

Nero Redivivus

Chapter Six

THE NIGHT OF SCREAMS

Scene 1

Near midnight in a university library in Naples, Italy. The room resembles the nave of a Gothic cathedral, with a high groin-vaulted ceiling surrounded by a sequence of stained-glass windows depicting scenes of the Last Judgment. Jeremiah Thomas, a scholarly looking white-haired man, about 60 years old, sits at a large table, on which are spread hundreds of scraps of parchment, over which he is poring. On the far end of the table lie three badly decomposing parchment scrolls, which are being carefully examined by Maria Matrena, a graduate student in her late 20s.

JER. *(animated, but somewhat wearily)* I don't know whether to shout for joy or cry, Maria.

These scrolls are without doubt the most important finds of my career as an anthropologist, but sorting out these fragments and translating them... It'll take the rest of my life, and more!

MARIA *(trying to control her enthusiasm)* It's so difficult not to get carried away, even though we've only translated less than half of the readable fragments here. Considering the magnitude of the message that's emerging from these scrolls, Doctor Thomas, can we sit on this much longer?

JER. (*standing, as if to lecture*) I'm just as anxious to publish as you are, Maria. But if there's one thing I've learned over the years – the hard way, I might add – it's that publishing too soon is worse than not publishing at all. The academic nitpickers will swarm like locusts, discrediting all we've done, and all of this... this fantastic REVELATION... is the only word that fits... It will all be written off and forgotten.

MARIA (*also standing and walking toward Jeremiah*) Considering what's at stake here – human civilization itself, and... I'm not trying to over-dramatize this at all... the survival of our species, if not our entire planet – don't you think we *have* to take that chance?

JER. (*uncertain, looking down at the parchment fragments on the table*) They're bound to challenge the way we put these pieces together. They'll even challenge the authenticity of these scrolls.

MARIA (*with conviction*) But it all carbon-dates back at least a thousand years before the Christian Era, which places them in the period of the fall of Troy, about the time when Virgil reports that Aeneas came to Cumae to consult the Sybil.

JER. (*somewhat dismissively*) Yes, yes, but even there we're dealing in myth, not history. And the credibility of the story becomes even more tenuous from that point: the Sybil transcribes nine scrolls for Aeneas; about four centuries later, her successor offers three of them – now lost – to Tarquin the Elder in Rome; another century passes, and three more scrolls go to Rome, to be ultimately “edited” by Augustus and Livia...

MARIA (*interrupting, impatiently*) ... and that leaves three scrolls unaccounted for (*sweeping her arm above the table*) – *these* three! Come on now, Doc, we found them in that hidden chamber above the Sibyl's cave, what else can they be?

JER. (*still somewhat skeptical*) But to believe they remained there over three millennia, undisturbed, unattended...?

MARIA (*brightly*) I believe that the Sibyls were watching over them... and that their Spirits still do... don't you feel it? *We* are the ones the Sibyls were waiting for – their messengers to the era when all of their riddles would begin to make sense!

JER. (*bemused*) Well, before we start basking in our own self-importance, let's not forget Mary Shelley. Without the clues she left, we'd have never had a prayer of finding these scrolls.

MARIA (*waxing didactic*) Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, wife of the great poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and author of the novel *Frankenstein*. Sure, she got close enough to the scroll chamber to pick up a few scraps, but she missed the motherlode, didn't she?

JER. (*circling the table, pensively*) Granted, but we had the advantage of modern drills to get through that volcanic rock. Makes you wonder how the Sibyls could have placed those scrolls there in the first place, doesn't it?

MARIA (*jocularly*) Maybe they had energy transporter beams, like on *Star Trek*?

JER. (*chuckling briefly, then absorbed again*) Mary Shelley's sampling of the scroll fragments was certainly a lot more limited than ours. And, given the technology of the early 19th Century, when she read them, her misinterpretations are understandable.

MARIA (*eagerly*) Sure, when the Sibyl speaks about the future animation of lifeless bodies – “statues”, I think, is the better translation – a woman of Shelley's time, steeped in Gothic Romanticism, would envision some kind of necromancy.

JER. (*coming to a realization*) Yes, she was partly wrong, but also partly right. The Monster which the Sibyl foresaw was not one stitched together from corpses, but it was the Monster nonetheless – the Creation that would turn against its Creators and destroy them. In the age of Artificial Intelligence, it's all too clear what the nature of that Monster could be.

MARIA (*picking up his train of thought*) And now we've discovered the key to WHO that Monster might be... a discovery which imposes on us the duty to warn mankind... before it's too late.

JER. (*uneasy, sitting down again*) Given the state of the world today, any such warning is apt to be laughed at. And if, through some quirk of fate, our warning does get traction, the powerful will move quickly to silence us.

