



# NAIN ROUGE

*a novel:*

*Josef Bastian*



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THE CRIMSON THREE

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by

Josef Bastian

illustrations by

Bronwyn Coveney & Patrick McEvoy

FolkTeller  
Stories To Be Shared



Nain Rouge: The Crimson Three  
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*Some of the most amazing things happen in the  
most ordinary places...*

*-From the Folkteller's Guidebook*

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Part 1  
The Red Legend

*Honi soit qui mal y pense*



*Honi soit qui mal y pense*

*“Evil be to those who Evil think”*

# Prologue

**O**nce upon a time, seems like a logical place to start, doesn't it? Most good stories begin this way and I will make no exception. As the Folkteller, it's my job and duty to appear once in a while and tell some of my stories to you. No one really knows when I will show up or when I will leave. In fact, I don't really know myself. What I do know is that I'm here now, so it must be time for me to share a story with you ...

Once upon a time, across the great sea, the kings and queens of Europe looked to knights, lords and ladies to maintain peace and balance in the land. People spoke of chivalry, a term used to describe what is best in all of us. Chivalry became the name for the general spirit or state of mind which inspired men and women to heroic actions and greatness, keeping them in tune with all that was beautiful and sublime in the universe.

In the New World, the order of knights and chivalry died. In the New World, explorers and settlers came. They scrapped their old ways in exchange for adventure, discovery and opportunity.



Decisions were made. Some of these decisions were good, and led to growth and prosperity. Some of their decisions were bad, and became buried in a dark history of war, strife and human conflict.

Now, the land and its people have grown up together. We live in a land of democracy and personal freedom. We live in a land where people have the right to vote, speak freely and protect themselves from danger. We are left to our own devices to choose between what is right and wrong. In this land of individuals, we are left to decide between good and evil; to pursue our own happiness.

But in these current times – somewhere, somehow – something has gotten lost, mixed up and out of balance. In this process of exploration and discovery, choices were made, some of them bad.

Now we know that every bad choice, every dark thought, has to go somewhere. They build up over time and eventually manifest themselves in one fashion or another. Usually, this negativity creates nothing more than a bad mood, hurt feelings or a sad face. Fortunately, these things fade quickly and are soon forgotten.

But sometimes, evil does not go away. Sometimes, the darkness builds up and up and up until it manifests into something quite astonishing, quite frightening and quite real.

This is where our story begins.

It is at these critical times, these times of crisis, when we are forced to look deep inside ourselves and ask...

“What do I believe in? What do I choose?”





## 1: *At the Museum*

**T**he museum felt very different today. Elly and Tom both noticed it. These best friends had been to the Detroit Institute of Arts on field trips many, many times and had never felt such a creepy, eerie feeling. It was not quite a smell or a sound or anything they saw. No, it was more like a whisper, a hint, a shadow, a feeling down deep in the soul that something was not quite right.

This tingling of uneasiness followed Elly and Tom from the main hall into the Diego Rivera Court. As they looked around, Elly and Tom were swallowed up by the enormity of the scene that encircled them. Images of factories, pyramids, machinery, airplanes, gods and goddesses blurred past their eyes like a fast-moving freight train. It was almost too much to take in at once. Fortunately, chairs and benches had been placed strategically around the room, so that their large group could settle in and unravel the activity



## Book 1: *The Red Legend*

that played so rapidly before them.

Some said that these *Detroit Industry* murals were the finest example of Mexican muralist work in the United States. Tom and Elly wouldn't know whether to disagree or not. What they were about to learn, however, was that in 1932, Edsel Ford and Ford Motor Company commissioned Diego Rivera to create two magnificent paintings for the museum in its old Garden Court.

As they read the placards near the courtyard entrance, Elly and Tom learned that the north and south walls were devoted to three sets of images: the representation of the races of people that shape North American culture and made up its work force, the automobile industry, and the other industries of Detroit - medical, pharmaceutical, and chemical. At the bottom of the walls were small panels which depicted the sequence of a day in the life of the workers at the Ford River Rouge plant.

The central panel of the north wall represented important operations in the production and manufacture of the engine and transmission of the 1932 Ford V8.

The major panel of the south wall was devoted to the production of the automobile's exterior.

Just as they finished reading the descriptions, their guide began her presentation about the Diego Rivera murals. Her voice echoed in the courtyard like a distant call from a far-off hill. Elly and Tom barely understood a word of what she was saying. Instead, they swiveled their heads slowly around, like barn owls, trying to figure out the story that was being told within the giant symbols and pictures that covered every wall.

The docent continued with her presentation about Diego

## *Chapter 1: At the Museum*

Rivera and the history of the “Detroit Industry” murals, as the two teens broke away from the larger group, slowly swivelling around the large room to take in the giant frescoes.

