

Angelic Deception

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7:48 PM JST

The dazzling lights of Tokyo blackout even the most brilliant of heaven's stars, but they also serve as a luminous celebration of modern civilization's climax.

I'm gonna miss it.

Warm air rushes out into the winter night as Jared holds the glass door of Shibuya Tsutaya open for Sakura. It's in the all glass Q-Front building, a Tokyo landmark. A two-story Starbucks is housed on the first two floors.

Sakura speaks with a heavy Japanese accent that Jared finds adorable. "Please get me one of whatever you having." Then she gracefully strolls to the escalator entrancing every man within visual range with the gravitational intensity of a black hole.

Her fluffy black coat is open in the front and her gray silk blouse is unbuttoned enough so that her bounteous bust is spilling out. Her chunky black Ugg boots accentuate her slender legs and her titillating thigh gap. Her petite build and small Hello Kitty purse deceive the gawking onlookers about her age. They should all be ashamed. Her black microskirt is merely ornamental and her hot-pink leggings are so thin the outline of her frilly thong is visible. Mmm, mmm, mmm, dat ass!

Jared admires Sakura's divine rump, along with the other ogling men, as she ascends the escalator like a sex goddess returning to the celestial realm. Her booty is so taut, so perfectly shaped, that he struggles to hold back tears of joy. I solemnly vow to penetrate those sweet cheeks!

The Starbucks is laden with the arousing aroma of percolating coffee and the sweet scents of caramel and chocolate. It's considered the world's busiest Starbucks, so busy that they don't allow customers to order any size other than a Tall, for which they charge the price of a Grande. Is there even a term for overcharging for an already overpriced product? Absolutely *ridiculous* may suffice.

Upbeat American music drifts down from speakers set in the ceiling. The bubbly music mixes with the chatter of Japanese youth. There probably isn't anyone over the age of thirty-five in the entire eight-story building. There must be some type of secret age specific reflection tech on the roof. Either that, or the older folks purchase their magazines, manga, movies, and music somewhere less crowded.

Jared is wearing a black fedora hat, which is common in Japan, tight fitting jeans, a Bruce Lee t-shirt expressing his affection for the culture, black Van sneakers with bright purple laces, and a neo-punk style olive-green jacket. He blends into the fashionable crowd with ease. Well, as much as a white boy from Philly can hope for at least.

He orders his drinks and pays with yen he earned providing private English tutoring for the equivalent of fifty dollars an hour. English is the second most spoken language in Japan. So finding students to tutor is not a problem.

By the time Jared has shoved the change into his wallet and his wallet into his pocket, his caramel macchiatos are ready. Now that's service, and with a smile too.

I'm gonna miss it.

The warning on the side of his paper cups, 'Careful, the beverage you're about to enjoy is extremely hot,' is written in English. There are no kanji or hiragana on the cups. I guess only

native English speakers are stupid enough to believe that their latté is anything other than flesh boiling hot, or maybe we're just the only ones who will attempt to sue for our own clumsiness after spilling a blistering coffee all over ourselves. God bless America.

Jared walks the stairs, rather than the narrow escalator, up to the second floor. He takes a seat on a wooden-topped stool, places his caffeinated sugar-explosions on the wooden bar, and looks out at the bustling Shibuya Crossing in awe.

Tokyo Drift is so full of shit. There is way too much congestion to be drift racing through the scramble crossing. Only Godzilla or a gladiatorial mecha battle could part this sea of commuters and consumers. Not to mention the non-stop flow of city buses, double-decker London cruising party buses, Jap and Euro compact cars, motorcycles, dirt bikes, scooters, mopeds, trikes, people of all ages on bicycles, and various colored taxis; yellow, black, navy, teal, white, pea-green, blue and white, orange and gray, lime-green with yellow stripes on the doors, and burnt orange with white hoods: It's an orgy of color and light and commotion.

I'm gonna miss it.

After a messy breakup, cough *slut* cough, Jared got addicted to pharma-opiates, and one way or another burned all his bridges with his family and all his real friends. Drugs are bad, don't do drugs.

After watching his sidekick overdose, Jared did a stint in rehab. Then his ex started hanging around the bar he tended, and he felt the sudden urge to travel. He'd always been attracted to Asian culture, so he bought a one-way ticket and left with no preparation other than purchasing a copy of Survival Japanese, a pocket-size dictionary. Thank Buddha that Sakura speaks fluent English.

The problem is Jared's tourist visa expires in two weeks. Without a bachelor's degree and a company sponsor or a marriage license, a visa permitting a stay of more than ninety days is impossible to obtain. He doesn't want to leave without Sakura. But he could never ask her to forfeit her life in wondrous Japan to move to the states: She might say yes.

And there is nothing waiting for him back home but a semi-friend's beat-up couch to lay his head on and his '99 Honda Nighthawk motorcycle.

Most Japanese view sex with a gaijin as socially acceptable, but marriage to one is considered a dishonor to oneself and one's family. If you marry a gaijin you are thereby regarded as a failure, as if you were too distasteful or disgraceful to acquire a Japanese mate, forced to settle for a foreign spouse. So slipping some bling on Sakura's finger to obtain a spousal visa is not happening. She's already cursed as the black sheep. If she married me her father would most certainly commit hara-kiri after dulling the katana with my blood.

Jared sighs. Damn. What am I gonna do?

Sakura squeezes the back of his neck. "It'll work out." She's a firm believer in the power of positive thought. But she's only twenty-three, so her innocent naivety is excused.

She takes the stool next to Jared and sips her macchiato. She had gone up to the sixth floor to buy the newest issue of her favorite josei manga. Young and old, the Japanese read more manga than anything else.

Sakura's soft brunet hair is cut in a natural airy medium-length hairstyle with layered bangs and a ravish-red dyed stripe. She's sexier cute than the most popular Japanese adult video idol. She's a *serious* hard ten. What does she see in me? I'll never know, but if I had to guess, I'd say it has something to do with the magnitude of my Caucasian lightsaber, *and* I make her laugh.

The Japanese are firm believers in astrology, so according to Sakura, because Jared's sun sign is Sagittarius, he embodies the element of fire, and her sun sign being Libra means she embodies the element of air, and air feeds fire and fire warms air, so therefore they make an excellent couple. When she tried explaining their moon signs and rising star signs he quit arguing and nodded his head from time to time as if he had any idea what she was talking about. I'm thirty-years-old and I still have to remind myself that debating with a woman is useless.

Jared met Sakura at a Halloween bash at Womb in the Dogenzaka district. It's one of Tokyo's largest nightclubs and one of the top voted clubs worldwide. It was even featured in the film *Babel*. Though unlike the movie, he didn't notice anyone on ecstasy, and the look of someone rolling on beans is unmistakable.

Jared had come dressed as an American tourist, meaning no costume. Sakura was dressed as an angel, and her best friend, Miki, as a devil. At the start of the evening when Jared had an angel and a devil grinding each leg while playfully kissing each other, he knew it was going to be one of the greatest club experiences of his life. Club Roxy in New York had up until that point been his finest club experience, but Roxy paled in comparison to Womb. The music was a bit repetitive that night, and the Japanese all dance *exactly* alike, but the jubilant ambiance and joyful acceptance of the people were amazing. Even the bartenders grooved as they poured drinks and the bouncers wore smiles as they roved the crowd.

At six a.m. when the party was finally winding down, Miki left with a Euro tourist to visit a local love hotel. Jared and Sakura went to a nearby Chinese restaurant for breakfast, before taking the subway to Sakura's studio apartment in Akihabara. Later that day Jared returned to bAKpAK Tokyo Hostel to collect his belongings, the little that he owns, and has spent every night at Sakura's apartment since.

To her family's utmost dismay, Sakura works at a cosplay pub. She's basically a classier version of a Hooters' girl, except she wears a different sexy costume every day, including dressing as popular anime and video game characters. Jared's personal favorite is when she dresses as Faye Valentine from *Cowboy Bebop*, with her cheeks sticking out of the yellow short-shorts. He thanks God each night that they let her wear the scandalous outfits' home. It makes role-playing a nightly indulgence.

Sakura squinches her face in an expression of pain and cries between clenched teeth. "Itai."

She has been experiencing short intense headaches for the past two weeks. They both have. And they seem to be occurring more and more frequent.

Most headaches, even migraines, are caused by lack of water or essential oils. Something he learned during rehab detox. Back in the states, Jared slurped a tablespoon of flaxseed oil every morning. But the typical Japanese diet consists of a lot of fish, therefore no Omega fatty acid deficiency. And if I force any more water down my throat I'll drown, that is if I don't blowout my kidneys first.

Of course, their every evening debauchery of drunken erotic cosplay probably isn't the best medicine. Though Jared had endured enough hangovers in his teens to abide by a strict rite of washing an aspirin down with thirty-six ounces of water before falling down in worship of Morpheus, god of dreams.

Therefore our random headaches must be caused by stress due to our forthcoming unavoidable separation. What else could it be?

"I'm not stressed," Sakura answers. "It will work out somehow."

Jared cocks an eyebrow. "I didn't say you were stressed."

She narrows her eyes at him. “Yes, you did. I heard you.”

“I didn’t say it out loud,” he flares his brows at her, “I *thought* it.”

Sakura pouts. “You tease me too much. Japanese girls not like that.”

Jared looks deep into her beautiful almond-shaped chocolate eyes. “I promise I’m not teasing you.”

She gives him a half-hearted scowl. “So now I X-Man?”

“Yeah, I wish.” Jared grins. “You would look *awesome* in blue and yellow spandex. Your code name could be Scrumptious-Asian-Girl.”

Sakura protests, “I not have x-gene or wear tacky colors.”

“So you’re telling me you don’t like the name.” He strokes his chin, contemplating.

“How about Weapon Crazy-Hot? Or Lady Salacious? Or the Sexy Samurai?”

Sakura rolls her eyes with a snort. “I *not* a mutant psychic.”

“Okay, fine, there may be a less *marvelous* explanation.” He sips his macchiato. “Have you ever heard of thought jumping?”

Sakura shakes her head no with a look of skepticism.

“It’s when you’re thinking of something totally out of left field, and the person next to you mentions the exact same thing. It happens more often between people who spend a lot of time together.”

“Jared,” she sighs, “I think that is called *coincidence*, not leaping brain.”

“I read about it in this spiritual book my brother had lying around. Sixth Sense by Stuart Wilde. It explained that an electron orbiting the nucleus of an atom can *jump* from a higher orbit to a lower one. But when it does, it doesn’t travel across the space between the orbits. It just disappears from the higher orbit and simultaneously appears in the lower one. It has to do with quantum mechanics. It was a *smidgen* above my usually reading level of comic books. But it was very convincing.”

A massive flock of pigeons flies across the window stealing Jared’s attention. He looks out over the crowded scramble crossing and his eyes go wide as the chattering of the Starbucks turns to hushed gasps.

The sea of commuters and consumers along with the non-stop flow of city buses, double-decker London cruising party buses, Jap and Euro compact cars, motorcycles, dirt bikes, scooters, mopeds, trikes, people of all ages on bicycles, and various colored taxis, they have *all* come to an unbelievable grinding standstill halt.

It wasn’t a flock of pigeons that had crossed the window. At the center of the scramble crossing, stands a bare-chested man in a white loincloth, eight-foot-tall, with rippling muscles, golden hair, and white wings. Not a man. An angel.

Holy shit! My crazy Christian fanatic mother was right? I’m gonna burn. Extra fucking crispy.

Sakura whispers Japanese, “Muika dake.”

Jared tears his wide eyes away from the angel to witness Sakura falling from her stool. He catches her in his arms, and a wave of dread comes with her like a crashing arctic surge as he realizes what she had whispered. “*Only six days.*”

Monday, December 24, 2012

9:00 PM JST

Sakura's twelfth-floor apartment balcony has an awesome view of the neon-lined streets of Akihabara, Japan's world-class renowned cyber town. Its streets are utterly barren in comparison to its usual bustle. The world is in shock.

Jared gulps a swig of his Nikka Whisky and Coca-Cola, then closes the glass balcony doors behind him and plops down on the upright futon, to continue watching the 32" LCD on the opposite wall.

The end of the Mayan calendar passed without the second coming of the Maya surfing volcano tsunamis across the globe. New Agers everywhere are distraught.

Instead, four biblical archangels descended upon St. Peter's Square and spoke directly with Pope Benedict, while lesser angels appeared in every major city around the world. The following day the Pope explained to the masses that humankind has been given a choice. I'm confident you know all that religious jazz about free will. Anyway, option one is we surrender our free will so that the angels may lead us back to Eden. I'm not sure what that entails exactly. Naked gardening I suppose. Option two is we continue to destroy our planet and eventually ourselves, but at least we get to do it under our own free will. We were given forty-eight hours to decide.

Call me a skeptic, but I voted for self-destruction. Jared takes another substantial gulp of his mixed drink.

No fallible electronic voting booths for the Almighty. A simple acceptance prayer will do fine. And the results are in: Pope Benedict, covered live by CNN International, announced that by majority vote, our God given free will has been surrendered.

Guess I better find a hoe and drop my undershorts. Nude agriculture, here we come.

The Pope, with archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel standing to either side of him, towering over him like winged Nephilim, is still blabbering on as he has been doing for the last hour. Here are the highlights so far:

Vatican City is now the capital of the world. There seems to be more angels circling the holy city than there are clergymen within its walls. The armed forces are *divinely* ordered to disassemble all armaments and disband. Even with a presidential order, it's improbable that the American military will comply. Hoorah! Law enforcement and civilians are to hand in all weapons to be destroyed, including sport and hunting weaponry. Tibet will be a free nation before I give up my ninja stars. Hi-ya bitches! Oh, and apparently the return of Christ and the Rapture were never meant to be taken literally. So there's no getting off this crazy rock. Also, the Antichrist has been here all along. And no, it's not Islam or vegan hippies. It's human ruled governments. Big freaking surprise, not really.

Jared hears the clank of the front door unlocking. He mutes the TV and places the remote on the end table beside his drink as Sakura enters, flips on the lights, and re-locks the door.

He notes, "You're home early."

She drops her keys into her Hello Kitty purse and plunks it on the kitchen counter. "Few customers. Too many girls." Her voice is low and even with dispassion. Obviously, she has seen the news. Guess I'll have to cheer her up with my *charm*.

Sakura pulls off her fluffy black coat and hangs it in the small closet by the door, then tosses her white half helmet with riding goggles strapped atop on the closet shelf. She's clothed as a risqué version of Belldandy from the *Oh My Goddess* manga and anime series. Her blue and white short-dress exaggerates her ample cleavage and showcases her slim waist, while her blue thigh-high stockings flaunt her slender legs. The outfit also includes a fake gold choker with matching golden bracelets, with a blue diamond painted between her eyes and off to the side of

each eye. She pulls off her white high heels and leaves them by the door, as is the custom in Japanese homes.

“That’s okay, babe,” Jared grins with a look of vicious desire, “because I’m ready to spear the *Jesus* out of your sweet little sideways puss-box.”

Sakura smiles with a raised eyebrow, her hands placed stout upon her rounded hips. “Are all American boys so romantic?”

“I can do roses and chocolate,” Jared retorts. “But you seem more like the spanking and naughty talk kinda gal.”

Her lips twist into a sardonic grin. “Can I not have both?”

“Well, we may have to ask the Vatican’s permission first.” He rises with fervid expectation. “So for now, how about I turn off the old man wearing the stupid hat and pull out the futon?”

She offers him an apologetic frown. “I not in mood. You want sloppy blowjob instead?”

Sakura is *always* in the mood. Therefore she must really be feeling blue. But that doesn’t mean I’m gonna say no to her luscious little mouth. “Are you ready to show your gaijin sensei your new and improved Suck Fu?”

She smirks. “You so crazy.”

Jared recently introduced her to American porn via the Interwebs, in an effort to expand their sexual escapades to include more than her lying there squirming and squealing while he has his way with her. She’s made impressive progress in a short period of time.

Gliding the tip of her tongue over her pink pouty lips, Sakura sashays over to him with an arousing expression of carnal lust. “Otoochan, I hungry for your big cock.”

Screw your Freudian psychology. I *love* it when she calls me Daddy!