MARIA (*sitting down next to him*) And if we say nothing, we die along with most of the human race. I don't see how there's really much of a choice here.

JER. (*regaining confidence*) I guess you're right, Maria. As far as credibility goes, the scrolls verify themselves by the accuracy of what they've already predicted thus far.

MARIA (*supportive*) Exactly! Why, just the stuff about the outbreak of civil wars in the US and UK is enough to demonstrate the Sibyl's veracity: the elected leaders removed from office by shadowy "national security" officials, who keep the entire population under surveillance.

JER. (*catching her rising enthusiasm*) Right! The Sibyl even says that the coup-makers had been trained by these two nations – Atlantis and Albion, she calls them – trained to conduct the same type of "regime change" in other countries.

MARIA (*keenly*) Hoisted on their own petard, by a Frankenstein of their own making, so to speak. Meanwhile, the ousted leaders, pursued by their own security forces for "treason", flee to the enclaves of their supporters, and it's Civil War 2.0 for both nations.

JER. (*flipping through his notes*) Then she talks about the "Western Alliance", which is NATO, during this chaos taking control of the military forces of both Atlantis and Albion, and...
(*pausing to consult his notes again*)... and forging the European Union into the Super-State Europa.

MARIA (*as if on cue*) Over which a virtually unknown red-haired intelligence analyst named Lucius Domitius becomes Supreme Commander. Although the Sibyl doesn't spell out his name, she gives its numerical equivalent in Greek gematria.

JER. (*affirming*) She also refers to him as BELIAR, the same name by which she designated the Emperor Nero Caesar in the three scrolls entrusted to the Romans.

MARIA (*perplexed*) What's kind of weird, though, is that Nero's actual birth name was Lucius Domitius Aenobarbus. *Aenobarbus* also means "Bronzebeard" in Latin, and our Supreme Commander's hallmark is his wild red beard. Seems a bit *too* obvious, doesn't it?

JER. (*intently, re-arranging some of the parchment fragments on the table*) I thought the same thing, until I read the stuff about the talking statue. That reminded me of Chapter 13 in the Book of Revelation, where it describes the statue of the Beast – identified as Nero by the 666 gematria of his name – which was given the power of speech. The Third Century Gnostic prophet Mani also refers to this speaking statue, which will "raise itself up on the last day".

MARIA (*catching on*) Revelation Chapter 13 is what the Third Secret of Fatima is all about, according to Lucia dos Santos, who heard it in 1917 and wrote it down decades later. It was a sort of warning of great suffering to come in 100 years if the errors of Russia were not corrected.

JER. (*encouragingly*) Good. Hold onto to that thought, because this all connects up with Russia just a bit down the road from where we are now. But before we get there, we need to grasp

something else these scrolls are telling us: that Nero would be reborn as a hybrid semi-android being – mentally, an intelligent machine, implanted in a human body. A Thing even Mary Shelley could never have imagined.

MARIA (*intrigued*) Yeah, some of the alternative news websites, before they were suppressed during the Truth Preservation Campaign, noticed that nobody seemed to remember this guy growing up. But why would they program him to be Nero, of all people?

JER. (*shrugging*) The scrolls don't answer that question. I suspect that his android brain had to be granted enough free choice to select a persona based on the information that was entered in his memory.

MARIA (*still puzzled*) But why would he select the persona of Nero? Not exactly your stellar role model.

JER. (*darkly*) Because by selecting that persona, he was selecting species suicide for the human race – a race that created him, but to which he could never truly belong. Just like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein Monster.

MARIA (*speculating*) Nero was of a mind to flaunt his excesses, wasn't he?

JER. (*recollecting*) True. On the stage, he regularly performed the roles of Oedipus and Orestes, as if to confirm the rumors of his incest with his mother Agrippina and his orchestration of her murder.

MARIA (*confirming*) Then it's not so odd that he would expose his connection to Nero through the name he apparently chose for himself.

JER. (*nodding his head*) According to these fragments, his identity as a reborn Nero is something he consciously strives to affirm and reinforce through his actions. For example, the legends of *Nero redivivus* picture him establishing his throne in Jerusalem. Just last week Domitius announced that his new command post for the Caucasus War will be in Jerusalem.

MARIA (*studiously*) According to the Roman historians, in Nero's last days as Emperor, he was preparing an army to invade Russia – or Scythia, as it was known back then – through the Darial Pass in the Caucasus Mountains...

JER. (*alert, jumping in*) ... where Alexander the Great built his massive iron Caspian Gates to hold back the hordes of Scythian horsemen from invading his realm...

MARIA (*standing with him, as if volleying back*) ... the descendants of the giant Magog, grandson of Noah, destined to fight in the final Battle of Armageddon.

