

Chapter One

~ Part B ~

A gray foggy mist swirled slowly, silently in the middle of a dark expanse; like a wilderness without vegetation. Other than the rising column of smokey silk, there was nothing... a vacuous empty echo of complete silence. Yet this place, this particularly empty void was still filled with presence. Even a voyeur looking in from the outside would feel it; an uncaged beast that suddenly sees it's prey and calmly turns from what it's doing to begin approaching. The strange surrounding echos with such loud silence that the walls disappear between reality and thought, and in this place we begin to see the slither of silent smoke begin to take form.

At first it looks like nothing more than a flame shaped column of smoke the size of a large garden shrub, but it continues to rise. Then at a point somewhere in the range of a man and a half in height, the rising stops and the form begins to take on details. Constrictions in the girth

tighten an unseen belt and the form of a head and torso appear. Slowly, still silent, arms separate from the torso and in the head, two large holes form where eyes should be.

A gentle hot waft of wind swirls around this floating image sending curls of smoke rising off the body of this presence as it continues to hover a few inches from the ground. Below the holes where eyes should be, another opening begins to suggest its way into the smoke and now for the first time a sound can be heard.

At first there is no form to the sound and it seems to have no source. Instead this disturbance appears to come from every direction at once. It starts out very low and quiet but then begins to resonate in the emptiness as if this were a cave. While continuing on the same low note, the sound reverberates until the tone swells to a climactic power. As the blare thunders, hundreds of new smokey columns appear, squeezed from the very air by the irritating choke of awful tumult. Heads, eye holes, arms and torsos form over every column and all of them float around the central figure, watching their leader and waiting for the call to end.

As the sound dies, what was a hole for a mouth disappears, seemingly absorbed into the formless smoke that forms this head. At the same time, gradually, the gray smokey central column waxes into an almost in-detectable shade of crimson. The figure's arms begin to swirl and move about like some great orator, yet without the accompaniment of words... or even sounds for that matter. The figure rises to a height above the tallest form of head in the surrounding horde and in its place below, an image is formed out of nothing. It's as if a projector is shining its image on a cone of fog. The image is a collection of smaller items which all glow with a red hue that reflects the color the central figure now vibrantly radiates.

The collection appears like the top half of a ball, made of red glowing lights that each bleed

tiny thin strings inwardly, and attach themselves to other items buried deeper within the ominous glowing mass. The image grows like a picture magnified for clarity and those beings gathered around now begin to gyrate and move in with what appears to be some kind of excitement. The horde tightens on the image and as they do clarity is formed within the light and details can be seen... twigs tied together, small bones placed in patterns around the inside all surrounded by a couple of larger bones forming an X and in the very center, over all of the other symbols hovers a steel inverted cross.

As the mirage hovers, glowing larger and revealing the now crimsonly illuminated articles it contains, the wafting figures fluidly fix their heads to the entire surface like jackals crowding around a waterhole in a slowly growing frenzy. As room around the image is filled with every every guest, the red master floating above the scene waves his arms in wide flat paths, then slowly tilts the motion until he is waving completely up and down. The silent animated incantation affects its target and the entire collection of image and spirit is turned on its edge. It almost appears as though it were the watcher, not the spectacle that changed position. Then as all the spirits clamor around the side of the hungry image, a projection shoots from what used to be the bottom and shines a scene on an imaginary wall several feet away.

The scene shows a man chopping at a tree with a sprawling valley of changing leaves and autumn color for backdrop. The color though, is not vibrant or pretty. Instead it appears almost like someone bleached the color with a black and white TV. While the reds, oranges, golds and greens can be detected they are pale and lifeless like the bright setting sun were instead an overcast sky of clouds.