Sakura pinches the ends of the gold laces of the bow binding her dress top and slowly pulls them outward until the bow is unwoven. Her top falls open, releasing her generous bounty of beautiful bosoms with a tantalizing jiggle. Gripping her elbows, she squeezes them together and puffs out her chest, magnifying their splendor.

Jared chomps his bottom lip with a predatory snarl of ravenous gluttony at the enticing sight of her bodacious breasts. He is overcome by a desire both exotic and enthralling. I wanna impregnate her so I can nurse from her succulent tits! I wanna spew my virile seed into her fertile womb to watch her belly stretch while her peaks swell with milk! I wanna lap warm cream as it seeps from her nipples and dribbles down her bursting bosoms!

Sakura cries out with a shuddering gasp of surprised jubilation, as Jared seals his mouth over a pink nipple with a thirsty groan of elation. He gropes her perky pillows as he sucks and nibbles each teat, back and forth, with famished moans of felicity, as she whines and whimpers, “*Ooh, Otoochan. Ooh, Otoochan. Yes.*”

At length, when he has had his fill, Jared ascends and kisses her mouth with sweltering passion, his palms cradling her breasts as he pinches and pulls her stiff nipples.

In an apparent attempt to tame his surging obsession, Sakura sucks his tongue slow and soft as she gently fondles his erection through his pants.

Relinquishing his covetous clutching of her bosoms, Jared fumbles with his belt, unbuttons his jeans, pulls Sakura’s hand away from his groin to unzip, and finally yanks his pants down.

Sakura yields his tongue and takes a step back. Spreading her legs, she bends over at the hip, hands clasped behind her back like a good little girl, whips her brunet hair over to one side, and laps a pearly bead of pre-cum from his purple mushroom jutting out from under the

waistband of his navy boxer-briefs, before pecking the tip with a tender kiss that shoots warm tingles of bliss throughout his body. Turning her head, she kisses her way down his long shaft over his underwear and nuzzles her button nose against his balls with a giddy giggle. Then pecks her way back up his shaft to his exposed cockhead and butterflies her tongue over the tip, as Jared clenches his fists and curls his toes while groaning toward the ceiling in delirium.

After repeating this torturous teasing a few more times, she cranes her neck, gazing up at him with puppy-dog eyes, and coos, "Ootochan, may I suck your big cock now?"

Jared bites the inside of his cheek, fighting the intense compulsion to fist her hair and savage her mouth, and tears his boxer-briefs down, unleashing his pulsating prick. "Yes, sweetheart."

Sakura affords him a demure smile, batting her lashes. "Thank you, Ootochan." And at last, with a rapturous moan, she steadily stretches her plump, silken lips over the fat head of his manhood and slides them halfway down his thick shaft until his cockhead strikes the back of her throat.

Jared's eyelids flutter, as he growls, "Ooh, *fuck* that's good!"

Her cheeks concave with the effort of sucking, her tongue swabbing back and forth, her puckered lips glide up and down his shaft a few times before leaving the head with a wet pop. "Ootochan, your cock tastes so yummy." She juts out her tongue and playfully drums his prick against it, while humming, "Ahh."

Jared mockingly chides her. "Don't play with your food, sweetie."

Sakura blows a raspberry on his cockhead to spite him. Then drags the tip of her tongue up and down the underside of his shaft several times as though it's a long lollipop, before lapping and sucking at his clean-shaven balls with lustful moans. Taking his cock into her mouth again, she bobs on little more than the head while swirling her tongue around and around, until Jared finally palms the back of her head and shoves her face down, forcing her to take him deeper. Every time she ascends to the tip, he pushes her down again, jabbing her throat and evoking a gagging cry from her sucking lips.

Proving herself a true submissive, she endures his rough treatment without resistance, her hands remaining clasped behind her back, her mewling mouth continuing to suck with zeal, as he plunges her face down again and again until eventually Jared takes pity on her and ceases.

Squatting down, Jared cups her cheek as she pants for air, and he permits, "You may now use your hands as well." And he kisses her wet lips with relish as she pumps his sopping prick with her soft palms.

He rises and Sakura looks up at him with imploring eyes, beseeching for his approval as she twists her small hands up and down the lower half of his dick at a leisurely pace, while gliding her lips up and down on the upper half and moaning with insatiable yearning.

Jared groans, "Ooh, babygirl, that feels *beyond* amazing."

She smiles with pride around his dick in her mouth and then closes her eyes to focus more intently on milking and sucking his cock. She soon works up a bubbling lather of warm drool that coats his balls and dribbles down her pumping forearms, as she sucks his throbbing member with greater and greater vigor while maintaining a sluggish speed, moaning with more and more volume, losing herself in the pleasure of servicing him.

Outside the proverbial bedroom, Sakura's spunky and strong-willed, but once Jared's pants come off she becomes his obedient pet. She undeniably wallows in the serenity of surrendering herself to him.

Arching over her, Jared flips up the back of her short-dress, exposing her boy briefs, which he wedges into her crack. He spanks her cheeks a few times, driving cries from her suckling mouth, then kneads her rump with rapacity. “You’re gonna give up this *exquisite* ass to me someday.”

Sakura whines, “No way, Ootochan.” And returns to gorging herself on his prick, now attempting to cram it down her throat but choking each time.

When the urge to throw Sakura to the carpet and pillage her virgin rump becomes overwhelming, Jared releases her cheeks, clutches her head and sits back on the futon, pulling Sakura down to her knees.

Jared sips his whiskey and cola as he watches Sakura bob and drool and moan in ecstasy, her hair and tits bouncing. With his free hand, he fondles her jouncing breasts, enjoying the weight of them in his massaging palm, savoring the feel of them spilling through his squeezing fingers. The sight and sounds of Sakura worshiping his manhood with reverence are the most hallowed rite he has ever witnessed.

She repeatedly coughs and gags, choking herself on his dick, drawing tears from her fluttering lids, which smear her blue eye makeup down her cheeks. Her foaming slobber has oozed over her chin, down her neck, and between her cleavage to soak into her dress. She’s a hot whorish mess, and yet she has never looked more adorable and sexy.

Long after he has finished his drink and is overdue for a refill, Jared decides to take advantage of Sakura’s lubricated cleavage. Running the fingers of one hand up the back of her scalp, he grips her hair and pulls her mouth from his cock. “Squeeze those terrific titties together.”

She pants, “My pleasure, Ootochan.”

In a crouched position, staring into her almond-shaped chocolate eyes, Jared thrusts his steely erection between Sakura’s saturated bosoms, the head pushing through her soft flesh to pop out the top of her cleavage with each roll of his hips.

Gazing up at him, she purrs, “Ootochan, your big cock feels good on my boobies.”

Still clutching her hair, Jared guides Sakura backward onto the azure carpet. With her head pulled forward so her chin touches her chest, Jared continues to hump her mashed breasts, plunging his cockhead into her puckered lips with each lunge.

Eventually, he ascends, slides his left arm under her lower back and heaves her into the air, flipping her upside down as she squeals in surprise and he rests her pelvis on his shoulder, her hip pressed against his cheek. “Suck Daddy’s cock while I make another whiskey and cola.”

Sakura slurps on his dick while fondling his balls and stroking his shaft, as he carries her into the kitchen and mixes himself a drink. I love fucking a spinner!

Back in the living room slash bedroom, after a few satisfying gulps, Jared sets down his drink, grasps Sakura’s slim waist, and repositions her so her crotch is in his face, her thighs hugging his neck. He pulls her panties aside to lap her feminine nectar from her pink slit. Her cunt juice is sweet ambrosia to his palate. The taste of her on his lips is a potent aphrodisiac. I wanna wreck this pussy!

As Jared flickers his tongue tip over her tiny bundle of nerves, he delves his middle finger into her moist puss and whirls it around, rubbing her inner erogenous area. When her thighs begin to twitch, a sure sign of a nearing climax, he retracts his slick digit and twirls the tip over her rosebud. Applying gentle pressure, he worms his finger into her bud and gradually burrows farther until he’s three knuckles deep. He slithers his digit in and out with a careful tempo, wishing it was his dick. I must pulverize this booty!

Hanging upside down, Sakura finally manages to stuff his meaty dick down her gullet. The glorious sensation of her snug throat strangling cock is mind-bending.

Overpowered by vehement rapture, Jared forgets all restraint and bucks his hips, fucking Sakura's gagging throat hard, fast, and deep, while continuing to suck her clit and finger her ass.

When her fingernails claw at his clenching rump in desperation, he regains some semblance of his senses and halts his barbarous assault on her throat. Twisting her right-side up, he sets her on her feet, spins her around, and shoves her onto the futon so she's leaning over the back, hands spread against the wall, her ass propped for pummeling.

Jared kneels on the futon, grips her rounded hips and succumbs to his foolish craving to forgo a condom. He slams his pelvis against her firm cheeks with a grunt of effort, spurring a screech of ecstasy from Sakura's throat. He immediately begins to plow her clutching cunt swift and hard, fucking her raw for the first time and driving mewling cries from her lips.

The rhythmic spanking of her cheeks synced with her joyful wails are an elysian symphony to his ears. The genuine expression of triumphant jubilation on her makeup-smeared face as she looks back at him is awe-inspiring. The unbridled feel of her taut cleft clenching his cock is exhilarating and intoxicating.

Sakura utters a devastated cry, "*Otoochan*, I'm going to cum!"

"I'm gonna cum with you!" And he thrusts like a jackhammer Decepticon.

Sakura screams, "Ee! Ee! Ee!"

Jared roars, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

And together they quake with orgasm, Sakura's inner muscles seizing up as Jared's balls pull tight. Searing jets of splooge erupt from Jared's prick as Sakura's pussy squirts scorching juices.

When her euphoric tremors wane, Sakura twists around and gobbles down his half-engorged member, invoking blissful aftershocks of pleasure while sucking him clean and imbibing his last drops of spunk, until he is completely flaccid.

She looks up at him, licking her lips. "That was hottest sex ever. But we can't do that again. I can't afford to get pregnant."

He pecks her forehead. "Agreed."

Sakura puts off showering and changing to have a drink first. She reties her short-dress and cleans up in the bathroom while Jared pulls on his boxer-briefs and mixes her a beverage. They sit down and Jared grabs the remote from the end table and reaches with his pointer to jab the mute button, but it seems to indent before his finger touches it. What the hell? Am I hallucinating?

Sakura questions, "Hallucinating? What are you speaking about?"

Jared jumps up with shocked excitement. I wasn't speaking, I was thinking.

Sakura rises from the futon. "No...how you speak without moving your lips?"

"I *wasn't* speaking," Jared exclaims. "You read my mind again."

"Jared, what is your trick? I not know leaping brain!"

He shakes his head. "This is not thought jumping. This is *outright* Prof Xavier telepathy!"

"Stop teasing me!" Sakura stomps her stocking-shod foot. "I not mutant!" She crosses her arms. "No more sex for you!"

Jared insists, "I swear to *Buddha* I'm not teasing you."

Sakura squeezes her eyes shut in intense pain and holds her temples. Usually, the headaches only last about three seconds, but it has to have been at least fifteen seconds already

and she's still hurting. She looks like she might faint again. She didn't remember whispering six days when she awoke the last time, and she didn't believe that she had said it at all.

Jared grips her slender shoulders. "Babe, you okay?"

Sakura's eyes shoot open, wet with bursting tears. "We must leave! Now!"

"Why? What's wrong?"

The hairs on the back of Jared's neck tingle. He turns toward the balcony as icy dread courses through him. A vibration flows across the apartment from the balcony to the front door, kicking pictures off the walls and popping every light bulb. A high-pitched sound that threatens to burst their ear drums follows. The shrill amplifies until the balcony doors quiver and then explode with a violent roar, glass shards spraying across the room.

Jared throws out his hands in reflex, and by some miracle, neither he nor Sakura bare a scratch.

An eight-foot-tall angel, radiating a magma-orange aura, lands upon the balcony, tucks his white feathered wings and steps through the shattered doors. The dogmatic look upon his impeccably sculpted face is that of righteous slaughter.

Damn, I knew I should have read *The God Delusion*. Is it too late to become an atheist?

The angel's bare chest expands as he pulls in a deep breath.

Jared feels tingles on his neck again. "Shit!" He throws his arms tight around Sakura and forces her to the carpeted floor as the angel lets out another horrific roar.

The PS3, end tables, futon, LCD bolted to the wall; everything in the entire room is thrown crashing into the rear wall of the apartment.

Jared, clenching Sakura firmly, slides and then rolls across the carpet by the force of the roar, and bashes into the underside of the futon.

His ears ring, his head spins, and his stomach churns.

The furious angel marches across the room, death etched into his face.

Heart pounding with fear, Jared grips hold of a half broken end table, leaps up on wobbling legs, and flings it at the angel with every muscle in his body.

Maybe it is a play of the angel's aura. Maybe an illusion. But it appears as if the wooden table carries a blast of energy with it. The table explodes into splinters and the angel is forced back three strides.

Jared grabs a stunned Sakura and pulls her to her feet, shouting the obvious plan of action. "Run!"

Sakura scurries over her demolished belongings, flips the deadbolt and tears open the door, smacking busted electronics aside. Jared grabs her purse from the floor and his jeans out of the kitchen sink and follows her out of the apartment.

Barefoot and trembling with adrenaline, they sprint down the hallway.

This can't be fucking happening!

Sakura pleads, "Chotto matte kudasai!" And the couple in the elevator hold the door until they make it inside. "Arigatou."

Jared holds the close door button, and just before the doors shut completely, the angel steps out from Sakura's apartment.

The Japanese are ultra polite, so the couple does not ask why they were running from their apartment, and neither Sakura nor Jared are about to volunteer the insane reasoning. As if archangels declaring world peace for the one-time-only low price of free will isn't enough insanity for one day.

As the elevator descends toward the parking garage, Jared slips on his jeans while imagining the angel tearing through the roof of the elevator, pulling them out by their throats, and strangling them as they kick and punch to no avail. Fuck! He forces the terrifying imagery from his mind. I've got to stay calm. Figure out what to do, besides getting some serious earplugs. Think! What do I know about angels? They float on clouds and play golden harps. Wrong! Angels are aerial creatures. Right! The subway has got to be our best bet.

Jared fishes Sakura's keys from her purse and hands it to her. Her eyes are wide with fear and distant with disbelief. He grips her trembling hand, lacing his fingers between hers, to comfort her.

When the metal doors slide open, they dart out of the elevator, hand in hand.

They run through the garage and jump on Sakura's Vespa scooter, which is painted Ducati Desmo Yellow to match the Vespa from the *Furi Kuri* anime series. Let's hope its 150cc engine is powerful enough to escape a murderous angel.

Jared jabs the key in and turns it. Flips the engine kill switch and thumbs the electric starter as he rips back on the throttle. The engine revs to life and the scooter jolts forward.

Sakura hugs Jared tight as they speed through the garage. He zooms through the exit and just barely veers around a lady on a bicycle. Then shoots into traffic with the haphazard confidence of a man driving an armored tank rather than a dinky scooter.

Jared angles the right side mirror toward the night sky. High above the tall buildings, billboard covered and neon-lit, he notices the magma-orange glow of the homicidal angel, hunting them like a bird of prey.

We're so fucking dead!

The traffic signal at the intersection ahead turns red and a mass of pedestrians began to pace from each side. Damn! As the last of the opposing traffic passes, Jared darts onto the wrong side of the road and accelerates. He tenses his muscles as Sakura screams and grips him tighter. They zip between the two crowds just before they intertwine, center of the crosswalk.

The rushing winter wind draws tears from Jared's unprotected eyes as he continues to race madly down Chūō-dōri, weaving between traffic and inciting honking horns as he cuts people off.

The back of Jared's neck tingles. He peeks in the mirror and sees the angel swooping down at them. "Shit!"

The angry honking is conquered by the angel's powerful roar. The Vespa's mirrors and lights, as well as those of the cars surrounding them, all shatter at once in an explosion of showering glass shards.

As the roar intensifies to an earsplitting volume, Jared swerves in front of a taxi.

He looks back over his shoulder as the taxi topples forward, lifted by the angel's cry. It slides upside down across the pavement into oncoming traffic, slamming into another taxi.