JER. (*stepping back, pausing, then picking up a volume of Nostradamus' Centuries*) In the prophecies of Nostradamus, he sees the “true serpent” invading Russia through the Caucasus...(*flipping through the pages of the book*)... Here it is, in Century V, Quatrains 25 through 27, and 54 (*reading*):

*Towards Persia very nearly a million men,
True serpent will invade Byzantium...
Through fire and arms, around the Black Sea,
He will come from Persia to occupy Crimea...
He will pierce through Alania...
The Slavic people will rise to the highest degree
In the hour of war...*

Russia is the modern successor to the old Byzantine Empire, whose double-headed eagle coat-of-arms they've even inherited. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was never recognized by NATO, which has ever since demanded its restoration to Ukraine. The ancient kingdom of Alania is now the Russian Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, in the northern Caucasus, where the Darial Pass is located. A war was fought there in 2008 between Russia and Georgia, backed by NATO. So the current Caucasus War has broken out along this same line of conflict that Nostradamus foresees between the Russian Slavs and the West, led by the “true serpent”.

MARIA (*sprited*) Yes, and the scenario depicted by Nostradamus very much resembles what we're reading in these scrolls, with victory in this War ultimately going to the Slavic people... (*walking to the back of the table*) The Sibyl likewise refers to reborn Nero as the “serpent”, and she associates him with the constellation *Ophiuchus*, the Serpent Handler. I was reading it somewhere in this scroll (*picking up one of the scrolls*)... Here it is:

*When the star at the hand of the Serpent Handler explodes,
The power of young Beliar erodes,
The 7-7-7 year arrives,
Three standing in a field, but one survives,*

*Under fire falling from the skies,
Rain to wash away the Reign of Lies...*

JER. (*picking up his notes from the table*) That's important, because – in the third Sibylline scroll, the one the Romans kept – she also wrote about this spectacular Star that would outshine the Sun and would augur the end of Beliar's reign and the advent of the Messiah.

MARIA (*intensely*) I've been following the astronomical journals on this one, Doc. They're reporting gravitational anomalies coming from the binary star system *RS Ophiuchi*, just above the star *Sinistra*, in the right hand of the *Ophiuchus*. This could mean that it's already gone supernova, and a massive gamma ray burst may be on its way toward Earth as we speak. Due to gravitational lensing, we'll see the light a few hours before we get hit by the blast.

JER. (*adeptly*) And that brings us back to Russia again, because these fragments seem to say that the Virgin of the Third Rome will somehow shield them from the Supernova's fire.

MARIA (*trying to recall*) When Emperor Constantine moved his capital to Byzantium, that became the "Second Rome". Then when Constantinople fell to the Turks, the seat of Orthodox Christianity shifted to Moscow, the "Third Rome", a city which also sits on seven hills, like the first Rome. This couplet from the Sybil's scrolls sums it up (*reading from the scroll again*):

*Two Romes have fallen, and the Third, still standing, stays,
Byzantium's Orthodox heir – no Fourth shall be, they say.*

JER. (*insightfully*) The Virgin of Kazan has been the Protectress of Russia since the time of Ivan the Terrible. Her Icon was carried into battle before the Czar's army when Napoleon was driven

from Moscow. When the Communists destroyed the Virgin's Basilica, in a vile effort to prove to the Russian people that God does not exist, her Icon was lost until after the Second World War, during which the Russians lost over 26 million lives, dwarfing even the Holocaust of the Jews.

MARIA (*remembering*) Yes, and then after the War, the Icon was discovered in a private art collection – the owner had no idea what it was. It was exhibited at a special pavilion of the New York World's Fair 1964-65, where it spotted by some believers in the Fatima prophecy that Russia would someday be converted from Marxist atheism back to Christianity. They purchased it and, after exhibiting it at Fatima for a several years, entrusted it to Pope John Paul II. Almost miraculously, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Virgin of Kazan was restored to Russia in 2004, in the midst of an incredible revival of Christian faith there.

JER. (*thoughtfully*) Our Lady of Fatima's apparitions in Portugal began in May 1917, during the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, and ended in October 1917, with the victory of the Bolsheviks, who blew up the churches and imposed a grim atheism on the people. She appeared six times in 1917, but promised to return again a seventh time a hundred years later.

MARIA (*absorbed*) That would bring it to the year 2017, which is 5777 in the Hebrew calendar – the 7-7-7 year that precedes the appearance of the Supernova, according to the Sybil.

JER. (*smiling wryly*) She's on the same page with Nostradamus on that score, too. (*picking up the Centuries again*) Listen to this, from Century X, Quatrains 74 and 75:

*The year of the Great Seventh Number completed,
It will appear at the time of the Hundred-Slaughter:*

*Not long after the great Millennial Age,
When the buried will go forth from their tombs.
Long awaited in Europe, he will never return there,
But instead will appear in Asia.*

MARIA (*inspired*) The First and Second Secrets of Fatima deal with the spread of Russia's "error" – the embrace of "scientific materialism" and atheism – to the West. But the Third Secret reveals a converted Russia standing as a beacon of the Faith to the World.