“Now, children, you will notice that the entire mural begins on the East Wall. As you look up, you will see that Rivera uses the image of a baby growing in the bulb of a plant. This was done to remind us that all human endeavors are rooted in the earth, the water and the land on which we live. The women on each side are fertility figures, holding fruits and vegetables that are native to this region...”

Elly commented, “Could you imagine how long it took to paint these?”

“Stopping all that paint on a wall, I would have been bored out of my mind. Kind of like I am now...” Tom whispered.

Elly hushed him, “Stop complaining. A little culture wouldn’t kill you Tommy.”

“I don’t know, it might,” Tom flipped back.

Just then, Elly’s eyes flashed back and forth across the mural on the north wall. She could have sworn that there was a shadow moving, appearing and disappearing, shifting behind the industrial images and unfamiliar faces within the painting. She could catch a glimpse of it with her peripheral vision. But as soon as she would turn and focus, like a wisp of smoke, it was gone. Instinctively, Elly ran back into the main hall, unfazed by the noise and commotion that still emanated from that direction. As she burst into the room, she took about three steps and then froze in her tracks. The suits of armor that had so recently lined each side of the hall were in the process of falling, flying and slamming against each other. As

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

the last armor fell, before the final echo faded, Elly saw something even more unbelievable.

At the far end of the hall where 17th century Italian Corsaletto armor once stood, there crouched a small, gnarled, bizarre-looking creature. His face was as red as new copper, rough, stubbled and twisted.

Tom came running in and caught up with Elly, just in time to see this little man hopping up and down in an odd and joyful jig. He was surprised at the sight of this impish person, adorned in worn, threadbare clothes that looked like a blackish-brown animal pelt and a dingy greenish-gray mossy cap that was pulled down over the points of his ears.

This excited little creature who they watched dancing and jumping about seemed to be in a maddened frenzy of anger and joy. Just as Elly and Tom were taking in the entire scene, the little man stopped. The dancing stopped. The odd, queer, caterwauling sound he made stopped. Everything stopped - except his eyes.

As the echoes of falling armor had faded, the silent aftermath fell down around both children, like disturbed dust from an empty, unkempt room. Though still quite far away on the other side of the hall, his eyes never moved. He was staring right at them. They tried to look away from the piercing black eyes, but could not. The feeling that they had felt earlier in the day came over both of them – even stronger now.

It seemed like an eternity that he gazed at them. He never moved. It was as if his dark, onyx eyes had caught them, trapped them in his stare. Slowly, his eyes changed like glowing embers caught by an errant wind – coal black into deep blood red. It was

## *Chapter 1: At the Museum*

then that this elfish man began to turn his head, slowly back and forth, ever so slightly, almost like he was tugging, trolling on the line of sight he had drawn between them. As he did this, both Elly and Tom began to feel dizzy, sick and nauseous. Dark and brooding thoughts began to bleed, seep into their brains.

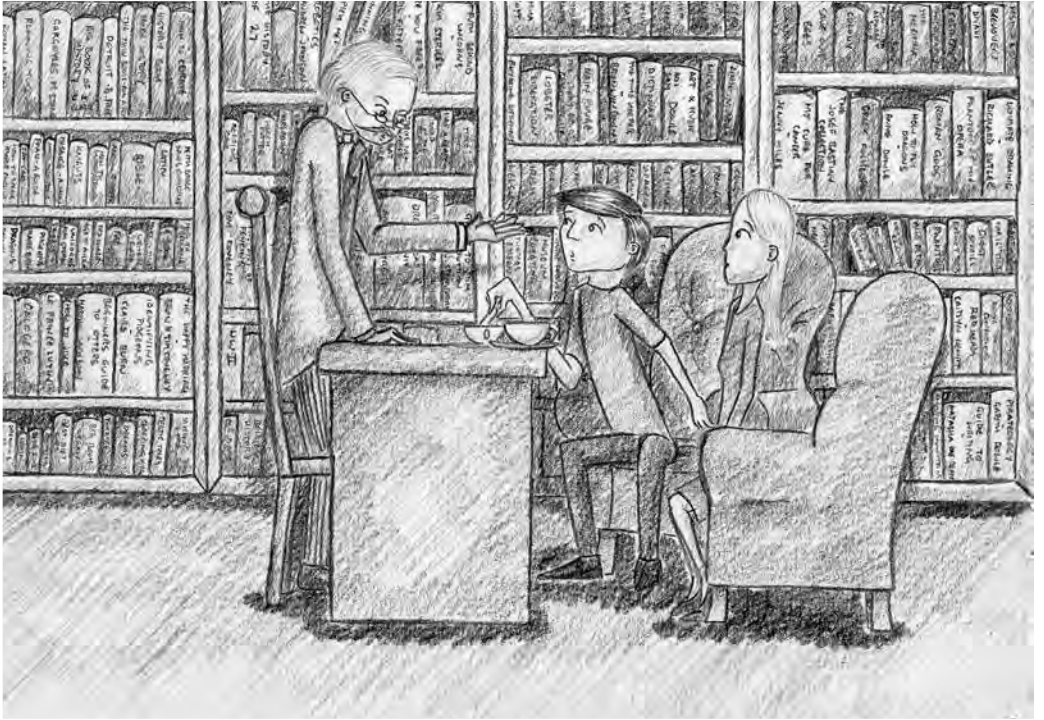
Elly and Tom felt a strange spinning, as if they had been caught up in a vortex of darkness, sadness and despair. It was a feeling like rocking on the back legs of a chair, being pulled off-balance, bracing for a fall and then being caught at the last second. Only the feeling wrapped around them again and again and again; like falling inside of a fall.