As if overtaken by excitement, one of the gray spirits shoots completely through the

luminous portal and lunges toward the ax wielding pioneer. About 4 feet before impact, two sections of the background appear, refracting the scene slightly, not blurring it but rather creating a clear line that forms the outline of two large human shaped see-through objects. Upon impact, the unsuspecting ghoulish predator dissipates like a blast of compressed air scattering a foggy spray in every direction along the plane of the two figures. At the same time, there is an instantaneous flash of brilliant pure white light and then everything disappears once again. The projection is stopped and the sideways pose of the gathered host is returned to normal.

The figures begin pushing away from the glow with their arms, each of them struggling to free the attachment of their heads from the strange portal. One by one they break free and begin aggressively circling... a shunned pack of crazed carnivores.

Above the mirage, their leader has changed from glowing red to a thick remington gray cloud and the once round eyes have pulled into angry crescents. More arm gestures conjure up two large arms, one longer, one shorter, and both are attached at one end. With a powerful counterclockwise slap, the tip of the larger arm is struck sending it circling backward violently. As it whirls around its tethered center, the shorter arm also travels backward around the unseen circle while the edges of the gray outer perimeter of the wilderness begin to vibrate. The backward spinning picks up speed for several revolutions until both arms stop suddenly at what would appear on a clock as to indicate midnight. The instant they stop, a thunderously loud gong chimes once and the ground shakes in one unilateral crash, sending echos of the unseen impact off into the void.

The thick gray smokey master begins to radiate red once again as his gaze is once again turned upon the glowing portal hovering below him. This time the spirits gather around to watch

but none reach out to touch it. In the midst of the red bleeding lights a human pair of hands can be seen, joined to the end of forearms that disappear into the blackness outside the edges of the crimson ring. Fidgeting with rag strips, the hands are tying bunches of hair into small sheaves and placing them around the inner collection. As the gray host watches, the crimson master extends his hand and touches one of the spiritually wicked on the head. That spirit immediately shoots forward through the portal, grabs both hands and seemingly injects himself into its host through the palms of the hands, giving them a red aura before the hands pull back and fade into nothingness.

As the horde starts to jitter and dance in apparent approval, the crimson master again begins an incantation of gestures. The glowing half ball rises and takes up a position beside the two clock arms. Once in position the master touches the large arm and it begins to spin the other way once more, returning first to the starting position and then coasting just a little beyond. As soon as the arms are completely stopped, his arm reaches out and touches the glowing portal and it once again shines a projection onto the imaginary screen to the one side.

Again the scene on the wooded edge of the mountain appears, but this time the figure in the screen is a different human standing amongst the scrub-oak shadows at the edge of a grove of evergreens. He is robed head to toe in a hooded cloak and like the first scene, the color is all washed out gray with only the exception of two glowing red hands. Clutched in their grasp is a long thin hollow pipe which the figure raises slowly and places into the lower portion of the dark shadow below the cape's hood. All movement appears to stop for a long moment when, breaking the silence can be heard a quiet, muted popping sound.

The crowd of watching specters all gasp together, disrupting the silence with their sounds of

unified suspense. On the screen, trees shrubs, rocks and sky begin to swirl, blurring all understanding of what should be seen until with a long slow crashing sound, another figure appears on the screen, falling to the ground in slow motion. As his head bounces off the ground a tumultuous shout of exuberance thunders uncontrolled from the wicked gathering and they dance violently, shouting praises to their hovering superior.

With obvious indulgence the floating figure, glowing red and surrounded by his swarm of minions, extends his hands drawing in more pleasure from the worship of his admirers. As if rewarding a dog, the chieftain touches his hand to the portal and sweeps it down from its hidden hook, and throws it to the center again where it began. The cries and hoops of laughter and dark delight rise together and then one by one the spirits swirl in to the center where they each take turns skimming the red light from the portal with their hands and lifting it to their unseen mouths. After each of them drinks, they are thrown back, catapulted outward and over and into the crowd like a spiritual fountain of fog.

The celebration continues through the night as the scene slowly fades from the foreground and blackness swallows up the now shrinking dream.