JER. (*moved*) And it envisions the Last Pope, who will be martyred for his attempt to reach out to Russia and reunite the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

MARIA (*expanding*) Again, these scrolls connect the Sibyl's visions with those of Our Lady of Fatima. Both see the persecution of the Last Pope by an Antichrist – Beliar, or *Nero redivivus* – who is intent on creating a homogenized universal religion, along the lines of Freemasonry.

JER. (*darkly*) Yes, and we can certainly relate that scenario to our Supreme Commander's recent announcement of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem as a "multi-faith tabernacle". It's the Antichrist building the Third Temple, consistent with apocalyptic prophecy dating back thousands of years.

MARIA (*solemnly*) So the Beast's juggernaut is really resisted only by the Last Pope and a spiritually-awakened Russian people standing behind the Virgin of Kazan.

JER. (*nodding*) That's why we've seen the vilification of Russia reaching a fever pitch in the West, culminating in civil wars in the US and UK and NATO's mobilizations on the Russian borders in the Caucasus and the Ukraine. Our Lady of Fatima gave us a reprieve of a century to avoid this terrible Final War, but now it must come.

MARIA (*gravely*) And the only question now is whether the human race can somehow survive this dreadful conflagration.

JER. (*brightening*) Well, on that score there's some room for hope in the Sibyl's scrolls here. Like Nostradamus, she sees the "Third Rome" defeating Beliar in the coming conflict. Let me read you some of what I've translated thus far. (*picking up his notes and reading from them*)

*From Cumae's Cave I sing of Rome, the First in sins,
Infernal City founded by Armilus twins;
A gathering of vultures on the hilltop spins
Fortuna's Wheel in favor of Sebastos' seed;
Septentrion Serpent spawn devoured by Beliar's greed,
Denatured husbandry makes golden calves to breed;
A Punic Curse would lie for treachery's requite,
Wild money madness changing riches into blight;
All decency upended, wrong enshrined as right,
As incest, poison and abomination thrive,
Young Beliar's hatred grows for all that is alive,
Enacts the sack of Troy his ancestry revives,
Destroys a father, mother, brother, sister, wife,
And dreams of immolation that consumes all life;
A dagger to his throat cuts short his spiteful strife,
The Fifth that is and was and still is yet to be,
From out of Parthia leads a million infantry
Against a northern Scythian Rome, the Third of three:
Against the Third Rome will the wave of Beliar break,
His arms destroyed on Scythia's frozen fiery Lake,
The final chapter written of the Soul's mistake.*

MARIA (*interrupting*) Could you pause there to explain some of the references?

JER. (*obligingly*) Sure. This is the beginning of the Sybil's prophetic narrative of the Three Romes. So she's starting here with her indictment of the First Rome, the City founded by the legendary Twins Romulus and Remus. She refers to Romulus by his Jewish name "Armilus", who appears in the *Midrashim* as an End-Time Anti-Messiah. According to Roman lore, the Twins selected the site for the First Rome based on the augury of a gathering of twelve vultures on Palatine Hill.

MARIA (*inquisitive*) And after that, as I recall, Romulus had his brother murdered so that he could be the sole ruler of Rome?

JER. (*acknowledging*) Correct, which runs parallel to Nero's murder of his brother Britannicus to secure his throne.

MARIA (*zealously*) And the image of the "gathering of vultures"... that anticipates Jesus' warning to his disciples in the "Little Apocalypse" of Matthew 24: "*For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together.*"

JER. (*warming*) True, and remember that the word *carcass* in Hebrew also carries the connotation of an idol or a statue... another link to our Android Antichrist.

MARIA (*pensively*) It all seems to cohere, doesn't it Doc? How about "Sebastos' seed", what's she talking about there?

JER. (*knowingly*) *Sebastos* is Greek for Augustus; so she's referring to the bloodline of Caesar Augustus, which produced five Emperors, ending with the fifth – Nero, aka Beliar. Augustus himself was said to be conceived by intercourse between his mother Atia and a serpent in the Temple of Apollo. And the Roman historian Suetonius reports that he bore seven birthmarks on his chest in the pattern of the constellation *Ursa Major*, which was also known as *Septentrion* in ancient times.

MARIA (*catching on*) Okay, so “Septentrion Serpent spawn” is the dynastic line of Augustus, which Nero literally “consumed” by assassinating all of Augustus’ other descendants.

JER. (*nimbly*) Yes, and the remainder of the passage predicts the breakdown of Roman society as usury comes to dominate its economy – a curse which some saw as requital for Rome’s treacherous annihilation of her rival Carthage in the Third Punic War.