All traffic comes to a screeching halt, and Jared steers the scooter onto the sidewalk. He drives along the walkway, honking the horn to warn pedestrians out of his way.

He rides right on through the open doors of Akihabara Station, Sakura shouting again and again. "Sumimasen!" Until they reach the first ticket gate for the Yamanote Line, with several Tokyo police chasing after them and commanding them to stop.

They abandon the scooter and rush through the ticket gate using their Suica, Super Urban Intelligent Cards, to pay the fair by passing their wallets over the ticket gate card-reader.

They run to the first platform and into a train just before it takes off.

Seeing people run to catch a train in Tokyo is an everyday occurrence, and cosplay is extremely common in Akihabara, so neither their heavy breathing run nor Sakura's *Oh My Goddess* outfit warrants special attention from the other subway riders.

Jared catches his breath, his adrenaline subsides, and his heart slows to a post-workout rate. His mind had been in survival mode, where he acted without conscious thought. Now that they are relatively safe, at least for the moment, his mind is bursting with questions and fears and suspicions that he doesn't want to ponder.

Why us? What sin did we commit to deserve a holy execution?

How will we ever hide from an avenger of an omniscient God?

If God wants us dead, why not strike us down with lightning rather than send an angel? Maybe only Zeus does the lightning bolt trick.

When the balcony doors shattered how did we remain unscathed? And what was with that apparent blast of energy when I threw the end table?

Jared sighs as no answers come to mind, and then notices the old man sitting across from him is sweating, although the temp is cool. A middle-aged woman sitting a few persons to his left is also perspiring. A couple persons to his right, a little boy sitting with his mother is dripping sweat, but the mother looks just fine.

Jared stands up and pretends to stretch his legs. He peers down both ends of the train car. At least a quarter of the occupants is sopping with sweat. What the hell? Can this night get anymore *totally* sci-fi insane?

The old man gags and then upchucks all over himself. The middle-aged woman pukes into her purse. The little boy splashes his mother with vomit. People all over the train begin to heave and retch.

Chilled with fear, not knowing what else to do, Jared sits down.

Sakura climbs onto Jared's lap, pulls her bare feet to her bottom, wraps her arms around his shoulders, and buries her face in his neck. Hot tears splash against his skin, and Sakura whispers, "Doushite?"

Jared hugs her tight. "I don't know why."

Tuesday, December 25, 2012

12:00 Noon JST

According to the CNN reports, an estimated thirty-five percent of the population of the world is infected with a disease, presumably a virus, unlike anything ever categorized by medical science. The Japanese government, along with most other governments, has already begun setting up quarantine camps. The US President has ordered the immediate and complete extraction of all military personnel abroad to be redeployed to American soil to aid the CDC. Pope Benedict stated the illness is God's way of separating the wicked from the righteous.

What a grand Christmas gift to the world. Forget the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, we've got a divine plague instead. Damn, I could go for a mimosa right about now.

Sakura turns off the 42" LCD that had delivered the Xmas morning joy, and climbs out of bed, naked and beautiful, even with her brunet hair a wild mess and her blue diamond Belldandy makeup smeared. "Forget about mimosa. We have to go to Kyoto."

"You're really freaking me out with the telepathy." After escaping a killer angel, mind reading isn't so bizarre. "You better make sure you don't explode my brain. And why Kyoto?"

“Don’t know.” She frowns. “It’s like when I knew we needed to leave my apartment.”
“Clairsentience too?” Jared swings his feet off the bed and rises. “Now *you’re* teasing me.”

“No teasing. I will call my cousin after we bathe. We can stay with her.”

He gives her a roguish grin. “Is she as hot as you?”

Sakura scowls. “Yes, and *married*.”

“Damn, no threesome.” Jared falls back into the bed. “Maybe it’s time I woke up from this dream.”

“Not a dream. This real.” She grabs both Jared’s wrists and pulls him from the bed. “Bath time.”

“Only if you promise not to molest me with your leaping brain.”

“Jared,” Sakura huffs, “do you ever stop teasing?”

He feigns confusion. “Sumimasen, wakarimasen.” I’m sorry, I don’t understand.

“Baka.” Idiot. “No sex for you,” she jabs a finger into his chest, “*ever!*” And tramps across the room to the glowing purple bubbling whirlpool that she has already prepared.

Physically, they’re staying at Hotel Pal, a love hotel in Kabukichō, the red-light district in Shinjuku. Mentally, they’re residing in a state of denial: The only safe place to hide. Neither of them has said a word about the angel as if to speak about it would summon another attack.

After bathing and dressing, Sakura calls her cousin.

Kaida, a nurse, and her husband, Dai, a doctor, are both staying on-site at different quarantine camps, so Sakura and Jared will have the house to themselves. Good, if an angel comes knocking, Sakura’s family won’t be harmed. Though of course the big bad huff and puff won’t leave much of the house standing.

They exit the love hotel, Sakura still dressed as Belldandy, though now at least they are wearing socks and shoes they purchased the night before. They walk ten minutes to Shinjuku Station, take the Yamanote Line to Shinagawa Station, then take the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, the faster than a speeding bullet train, to Kyōto Station, which is about a four-hour trip altogether. They ate and napped during the long train ride.

The last streams of a pink sunset are fading into the night when they come up to the bustling ground-floor of Kyōto Station, which is open to the sky. The glass-plated monolith is one of the largest and most striking railway stations in the world. The futuristic architecture of the fifteen-story station is lit up with Christmas lights and there’s an enormous Christmas tree too.

Japan is a secular nation, so Christmas is a purely commercial holiday for the Japanese. While they follow many customs and rituals religiously, they are not very religious. They are typically born Shinto, married Christian, and buried Buddhist. Or at least that is the origin of the ceremony for each.

The artificial beauty of the multi-colored illumination momentarily lifts the heavy cloud of anxiety that has been mounting since the angels descended four days ago.

Which leaves only two days. Two days until what? We both die? Two days until the angels lead humanity back to Eden? Quite *stupidously* unlikely. I’ll believe that when one of them washes my feet and anoints me with oil.

Sakura asks, “Your feet what?”

“Babe, you’re doing it again.”

Her eyes go wide. “Ie!”

“Yes, you read my...” Jared realizes Sakura isn’t arguing when she points toward Kyōto Tower.

There are three magma-orange flames, like burning meteorites, tearing through the sky. His adrenaline spikes and his heart threatens to punch through his chest. Three angels! We narrowly escaped one!

Tears pour down Sakura’s cheeks and she sinks to the concrete in defeat. She hugs her bare knees and hides her face in her thighs.

Jared shouts, “Sakura! We’ve got to run!” But she doesn’t respond. “Shit!”

He scoops her up, cradling her in his arms, and rushes toward the taxis. He clips a middle-aged woman with Sakura’s feet, causing her to spill her purse, and bumps a young man with his shoulder, causing him to drop his handbag. Jared yells, “Sumimasen!” as he continues to run.

People shout and scream. Jared looks back over his shoulder as the three angels fly over the crowd in a V-formation, headed in his direction.

Jared runs harder and accidentally bangs into an old woman, knocking her to the ground. He stumbles over her, almost dropping Sakura, and just barely catches his balance. “Gomen nasai!”

A Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, the military army of Japan, light armored vehicle with a machine-gun turret mounted atop, pulls onto the walkway in front of the entrance behind them.

The government must be enacting martial law, or already has.

The thunderous staccato cough of the machine-gun turret instantly brings the crowd to their knees, cowering in fear. And one of the hovering angels tumbles from the sky and smacks face first into the concrete. Black blood pools from the massive wound in its side.

So the angels aren’t invincible.

The other two angels split formation, one arcing right, and the other left, turning their attention from Jared and Sakura to the light armored vehicle.

The bleeding angel lurches up, reaches around into the back of his loincloth, and pulls out something that extends into a staff with a golden sun at its head and a sharp point at its base. He hurls the staff with his last dying breath. Not at the armored vehicle, but at Jared and Sakura.

Jared drops to his knees and the staff whooshes over his head and spears an old man through the chest.

Before the bewildered old man hits the ground, Jared is up and running. He tosses Sakura into the backseat of the first waiting taxi, climbs in and slams the door.

“Sakura, give him the address!”

She arises from her catatonic state just long enough to give the driver the address.

The driver, obviously anxious to get away from the machine-gun fire, speeds onto the road before Sakura has even spoken.

Jared watches out the rear windshield as they drive away.

The two angels weave through the sky dodging the turret’s fire until the ammunition belt runs out. The angels swoop down together and smack into the side of the armored vehicle, flipping it upside down.

Two soldiers scramble out, and Jared sees the muzzle flashes of automatic rifles. Just before the taxi turns the corner, Jared hears the angels roar.

Jared pulls Sakura onto his lap, squeezes her firmly to his chest, and kisses the top of her head. He whispers, “It’s okay now, baby. We escaped. It’s gonna be okay now, baby. I promise.”

Of course in truth, Jared doesn't see how anything will ever be okay ever again.

Wednesday, December 26, 2012

1:23 PM JST

CNN is calling it World War III, only it isn't a war between nations, it's a war of all nations versus the armies of God.

When the world's armed forces refused to disassemble their armaments and disband, a massive swarm of angels destroyed the Pentagon, along with the headquarters of the Ministry of Defence of the UK, Russia, China, Germany, and France. They then began to systematically attack every major military base in the world.

Martial law has been enacted in every country with the power to do so. Restricted travel and stern curfews are already being rigorously enforced. If we hadn't left Tokyo when we did, we never would have made it to Kyoto.

Every branch of the military in every country, including all reserves, is fighting on all fronts. Well, they were. All air assets have been neutralized or grounded. The angels own the skies. Even the F-22 Raptor proved to be no competition for their air superiority.

After issuing a military draft, the US President and his entire cabinet moved to an undisclosed underground military installation. I suppose they believe they can hide from the wrath of God. And I'd thought the Bush administration were egotistical morons.

The US, UK, Russia, and China, coordinated a massive tactical nuclear strike against Vatican City, the angel's base. The four archangels residing within deflected the missiles with song. Even the radiation was repelled. All of Rome outside the papal state is obliterated. Can such devastation even be labeled collateral damage?

There has been no reported progress with the global pandemic, but it hasn't spread either. It is only affecting the original thirty-five percent of the population stricken with the disease. The CDC is just as baffled as all those afflicted.

Religious nuts have taken to the streets, preaching repentance and prophesying the end of days. There have been numerous cultist-driven mass suicides. The Jehovah's Witnesses are the only ones celebrating.

A mottled purple mold grew over all the perishables during the night, even in the fridge. We were forced to eat canned tuna dry for breakfast. According to the news, even fruit still on the branch and vegetables still in the dirt, are covered with mold. Although hermetically sealed greenhouses are already under construction in many countries, food riots and grocery store robberies are completely out of control. The mold is also highly toxic, though it smells and tastes sweet. A profane amount of animals and children have suffered excruciating deaths. So when does the water turn to blood and all the firstborn keel over?

Speaking of firstborn, I should give my brother a quick call. Electronic communications might not last much longer, that is, if they haven't failed already.

Sakura mutes the 46" LED TV, pulls her smartphone out of her purse and hands it to Jared without looking at him, as though eye contact will cause the tears she's been holding back to erupt. "You call family first. International will fail before local. Yes, I read your thought."

She's wearing a tiny pink silk babydoll borrowed from Kaida's wardrobe, which looks *magnificent* on her, as well as a pair of pink knee-high socks. She's also applied fuchsia eyeliner

and lip gloss. Even at the end of the world, she wants to look pretty. Jared's barechested, wearing the same unwashed jeans, and a pair of briefs stolen from Dai.

Last night Jared had to carry Sakura from the taxi into the small but lavish two-story house. The front door had been left unlocked for their expected arrival. After undressing Sakura and placing her in a hot bubble bath surrounded by scented candles, she burst from her withdrawn state, crying in frantic shame for her reaction to the angels' appearance. Jared stripped and climbed into the tub with her, embracing her and reassuring her until she calmed. He proceeded to wash her hair, then sponge bathed her lithe body, which led to manually pleasuring each other as they kissed deep and passionate, while she wept tears of remorse and rapture. Afterward, they cuddled in bed, watching anime movies until they drifted off to sleep together.

Jared takes the phone from Sakura with mock contempt. "How dare you read my thought."

He dials the fourteen digits necessary to reach his brother's cell phone in the states. It disconnects before the connection is completed. Shit, I hope I'm not too late. He hits redial. There is a loud beeping noise. Dammit, come on! He disconnects and tries again. After a long pause, it finally begins to ring.

"Hello?" comes the tired voice of his brother.

Jared uses the common causal Japanese phrase for answering a phone call from family or friends. "Moshi moshi."

"Jared?" asks Zane, obviously surprised.

"Yeah, it's me."

Zane's voice spikes with anger. "I swear if this is about money—"

"It's not. I haven't touched any pills other than an aspirin in months. I promise."

"Glad to hear it. Truly." Zane lets out a sigh of relief. "A few weeks ago I took a ride up to Philly and hit the bar. Frank told me you quit. Said you were going on a *wild adventure* to Tokyo." He says it as if it's the most ridiculous thing he's ever heard.

"And I had no idea how *wild* it would be. Trust me."

Zane snorts. "I can imagine."

"Look, with all this crazy shit going on, I don't know when, to be honest, if ever, I'll make it home. I wanted to say, I mean I need to say..." Jared pauses to gather his courage. "I'm sorry. I know I messed up big."

Zane utters a compassionate groan, "Ehh. That's what little brothers do. Forget about it. It's forgiven and forgotten."

"Thanks, Zane." A grave burden he was previously unaware of, dissolves instantly. "That means a lot to me." More than he had thought it would.

"Sarafina has the illness." There is great pain repressed in Zane's voice that strikes Jared's heart with barbs of lighting.

Jared chokes. "I'm so sorry."

"This may seem like an unfair question, but can you tell me where to get painkillers? Sarafina's in a lot of pain and she can't keep any food down either."

Jared blurts, "You didn't take her to one of the quarantine camps?!"

"An associate forwarded me some shots from one of the camps." Zane is a photojournalist. "I'd rather catch the disease myself than send her to one of those hellish wards."

Jared explains which drugs will help with her pain and which will help with her stomach, how much to use, and where he can get them. His dealer's number is still branded in his memory.

Wishing to lighten the conversation, Jared asks, "How's my Nighthawk?"

"Still sitting where you left it." Zane amends, with a feigned tone of disapproval, "Without *asking* me first."

"I guess it's yours now."

"Merry Christmas to you too."

"Zane, do me a favor. Tell Mom and Dad I'm sorry, and I love them."

As Zane begins to reply, his voice is cut off by a beep. The connection has dropped.

"Damn!" Jared hits redial. A loud beeping noise. He disconnects and tries again. Same annoying beeping. He tries again. And then once more.

The room begins to spin. He shakes it off and hands the phone to Sakura. Then hurries into the downstairs bathroom and closes the door behind him. He haphazardly splashes his face with warm water, dousing the sink, and then dries with a hand towel.

He stares at himself in the vanity mirror. Watches as his baby blues grow red. Watches as his vision blurs by brimming tears. Watches as they break and run down his cheeks. He's kept his shit together until now, but saying goodbye to his brother was too much. Zane's forgiveness somehow removed a layer of guilt that had been shielding him from the reality of the situation. It is suddenly all so real. Too real. The angels, the disease, the war. Is this really judgment day? Has humankind reached its end? Is there nothing we can do to save ourselves?

The repressed pain in Zane's voice about his sick wife had tugged hard at his heart. The strain in Zane's voice echoes in his mind even now, causing him to think about losing Sakura. He's only known her for less than two months, and even though he hasn't admitted it to her yet, he feels a great deal of love for her. I'd do anything for her. I'd take bamboo shoots under my fingernails to keep her safe, without hesitation.

Jared looks away from his reflection as sobs burst from deep within, and he sinks to the floor in a heap. Clenching his fists, he bites down on a finger to hide his weeping cries from Sakura. I need to be strong for her. I need to be strong if we're gonna survive this. If survival is even a possibility.

Pulling in deep breaths, he fights to regain control. Once he has settled his emotions a bit, he laces his fingers, bringing his hands together to pray. Something he hasn't done in a long time. Longer than he can remember.

