatly, but his eyes burned like hot coals of determination. “We’re going to reproduce the conditions that brought us here so I can understand their plan.”

“Pierio, I’m Ceres. I’ll help you however I can. I’m grateful not to be alone here. It’s beautiful, and it looks bountiful at a glance, but I’m still grateful you’re here with me. How can I help?”

Taking her hand in his, he began describing his plan to her, and it all started with mining. They needed ore—and lots of it. They needed to start gathering the raw ingredients to build back the technology that had exiled them here. And, they needed to find Durial and the rest of his brothers. They needed a way to communicate through and traverse the vastness of space. Without FTL capabilities, they’d have to find another way. He’d have to start running some calculations in his mind from the time spent traveling in their tactical FTL, gravity-field-drive ship to develop a star map of possible locations for Durial and Alexelio, but if it took hundreds of lifetimes to find them, he’d keep himself alive with his magic long enough to make right what the Sentinels had made wrong.



Chapter 2: Thrice Broken

(Austin, TX, Earth, Present Day)

A low, guttural growl of Damon's house bemoaned the crestfallen fate about to befall future Mira as the sound of 2x6s snapping at their waistlines around the perimeter of the great room crackled the air, driving chills of portent up Mira's spine. Shadow-backlit, molten eyes stared back at future Mira as a cupped-winged-Banthis loomed over Damon, threatening to carry him home. The slipstream of Banthis' *hate* still coagulating spacetime around them clashed against the struggle of future Mira's right, hammer-laden hand.

The ting of the microwave had proven just enough a distraction for the hammer to start to move toward Illirian's clay seal, but Mira felt the manifold of spacetime thicken again around her right hand as Banthis regained her focus.

Gnarled fingers of shadow and *hate* crept nearly all the way around the perimeter of the great room now, starting at the far end of the living room, now making their way toward the kitchen—and Mira. Mira could feel the room constricting around her along with the manifold of spacetime, trying to suffocate and snuff her out of existence. The 2x6s snapping where touched by Banthis' shadow-cast fingers as they made their way to her—and Damon. Even now, a set of fingers moved from wall to floor, slithering serpent-like on broken flooring—now only inches away from Damon's broken body.

As the gnarled fingers of shadow crept over Damon's feet and legs, they suddenly stopped—nearly in immediate retreat from Damon's chest.

The room began to hum and resonate with a warm energy Mira could only compare to the coming of the morning. Mira's eyes couldn't see the souls bursting through Damon's chest, circling him like a great toroidal energy field—but Banthis could. Another moment of distraction caused Banthis to lose focus, looking down at the thousands of souls ensnaring Damon's broken and gaping chest, circling Damon in torrent rings of energy and pushing back against Banthis' immortal *hate*.

Like unto flocks of wren, the thousands of souls captured by Damon's *Throne of Souls* moved in unison, with two souls brighter than all the others seemingly coordinating the release of coagulated spacetime ensnarled around Mira's right-hand grip of Damon's hammer.

Mira barely felt the hammer move before the coagulated spacetime suddenly broke like a dam, causing the hammer to race toward Illirian's seal in a haste of resolve for Mankind.

Striking the seal with enough force to break off a large chunk of underlying granite, the hammer shattered Illirian's seal into a thousand tiny shards of clay and dust, causing a deafening thunderclap that surely could have been heard all the way to the university several hundred yards away.

Startled by the delicate, feminine hands suddenly on her hips, moving her aside, Mira instantly recognized the scent of Illirian's presence from where she'd encountered it before in Damon's study. Even the memory of that memory had been distinct and immediately recognizable.