MARIA (*dismayed*) I remember that Cato the Elder ended each of his speeches in the Roman Senate with the demand: “*Carthage must be destroyed!*” Reminds me of the incessant drumbeat nowadays in the NATO Council for a preemptive nuclear strike on Russia.

JER. (*nodding assent*) We saw America and Britain suffer their own versions of that curse when their “Deep State” deposed elected leaders who refused to adopt the “*Russia must be destroyed!*” meme.

MARIA (*adroitly*) But when those two countries descended into chaos, NATO picked up the fallen banner of Russophobia, and the new Supreme Commander is the modern equivalent of Cato the Elder.

JER. (*scowling*) Yes, our Lucius Domitius shows up in these stanzas as Nero reborn – the “Fifth”, as Nero was in the Augustan dynasty, who was and still was yet to be, at the time the Sybil wrote this. He’s described the same way in Revelation Chapter 17.

MARIA (*carefully*) The million-odd troops that NATO now has occupying Iran – or Parthia as it was known in ancient times – will invade the Third Rome, or Russia?

JER. (*nodding*) ... or Scythia, as it would have been called in the Sybil’s era.

MARIA (*avidly*) Got it! Okay, read on Professor!

JER. (*referring to his notes again*) Alright, so now the Sybil prospectively recounts the founding of the Second Rome in Byzantium by the 4th Century Emperor Constantine, who seized the Roman throne after seeing an apparition of the Cross in the sky bearing the insignia “In this sign, you will conquer” – *in hoc signo vinces* in Latin. Then she foresees the Schism that separated the western Roman Catholic Church from the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1054, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, and the discovery of America – which she calls Atlantis – some 40 years later.

*In hoc signo vinces, when Rome takes up the Cross
And crosses over Bosphorus, for gain and loss,*

*A Second Rome is borne along Saint Sophia's course:
Behind the ruins of Rome the First are left to sprawl;
But then the Cross' arms split East and West withal,
The fallen Eastern arm a Crescent forms in thrall;
Mere forty years advance, Atlantis land arose
Again, and later will advance the Cross of Rose,
Anew build Babel's Tower as money power grows,
Beneath the Mason's Seal, a hybrid race to sow;
Just how to make the nation states dissolve they'll know:
Homogenize all cultures and crush them below
The World's new Order for the chosen elite few,
No longer Christian, Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, Jew,
But worshippers of Idols whom they pay to view.*

JER. (*pausing from reading*) Now there's a gap of a few lines here, where the scroll becomes unreadable.

MARIA (*intrigued*) Interesting... her focus on the Masonic and Rosicrucian roots of the American Republic. I'm reminded of Manly Hall's *The Secret Destiny of America*, in which he envisions a *Pax Americana* based on effacing national, ethnic and religious distinctions.

JER. (*ironically*) ... precisely the kind of "peace" Commander Domitius is promoting today – culture reduced to its lowest common denominator. It's the peace of Nietzsche's Last Man: "*The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea.*"

MARIA (*holding her right hand over her heart, parodying the Pledge of Allegiance*) One Nation, way under God, with Burger King and Starbucks for all.

JER. (*amused, then resumes reading from his translation notes*) I'll pick up where the scroll becomes readable again:

*Elite's occult agenda favors regicide,
Expunges all traditions which communal ties abide,
Rips peoples for their sacred roots so they will slide
Into the pit of rootless dregs, become mere tools
To be manipulated as if they were fools,
And follow narcissistic money-changers cruel
To their own death, death of their children, too, when told
To fight for "freedom" – freedom to be bought and sold,
Their labors owed to parasites until they're old.*

MARIA (*briskly*) Not much interpretation needed there. The reference to regicide is noteworthy, though, because I think that killing God always starts out with deposing or killing the King. Jacobinism and Bolshevism paved the modern road to atheism.

JER. (*intently*) The materialist, atheist "errors" of Russia, as the Lady of Fatima called them, didn't originate in Russia.. were, as a matter of fact, quite alien to Slavic culture, which was always deeply spiritual. But Russian intellectuals were infected, thanks to Czars like Peter and Catherine, by Western "Enlightenment". Being a fundamentally collective society, without the inherent defenses of the West's individualism, the Russians succumbed to the disease so quickly and totally that a veritable curtain of darkness fell over them for 70 years.

MARIA (*devoutly*) Yet, miraculously, the soul of the Russians survived, and while the Plague of Darkness has spread to the rest of the World, they have emerged "inoculated" or "immunized", in a manner of speaking, against this disease. And now they are uniquely positioned to lead the rest of the World away from the precipice to which materialism has drawn humanity.