Mr. Supreme Being, if you're really up there looking down on us, please hear me now. I know I'm usually an agnostic blasphemous son of a bitch sinner, but deep down I've always believed in you, and I've never purposefully brought harm to anyone. If these angels are truly yours, then recall them to your heavenly plane. If they are not, please deliver us from this evil. I'm not just asking for my loved ones or myself, but for the entire human race. Don't let us go extinct. For all the wrong in the world, Blackwater, Monsanto, Old Navy commercials, Walt Disney, Kim Jong-il, BET; there is so much right, music, art, Christopher Nolan, the Peace Corps, the Dalai Lama.

There comes a tapping of fingernails on the door. "Daijoubu?"

Jared rises to his feet. "One moment, babe."

He splashes his face in the sink, washing away the remnants of his cries, before opening the door.

Sakura's cheeks are wet with tears. She throws her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist as she climbs into his arms, and weeps, "I said sayonara to my mother and father."

Jared squeezes her tight. “I know that had to be extremely difficult. I cheated by telling my parents through proxy.”

She snuffles. “Proxy?”

“Another word for your vocabulary list.” Jared pecks her forehead. “I mean I asked my brother to relay my goodbyes.”

Sakura gives his neck a tender kiss as tears continue to pour. Then another and another, slowly working upward. She sucks and nibbles his earlobe as Jared squeezes her bottom, an involuntary response. She traces the edge of his ear with the tip of her tongue, and then exhales a warm coo into his ear, sending a tickle down below.

“Before we commit my favorite sin, we should go pick up supplies.” He flares his eyes. “There isn’t a *drop* of liquor in this house.”

Sakura licks his lips as she curls her fingers into his hair. “But Ootochan, I *need* you now.”

Jared kneads her cheeks as he manhood thickens within his pants. “There’s no condoms either.”

With a demure expression, she purrs, “You can do it in my tiny hiney-hole, Ootochan.”

His cock throbs so forcibly in response to her titillating offer that the button of his jeans unclasps. She must *really* need that dick if she’s willing to take it in the ass. “Well, I sure as hell don’t have the willpower to say no to *that*.” And he plops her down on the counter, kissing her plump lips with ardent desire while unlacing the front of her silk babydoll to release her beautiful bosoms.

When her buoyant breasts spill out into the afternoon light, he breaks away from her lush mouth and admires them in awe. They appear to have somehow grown larger. His pupils dilate and his mouth salivates at the stimulating sight of her taut nipples atop her swollen mounds of flesh.

As he closes his lips around a nipple and flickers his tongue tip, Sakura hisses a moan of stunned bliss, “*Ooo*, Ootochan, they’re extra sensitive.” He suckles her teats with gentle affection, back and forth, as he massages her perky peaks with tender devotion, as she kneads his scalp, and coos, “*Ooh*, *Ootochan*, ooh yes.”

As Jared continues to nurse with zealous adoration, he reaches under her tiny babydoll, grasps the waistband of her pink panties and pulls them out from under her, over her pink knee-high socks and lets them fall to the floor.

Relinquishing her bosoms, he crouches and strokes his palms up and down her velvety thighs as she lifts the front of her babydoll and thrusts her pelvis out in need. Her sensitive button is protruding from under its hood and her perfect Barbie doll slit is glistening with her arousal.

Jared plants kisses in the creases between her thighs and pelvis and then atop her feminine mound, until she whines, “*Ootochan*, suck my little kitty.”

Sakura utters a heavy-breathed moan as a quiver of elation flows through her when Jared teases her clit with a swipe of his tongue tip.

Cradling the back of his head, she presses his mouth to her puss and rolls her hips with acute demand, groaning pleas, “*Ooh*, *Ootochan*, suck it, suck it, suck it!”

Jared works his tongue with diligence and massages her inner thighs as she humps his mouth and whimpers with mounting joy, knocking toiletry items from the countertop. All the while, his pulsing prick aches to be unleashed from the restraints of his briefs and jeans.

A short time later, Sakura's legs tremble as they steadily clamp closed around his head, and her clenching ass lifts high off the counter as a gasping moan of ecstasy catches in her throat, and she seizes in rapture while squirting hot juices into his mouth and over his chin.

After her jubilant tremors cease, her bottom descends to the countertop and her legs unclamp from around his head, and Sakura pulls Jared up to her and licks her feminine secretions from his chin before kissing him with voracious passion while groping at his chest.

Eventually, she pulls away, and pants, "Ootoochan, I want to sloppy suck your big cock!"

Licking his smirking lips, Jared hoists her off the counter and sets her down on the floor on her knees. "Babygirl gets what she wants."

Sakura unzips his jeans, tugs them down to his ankles, and then tears down his briefs, liberating his pulsating erection, which springs out and smacks her in the face, causing her to burst into girlish giggles. Once her adorable fit has waned, she fondles his balls with one hand while fisting his shaft with the other, and presses her silken lips over his cockhead while he groans with rhapsody. She bobs deep and slurps loudly with eager moans of esurient hunger as she gazes up at Jared with delighted satisfaction in her almond-shaped chocolate eyes.

Jared kneads her bouncing breasts as she begins to jam his prick into her throat, gagging and spitting and drooling over his cock and balls like a rabid little succubus.

Her fervent suckling is wondrous, and to shoot his load into her moaning mouth or shower his spunk over her heaving tits would be transcendent, but Jared has coveted her divine rump since she wiggled it against his groin at the Halloween bash the night they first met. He further exasperated his obsession by surveying her morning exercise routine every day since, which is comprised mostly of using a stepper machine. He examined her round cheeks clenching and unclenching in her skimpy yoga shorts with studious attention as he sipped his coffee. Most days it worked him into such a lustful frenzy that he would clobber her ass as he pounded her pussy from behind during her post-workout shower, her lathered tits slapping the glass shower door. A few times he threw her over his knees, peeled her sweaty yoga shorts down and spanked her bottom red before brutalizing her pussy doggie style on the carpeted floor, inducing rug burns.

So after ten blissfully minutes of her earnest effort to ram his cock down her throat, he pries her from his soddened dick, tosses her over his shoulder and carries her into the dining room where he plops her down on the table, and orders, "Lay on your stomach and spread your cheeks for Daddy."

Sakura bites her bottom lip, attempting to smother an excited grin, and obeys his command with gleeful giggles, sliding dining accessories and a floral centerpiece off to the side to make room in the middle of the table, and lays atop the decorative table runner.

With her silk babydoll bunched around her slim waist and her firm cheeks splayed wide by her grasping hands, her tight pink star is a crown jewel on display. He tugs on his rigid member for a long moment as he cherishes the gorgeous view of Sakura exposed and waiting, her goddess-like booty placed at the perfect center of the dining table like the primary dish of a grand fest.

Climbing onto the table, he clutches the back of her thighs and delves his face between her cheeks. He swirls his tongue tip over her taut rosebud with gluttonous groans of depraved demand and her pink pucker opens for him. He jabs his rolled tongue inside and Sakura wriggles and whines in exalted pleasure. Her virgin ass is a delicious delicacy of the highest quality.

When he's had his fill, Jared plucks a fancy bottle of olive oil from an oil and vinegar set and dabbles a generous amount into her crack. He smears the oil over her bud as she moans

pleasant coos. Applying gentle pressure, he gradually forges a finger into her rectum, then pumps it in and out as she squirms and squeals, thoroughly lubricating her asshole.

Once she's primed and ready, he straddles her upper thighs and slaps his cock between her splayed cheeks. She's so petite it looks colossal in comparison. Gripping his girthy shaft, he prods the bulbous head of his prick against her elfin bud, pressing harder and harder, her rosebud resisting his effort, until finally, he crams his cockhead inside her, stretching her teeny hole open as she grunts through gnashing teeth.

She looks back at him with crying eyes, her cheeks streaked with pink eyeliner and matted with hair, and he brushes her hair from her face with a finger, and consoles, "That's my good girl."

With a glacial pace, he works only the head in and out, exercising her sphincter and enjoying the sensation of forcing her anus open over and over again, as Sakura digs her fingernails into her own cheeks, and weeps repeatedly, "Ooh, *Otoochan*, it's too big!"

When her pink pucker gapes in response to the extraction of his cockhead, he decides it's time to forge on. With the tip of his dick embedded in her tight asshole, he wrenches her hands from her cheeks and uses a cloth napkin to bind her wrists behind her back. He twists around and does the same with her ankles. Then with a slow roll of his hips, he thrusts his pelvis, burrowing his prick inch by inch into her seizing anus, savoring the sight of his cock disappearing into her clenching cheeks as she howls in agonizing felicity, her painful scream edged with joy, revealing her true masochistic nature. I doubt she had any idea she would wallow in the contradictory pleasure of pain.

No longer concerned with her frailty, Jared leans forward, grasping her slender shoulders for balance, and begins to lunge his hips, hammering her ass with powerful blows, grunting with the exertion of his fierce stabs.

Sakura writhes below him, kicking her pink sock-shod feet and pulling at her bounds while screeching at the top of her lungs with each savage spear of his steely manhood. Yet she doesn't plead for him to halt his assault, knowing he would cease immediately, a confession of her indulgence. Instead, she cries, "Ooh, *Otoochan*, yes! Ooh, ee, ee, ee!"

So Jared continues to pummel her rump with brutal bucks of his hips, slamming her harder and swifter, rattling dining accessories off the table edge, as Sakura shrieks in excruciating jubilation, while chewing the table liner, each time his pelvis spansks her cheeks and his balls slap her oozing pussy.

Some time later, when Jared's sides are aching and he's dripping sweat, he climbs off the table, pulls out a sturdy chair, spins it around and pushes it up against the table edge. Then slides Sakura to the border, unties her ankles and sets her in the chair on her knees with her ass propped out. Gripping her rounded hips, he resumes his barbarous attack, now able to redouble his efforts in this standing position.

Using one hand to fist her hair and arch her back, holding her in place for his punishment, he uses the other to smack her cheeks, back and forth, between each spank of his pelvis as she yelps and howls.

Shortly thereafter, Sakura wails, "*Otoochan*, my hiney's going to cum!"

Then with a few final bucks, Jared throws his head back and roars with ecstasy as Sakura's asshole clinches tight, and she quakes with orgasm while her pussy sprays nectar as he pumps her rectum with blistering surges of spunk.

Thursday, December 27, 2012

6:37 AM JST

Jared wakes in a cold sweat. He was having a nightmare, but the demons lurking within it elude him the moment he opens his eyes.

Sakura is sleeping soundly, and he leaves her where she lay in a mess of sheets and blankets and pillows all askew. Nude and half-conscious, he stumbles into the bathroom. It's too early. Why the hell am I awake? Even the sun is still sleeping.

As he urinates with a pleased sigh of relief, he looks out the window to find it has snowed during the night. Half a foot by the looks of it.

He splashes his face with hot water, brushes his teeth with his new toothbrush, and after slipping into his unwashed jeans and putting on a clean pair of socks, he makes his way downstairs to the kitchen, where the Boss Coffee has been calling to him all along. Caffeine and sugar, does a hangover good.

Yesterday, after their lascivious interlude, they visited a military controlled food distribution center and bought a few days worth of canned soup, bottled water, canned coffee, and several bottles of Nikka Whisky and cans of Coca-Cola. They would have bought more, but the food supplies are being rationed due to the unexplained poisonous mold destroying everything and anything not hermetically sealed. All the vending machines, which are placed on every street corner in commercial and residential areas, were emptied before they had left the house.

Jared pops open his can of Boss Café au Lait as he goes into the living room, and turns on the TV to see what new catastrophe has besieged the world today. The same thing is on every channel. Scrolling kanji that most likely states the cable is out. It could be a local problem, but considering the last six days, it probably isn't. And today is the *last* day, according to Sakura's eerie prophecy.

He jabs the power button on the remote and sighs. Guess I'm gonna miss the new episode of Homo Rangers: Turbo Rainbow Explosion. *Christ*, how can Japanese children be so intelligent when they watch such unintelligible crap? I'm still not sure what a Pikachu is.

Jared drops the remote on one of the end tables and goes into the kitchen for another can of coffee. Six ounces is never enough.

As he closes the fridge he is startled. Out of the corner of his eye, he thinks he sees something zip past the kitchen window. The jolt of fear jogs his memory causing him to recall part of his nightmare. He and Sakura had been running from *darkness*. The foggy images shoot a cold chill up and down his spine. If dreams are symbolic messages from the subconscious, then what does darkness symbolize? Let me guess, the presence of evil?

With paranoid caution, he peeks outside. The sky is aglow with the indigo predawn of sunrise. He doesn't see anybody, but the front gate is open and there are tracks in the snow. Mailman maybe? No, it's way too early.

Sakura pads into the kitchen barefoot, working a toothbrush in her mouth. She's wearing Kaida's tiny pink silk babydoll again. Thus Jared's thoughts of chasing darkness and snowy footprints dissolve.

He purrs with admiration. "Good morning, my sweet uncensored Asian porn star."

She bends over the countertop, sticking her head into the sink to spit and rinse her mouth, propping her bottom in the air and exposing her pink bikini panties. 'Magically delicious' jingles

in Jared's inner ear. He would like to take advantage of her precarious position by peeling her panties down and eating her ass for breakfast, but his gut reminds him something is wrong.

Sakura turns off the faucet and spins around. "I dreamed where we need to go."

Jared replies, "And I dreamed that we need to hurry."

As if to punctuate his statement, a loud bang sounds from the front door, like someone chucked a brick, causing Sakura to jump in fright.

Jared's heart rate speeds up. "What the hell was that?"

He dashes from the kitchen to investigate with Sakura trailing close behind.

As he approaches the door, there comes a scratching accompanied by a strange groaning that makes his eyes water and his fists clench with anxiety.

Jared whispers, "Maybe the Kyoto zoo had a recent jailbreak. It might just be a pissed-off panda bear."

He creeps to the window beside the door, barking grunts twisting his stomach and forcing coffee and acid up his esophagus. With thumb and forefinger pinched, he peels the thick curtains a sliver and peers through the open blinds with one eye. "Holy fucking shit."

His heart explodes into a rigorous hammering and he inhales a sharp breath as a violent shudder rips through his body. What he sees on the other side of the door strikes him with more terror than if it had been an onryō, a vengeful Japanese ghost, out of a J-horror film. He'd rather deal with spooky long-haired girls climbing out of the ceiling, the TV, *and* the damn toilet bowl, because he has seen enough *American* horror movies to recognize what this single inconceivable threat truly represents: When you see one, a horde of them is never far off.

Sakura whispers, "Nani?"

Jared stutters, "It's a man...covered in bloody gore."

He steps away from the window and glances around the room in a panic. "The couch. Help me push it."

Sakura doesn't respond. Shit! She's going catatonic on me again.

Knocking over one of the end tables, he pushes the couch across the plush carpet and against the front door.

The crazed man is now pounding on the door and howling in a frantic rage.

He knows we're in here. And now so will the rest of the goddamn neighborhood.

When Jared turns around, Sakura is standing with eyes closed and arms limp, as if she is sleeping while standing.

She speaks in a monotone voice with no sign of her Japanese accent. "I am a channel of transdimensional intelligence."

Jared exclaims, "Oh, you have *got* to be *shitting* me!"

"Revelation 12:4 'And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.' "

Jared is walloped with a sudden realization. "Why didn't I see it before? First, there was the strange plague, *pestilence*. Then the entire world went to *war*. Then there was the mold causing *famine*. The four archangels that descended upon Vatican City are the goddamn Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse!

"And the final horseman is *death*, with Hades following. But when a third of the angels were cast out of heaven with the devil, they didn't perish, they became demons."

Sakura replies in the same monotone voice. "They are insatiable hunger. What they crave, is blood and death."

As if to confirm her message a neighbor begins screaming.

“Thanks for the fucking pep talk. Could you tell me something useful? If not, give me back my girlfriend, *dammit!*”

“By any means necessary, the both of you must reach the ark.”

“Ark?” Jared questions. “What the *fuck* are you talking about?”

Sakura wavers on her feet, her eyelids fluttering, and Jared grabs her before she falls.

He shouts, “Babe, wake up!”

Her eyes open gradually, as if being awakened from a deep sleep.