Positioning herself between Mira and Banthis, Illirian recognized Damon's urgent condition at a glance—knowing he had only mere moments before he'd be forever lost. Banthis and Illirian had worked their magic independently in Damon's orbit for millennia—never having seen or experienced the other in person. Alone together, for the very first time, the light of Illirian Starfire stared down a now-spread-winged Banthis positioning herself in front of Damon as if to warn Banthis the only way for Banthis to get to Damon was *through* her. Feeling very much like the third wheel, and very grateful not to be the first nor the second, Mira's eyes darted between Illirian and Banthis, wondering if Earth could survive these two being in the same room together and if saving Damon was even still an option. Giving them both a wider berth, she slowly backed away from the island, hoping they would keep each other occupied. If only for a second or two longer.

Gnarled fingers of shadow retreated into the standing shadow of Banthis now clinging to her forged body as Illirian took another step toward Damon—and Banthis.

"It's time for Damon to come home," Banthis proclaimed flatly in a tone that recognized the greatness before her yet yielded nothing.

"That outcome is not for you to decide," Illirian countered, taking another step, watching Banthis flex as her molten katana suddenly appeared in her right hand.

Light bulbs around the house suddenly burst, spraying glass all over the flooring and countertops, allowing only the light of Banthis' molten katana and the light of Illirian to illuminate their first-ever encounter.

Now having to feel her way around due to the sudden darkness, Mira tried not to cry out when the long shard of hot bulb glass thrust into her right foot. Years alone in the field of Armageddon without the protection of Damon had toughened Mira; she didn't even wince when the cold, hard, anodized metal made contact with her fingertips. Moving her right hand just above the light switch on the garage side of the wall between the kitchen and the garage, Mira made her move to save Damon.

"You're not allowed to interfere in this. I know that much." Banthis offered logic, knowing Illirian's emotional investment with Damon but also knowing her role in maintaining the status quo she—herself—fought to disrupt.

"Others have already interfered. I'm here to set that right." Illirian's gold-fire eyes tightened on Banthis, no longer darting to Damon.

“He’s coming with me,” Banthis decreed, assiduously protecting her future with Damon. The Master Plan could still be completed. All was not lost. She could have both Damon and the outcome of his plans. She knew that much to be certain.

“Damon’s not going anywhere with you.” Squeezing the trigger of Damon’s Glock® twice, two .40 caliber hollow-point rounds struck Banthis where her vital organs should have been, causing Banthis to violently throw her molten katana at Mira, severing her body in half; the torso and head fell in a heap backwards—her long legs falling forward. Blood and entrails gushed from what had been future Mira as the ground and framing violently shook, threatening to collapse inward on Illirian as Banthis suddenly disappeared into a great void. Her molten katana melted into the flooring, burning its way into a crevasse of *hate*, chasing Banthis whence she came.

Kneeling beside *her* Damon, witnessing his *Throne of Souls* collapsing in all around him, Illirian knew he had but seconds—valuable time purchased with Mira’s sacrifice. Her lips touching his, she probed his great wound with her powerful magic and her new station as her soul surrendered to him. Light amber of fire, blue of life, gold of magic, and charcoal of Damon’s essence formed concentric rings, each larger than the one before as they slowly began revolving about a center axis unseen. Each ring moved inside the other as valve, cartilage, vein, and heart began pulling blood from Damon’s extremities, removing toxins from his body as the other side of his new heart began pumping oxygenized blood back out to a body on the edge of septicemia.

With her eyes still closed, Illirian’s spirit could feel her magic working on Damon as blood flowed back into lips she kissed for his survival and theirs as she begged him to stay. *Don’t go, Damon. Stay with me*, she pleaded to his soul’s energy still whirling around the room and around his body.

Inside her mind’s eye, she could see and feel his *Throne of Souls* stabilizing, the souls bursting through his chest consistently held in check by the gravity of his being as their normal orbits around him began to resume.

Breath leapt back into Damon rivaling the saving of a drowning man spewing water and expelling his airways. He felt his capillaries bursting back to life as feeling came back to his nerve endings. *Am I being kissed? Where am I?*

Looking sidelong at what remained of Mira and the bodily fluids pooling toward them, Illirian finally considered her possible future with Damon if she could get him to alter his Master Plan for her and for Humanity.