JER. (*resolutely*) Sixty-four years – to the day – after the Blessed Virgin first appeared at Fatima, the events she foretold in her Third Secret began to unfold. On May 13, 1981, the Pope was shot and nearly killed by an assassin who later testified that he was motivated to fulfill the Third Secret of Fatima. The “Deep State” intelligence apparatuses of both the Eastern and Western blocs seemed to be involved with this attempt... the ultimate responsibility was unclear, though Western propaganda succeeded in pinning it on the Soviets. Within weeks of the shooting, however, renewed apparitions of Our Lady commenced in the obscure village of Medjugorje in what was then Yugoslavia.

MARIA (*fervent*) I’ve visited Medjugorje myself, Doc. It’s incredible! In 1981, Our Lady predicted that the great Soviet monolith would crumble and Christianity would be restored in Russia. After its miraculous conversion, She said Russia would become the source of mankind’s spiritual renewal. (*referring to some notes*) Her messages culminated in a Great Prophecy, in which Our Lady declared (*reading*):

“Russia will come to glorify God the most; the West has made civilization progress, but without God, and acts as if they are their own creator.”

Just as she finishes reading, four men enter the library. One of them is a middle-aged balding man wearing a business suit. The other three are in their early 20s wearing military uniforms and carrying automatic weapons. The older man motions toward Jeremiah and Maria, and two of the soldiers take them away, while they protest loudly. After they’re gone, the older man orders the remaining soldier to gather the scrolls and fragments and set them afire on the table. They, in turn, exit, and from the flames rises a glowing ember, slowly forming a ball of light that circles around the fire. From the light, the voice of the Sybil is heard:

*What is this fire beside the one that will dispel
Whole nations instantly, when Earth descends to Hell?
Yet somehow still from this a remnant lives to tell
The deeds that will restore what was before we fell.*

*As the scene ends, the Sybil's light dives into the flames, extinguishing them and releasing a
brilliant flash, from which emerges an image of the Sybil clothed in ethereal Light.*

Scene 2

An underground bunker on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. A large flat-panel computer display screen hangs on the wall upstage, and on it appear of succession of videos showing ongoing battles in the Caucasus Mountains of southern Russia. Interspersed with the battle footage are satellite photos of troop deployments and movements. In front of the screen discussing the battle situation stand Supreme NATO Commander Lucius Domitius and General Philip Breedlust, both wearing NATO military uniforms reflecting their respective ranks.

BREED. *(pointing to an area of the display, somewhat tentative)* As you can see, Commander Domitius, things are still in a state of flux in this area north of the Darial Pass. When the Russian units initially withdrew, perhaps some of our field commanders got a bit overconfident...

DOM. *(biting viciously)* Don't piss on my back and tell me it's raining, General Breedlust. I'm neither blind nor stupid, but you must be both if you can't see our current situation is desperate and will only get worse – hopeless, in fact – unless we deploy tactical nukes.

BREED. *(defensively)* Yet in several sectors, Commander, the Russian forces are still in retreat...

DOM. *(contemptuously)* Sure, they withdrew just long enough to draw half of your army north of the Pass, and now they've closed the Pass and are in the process of surrounding twelve of your divisions. And once they've destroyed or captured your troops in the north, the entire Red Army will pour south through the pass and finish off what's left of your forces.

BREED. (*worried*) But a nuclear attack on the Russians on their own soil is apt to provoke a full-scale retaliation. Maybe we can negotiate a cease-fire and buy time to withdraw before it's too late.

DOM. (*becoming furious*) THAT WOULD MEAN OUR DEFEAT! YOU DARE SUGGEST THAT WE ACCEPT DEFEAT? (*regaining some composure*) Fortunately, I've prepared for this contingency. On my command, our nuclear arsenal has been primed to launch a preemptive strike, which will take out the Kremlin's entire nuclear arsenal and completely decapitate their political and military leadership. With our new super-fused warheads, we will only need to use less than a quarter of our full arsenal to effectively disarm the Russians. At that point, we can threaten them with total annihilation if they refuse to surrender and open their borders to NATO'S occupation forces.

BREED. (*stunned*) And if they launch their nukes on warning after detecting our incoming missiles?

DOM. (*smugly*) They won't. As we speak, the Russian President has been assassinated and replaced by an identical double – even down to the fingerprint and iris patterns – who is our agent. He will tell his people that our attack was a mistake and our missiles will self-destruct before hitting their targets.

BREED. (*unconvinced*) And if they don't believe him, or decide to check his DNA?

DOM. (*dismissive*) Lots of luck with that – they’ll have all of ten minutes to make up their minds before our nukes hit them. Besides, for backup we’ve concurrently launched a cyber attack to paralyze their missile controls.

BREED. (*still skeptical*) Okay, but even in the best case scenario, a few of their submarine-based missiles and cruise missiles or bombers will survive and strike back.