He shakes her, hoping to rouse her. “Babe, we have got to arm ourselves *now!*”

In the states getting a firearm is easy, but in Japan only the police and the Yakuza carry guns. I’d give up a kidney and *both* my testicles for a Wal-Mart shotgun right about now.

Sakura blinks her eyes slowly, coming out of her daze. “No weapons, only kitchen knives.”

Jared releases her and rushes into the kitchen. His sock-shod feet slip on the marble tile and he falls hard, bashing his elbow. Damn! He scrambles to his feet and a living room window shatters.

A middle-aged woman in a tattered nightgown has leapt through it from the backyard. Glass shards, embedded in her fists, drip blood on the expensive carpet. Her eyes are completely bloodshot. Fresh blood is smeared across her wrath engraved face, matted into her hair, and dripping from her chin, as if she has torn out someone’s jugular with her teeth.

She lets out a raucous shriek and charges at him in an insane rage as he backpedals into the kitchen. She jumps over an end table in her way, kicking a lamp to the floor.

The woman is only about five-foot-five and maybe a hundred-and-thirty pounds, but she hits him with the ungodly strength of a charging yak from hell. He is slammed to the tile floor, cracking marble with the base of his skull.

Fireworks of pain erupt from his every synapse and his peripheral vision is swallowed by a fiery gloom.

Struggling against vertigo and the woman, Jared presses his forearm to her throat, keeping her gnashing teeth from tearing into his nose, while using his elbow to block one of her thrashing hands. With his other hand, he grabs her wrist, stopping her from clawing his eyes from their sockets.

She growls furiously and spits foaming saliva and blood into his face. The pupils of her bloodshot eyes dilate completely. Her gaze burrows into his mind. What he feels within stabs at the central core of his being like a frozen dagger laced with venom.

Something dark dwells where this woman’s soul used to reside. The darkness within her doesn’t just want to rip my heart from my chest: It wants to devour my soul.

Picking up the fallen lamp, Sakura lifts it above her head to strike the bloodthirsty woman, but her attention is drawn away. The gore-covered man smashes through the window beside the front door and irritably jerks the blinds down as he climbs inside the house.

Sakura turns and hurls the lamp at the feral man as he darts across the living room. The lamp ruptures against his shoulder but does nothing to slow him as he leaps atop her snarling.

Sakura screams, “Jared!” As she is thrown to the carpet.

Her desperate cry for help causes an emotional reaction within Jared so profound that it triggers an immense psychokinetic response. For a blink of an eye, the entire room is an extension of his mind: He can feel the warmth of the syrupy blood absorbing into the fine fibers of the carpet; the texture of mountains and valleys of dust motes atop picture frames; the

vibrations of chittering insects in the walls. Then without thought, he focuses all his fear and anger into a bone crushing punch of mental force.

All of the intense headaches over the last few weeks were worth it, because the woman thrashing atop him is launched across the room with a shriek. She slams into the wall, indenting it, and collapses in an unconscious sprawl.

That was some hardcore Obi-Wan Neo-the-One dope shit right there!

He leaps to his feet and seizes the man assaulting Sakura. Jared grips him by the neck with both hands and tosses him off her. The man rolls over and leaps up in a heartbeat.

Jared freezes. "Fuck! Shit! Fuck!"

The crazed man lets out a furious howl and charges.

Jared drops to the carpet and clutches a jagged chunk of the broken lamp. As the lunatic comes down on him, Jared jolts up to meet him and jabs it into the man's jugular, and he falls over kicking and shaking as he gargles blood.

Revulsion wrings Jared's stomach. Coffee and bile slap the carpet, splashing his socks and jeans. He spits and wipes his mouth with his bare forearm.

Gripping Sakura by her arms, Jared pulls her from the floor where she is trembling with terror and gushing tears. Blood is smeared across her babydoll. Jared checks her over, confirming it isn't her blood.

Windows all over the house shatter and ravenous shrieks echo off the walls as Death's minions flood into the house.

Jared grips Sakura's hand and leads her sprinting to the staircase and up the stairs, taking two at a time, as screaming maniacs chase them.

Sakura squeals in horror as one latches onto her ankle, pulling her from Jared's grasp.

The unexpected yank almost causes Jared to tumble backward, but he manages to twist around, banging his shoulder into the wall, before regaining his balance.

"Let her go!" Jared kicks the man in the teeth, knocking him down the steps into others behind him, impeding their ascent of the staircase.

Jared grabs Sakura and shoves her ahead of him, up the remainder of the stairs, and directs her with a push into an office. He slams the door and rams his back to it as feral howling and pounding fists come from the other side.

Thank God it's a western style house. No amount of rice-paper walls would slow these blood crazed lunatics.

There is no lock, but the room has another benefit. It faces the street and is placed at the center of the house, where he remembers there is an awning to aid in their escape.

A crack of splintering wood sends his Terror Alert Level from Severe to Y'all Gonna Fucking Die, and pumps another fear-induced rush of adrenaline into his already boiling blood, propelling his mind into searing focus.

"The chair!" Jared shouts, as he struggles against the increasing weight, his socks slipping on the carpet again and again.

Sakura grabs the wooden chair from behind the desk, drags it over, and jams it under the doorknob.

A fist smashes through the hollow wooden door and grasps Jared's throat.

Sakura screams as she falls to the floor.

Jared punches the wrist of the grasping hand and twirls about, wrenching himself free. He shoots across the room and tears the curtains off the wall, letting them fall, jerks the blinds up,

slams open the window, and kicks the mesh screen. Its thin metal frame bends as it pops out and falls from view.

He turns to Sakura who has managed to her feet. "I'll go first so I can catch you."

Sakura hugs herself as the cold air rushes in, erecting her nipples and puckering her skin with goose bumps. She's not gonna make it far in this frigid weather wearing only a tiny silk babydoll.

Jared swings one leg out the window and then the other. He clenches his jaw and pushes off the windowsill, hits the snow-covered awning over the front door, and slides off, taking most the snow with him. He hits the uneven ground and falls onto his shirtless back. The icy snow stings his exposed skin.

Shivering, he climbs to his feet, and with a wave of his hands, he signals Sakura to leap.

With a look of acrophobic terror, she jumps, hits the awning with a yelp of pain, and slides off and into Jared's open arms. As he catches her, he falls backward into the snow again.

One of the crazies lunges out the window at them. Holding Sakura, Jared rolls over in the snow, dodging the falling fiend. It lands on its head, breaking its neck.

They scramble to their feet and rush out the front gate, between parked cars and into the snow-covered street, as the criminally insane clamber over each other to vacate the house through the shattered windows.

One of the quarantine camps is only a few miles away. The whole lot of them must have escaped. And for some damn reason, they all seem to be hunting us. Why are we a designated target, yet again? What the hell did we do that was so goddamn wrong?

Jared pumps his arms and legs with all of his strength, chest heaving, heart pounding, as barking grunts and hoarse snarls spur him on. The brisk air burns his lungs with twice the ferocity of the burn of his muscles.

Sakura screams from behind him, and Jared skids to a halt as he turns to find Sakura has fallen. Their manic pursuers are almost close enough to pounce on her.

Jared sprints towards her as she crawls to her feet, and he reaches her the same moment one of the lunatics leaps on her back, knocking her to the snow.

As in the house, his surge of emotion transmutes instinctively. With a raging fist full of psychokinetic force, Jared punches the man in the face so hard his neck snaps and his jaw comes unhinged.

Jared yanks Sakura to her feet as two more blood-soaked howlers lunge at them. With a fierce backhanded punch, heavily charged with psychokinetic energy, he sends both of them twisting through the air into a frenzied mass of stampeding screamers.

They continue running down the snowy street until they come to a major road. It has been plowed at some point. The snow is only half as deep as the side street. Jared's eyes are drawn two blocks up the road by flashing red lights. An ambulance, a Toyota Hiace van with an extended roof, is parked with its doors wide open. Thank you, Lord!

Jared holds Sakura's hand tight and leads her in an all-out charging sprint, the infected continuing to gain on them until they reach the ambulance.

The paramedics lay dead on the road. They look as if they have been mauled by a pack of timber wolves infected with rabies. Bloody chunks of flesh and hunks of innards paint the snow.

Resisting the urge to vomit again, Jared jumps into the driver's seat as Sakura dives in the passenger seat. They slam the doors shut and lock them as crazies pound on the windows, leap on the hood, and at least one climbs onto the roof.

Jared slips it into gear and slams on the gas. The tires spin in place, spraying snow, and then the ambulance lurches forward, throwing a howling lunatic from the roof. Another one slips off the front bumper and its legs are crushed under the wheels.

The remaining lunatic clinging to the hood continues to beat on the windshield and scream as if they might let him in if he puts up a big enough fuss.

“Seat belts, now.” They both buckle up, and Jared thumps the brakes, shooting the screaming madman off the hood. He then floors the gas, smashing the loony with the bumper.

A frantic dispatcher calls over the radio and Sakura fumbles quickly to turn it off, drawing Jared’s eye. When he glances back to the road, a bloody little girl is standing in their path. “Shit!”

Jared jerks the wheel to swerve around the girl, misses her by an inch, and sideswipes a parked pickup truck, tearing off the side mirror.

He ponders if he should stop and help her, then realizes she is likely infected.

Teeth chattering, her entire body shivering uncontrollably, Sakura holds her pale hands to the heat vents. Her voice quivers, “*Cool.*”

Jared thrusts a numb thumb over his shoulder. “Find a blanket in the back before you go hypothermic.”

Sakura unbuckles and moves into the back, where she pulls a sheet from the stretcher to dry herself.

Jared absentmindedly wipes the snot from his upper lip, which the cold air and physical exertion had wrung from his sinuses, and slaps it on the side of his seat.

He mumbles to himself between haggard breaths. “Holy shit. Holy shit. Holy shit.” How can this be fucking happening? How did I? Crazy Jedi shit! How did Sakura? Transdimensional intelligence? An ark? “Holy goddamn shit.”

His shock is subdued by his pounding head. He feels the back of his skull and finds a tender lump.

Jared calls back to Sakura. “So which hospital would you prefer I drop you at?”

She replies, “Kiyomizu-dera.”

Literally the Pure Water Temple. It’s notable for its vast veranda, supported by tall wooden pillars, which juts out over the hillside and offers a beautiful view of the city.

“Sightseeing wasn’t exactly on my to-do list today, but neither was jumping out a second-story window into a snow drift.”

“Shut up and turn right at signal.” She does her best to dry him, then drapes a blanket over his bare shoulders, and wraps another around herself, before buckling up again. She cracks open a bottle of sterile water and, after gulping down half the contents, hands it to Jared.

Jared steers the van through the mayhem on the streets as Sakura acts as navigator. They share no conversation otherwise.

The raging infected are everywhere, killing without mercy or hesitation. There is no doubt the dark rider of the pale horse has seized this day. There is an overabundance of car wrecks, bloodied bodies strewn about, blazing fires billowing smoke, sirens and screaming without end.

Jared feels detached, and yet the tears will not stop flowing. As though his mind has switched off emotion reception, though his body and soul remain in anguish over the atrocity transpiring across the globe. When thoughts of his family intrude on his mind, he pushes them far away, keeping his focus on the road.

All the while Sakura points directions, she cycles between sobbing so hard he thinks she will puke, to hyperventilating to the point of near fainting. He knows there are no words that can soothe her, no comforting lie that will lull her, no optimistic quote that will calm her. He hopes she won't be too emotionally scared to heal, that's if they survive at all.

Finally, the snow-covered entrance to the Pure Water Temple complex comes into view as they round a bend on Matsubara-dōri. The complex is located on a steep hill, with the vast veranda at the top.

The sight must bring Sakura relief because she closes her eyes as if in thanks and takes control of herself.

There is a loud thud on the roof and the van bottoms out, grinding sparks off the street, as if something landed atop the ambulance.

"*Dammit*, all to hell! Hold on!" Jared slams the accelerator, engine roaring, and swerves back and forth on the tiny street, trying to toss their holy hitchhiker from the roof.

There comes a tearing noise in response, like talons ripping through metal. Then white feathered wings, too large to belong to a lesser angel, beat against the windows, and the ambulance is lifted off the street and into the sky.

"We've got to jump!" Jared shouts, as he pushes the door open, but the beating wings slam it shut again.

Sakura's eyes go wide with realization, and she shouts, "X-Girl time!" She clamps her eyes shut tight, scrunching her forehead, and clenches her fists, attempting some type of telepathic maneuver.

Whatever she does, it works, because the ground comes up to meet them fast, and the van collides engine first with the pavement with a thunderous crash, and all at once, the seat belts lock with a strangling grip, random medical supplies shower over them, and the airbags erupt with a white cloud, punching Jared in the nose and mouth.

The ambulance falls forward onto its roof, leaving them hanging upside down from their seats. They cough on the airbag dust. Jared winces as he holds his ribs. They're definitely bruised if not fractured. He spits blood. The inside of his lips feel shredded. The stinging scent of gasoline sparks horrifying images of burning alive.

Sakura cries, "We have to get to the main hall!"

"First we have to get out of this Tilt-A-Whirl." Jared grips the steering wheel with one hand, and with the other, unbuckles himself. He flips forward, his feet landing on the spider-webbed windshield. His head spins and twinkling stars appear in his peripheral vision. He closes his eyes and a wave of warm energy flows through his mind and body. It feels weird but invigorating.

Sakura pleads, "Jared, help me."

He opens his eyes, blinking, and shakes the daze from his head.

Grabbing Sakura's thin arms as she unbuckles herself, he assists her down. He wraps her blanket around her upper body, leaving her bare legs unconstrained so as not to impede their climbing run. He leaves his blanket where it lay.

Jared attempts to force the door open with a few shoulder slams, but the van's frame is too mangled. "Shit!"

Sakura suggests, "Use leaping brain."

He huffs, "That was just an emotional reflex."

She squeezes his shoulder. "You can do it. I know you can."

“Alright, I’ll give it try.” He closes his eyes and draws in a deep breath through his bleeding nose. He holds it for a long moment, attempting to focus his mind beyond his throbbing headache. Then exhales through his tattered lips, and thrusts his palms, willing the door to open. A surge of psychokinetic energy courses from his mind to his heart and through his arms. With a pop of metal the door rips open.

He wipes the blood dribbling from his nose and smears it across his jeans, clutches Sakura’s hand and steps out of the overturned ambulance, the snow crunching under their feet.

Hand in hand, they sprint up stone stairs past Korean lion-dog stone statues, up more stairs, then through the massive vermilion and white painted Gate of the Deva Kings. They race up more stairs, past the huge West Gate on their right and the Bell Tower on their left. They turn right, running another flight of stairs, a wooden three-tiered pagoda now on their left.

Jared feels the familiar haunting tingling on the back of his neck. The world slows around him. All that he can hear is his own thumping heartbeat. His mind flashes with tender memories of Sakura; that first dazzling smile in the club, her first giggling laugh at one of his stupid jokes, their first kiss on her apartment balcony, the surprised look of ecstasy during their first shared climax, a photo captured while she slept.

The earth begins to quake.

We’ll never outrun it. And I’m tired of running anyway. I ran away from my broken heart with drugs. I ran away from my rejecting family and lurking ex to Japan. And I’ve been running from the fall of mankind with sex and alcohol. It’s time I take a stand. It’s time I did something honorable. Even if I feel like I’m about to shit my pants. I have got to give Sakura enough time to get out of here.

Jared speaks through panted breaths. “Keep going. I’ll handle this.” He releases Sakura’s hand and turns toward the complex entrance.

She screams with a look of horror. “Please Jared, no!”

He barks, “Go now! Run!”

Sakura shrieks with bursting tears. “Ie! Ie! Ie!”

Jared shouts at her with a look of fury. “I said to fucking run! Now!”

She punches him in the shoulder. “Gaijin baka!” Then turns and flees.

A fifteen-foot-tall archangel, emanating a fiery golden aura, with a fifteen-foot wingspan, dives through the sky, jaws wide with song.

The pitch of his abysmal cry is so intense, it is inaudible, but the visual effects are cataclysmic: The lion-dog statues, the massive Gate of the Deva Kings, the Bell Tower, the huge West Gate, even the stone stairs, they all explode into dust and splinters, pulverized by the epic force of the death psalm.