On the verge of passing out, the children struggled to open their eyes once more. To their horror, they found that the little trollish figure was moving toward them. It may have been the dizziness or general disorientation, but both children watched as the man disappeared and re-appeared closer to them, like pieces cut away in a film strip and spliced back together, creating a strange, strobing effect. At the very moment the creature seemed to be upon them, Elly and Tom heard a loud, electrical POP, a queer cackling, and then they dropped down hard to the ground.

Everything went black.







## 2: *Bad Things*

**F**aces hovered above Elly and Tom as light flooded back into their eyes.

“Are you guys okay?” came a voice from above.

As the children became more aware of their surroundings, they realized that they were lying flat on their backs in the main hall of the museum. Their teacher, Ms. Julian, was bent over them with a look of quiet concern, while some of the other children stood around Elly and Tom in a stunned semi-circle.

“Did anyone get the license plate number of that truck that hit me?” Tom slowly sat up and rubbed the back his head.

“What happened?” asked Elly, as she pushed herself up off of the museum floor.

“We were hoping that you could tell us,” said Ms. Julian.

Elly was the first to speak, “I’m not sure what happened, really. I ran in here when I heard all of the noise, and the next thing I

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

knew, I was knocked out cold.”

Tom sat up a little bit more and added, “I was running in after Elly to see where she had gone. When I got into the main hall, I saw Elly staring at a p-”

Tom felt an elbow slam sharply into his rib cage.

“Ow, what did you do that for?!” Tom yelled as he turned toward Elly. Elly gave him a stern look, pursed her lips and shook her head ever so slightly, subtly telling Tom to keep his mouth shut.

“What I was saying,” Tom began again, “Was that when I came in, I saw Elly staring at a pile of armor.”

Tom looked back at Elly with the silent understanding that they would talk later in more detail about what both of them had seen.

After the children were helped to their feet, Dr. Beele, the museum curator, entered the room - quietly approaching Tom and Elly amidst the broken armor and discarded weaponry. Dr. Beele was a world-renowned art historian and had been with the Detroit Institute of Arts for many years. He was a very dapper man, always clean and pressed, with a dusty rose bow-tie, salt and pepper hair, and antique Victorian glasses that seemed to balance perfectly at the end of his pointy, particular nose.

At first, Dr. Beele wanted to be sure that Elly and Tom were all right, which they were. Secondly, he wanted to reassure all of the children that the museum was safe and that they could continue on with the rest of their tour. Lastly, Dr. Beele wanted permission from Ms. Julian to have a private conversation with both Elly and Tom. When Ms. Julian asked the children if they would mind going with Dr. Beele and joining up with the group later, Elly and Tom agreed.

## *Chapter 2: Bad Things*

Once the group had moved into another section of the museum, Dr. Beele smiled warmly at Elly and Tom, beckoning them to follow him to his private office. Dr. Beele walked with purpose and precision through the Detroit Institute of Arts, around artifacts, past the Taubman Wing, through medieval antiquities, down the spiral staircase and up into the private employee elevator to his corner office.

Dr. Beele's office appeared just as a world-traveling, highly-educated, cultured museum curator's office should appear. Ceiling to floor bookshelves filled with ancient historical texts and modern fictions surrounded a large, turn-of-century mahogany desk. Dotted about the room were various artifacts, paintings and figurines that served only to add to the powerful atmosphere of this broad-shouldered, academic workplace.

The intimidating effect of Dr. Beele's office was softened by a large, Italian Renaissance-styled window that made up the fourth wall of the room. These windows faced the western sky, just left of the main entrance of the museum, letting in the soft amber light of the afternoon sun. It was this combination of indirect light and expansive scenery that made the room both subtle and substantial at the same time. This western view from Dr. Beele's office drew in the center of the city. Between the large brick buildings and glass atriums that ran parallel down to Hart Plaza, was the main thoroughfare of the city of Detroit.