“Breathe... Come back to me, My Love,” again she begged, her love for Damon no longer constrained by a station she no longer held or cared for—her prior mission abandoned for her obsession for Damon. Now she had truly interfered. Now she had truly broken all the rules and every ethos. There was no going back. Centuries of denial broke like a great floodgate for Illirian Starfire as she struggled to illustrate to Damon meaning in each of her tears now streaking down her beautiful cheeks with her eyes of gold-fire pleading for him to understand.

Damon’s house creaked and moaned, threatening to collapse on them as Damon slowly came around. Another 2x6 snapped in half, allowing another section of the living room drywall to tumble into the room.

“What happened,” Damon asked, his *black mirrors of the soul* taking on a new and brighter backlit hue.

“Don’t try to move too much.” She could see him already trying to get his legs underneath him enough to stand, but she knew him not ready for that and she wasn’t ready for him to see what remained of Mira. “What’s the last thing you remember?”

Damon’s eyes widened at the memory that crashed in on him—memories of destroying the Chairman. Gripping his chest, he tried feeling for the wound that should have been there but was not. “I’m on Earth.”

“Yes. Good. What else?”

“Where’s Mira? I made a *Portal* to Austin and held your seal in my hand. Did she summon you?”

“Damon, there’s something I need to tell you first.”

“Where’s Mira?”

“Banthis came for you.”

“***Where’s Mira?***” Damon started to stand but needed his Telekinesis to bring himself upright.

Now fully upright, using the far end of what remained of the island granite countertop to steady himself, he could see Mira’s severed body spilling blood and entrails into

the kitchen and garage with what looked like one of his pistols still clutched in her right hand. “Banthis?”

Illirian only replied by placing a hand around his waist to steady him, now looking him in the eyes as if to communicate something physically she’d held back for centuries that words could not.

“She sacrificed herself for me...?”

“I couldn’t have saved you in time without her. You were fading too fast, and Banthis was determined to take you *home*. Her words.”

For one of only a handful of times in Damon’s multi-generational life, Damon began to shed tears for yet another mortal toll to his miserable existence. His tears bleached the granite upon which they fell with contrition. “First Dallia, then Mira, and now this Mira—this extraordinary and unique Mira—all gave their life for me. Why can’t I protect them?”

“Because you were meant to protect us all.” *You could help him. Couldn’t you? You’ve already interfered.*

“That simply cannot be. I’m not *that* person, and the Master Plan was never meant to ‘protect us all.’”

“I think you need to meet someone, Damon. Someone that might change your mind. Someone that might change your perspective.”

“My perspective is pretty fucked right now.” Unable to take his eyes off what remained of Mira, he knew himself now thrice broken.

“You are loved, Damon. Never forget that. She loved you. She still loves you.” A knowing look from Illirian again tried communicating non-verbally with Damon whose eyes were tear-glossed with loss. “I have new responsibilities, thanks to you, and I must attend to them. I can hear his call, and I must go.” *You could help him instead. Why don’t you? What’s wrong with you? You love him! You need him! Admit it! Tell him. Tell him now!*

A perfumed gale disintegrated Illirian’s body to ethereal form, transporting her whence she came, leaving Damon to deal with what remained of his beloved Mira.