What the shit am I doing? I’m so fucking dead!

As the devastating resonance reaches for him, Jared thrusts out his palms and spins them, bringing his wrists together. With a volition of will, he projects a psychokinetic barrier. His every muscle trembles with the effort, tears squeeze from his eyes narrowed in concentration, and stars flare in his peripheral, as the archangel’s song hits him...and it’s reflected, pitching the monster backward through the sky.

Oh, shit. It actually worked!

Jared turns and runs, following Sakura’s tracks through the snow. His throbbing headache has become skull splitting torture. He takes a left past the wooden three-tiered pagoda and heads for the main hall of the temple complex. Let’s hope the loudmouthed evangelizer gives up and goes home to Vatican City.

Before Jared makes it far, the archangel lands ten feet before him. His wrath burns so potently, the snow around him melts, boils, and evaporates.

“Archangel Michael, I presume.” Jared grimaces as he holds his side. “Or is it Horseman?”

His voice booms like war drums and grinding boulders. “Woe! Woe to you for Yahweh has commanded your soul be reaped.” He pulls a mighty two-edged sword from his back that shimmers with terrifying radiance, and holds it above his head, preparing to execute him.

Jared has a bizarre *Wizard of Oz* feeling like there is a devil behind a curtain somewhere controlling the archangel. It causes all his fear to become fury, and with his anger comes fool-hearted confidence.

“I don’t know what circle of hell you came from, but you’re no angel.” Jared moves into a defensive stance. “And I’m about to get all crazy Tekken on your ass. So bring it, *bitch*.”

Zane is the martial arts connoisseur in the family, but at least he taught me some self-defense basics. With that, plus my newly born psychokinesis, I should be able to keep this monstrosity busy long enough for Sakura to escape. At least I hope so.

The faux archangel slashes his broadsword down at Jared, intent on bisecting him, though with a growl of exertion, Jared thrusts a palm up at the blade, repelling it with a burst of psychokinetic energy.

With double the force of his first strike, muscles rippling, the unholy avenger slashes downward again. Jared grits his teeth and thrusts both his palms, barely repelling his fierce assault.

The winged attacker swings his broadsword behind his head and slashes horizontal, aiming for Jared’s midsection. Jared drops into a Spider-Man-like crouch, dodging the slash. Damn, that was *too* close!

The Nephilim surprises him with a swift kick. Jared attempts to block with both palms but is thrown flipping backward and lands a few feet away on his stomach. Shit!

The winged assailant lunges into the air, broadsword held high, and comes down at him like a bolt of lightning from the heavens. Jared rolls out of the way, and the sword strike causes an explosion of snow and stone.

With a psychokinetic thrust from both palms, Jared leaps high off the ground and brings his elbow down on the back of the bogus archangel’s neck. The creature beats his white feathered wings together once, smashing Jared between them, then twists his back and slaps Jared with one wing, tossing him back to the snow.

Jared turns over in pain and forces himself to his feet. If his ribs weren’t fractured before, they are now. He pulls in a breath and his body screams in agony. Sweet Jesus! Definitely broken.

The winged beast bellows in mock laughter and marches toward him with his sword raised.

I guess this is the part where I die. At least I didn’t piss myself. I always hoped my final thoughts would be something poetic and deep. I guess it’s *not* my time, after all.

Jared has noticed something that the Nephilim has not. Three blood-crazed temple monks in soiled black robes are climbing through the rubble toward them. Reaching out with his mind, Jared weaves his focus and will to grab a hold of the closest monk, and yanks the man into the air, throwing him at the beast.

The brute’s attention is diverted from Jared for a moment as he beats one wing, flicking the monk to the ground with a broken neck.

Only two more infected. I better make this maneuver count. Jared takes a deep breath, reaches out and psychokinetically grips both of them. He flings one and then the other.

As the Nephilim turns his gaze to the flying monks, Jared gathers every quantum of his willpower, clenches his jaw against his rib pain, and rushes up to meet the beast with a burst of incredible speed, while the creature slashes the first monk in half and then the second.

With a psychokinetic palm thrust, Jared smacks the broadsword to the brute's chest. Then grips a hold of the sword's crossguard with both fists and thrusts the blade up. The beast seizes control before the shimmering tip pierces his chin.

Jared is forced to his knees as he struggles with all his strength, straining every muscle and groaning with fierce exertion, to shove the sword upward. He feels his body preparing to surrender, his muscles spasming and burning, when an icy snowball smashes against the Nephilim's face with tremendous force.

The beast's focus is momentarily broken, and so with both palms charged, Jared surges up with a roar, thrusting the blade upward and driving the two-edged sword through the brute's chin and into his skull.

Black blood oozes down the blade. His cruel eyes flicker and close. His fiery golden aura fades away. And the creature falls back, white wings spread wide, into the snow.

Jared breathes wheezing breaths and drops to his knees. He feels faint and dizzy with mental and physical exhaustion. He's on the brink of collapsing.

Sakura runs to him, tears still gushing, and throws her arms tight around him as she drops to the ground beside him. "You defeated archangel!"

Jared cringes with the pain of his broken ribs, and mumbles, "Yeah, I made a snow angel out of him."

A Hindian, an African, and an Indian couple approach. All of them appear to be in their thirties. Although each of them is teary-eyed, they put on smiles of welcome and congratulations for his triumph.

Sakura eases her embrace but doesn't release him, so as to share her blanket and her warm flesh.

The African woman twists open a bottle of spring water and hands it to him.

He accepts it with a trembling hand and gulps down the entire bottle. He coughs, pain erupting from his ribs, then wipes the blood, snot, and drool from his face with the blanket, before looking up at the six onlookers. "So which one of you is Noah, and where are you hiding this so-called ark?"

The Hindian man replies, "It is not a biblical ark that we are waiting for. It is an interstellar ark."

Jared asks, "Who's sending it?"

"The Galactic Federation of Planets, under direct command of The Interdimensional Federation of Free Worlds."

Groaning, Jared rises with caution and looks at Sakura, eyebrows raised. "Maybe we should take the bus. I wasn't aware this ark was on its way to a Trekkie convention."

"The Drake equation, which is extremely conservative, factors the potential number of intelligent extraterrestrial civilizations in our galaxy alone, not even counting the probability of other dimensions, in the *millions*."

"So is this Drake space wiz a friend of yours, or just some UFO abductee?" Wow, I'm such an asshole.

Sakura cuts in. "Please excuse Jared, he is an American. He does not mean disrespect."

Jared holds out his hand to shake. “It’s not *just* that I’m an American. I’ve been fighting for my life since I woke up this morning. I’m sure your Drake buddy is a good guy.”

The Hindian man shakes his hand firmly with a look of understanding. He gestures to the Hindian woman beside him. “This is Sujata, my wife, and I am Rāhula. We came from India for vacation, and the world went mad.”

“You’re telling me. I just ran through an archangel with his own broadsword.” Jared wobbles on tired legs as he glances back at the beast. “Well, it looked like a mighty big angel at least.”

“Hostile hyperdimensional beings genetically engineered the angels. They have only a rudimentary sentience. They are organic robotic puppets.”

Jared questions, “If dimension aliens want our planet, why not just take it? Why send Muppet angels to ask us to surrender our free will?”

“Free will is a feature of the multiverse, an aspect of the very fabric of reality. It is as substantial as the law of gravity. Directly breaking someone’s free will, let alone that of an entire species, has grave consequences.”

Jared squints skeptically. “Are you some sort of Indian sage?”

“I am a medical doctor. May I ask what your area of employment had been?”

“You mean *other* than being a kickass psionic warrior? I was a bartender. And more recently, I tutored English illegally.”

There comes a brilliant flash of white light from the direction of the main hall.

Jared wheezes, “I’m guessing that’s our cosmic trolley.”

“It is the ark,” Rāhula breathes with relief. “We must hurry now.”

“Sorry, Doc,” Jared wheezes, “that’s one thing I can’t do. That alien puppet crushed a few dozen of my ribs.”

“We will help you, my friend.” Rāhula carefully wraps an arm under Jared’s shoulder and the African man does the same on his opposite side.

The eight of them hike through the temple complex until they finally reach the main hall. Jared trembles due to the cold and groans due to his damaged ribs as they trek. His adrenaline, now dissipated, had previously subdued both.

A silver saucer materialized from the bright luminosity, just outside the grand veranda. It has a diameter of about thirty feet. It hovers over the snow-laden treetops in absolute silence.

Sakura whispers in amazement, “Waa, sugoi.” Wow, amazing.

“Looks rather plain,” Jared counters. “I was hoping for a Gundam or a Star Destroyer.”

He has the sense the saucer is scanning each of them to confirm their identity, and then an opening materializes in the seamless alien metal.

After clearing the snow from the wooden railing of the veranda, one after the next, each of the four women climbs up and jump into the opening of the saucer. With the help of the three men, Jared clambers up next, wincing with pain. He pauses on the railing as the two men that are still nameless leap in before him so they can assist him in entering. Jared looks out over the beautiful city of Kyoto below, where billowing clouds of black smoke rise into the early morning sky. I guess this is sayonara.

Jared climbs in with the men’s careful aid, and Rāhula hops in behind him. The opening disappears without a sound.

The moment Jared’s feet touch the metal floor, his headache vanishes, and his other pains begin to diminish as though healing at an accelerated rate.

The interior is nondescript. No alien sigils, blinking lights or welcoming holograms. A white leather-like wraparound seating is all they find within. It is softly lit by a luminous floor and ceiling. And it is blessedly warm. Thank you, Galactic Federation! Yet he spots no air vents. Nor a bathroom or refreshments. I hope this will be a short journey.

Each of the four couples sits, evenly spaced around the saucer. Sakura wraps her blanket around the two of them, snuggling up against him. Though there is no sense of movement, nor any viewports, Jared surmises they are traveling at an incredible speed. Alien technology truly is indistinguishable from magic.

He looks to Rāhula. "So where we headed?"

"An uninhabited world," Rāhula replies, "comparable to Earth."

"What's on our itinerary once we arrive?" Jared jests, "Did we get the all-inclusive package?"

Sujata smiles, a moment of pride shining through her glistening tears of sorrow. "We will seed a new world. We will birth a new humanity."

Jared asks, "Why us eight?"

Rāhula answers, "Our being chosen was a result of a combination of factors. Most importantly, our level of open-mindedness, which was crucial to receiving the energies that stimulated our latent psychic abilities through activating sequences of our non-coding DNA. A great evolutionary step toward becoming Avatars. This would have proved impossible with a closed crown chakra. Secondly, we represent all five root races. And finally, was the matter of collecting us all to one place for our exodus. As the saying goes, right place at the right time. Also, we are not the only group. There are several others from different locations around the world."

Jared cocks a confused eyebrow. "Wait, you're saying we are becoming ten-foot-tall Pandoran-alien human hybrids?"

"No. An Avatar is a person who has fully realized, on all levels of their being, that they are divine consciousness within a physical vessel."

"*Riiight*," Jared drawls, "so you're saying I'm *not* gonna turn blue. Let me guess, you know all this because of the transdimensional intelligence channel, correct?"

"Yes. Each of our group has the ability to channel. Due to your late arrival and lack of foreknowledge, I must conjecture it came more easily to us than you."

Jared grins. "Can any of you teach me how to get HBO?"

"I am sorry that I do not appreciate American humor. And the rest of our companions speak very little English. Please excuse me any further questions at this time." Rāhula hugs his mourning wife and speaks, what Jared guesses is Hindi, in a soft tone.

Jared leans his head back with a sigh. "I'm gonna miss it."

Sakura looks at him confused. "What is HBO?"

"The most awesomest TV channel. But that's not what I'm talking about."

"You're going to miss Japan?"

A week ago, leaving Japan was his biggest dilemma. Now which country he resides in feels incredibly trivial.

"Modern civilization," Jared replies, with a heavy tone of regret. "I'll never eat another sausage McMuffin with egg. Drink another shot of Jack Daniel's. Play another Final Fantasy." He peers down at his soggy, dirty socks and wiggles his toes. "I'll never wear another pair of Van sneakers." Or spar with my brother. Or get drunk with my rowdy cousins. Or argue religion with my mother. Or go fishing with my father. Or play poker with my grandfather. Or chat with

my grandmother while sipping her homemade iced tea. Besides Sakura, I'll never see anyone I've ever loved ever again.

Sakura hugs his arm under the blanket, and whispers, "No need for PlayStation when you can play with me, *Otoochan*."

"True," Jared agrees, as a grin brakes briefly from his somber expression. "And once you have learned to sew fig leaves properly, you can craft a sexy Poison Ivy outfit. She's my preferred DC villainess."

Jared feels a pang of guilt for making jokes when humankind is consuming itself, but humor has always been his emotional self-defense mechanism. And whenever he makes Sakura smile he feels as though everything will be alright. Her joyful glimmer always dissolves his every concern.

Jared smacks his forehead with a palm. "Damn, I forgot my passport. Immigration is gonna be a bitch."

Sakura beams brightly even as more tears well up, momentarily forgetting the apocalypse they narrowly escaped. "Daisuki desu."

"I love you too, baby." And Jared is struck with an epiphany as various moments of the last several days collide in his mind. His peculiar desire to nurse from Sakura's bosoms. Her newly developed nipple sensitivity. Sujata's prideful declaration of seeding a new world. "Jolly Buddha's belly, you're prego!"

This may be the end of Jared and Sakura's tempestuous journey on Earth, but what of the rest of the inhabitants? Is everyone else truly doomed? These questions are answered in *Shamans of Time*, a science-fiction horror full-length erotica novel. Check out the following preview.

Chapter 1 – Cataclysmic Origins

1 – Hollow Observer

Arlington, Virginia
Thursday, December 27, 2012
7:22 AM EST

Sirens wail in the distance like the cries of an abandoned child. Raucous shrieks and feral howls are met by panicked screams and piercing gunshots on the street three stories below. The reek of a burning car wreck filters through the floor-to-ceiling bedroom windows. It fuses with the stench of Sarafina's corpse lying twisted in the heavy quilt on their bed. Barking grunts and ceaseless pounding comes from the front door of Zane Hazen's condo.

He lies spread-eagle on the floor in the dark. He envisions a jagged piece of glass crawling up his arm. Just deep enough to open the arteries. Blood runs free over his palms and between his fingers, hot and thick and bright. He re-envisions the act using a large mirror shard instead. This time, he stares himself in the eye as he carves into his wrist, his gaze grotesque with judgment. He imagines what it feels like to bleed out. The beat of his heart grows farther and farther apart. His lungs breathe in less and less air until they quit with a gasp. His vision goes foggy as he watches his life drain onto the azure carpet and become an ugly stain. A blemish that can never be cleansed. A reflection of his soul.

Sarafina, Zane's loving wife of five years, was one of the thirty-five percent of the population afflicted with the horrible illness. 'Separating the wicked from the righteous' were the words of the Pope. Total bullshit.

A fellow photojournalist forwarded Zane pictures from inside one of the quarantine camps. The conditions were inhumane. There were simply too many ill to care for them properly. Zane decided not to report Sarafina's infirmity. Instead, he gave her Roxicodone he bought off the street for the pain and diarrhea. Marijuana to settle her heaving stomach. And ice packs on her forehead for the torrid fever. He fed her soup through a straw and kept her in bed. And that's where she died. In her sleep. It's also where he murdered her. And his daughter.

Although logically he knows murder is an inapt term for his actions, the anguish tearing at the inside of his heart screeches with terrible guilt. It's digging a chasm into the center of his chest. Boring out an emotional abyss.

Zane had been lying in a daze beside the body of his wife when a warm liquid dampened the sheets below him. Absentmindedly he touched it with his fingers and brought them up to sniff. It smelled of urine, but he hadn't pissed himself. He sat up and pulled the quilt off his wife. Her body twitched. He touched her cheek. Her skin was cool, but not as cold as he imagined a six-hour-old cadaver should be. She spasmed violently. Then her once beautiful harlequin-green eyes shot open, bloodshot and vicious. She roared a banshee's horrid scream and attacked him in

a savage fit of rage. She clawed and chomped at him, breaking her fingernails off in his chest, and nearly bit off the tip of his nose. In a primal state of survival, he clutched a lamp from his nightstand and smashed her skull in with its metal base.