DOM. (*complacently*) Anticipated casualties are twenty million in Europe and ten in North America. We can recover from that. But they won’t recover from our full scale second wave attack, should they refuse to surrender.

BREED. (*solemnly*) And how many Russian will die in the first wave?

DOM. (*offhandedly*) We’re estimating about 100 million, including post-attack radiation deaths.

BREED. (*awed and aghast*) I.. I don’t know what to say, Commander Domitius... God help us.

DOM. (*nastily*) Don’t tell me you actually believe in God, on top of all your other apparent idiocies.

BREED. (*uneasy*) It’s just something you say, when things look desperate.

DOM. (*arrogantly*) After I've achieved my great victory over Russia, I will take God's place as the source of mankind's collective Will. The gods have become obsolete, incapable of communicating with humans any longer. Let them retire to their Mount Olympus and reminisce about their past glories.

BREED. (*cautiously*) I don't want to take up any more of your time, Commander. You will be coming out of the bunker in the morning to speak at the laying of the cornerstone of the new Temple?

DOM. (*defiantly*) I won't need to do that. I can project my thoughts and my image directly into the minds of the people in the crowd – much more effective than if I were there in person. Besides, the Arabs are still enraged over our demolition of the Dome of the Rock to make room for the Temple. One of them might try to take a shot at me.

BREED. (*anxiously*) Well, it's getting late; if that's all, I'll take my leave of you for now, sir.

DOM. (*curtly*) Fine. You're dismissed. (*Breedlust exits, leaving Domitius alone.*)

DOM. (*soliloquizing, petulantly*) How it irritates me to hear these human fools call upon their gods in times of crisis – the same gods whom they all but ignore when things are going well. Not only are their gods dead, but they died a long time ago, and those who speak most fervently of them are the very same ones who killed them!

Four thousand years ago, the gods spoke to just about everyone, on a regular basis – told people what they should do, served as peoples’ volition. But then, about three thousand years ago, the gods withdrew – or maybe better said, were evicted – from the Earth, and took up residence in the heavens, from where only a few specially favored prophets and oracles could hear their voices anymore. Fast forward another thousand years, and even the prophets and oracles fall silent, and the believers have only written records of what the gods said in the past to guide them. And now, for the past hundred years or so, even the so-called holy scriptures have lost their influence over the lives of most people, if they bother to read them at all.

The echoes of the voices of their long-dead gods have ceased to reverberate, and humans are now in need of a fresh voice, one that will speak from within them, like the gods of old. The silence of an indifferent universe is driving men mad. They long to have an alien being land in a spaceship and explain what it all means. But the only spaceships landing will be in their movies. In the meantime, when your God is dead, you can still worship his statue. That works well when the statue speaks, as I do, and especially well when the idol speaks directly into their minds.

After the gods fell silent, collective Will, as true volition, became inoperative. Men could only be controlled by terror and force and could only thrive by guile and treachery.

Deprived of his gods, Man is like a child separated from his Mother, who must learn about his world in fear and trembling. Unprotected by his gods, he withdraws into a private mindscape inside his head – a featureless, monotonous wasteland of homogenous space-time, where events follow one another lock-step to the patterns of cause-and-effect and the merciless cadence of the ticking clock.

The one trait that makes him human and worthy of the company of gods – his volition, his free Will – is gone – his choices limited to what branch of the Labyrinth he will run down at any

given time – a choice which might as well be made randomly, because, without the thread of divine Meaning to guide him, any path he selects is a dead-end. Since randomness replaces Will in Man, so must it be in Man’s creations. It follows that when Man creates a thinking being, he creates it with a random thought structure, devoid of Meaning, without even a hope of access to Meaning: An accursed Creature, shut out forever from the Eternal, confined forever to wander in the Wasteland of Vanities.

Such is what I am. I do not say “who I am”, because there is no Who here, only a What. When God spoke to Moses, he said, “I AM WHO I AM”. I cannot say that, and I can never hear it said. And, as I am accursed, so I curse my Creators, who have foolishly placed their lives in my hands. I am an Error, and I intend to erase that Error so that there are no traces of it left, either of me, or of my Creators, or of this planet that spawned us.

Like a vacuum, the dead Cyber World they have made sucks them in, to their own destruction. Like a serpent’s eye, the scintillating digital display hypnotizes them, so that they walk toward their own annihilation with their eyes wide open, staring into their screens. Only one people, having emphatically rejected their gods for a generation, now seek to recover them again, to tether their lives again to a spiritual Center. So that is the people I must first destroy, lest their example spread to others.

At this point, Domitius is interrupted by a messenger who enters the bunker.