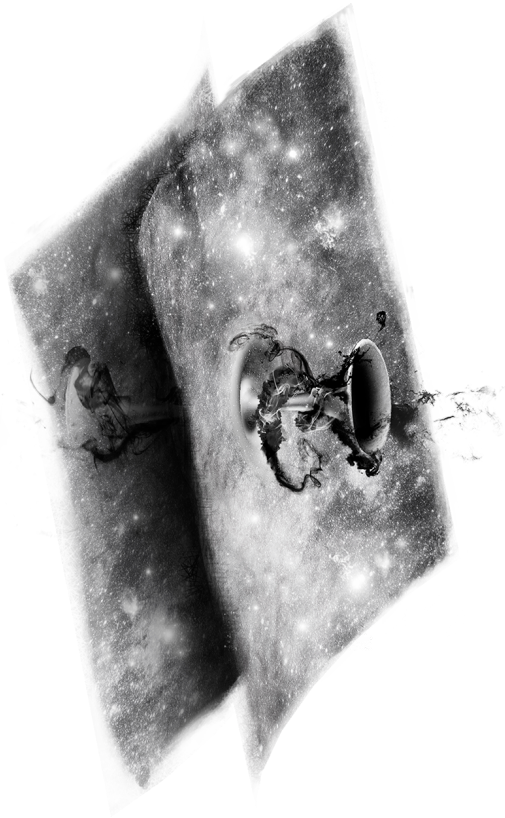


(Axum, Perion, Moments Ago...)

Mouth agape, Radin tried to pull together in his thoughts what just happened. *And, what was that great arc of charcoal-blue light streaking off to the northeast?* He had a very bad feeling as he ripped open a *Portal* to Exeter. *Where else could he go?* He had to face this head-on. He knew he'd have a lot of explaining to do, especially given Damon's apology for actions still as yet unknown to him. He only hoped he could get them to listen. He needed them to listen. He needed Elise to listen.

Creator, *what of my son? What have I done?* Walking through the hastily- formed *Portal*, Radin did something he hadn't done in forever, asking the Creator for forgiveness of his insult to Humanity: the insult of arrogance to think he could possibly be justified in opening these scrolls—these keys of hatred of Mankind. Still, he postulated and struggled to understand the mind of God the Creator and his intentions in bringing about such devastation to Man.

Part 1: What Was, What Is, and What Must Be



Chapter 3: When Even Love is Laid Down

(New Georgia Hospital, Eden, Present Day)

The pulse monitoring equipment sounded off with each of Mira's heartbeats as her condition stabilized. President Abel had left some time back to deal with the threat of the indigenous life that wanted—demanded, really—to meet with him. Alone. Her room was quiet at last except for the sound of the medical equipment monitoring her recovering condition. Her eyes fluttered as she floated in and out of consciousness—still healing from the gunshot wound her future self had inflicted upon her.

Door to her room now suddenly ajar, Damon—dressed in a charcoal-blue long-sleeved shirt and black slacks—stepped inside, putting together the pieces of this puzzle. He thought he knew, but a conversation—if possible in her condition—would verify his hypothesis. Slowly, he closed the distance between them till his feet were only inches from the large urethane wheels of her gurney. Closer, till beside her his immortal soul did kneel as his fingertips entangled hers. Her skin filled the need of the familiar, like cloth to a babe. Her scent—somewhere betwixt flower and flesh—cut through the sterility of the environment around them, reminding him of his longing for her when waking right beside her.

“You’ve looked better,” he quipped, smiling at her as she began to come around.

“What...?” Memories stirred as her body shifted. “What happened?”

“I was hoping you could tell me. What’s the last thing you remember?”

Eyes growing wide as the memories slammed home. “Damon, what have you done? I saw myself. She knew things she couldn’t have known any other way.”

He paused briefly, searching for the words as he looked her in the eyes. She was still so very full of life as he pondered the edge between life and death that was really a great canyon. Being here with her now alive, after seeing her severed body bleeding out on his floor, he didn’t have the words to explain the emotions he was still trying to put in place. “I’ve shared a lot with you, Mira, but I can’t say that I’ve told you everything...” He paused, pulling a chair from across the room with his Telekinesis so he could sit beside her while holding her hand. “When I brought Humanity to Eden, I did so in the future. I did that for many reasons. I knew the end was near for all of us. It was coming with or without me—better if I controlled the timing.”

“So, everyone here is from a future timeline? Why,” she asked, biting her lip at the pain of flinching in her bed.

“Because I needed the power from their prayers in the here and now, and because they wouldn’t just come unless there was good reason to come. The End Times colliding simultaneously on all the Seeds of Humanity provided the fuel to make that happen. I can’t rightly take on a deity without myself first being a deity and having some experience at it as well.”