Hours beforehand he had been forced to restrain her. He tied her wrists and ankles to the bed frame with random articles of clothing and stuffed a rolled pair of his socks in her mouth. She wouldn't stop screaming about a demon laughing at her and jabbing her with his taloned fingers. He untied her after she died. He was sure she was dead. But she couldn't have been. If only he hadn't untied her. He wouldn't have had to kill her. And his daughter.

Sarafina's warm blood splashed his face and into his mouth when he struck her repeatedly with the lamp. He vomited onto the bed and collapsed to the floor. He didn't bother to get up and wash. That was more than fifteen hours ago. If he has been infected he should feel the symptoms by now. If he isn't punished by the disease, he will have to punish himself. He can do it honorably like the samurai. Fall on the sharpened katana that decorates their coffee table in the living room.

Zane tells his stiff body to move, but some part of his mind countermands his order. His subconscious must have paralyzed him to sabotage his suicide. *I will end this!* He focuses hard and wills himself to rise. Up now!

And just then the first rays of dawn beam through the windows, banishing his dour thoughts like so many creatures of the night. The shackles of self-destructive compulsion that enslave his emotions shatter. The crushing weight of darkness that entomb his fractured heart sear away.

He becomes entranced by floating dust motes in the sunlight that swirl and flow, dancing curiously until they take a hazy form. My God! Sarafina! It is as if the aurora carried her soul to him from beyond the veil of death. She holds out her arms and falls upon him in an embrace that fills him with an invigorating warmth as her loving spirit envelops him. An understanding surfaces from the dredges of his consciousness: Death will not cleanse my soul. Only in life can my spirit be healed.

The perpetual beating on his front door ceases, and Zane leaps to his feet. He doesn't know why or where, but he has to move. Something is calling to him. He can feel it in the marrow of his bones.

He stares for a moment at Sarafina's body all twisted and decides he can't leave her that way. Rigor mortis has set in, but he does his best to lay her on her back and wrap her with their quilt.

Next, he hits the bathroom. The power is out, but the water is still flowing. That won't last much longer. He washes up in the sink, scrubbing the dried blood from his face, neck, chest, and hands. Brushes his teeth. Applies Old Spice deodorant to his under arms and fixes his messy blond hair using his fingers. His bright blue eyes look tired but determined.

Zane is thirty-two-years-old, six-foot-tall, and a hundred-and-seventy-five pounds of lean muscle. He has a mix of German, Irish, and Cherokee genes to thank for his 'handsome mug,' as Sarafina always put it. And a second-degree black belt in Shidōkan, supplemented by moderate weight lifting, to thank for his excellent physique.

Shidōkan translates as the group that lives and trains in the way of the samurai warrior. It is an eclectic combination of bare-knuckle knockdown karate, jujitsu grappling, and Muay Thai.

He is also skilled in the martial art of Kenjutsu, which translates as the technique of the sword.

Zane goes back into the bedroom, puts on a clean pair of bluejeans, socks, and a blue polo. Grabs his hiking boots, which he wears when shooting outdoor photography, and goes into the living room to lace them up. He doesn't want to sit on the bed where he left his wife's body to rest.

Sarafina is, or *was*, a journalist for The Washington Post. A strong-willed libertarian in converse to the Post's otherwise neoconservative slant. She was young to have obtained such a prestigious position, but she was an excellent journalist. And of course, it didn't hurt that her father was the executive editor. Zane and Sarafina shared a dream that once their daughter had grown, they would travel the world, Zane photographing all the exotic sites and Sarafina writing about them. They didn't know if their joint project would be a book, an e-zine, or just a blog, but none of that matters now. Sarafina is dead. Their daughter is dead. And with them all of his dreams.

After putting on his boots, Zane clips his smartphone to his belt and runs his earbuds under his shirt and plugs his ears. He throws on his black leather jacket, a gift from his wife. Grabs his Leica S2, a digital SLR 37.5 megapixel camera, his most prized possession, and hangs it from his neck. He snatches a key from a drawer and sticks it in his pocket. It belongs to his younger brother Jared's '99 Honda Nighthawk motorcycle. Jared left his bike without notice when he jetted to Tokyo three months ago. Finally, Zane straps his katana to his back using his black belt as a makeshift strap. He bought the katana in Japan while doing a photo assignment.

Zane's stomach roars at him and he realizes he hasn't eaten anything in the last twenty-four hours. So he goes to the kitchen, rips open a can of Campbell's Chunky Chili and devours it cold. He washes it down with a Starbucks Bottled Vanilla Frappuccino.

He spent all of last night on the bedroom floor, drifting in and out of consciousness, back and forth between strange dreams and haunting nightmares. One of the dreams, a dream that has reoccurred throughout his life, was of an alien city sinking into the ocean after a massive explosion. It always bothers him when he has the dream, but he has no idea why. It leaves him with a lingering heavy feeling of sorrow that is difficult to shake.

Which reminds him there's one more thing he must do before heading out into the dreadful madness. He doesn't want to do it. But he knows he will regret it for the remainder of his life, however short that may be, if he doesn't do it now. I've got to.

He clenches his jaw in resolve and heads for the second bedroom. With each step, a heavier weight bears down on him, as if he is fighting a repulsive magnetic force. As he approaches the open doorway his pace slows to that of a forming mountain. When he finally reaches the threshold he halts altogether.

The room had been his and Sarafina's shared office. Now it is empty but for some painting supplies they had recently bought. Sarafina fussed over the color choices as if they were a matter of life and death. She researched the psychological effects of not only every major color but also the effects of every color combination. Ultimately after much deliberation, she chose a garden theme of pale green paired with decorative accents of rose for the walls and a deep blue for the ceiling.

Sarafina was four months pregnant. She had an ultrasound a week before everything went crazy. They were going to name her Eden. Eden Olivia Hazen.

Zane can't enter the barren nursery. An invisible barrier of loss secures the room. He can't cry even though he knows he should. No tears will form. His eyes are sunbaked desert stones miles from an oasis. He can't feel anything. Misery or rage or pain. His guilt has consumed his heart. The center of his chest has become a cold void, black and empty.

He whispers softly as spring rain on a koi pond. “Goodbye, my sweet little princess.”

Then turns away and marches to the front door. He unclips his smartphone to select random play on all music before clipping it again. The non-lyrical post-rock song, *Greet Death* by *Explosions in the Sky*, begins to play at a low volume as he draws his katana. He inhales a long, steadying breath, flips the deadbolt, twists the door knob slow, and then pulls the door wide, ready to strike.

He is met by nothing more than an empty hallway. Whoever or whatever had been so driven to get at him must have lost interest. Why he has no idea.

Zane steps out and closes the door behind him. The only trace of the wannabe intruder slash killer is blood smeared across his door. He doesn't bother to lock it. He'll never return. This will never be his home again.

Creeping down the hall, Zane holds his katana tight with both hands as he heads for the stairs. If all of the infected have become like his wife, death can be hiding behind any door, around any corner, and humanity has certainly reached its end.

He passes by the open door of a Middle Eastern couple's condo. Dried blood stains the door. Expensive furniture is overturned. Shattered glass litters the plush carpet, reflecting sunlight that spills in through windows with their drapes torn down. Multiple holes puncture the wallpapered walls.

Zane continues on to the stairwell door, where he finds more smeared blood. He kicks the door open, daring anything lurking on the stairs to come for him. He would rather face any opponents in the hall than the stairwell.

No ravenous roars or rushing footsteps echo from the stairs. So he makes his way down to the parking garage, quick but quiet. The garage is dimly lit by sunlight pouring in from the exit.

He dashes to Jared's motorcycle. It is clean, all black and chrome, and well kept. It was the only possession Jared had ever taken good care of. As a kid, most of Jared's Christmas gifts were broken before New Years, and he had usually broken a few of Zane's toys too. When Jared lied to him about financial issues a year ago, when his real problem was a drug addiction, and yet he never hocked his bike for pill money, it expressed his true degree of love for his motorcycle.

Zane chooses his brother's Honda Nighthawk over his wife's Toyota Prius and his VW Jetta because the roads will probably be jammed with car crashes. He has never driven a motorcycle, but he had gone dirt biking a few times in high school with his brother, and the old VW Golf he owned while in college was a stick shift, so he should manage fine.

After sheathing his katana, Zane climbs on the bike and kicks the side stand up. He notices a woman at the other end of the garage, shambling toward the exit.

Turning on his Leica, he looks through the viewfinder and zooms in on her. She moves in a spasmodic fashion, her limbs twitching as if tugged by puppet strings. He snaps a shot and the flash lights up the dim garage. Damn! I forgot to turn off the auto flash.

The woman turns around at once. Her cloudy eyes do not focus on him, but she shuffles in his direction, twice as fast as she had been working toward the exit. It is his Middle Eastern neighbor. Blood stains her blouse and her throat is torn ragged. She can't be alive with a wound like that. It's just not possible.

A gurgling groan draws Zane's attention to the right. A middle-aged man is dragging himself toward Zane, two car lengths away, his jeans bunched around his ankles. His legs are dead weight, his pelvis clearly shattered, mostly likely by a speeding vehicle that had been racing to exit the garage.

Zane fishes the key from his pocket with a shaking hand, fumbles as he attempts to jam it into the ignition switch, finally slipping it in and turns it to the on position. Sets the kill switch to run. Squeezes the clutch lever with his left hand, and with his right, he thumbs the start button. And nothing happens. Shit!

The shambling dead woman is only three car lengths away. The dragger is only one.

What am I doing wrong? What did I forget? Maybe it won't start in first gear. He toes the gear shift lever up a half click to neutral and tries again. *Still*, nothing happens. Shit!

His moaning neighbor, jaw slack, drool dribbling down one side of her chin, arms stretched forward and grasping, is only two car lengths away. The paraplegic only a few feet.

Maybe the battery is dead. Or the gas...

Zane reaches down and turns the fuel shutoff valve he had forgotten. He attempts again and it purrs to life. He revs it a few times to warm the engine so it doesn't stall, kicks the hand gripping at his ankle, shifts into first and rips passed the undead woman.

The instrumental song, *Death is the Road to Awe* by *Clint Mansell* from *The Fountain OST*, begins to play as he exits the parking garage.

Just before rolling out onto the street, Zane stomps on the rear brake and squeezes the front brake and clutch lever, squealing to a halt.

A dump truck with a plow attached roars passed him and smashes two intermingled burning cars out of the center of the road, before coming to a stop. Two Mack trucks pulling trailers stop behind him and blow their horns. 'RIDE TO SAFETY' is spray painted across the trailers. A Hummer H20 and a few SUVs round out the caravan.

Civilians with hunting rifles and handguns jump out of the back of the trailers. A man with a megaphone announces, "Anyone who has *not* be bitten by one of the infected can come with us to safety. You've got two minutes to get down here."

The Middle Eastern man from Zane's condo, charges from down the street toward the caravan, growling like a crazed hungry animal. An old man with a rifle fires once. A plume of blood and brains erupt from the back of his neighbor's skull and he falls in a rag-doll sprawl.

Zane turns off the auto flash on his Leica and begins snapping photos as a dozen survivors rush out of the main entrance of the condos and toward the trailers.

A large shadow passes over Zane and a little white dog in the cab of the first truck begins yapping out the cracked window. Zane looks up with his camera and snaps a shot of an angel just before it disappears behind the building across the street. The mere glimpse of the white winged creature should send dread coursing through him, but he feels only a mild pulse of unease.

Zane jolts and almost falls over with the bike. The undead Middle Eastern woman shambles by him, an arm's length away, as if he weren't there. Her torn open throat exposes writhing black tendrils like rotten roots under her skin. A bullet to the head drops her to the street. Why didn't she attack me? She could have taken a bite out of me before I knew what was happening.

The number of infected racing, shambling, and crawling after the survivors quickly becomes overwhelming. The caravan rolls out, firing shots at the runners as they go, and they take a left onto 10th Street North.

Zane considers momentarily if he should attempt to ride up to Jersey and Pennsy where his family lives. Where he grew up. His father may have taken his fishing boat out to sea. But he'll only last as long as his fresh water does. His Christian fanatic mother is probably held up in a Kingdom Hall, waiting for Jesus to float down on a cloud riding a white horse. His rowdy cousins are most likely having a drunken end of the world blowout. His grandparents live in a

densely populated area and have neither the materials or the strength to adequately barricade their home. Even if he survived the three and half hour trip, which will be much longer due to the traffic conditions, the chance of finding his family dead or undead is vastly greater than finding any of them alive. He doesn't want to smash in the skull of someone he loves. Again.

So instead Zane follows the small ragtag caravan, a few car lengths behind, unsure if he should join them for the length of their journey.

Five blocks later, at the intersection of North Barton Street, two angels swoop down and attack the Mack trucks. Zane can't see what's happening. But both of the trucks jackknife, flip their trailers and spill tumbling people onto the street.

Zane swerves around the SUVs and Hummer, then turns sharp and puts on the brakes hard, skidding to a halt. A horde of the infected surge into the intersection, swarming the overturned trailers. They had been hidden by a patch of pine trees and a house on the corner. The angels must have herded them together, before setting the trap.

Help I'm Alive by *Metric* plays from Zane's smartphone as a few dozen gunshots ring out and the agonizing screams of men, women, and children coalesce with the constant savage cries of the raging infected.

♪ I tremble ♪
♪ They're gonna eat me alive ♪
♪ If I stumble ♪
♪ They're gonna eat me alive ♪
♪ Can you hear my heart beating like a hammer ♪

Zane lifts his Leica and snaps shots of the massacre. There is nothing else he can do. Photography is the only thing he has left.

He loved reading Spider-Man as a kid and wanted to be like Peter Parker and become a New York photographer. For Zane's twelfth birthday, his grandfather gave him his first camera, a 35mm Nikon, and taught him all the basics of photography; focusing and setting the exposure, proper shutter speed and aperture, and how to develop the negatives. Later Zane borrowed books from the library to learn when and how to use different lenses and filters, and all about lighting. After graduating from Neshaminy High School, Zane attended the Art Institute of Philadelphia, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in Photography. He spent many weekends during his college years, wandering the streets of Philly, camera in hand, searching both the gorgeous and the grimy, to create himself a grand portfolio.

He secretly wanted to emulate Henri Cartier-Bresson, the Godfather of photojournalism. From the early 1930's Bresson prowled the streets snapping moments, fleeting action that found its perfect expression and true meaning through the content and composition of the picture. Bresson's pictures were about being in the right place at the right time. He could step into a space and realize the theatrical possibilities. He knew that if he waited, a moment of life would enter that space, and then he would pounce upon that fraction of a second, that decisive moment, by shooting a photograph. A decisive moment is seemingly casual but charged with significance.

In Zane's sophomore year, he won the Young Photographer Infinity Award for a shot he caught in Kensington of a homeless junky. It appeared as if the bedraggled man had passed only moments before Zane stumbled upon him. The man was dead on the street, a syringe in his arm, laid between the crumbling curb and a junked pickup. The lighting was absolutely perfect; the sun was just rising over a church behind the deceased. The photo's viewpoint portrayed both the

tragedy of our society's most graphic deficiency and the beauty of the tattered man's liberation from a harsh life.

Transfixed by the atrocious scene, Zane kicks the bike's side stand down and gets off the bike to get some better angles. Without thinking, he moves in closer and closer, taking shot after shot, until he is so close blood splashes the lens of his camera. He stops and realizes he is surrounded. But not one of them touches him or even looks at him.

A strange understanding strikes him: Somehow Sarafina's spirit is acting as a protective shroud, rendering me invisible to all evil.

Or maybe you're infected and they can sense their own kind, whispers a voice in his mind that he refuses to give heed. The dark voice of death and despair.

Pulling the end of his polo shirt up from under his jacket, he uses it to wipe the blood from his lens, before moving further into the carnage for some more graphic photos of human teeth tearing ferociously into jugular veins. The terror-stricken faces of the victims are as intense as the rage engraved upon the faces of the infected. Neither the grisly fury of the diseased murders or the helpless cries of the slaughtered innocent touch the cold void that had been his heart.