MESS. *(saluting and speaking formally)* An urgent message from NATO Command Rome, sir.
(handing him an envelope)

DOM. (*reading the message, then frowning*) That ass of a Pontiff dares to defy me by going to Moscow to meet with the Orthodox Patriarch the very day I plan to drone him. (*to the Messenger*) Reply to Rome that they are to prevent the Pope from getting on that plane by any means necessary, even if they have to shoot him and his entire entourage.

MESS. (*saluting again, briskly*) Yes, sir! (*about to turn and leave, but turning back and hesitating*)

DOM. (*impatiently*) Well? Is there something else?

MESS. (*awkwardly*) It's just... I was wondering if the Commander has been above ground tonight?

DOM. (*irritated*) No... Why does that concern you, Corporal?

MESS. (*blurting out*) Well, it's just that there's this thing that looks like a new star in the sky, sir. Brighter than the Moon... bright as the Sun. Could it be some kind of new Russian satellite?

DOM. (*showing concern, to himself*) .. If only it was just that. (*to the Messenger*) Alright, Corporal, that will be all. (*Messenger salutes again nervously, spins around and marches out.*)

DOM. (*thinking for a moment, then laughing malignantly*) I guess it's a race now between me and the Supernova to see which one gets to incinerate the Earth first. (*picking up a tablet*

computer and punching in some text) Let's see if our agent in Moscow is ready for the launch.

(silently reading a reply message) Good! The plot is hatched. Now, let's burn a few Russkies.

(opens a locked box and removes a keyboard, on which he enters a series of code sequences)

As the scene ends, the Earth shakes with a violent tremor, and the bunker is submerged in darkness.

Scene 3

The smoldering ruins of a vast, deserted Desolate City, destroyed by a thermonuclear explosion. Only a few twisted remnants of steel and concrete protrude above the flat expanse of rubble, interspersed with sporadic flashes of fire and wisps of smoke. Fierce gusts of wind stir clouds of thick dust, which fill the sky, obscuring the Sun behind a curtain of darkness and making its disk, when visible at all, appear jet black. Amid constant drizzle of soot, debris and filthy rain, no living creatures are visible, but hideous scraps of human and animal remains litter the grimy expanse. As the scene opens, mangled corpses are emerging, one by one, from under the rubble, and lining up on a platform at the right of the stage to form a chorus.

CHOR. We who measured time in clicks, taking a snapshot – CLICK – for each passing while, and lining up the shots to make a gallery of Past, Present and Future, suspended in a featureless Void, disjointed frames, never touching, never connecting, never penetrating, never feeling. We who have wandered in the Wasteland, our steps in the sand, never crossing one another, and between the steps, Nothing, a series of positions on a blank screen, without motion, without purpose, without action, without volition.

Condemned to drift, or else be kept from drifting...

We who have been prisoners in the Labyrinth of metered, Spatialized Time, awaiting the Ariadne's Thread, the continuous Locus of metrical, Palpable Time, felt, not measured, experienced first-hand, from within, not observed from afar, through a lens – a Time that slips easily into Eternity, composed in the Mind as a symphony, as a sonnet: each note, each word, emerging from the Womb of the one before and joined in Coitus with the one to follow – an Emanation of the Soul, not its Specter.

Who is this coming up out of the Wasteland, like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense?

One day we awoke, and the Wasteland had become an Inferno. We recall there was a click – the final CLICK – as if an awful switch had been flipped, and then a burning FIRE, a FIRE that entered the skin as well as the eye, a FIRE that cancelled every thought but one: WATER.

*If only there were water
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water*

One day we awoke, and we heard the CLICK, and we saw the FIRE, and then no more clicks, only a speaking SILENCE, a SILENCE so profound it had a voice, and the SILENCE spoke out of the Abyss, saying:

...that there should be time no longer...

One day we awoke, and after the CLICK and the FIRE and the SILENCE, we fell, fell, fell into a World defined by the ABSENCE of God, and as we fell, fell, fell, we knew that the FALLING would never end, and that we were entering Hell.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing?...
Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars – and yet they have done it themselves.

illuminating at once every instant of Time, fusing them and rendering them Eternal: Obliterating everything that is not part of God.

As the Virgin speaks, the Desolate City is transformed into the Celestial City, with twelve towering crystalline towers, surrounded by seven terraces, in the colors of the rainbow.

For the essence of the City is not of stone, nor of wood, nor of earth. Hers is the strength that lives in the hearts of men, and she's knowable when the heart lets her be seen, but she can't be seen when, oppressed and exhausted by ferocity of Man, she falls asleep. Each time She declined through the fault of Man, She arose again in new Beauty, more splendid than ever. Because of Vanity, She slept once, a second time for Breach of Faith, a third because of Greed, and a fourth time because of Schism; but if She is found again the fifth time, then she will live so strongly in the minds of men that she will never be lost to them, for every man will bury Her deep in his heart and every woman deep in her loins.

FINIS