Mira shook her head in understanding that was not entirely fulsome. Now staring at him, remembering her last thoughts of him had been of leaving him, she shrugged back

into her hospital pillow—more guarded than before. “They told me they’d been trying to reach you but couldn’t get to you. Where were you when I was shot?”

Damon gulped, trying to think of a way to explain. He didn’t like keeping secrets from her. That never worked out well. But this was different. This could influence the timeline. This could disrupt his plans. He could *not* reveal this information. “You remember me telling you about Radin?” He assumed she would remember since it was the original timeline Mira Castille he had told, and he assumed he was now talking to the original timeline Mira.

“I do.”

“His girlfriend was having a child. That child was...,” he paused, visibly clenching his fist and knowing that was the very next thing on his massive to-do list to deal with, “...destroyed.”

“Destroyed is a very specific word, Damon. What do you mean destroyed?”

“I mean God the Creator ripped him out of her womb with his hypocrisy and mutilated his unborn body. Like I said...destroyed.”

“You’re leaving out a ton of detail, Damon. What happened, and how did it happen?”

“*I don’t know. Okay!*” Damon shot out of his chair, visibly frustrated. He didn’t know, and it was eating at him. *Is my grandson still alive? What kind of monster would destroy unborn children?* That kind of act was beyond even him to comprehend. He remembered reading of such things in their so-called Bible, and it infuriated him then too. *Who was this monster, God the Creator?* “I built a tether to my grandson, and I was on Kaleion to bring Dallia home to Eden. I felt the tether snap and it would only do so if he was murdered in the womb. So, I can only assume he’s dead. Unjustly so. That’s where I was. I’m sorry I wasn’t here for you when you needed me.”

Sitting up straighter in her bed despite the pain it caused her, she looked at Damon anew. The emotional swings of this conversation had taken her from the brink of leaving Damon to finding new boundaries for her love for him. *If only I understood him...* “You have nothing to apologize for and I’m sorry I put more stress on you. That’s my fault.” Another long pause as she mustered up a genuine smile for him. “I love you, Damon.”

Sitting back down beside her and again taking her hand, his eyes glossed over. That’s when she noticed something very new about Damon. Something about his eyes was... different. More depth. More fire. More clarity. His black gems more backlit and beautiful as if he was somehow renewed in some way she didn’t comprehend.

"I love you too. There's some place I'd like to take you, but you can't go with me like that," he mocked, motioning up and down her less-than-elegantly-hospital-gown-wrapped body with his right hand and a smile.

"Are you going to *Heal* me then?"

Nodding his head, Damon peeled back the bed linen to reveal the cauterized wound in her flank. They'd done a good job repairing it, but he could do better, even with his limited skills in *Healing*. "Hold onto the railing," he urged as he placed both his hands around her wound, forming a cup around it, casting into her with only arcane as an energy source.

Electricity shot up and down her body from the tips of her toes to her bangs as she felt every part of her body tingling and the blood rushing to the wound within. Letting out a guttural moan, she tensed then eased her body back into the bed. "So, where's this place you're taking me? Are we going back home? Earth home, I mean..."

"Uh, sort of," he deflected, picking up her body from the gurney now that it was safer to move her.

"*Where* are you taking me? I'm not sure I like being hauled off by you."

"I thought you loved me." He disarmed her with another managed smile, adding, "I would never hurt you."

"I believe you. But, I'd still like to know where you're taking me."

Before she could protest, a *Portal* ripped super-heated air inches away from the interior of her hospital room door, offering an arid plains landscape on the other side of the *Portal*. A place she hadn't seen since she was a child—the plains of West Texas.

Close to dusk and with temperatures falling fast, Damon knew he had to act fast now as he stood Mira Castille on the West Texas soil before them—tumbleweeds already blowing across the barren landscape.

"This isn't exactly a hot romantic spot, Damon."