Maybe the human race deserves eradication. For all the children we let starve due to greed and disinterest. For all the wars over oil and poppy and minerals. For the plundering and polluting of the earth. For the genetic engineering of viruses. For the creation and detonation of nuclear weapons.

Death And All His Friends by *Coldplay* plays as Zane rides around the trucks and continues on down the road.

♪ No I don't wanna battle from beginning to end ♪
♪ I don't wanna cycle or recycle revenge ♪
♪ I don't wanna follow death and all his friends ♪

Zane veers left onto Arlington Boulevard. Due to an abundance of abandoned cars, he is forced to drive on the grassy median that divides the road. Wandering infected, cloudy-eyed and twitching in spasmodic puppet-like movements, obviously hear the rumbling sound of the motorcycle engine as he passes. They spin around unable to tell where it is coming from, and others trapped inside vehicles smash their faces against the windows, moaning in either agitation or bewilderment

He takes the on-ramp onto Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge but has to stop half way across. A large segment of all seven lanes is completely gone. Charred rebar juts from crumbling concrete over blackened steel plate girders. The National Guard must have blown the bridge to stop an influx of the infected from entering DC.

The Arlington Memorial Bridge off to the right looks intact. So after taking a few photos, he turns the bike around and drives the wrong way all the way back down the on-ramp. Then takes the George Washington Memorial Parkway to the Arlington Memorial Bridge.

The entry to the bridge looks like the aftermath of a war zone. Blood stained concertina wire, spent shell casings by the thousands, discarded rifles and helmets, mutilated human remains, an overturned light armored vehicle, and a Humvee with one door ajar and all its shatterproof windows painted scarlet from the inside, imply it had been protected by a National Guard barricade that was overrun.

Apocalypse Please by Muse plays as Zane traverses the blockade wreckage and onto the bridge.

♪ Declare this an emergency ♪
♪ Come on and spread a sense of urgency ♪
♪ And pull us through ♪
♪ And pull us through ♪
♪ And this is the end ♪
♪ This is the end of the world ♪

He veers right after the bridge and then straight over the little median onto Lincoln Memorial Circle, driving the wrong way. When the circle ends he drives onto the sidewalk and then zips through the poles meant to stop vehicles from driving onto the walkway.

He stops between the Lincoln Memorial and the recently reconstructed Reflecting Pool, turns off the bike and gets off to take some more horrific photos.

Cold Desert by Kings of Leon begins to play as Zane climbs the stairs up to the massive monument and passes through the fluted white marble columns into the temple. A group of people is huddled atop the statue of Lincoln, crying and clutching each other tight, as a mass of the undead claw up at them and moan hungrily.

As Zane circles the statue snapping photos, a father holds his young son's waist as he stands on Lincoln's arm and pisses onto the twitchers below. A foul muck of urine and feces cakes the pink marble floor under the feet of the undead. The people atop the statue must have been there all night.

Zane zooms in on a middle-aged Afro-American woman resting on Lincoln's shoulder. She holds a silver cross between thumb and forefinger, both hands pressed firm to her heart, eyes closed, lips murmuring in fervent prayer.

♪ Jesus don't love me ♪
♪ No one ever carried my load ♪
♪ I'm too young to feel this old ♪

He leaves the doomed survivors crammed atop the Lincoln statue behind, and strides down the stairs and passed the Nighthawk.

Goodnight, Travel Well by *The Killers* plays as Zane gazes absentmindedly into the Reflecting Pool.

♪ The unknown distance to the great beyond ♪
♪ Stares back at my grieving frame ♪
♪ To cast my shadow by the holy sun ♪
♪ My spirit moans with a sacred pain ♪

Proudly reflected in the still water, the stone obelisk of the Washington Monument stands tall. It probably will continue to do so long after mankind has vanished from the planet.

A mid-size twin-engine bizjet enters the reflection and Zane looks up at the morning sky. It must have come from Reagan National Airport. It's only a few miles south of here. But where

the hell do they think they'll go? Canada? The North Pole? Even Santa isn't safe from this horror. There's probably a half dozen rabid elves chewing on his fat ass right now.

Something much smaller is trailing the jet. Zane zooms in with his Leica to reveal an angel hurling a spear. One of the engines lights up bright and spews black smoke. The jet wavers, losing altitude, then arches through the sky, and soars over the Washington Monument, the jet's belly only feet above the pointed tip. It is flying in Zane's direction. The pilot's going to try and bring the bird down in the pool.

Zane has photographed the aftermath of many major disasters during his career, and he'll never forget any of those images.

Bloated bodies half buried in mud and debris, after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004.

Children's mangled limbs and crushed skulls in the ruins of collapsed school buildings, after the devastating Kashmir earthquake of 2005.

Blood stained tattered clothes hanging from the twisted metal of bombed commuter trains in Mumbai India in 2006.

A father wading through chest-high waters while his wife and children cling to the boat he pulls, in India after the monsoon flooding of 2007.

Entire villages in Burma reduced to wastelands of wet rubble, after Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

Essential roads demolished by massive mudslides and bridges washed away by raging rivers, after Typhoon Morakot in Taiwan in 2009.

Tens of thousands of battered and broken bodies thrown into mass graves, after the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti in 2010.

Large ships at port capsized, trains derailed, and nuclear meltdowns, after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Until today, Zane had never photographed a disaster in progress.

The second engine bursts into flame and smoke. The jet descends rapidly, bucking wild and swaying chaotic, fighting a nosedive.

The voice of reason echoes from somewhere deep in the recess of his mind: Get on the bike and flee!

Of course, Zane ignores reason and continues snapping photos of the calamity unfolding before him.

The nose of the jet smashes through the nine-foot-tall granite Freedom Wall of the World War II Memorial with an explosion of stone and dust, before its belly smacks the Reflecting Pool, shooting water in a huge arch and creating a wave that travels the length of the pool, about two-thousand-feet, which splashes Zane, soaking him up to his chest and misting the lens of his camera. Upon impact with the pool the jet slides into a roll, tearing both wings off and igniting the fuel tanks with a roaring blast of heat and fire, and continues tumbling violently, losing its tail and flinging flaming bodies from its crumpled burning frame, until the mangled wreckage finally comes to rest at the edge of the pool, only a few feet from where Zane stands taking photos.

A good photograph encapsulates a moment of time, framing it in a way that emphasizes the splendor or calamity of that instant, revealing the truth of an inaccessible occurrence to anyone who gazes upon the photo, allowing them to experience that moment as though it were their own memory. But as I stare through the viewfinder, recording flashes of history, the end of humanity, I couldn't be any more distant from my captured images. As though my camera has

isolated me from the apocalypse transpiring all around me. As though I am a mere observer. A specter of Gehenna's uprising.

To capture such fiercely dynamic imagery with the static medium of photography has been a lifelong aspiration. These shots would grant him membership to Magnum Photos, the holy grail of photo agencies. He would then be regarded no longer as a photojournalist but as a visual philosopher. One of these would surely win him a Pulitzer Prize. Robert Capa, the world's greatest war photographer, would be envious of these shots.

Smoking chunks of debris rain here and there. Puddles of jet fuel burn on the surface of the water. A few trees have caught aflame. Charred bodies litter the grass. And still, Zane feels absolutely nothing. His chest is a barren tomb. An empty casket.

Hollow by Submersed plays as Zane mounts the bike, starts it up, and follows the walkway around and zips through another set of poles meant to block vehicles from entering.

♪ You take the breath you didn't make ♪
♪ What's left you did forsake ♪
♪ Lift me up my soul's so hollow ♪
♪ You can make me scream internally ♪
♪ You can make me breathe eternally ♪

He drives down the tree-lined shady street of Henry Bacon Drive and makes a right onto Constitution Avenue. All eight lanes of the road are crammed with abandoned automobiles, so he rides the sidewalk until he reaches the Ellipse of President's Park. The semicircular colonnaded balcony of the South Portico of the White House is visible in the distance, peeking arrogantly through the tall trees.

In the wake of World War III, the war of all nations versus the armies of God, the President issued a military draft, before he and his cabinet fled to an undisclosed underground military installation, leaving the American people despondent and the Executive Mansion deserted.

The thought of the President's Palace being unoccupied compels the curious explorer within him. So Zane drives between two dead fountains and on into the park, as *Monsters by Band of Horses* begins to play.

The tires of the bike crush the dead brown grass, frozen with morning dew, as he cruises through the center of the Ellipse, towards the National Christmas Tree at the other end of the park, off to the right. It is all lit up even with the power grid down since it utilizes solar energy.

A man in his mid-to-late-twenties darts into the park from the left, clutching a wooden baseball bat in one hand and the wrist of a woman with the other, who is having trouble keeping pace with him. A little girl, three or four-years-old, clings to the woman, face buried in the crook of her neck.

The photographer in him taking control, Zane stops, turns off the bike, and gets off.

Two bellowing bloody men enter the park a few yards behind the family of three. At the same moment, four more of the crazed infected rush into the park from the opposite side, spread out and close in on them.

The man halts at the center of the Ellipse, ten feet from Zane, his wife ready to collapse with exhaustion. The husband yells at her to get down and stay there, and she obeys immediately, falling to her knees and hugging her daughter with her entire body to protect her.

The six infected holler and bark like rabid dogs as they circle the man, waving his bat at them wildly.

♪ When awful people they surround you ♪
♪ Well hey, they just like monsters ♪
♪ They come to feed on us ♪
♪ Giant little animals for us ♪
♪ Though to say we got much hope ♪
♪ If I am lost it's only for a little while ♪

Zane walks a tight orbit around the phalanx of snarling infected, crouching here and there, trying to get the best angles so that their vicious attack is framed just right.

His mind refuses to observe the horror taking place in real time. He sees each image he catches in a freeze frame. And a flash of pleasant memory between each shot acts as a counterbalance.

Snap! The end of the father's bat connecting with a lunging woman's growling mouth, her neck twisted, jaw unhinged, blood and teeth suspended in midair.

Flash! Green mint ice cream smeared across Sarafina's smiling lips, after a game of miniature golf on their first date.

Snap! The father's bat rebounding off a frenzied attacker's crushed nose, with a mist of blood, and a crack through the center of the bat.

Flash! Sarafina in his arms, looking up at him and whispering, 'I love you,' for the first time.

Snap! With an explosion of splinters, the end of the bat ricocheting off an attacker's forehead, while the jagged end of the handle scrapes across the side of his scalp.

Flash! Eyes shut tight, mouth wide, Sarafina shudders in ecstasy as she climaxes below him.

Snap! The father jabbing the broken bat end into the throat of a leaping man with a gush of blood.

Flash! Sarafina doing the Egyptian dance in their bathroom doorway, wearing nothing but a hat of soap bubbles.

Snap! The father's arms are thrown wide, his mouth agape with a roar of pain, his body seemingly levitating as he is frozen in mid-fall, an infected man atop him, ripping into his jugular mid-tackle.

Flash! Sarafina jumping on their bed and daring him to use his 'fancy-pants karate' to take her down.

Snap! The mother yanked backward by her long hair, her daughter torn from her arms by her small neck, both crying out with horror as they reach for each other.

Flash! Wetsuit around her knees, Sarafina laughing loud after falling on her ass, on a boat trip returning from scuba diving during their Caribbean honeymoon.

Snap! The mother's arms and legs are pointed in different directions in a thrashing of helpless struggle, as her throat is shredded by grinding teeth.

Flash! Sarafina holding the downward dog Yoga pose while swearing jokingly to withhold sex if he gives her another wedgie.

Snap! The crying girl's little body is contorted in a flail of resistance as an enraged man palms the back of her skull with one hand and grips a leg with his other, and plunges his broken teeth into the soft skin of her neck.

Flash! Sarafina's harlequin-green eyes sparkling with tears of joy while viewing their daughter's thumping heartbeat with an ultrasound.

Until The End by Breaking Benjamin begins to play as Zane starts the bike and rides a wide arc around the family of three laying dead on the cold ground.

♪ I'm done with these endeavors ♪
♪ Alone I walk the winding way ♪
♪ It's over ♪

He exits the park onto East Street NW and rides past the derelict guard post onto Executive Avenue. Follows it up to the White House south lawn, speeds around the large circle to the Rose Garden, and kills the engine.

The *Black Eyed Peas* cover of *Power To The People* by *John Lennon* plays as he walks through the garden, up the stairs to the West Colonnade, through the unlocked doors of the office of the president's secretaries, where papers are scattered everywhere, and finally into the luxurious Oval Office.

♪ Power to the people ♪
♪ Power to the people, right on ♪
♪ Say you want a revolution ♪
♪ We better get on right away ♪
♪ Well you get on your feet ♪
♪ And out on the street ♪

Zane walks across the taupe rug bearing the presidential seal, passed two couches with a coffee table placed between them, around the ornately carved large Resolute Desk, and takes a seat in the president's comfortable leather chair. He gazes at the portrait of George Washington, hung over the marble fireplace across the office, as *The Ghost Of You* by *My Chemical Romance* begins to play.

The emo-punk song, like all the other music he has listened to this morning, carries the potent emotions Zane can no longer feel for himself.

♪ I never said I'd lie and wait forever ♪
♪ If I died, we'd be together ♪

And then with the force of a jolt of lightning, his ruptured heart pounds with torturous guilt. The cold black hole that fills his chest explodes into a fiery sun of pain and anger. Sarafina's protective spirit has forsaken me!

A torrent of vehement rage bellows up from deep within him, from the very core of his being, and erupts from him as a turbulent roar that causes his body to tremble. His lungs feel as if they are being torn apart by the fierce exertion of his furious thunder.

Zane pulls in a deep breath as he tears his Leica from around his neck. He lifts his most prized possession above his head, containing his life's greatest work as a photojournalist, and lets

out another thunderous roar as he slams the camera down on the wooden desk, shattering the lens. He brings it down, again and again, hollering ferociously as he does so, smashing the camera to bits, and then flings the remains across the room into the fireplace.

He shoots to his feet and jerks his katana from its sheath on his back. With one palm smacked on the desktop, he launches himself over the desk, bounces up and slashes his blade down on the wooden coffee table between the couches. He kicks it with a boot while yanking the sword back, then brings it down again, chopping the table in two. Twisting with a violent swipe, he slashes the cushions of the couch to his right, and white feathers burst from within. With a fierce howl and brutal kick he flips the couch over on its back. Then turns to the other couch and slashes back and forth in a screaming rage, mincing the cushions to ragged shreds and sending feathers flying all about the Oval Office.

♪ At the end of the world ♪
♪ Or the last thing I see ♪
♪ You are never coming home ♪
♪ And all the things that you never ever told me ♪
♪ And all the smiles that are ever gonna haunt me ♪
♪ Never coming home ♪
♪ Never coming home ♪
♪ Could I? Should I? ♪
♪ And all the wounds that are ever gonna scar me ♪
♪ For all the ghosts that are never gonna... ♪

Zane yanks his earbuds out and hurls his smartphone against the wall. He grips his katana firm with both hands, blade pointed down, and lifts it over his head. His arms shake and he hyperventilates as he gathers the courage to plunge the steel deep into his belly. With one last furious cry of wrath, he thrusts the blade down hard, stabbing it into the center of the president's desk.

He turns and melts to the floor, his back against the desk. Resting his elbows on his raised knees, he cups his eyes with his palms. A sob retches up from the bowels of his guts. And at last, his eyes fill with tears. I'm sorry, Sarafina. I'm too weak to take my own life!

He cries and cries, tears running from his palms down his arms. He cries and cries, begging his dead wife and unborn daughter for forgiveness. He cries and cries until he can conjure no more tears. And then he continues to sob without the tears.

When he feels too emotionally drained to cry anymore, a male voice, deep and melodic, sounds clearly in his mind. *"It is time to give up being only a spectator and become a true participant."*

Zane's eyes shoot open. A ghostly man stands before him. Ethereal blue and ageless, seven-foot-tall with white hair and gold eyes. He wears white robes with gold edging, the material as non-physical as the man. A white misty energy swirls about him and flows out from him like dry ice. He has no wings or halo, but he is far more angelic than any of those creatures soaring the skies.

This is the end of the free preview of Shamans of Time.
The full novel is available for purchase at most major eBook retailers.
Please browse my website JamesLucien.com for more of my works.