Kissing Mira with everything he had and everything he was, Damon leaned into her, laying down his for love her and his love for them as his left hand went from her hip to the back of her head, starting to probe memory by memory, thread by thread, unraveling their relationship from within.

Approaching the sound of a great chord being struck across the strings of time itself, Damon heard manifestations of his actions pounding inside his every thought as he brought forth what must be. Mira's eyes wide open and staring straight ahead while he probed every latent memory of Mira from childhood to the present.

Mira felt a hollow sound in her mind akin to being underwater. Only vaguely aware of Damon's hand on the back of her head, she started to lose awareness as Damon slowly draped his lips over hers.

His left hand traversed from her medulla to her pre-frontal cortex as one memory was erased, then another altered, then another augmented as he slowly built her complete rationale for their breakup. Sweeping through her thoughts, he found the one where she'd decided to leave him just before being shot and augmented that one too as tears began to streak down his stony face in the agony of letting her go.

He was a selfish bastard for doing this, and he knew it. He needed her to survive so he could survive so the goddamned Master Plan could survive. He had to plant her just where he'd found her, or everything would unravel. He deserved the suffering this was levying on him. He deserved to die for this.

Damon's tears now covering his dust-laden boots brought back stark and horrifying memories of his childhood—memories he hadn't accessed in centuries and hoped had died along with the nameless one who bore them.

Releasing his left hand from Mira's beautiful head and face, Damon had to steady her body as she waned against him, threatening to collapse with a blank look about her. Slowly he started walking further southwest to a tent and personnel he knew would be waiting for them.

Moments later, a series of camouflaged encampment tents cropped out of the arid ground of the West Texas soil. Now carrying his beloved Mira since she wasn't aware enough to walk, Damon approached a tall, roughneck-appearing man with a full beard, looking to be in his mid-thirties, who was coming out to greet them.

"I was beginning to wonder if you were going to show up," the bearded man offered, positioning himself to literally take Mira off Damon's hands.

"Just like we arranged. She's not to be harmed in any way, shape, or form. You'll take care of her, or I'll take care of you and your men. Do we understand each other?" Letting go of Mira in far more ways than one, Damon's eyes still watered, though the fire behind them threatened to set the kindling-dry landscape ablaze.

"You don't have to threaten me again. I get it. I'll take personal responsibility for her safety. And thank you for the gift. The ammunition and gold will come in handy for what's coming."

“Yeah, well, that’s privileged information. So, keep that to yourself. When she comes around, you can explain to her what I told you, but keep it simple and keep it limited. The events will speak for themselves.”

“Still, thank you for the heads-up. My friends and I always knew this day was coming, but knowing the specific hour and the specific day...” LT paused in awe of the man he knew barely an inkling. “Are we going to survive?” He paused again, somehow knowing with Damon he needed to be more specific. “I mean, will *my family* survive?”

“It will be just like I told you, LT. You take care of Mira and keep yourself—and your family—alive, and that day will come when I return for you. Though it might not be in the form you might expect. Watch for these...” Forming a *Portal* right in front of LT, Damon stepped through to what remained of his house in Austin, kneeling on the kitchen floor where future Mira’s severed body still lay—weeping.

Knowing her fate both broke and hardened him inside. He felt like he had no love left to offer and didn’t deserve it even if he could. Look what love had brought to his doorstep... A life of an all-consuming hate he still hadn’t learned to put down, a life of allowing himself to be broken repeatedly at the vulnerability of it all, and now being the center of a Master Plan that might unmake all things and all Creation. The good of love was massive, warm, and deep, but its crater of absence was a horrifying cascade of malevolence.

He needed clarity and focus, but right now he needed to do something he never properly did with Dallia. He needed to say goodbye to Mira. Clutching her cold face with rigor mortis long set in, Damon brushed her beautiful Brunette hair as tears streaked first down his face then down hers as he lay down on his broken floor with her—his face touching hers. In a pool of Mira’s still-drying blood, Damon wept for what could have been if not for his damnable Master Plan—and Banthis.