Woodward Avenue stretched right in front of the museum, marking the largest north/south gateway in and out of the city. Dr. Beele offered Elly and Tom a comfortable seat in two of his best red leather arm chairs. A silver tea service sat at the edge of

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

his desk, already prepared with a special Darjeeling blend and miniature biscuits and cookies. After the curator poured them each a cup of piping hot tea, he turned toward the windows, staring briefing out at the Detroit Public Library directly across the street.

Beele finally turned to them and spoke, “Elly, Tom, you are probably wondering why I asked you to speak with me today. I must apologize for my haste in shepherding you up here so quickly.”

The children shook their heads as if to say it was no trouble at all, when in actuality they would have found it very difficult to speak at that moment, with a mouthful of tea and lady fingers.

“I’ll get straight to the point,” Beele continued. “I know that you saw something today. I knew the moment I came into the hall and saw you both lying there. It is important that you know that this is not the first mishap to befall the museum as of late. In fact, these little disasters have been happening all over the city, and at an increasingly alarming rate, I might add.”

Tom was the first to speak. “Well Dr. Beele, I can tell you what I saw. I came into the hall after Elly. Before I passed out, I caught a glimpse of a weird little man. I think he was the one who knocked down all of the armor.”

Dr. Beele did not look surprised. In fact, he hardly even acknowledged what Tom was saying. “I know that you two had nothing to do with the damage to our collection,” the curator replied; “I am more curious as to what you think you saw.”

Elly finished swallowing her second macaroon and spoke up; “I’ll tell you what I saw. I got a better look at him than Tom did. When I heard all that crashing, I ran into the main hall. When I looked around, I saw a gross-looking little red creature shoving



## *Chapter 2: Bad Things*

armor against armor like a giant game of dominoes. He really seemed to be enjoying himself, because he was laughing and dancing around the whole time.”

“Yeah,” Tom piped in, “he had this crazy laugh like a mix between a cat, a hyena and a snake. It was kind of a high-pitched hissing laughter. Pretty creepy if you ask me.”

Elly spoke up again, “Yes, but that was not the strangest thing. He saw us. He knew we were there. And when he looked at me, it was like I was frozen right where I stood. I could not move! The worst part of it all was the sick feeling I had the whole time he was staring at me. It was like he was tapping into all of the bad thoughts and feelings I had ever had and bringing them to the surface.”

Tom shouted out, “Me too! That is exactly how I felt!”

It was clear that the children were becoming quite agitated, remembering the terrible experience that they had just been through. Dr. Beele quietly walked across the room in a calm, metered manner. He stepped toward the edge of his desk and offered Elly and Tom some more tea and cookies. Once the children had calmed down a bit, Dr. Beele went back to a spot closer to the window.

“Tom, Elly,” the curator began quietly, “There are some things you need to know about what you saw today. “Both children slid back in their chairs, relaxing a bit, but focusing all of their attention on the words that Dr. Beele was about to speak. The next two words that Elly and Tom would hear would change their lives forever. Two words that would echo in their heads, their hearts, for years to come.

“Nain Rouge,” Dr. Beele stated simply.

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“What? Who?” Tom blurted back.

“The Nain Rouge,” the curator repeated.

Elly interrupted both of them, “I’m sorry, Dr. Beele, but what is a Nain Rouge?”

The curator smiled apologetically and took a few steps toward them, “The Nain Rouge is the Red Dwarf.”

Tom jumped back into the conversation, “Okay, so what’s a red dwarf? Don’t tell me we were attacked by one of Snow White’s rejects!”

Dr. Beele’s face quickly became more serious as he moved toward Tom, slid the tea service aside and sat down on the edge of desk, directly in front of the children.

“Tom,” Dr. Beele said earnestly, “this is nothing to joke about. The Nain Rouge is quite real and quite dangerous.” The curator leaned in toward the children and began to tell them the story of what and who they had seen that day.

“The Nain Rouge is as old as the city itself, maybe older. Legend tells of a devilish creature whose appearance foreshadows terrible events within the city limits. The creature is said to have been attacked in 1701 by the first white settler of Detroit, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. Cadillac threw him out of the Fort Pontchartrain settlement, only to have the dwarf come back as a harbinger of doom. Ever since that time, Lutin has appeared in Detroit just before an impending disaster.”

As Dr. Beele took a long breath, Elly interrupted, “Doctor, why did you call him Lutin?”

“Did I?” the curator quietly responded.

“Yes, you sure did,” said Tom, chiming in. “Why did you say



## *Chapter 2: Bad Things*

‘Lutin,’ Dr. Beele?”

Dr. Beele got up slowly from the corner of the desk and made his way toward his shelves of books. Briefly stretching upon the balls of his feet, he pulled down a brittle-looking leather bound book from an upper shelf. The binding of the book creaked a little, as the curator opened to a dog-eared passage. Upon opening the book, a small blue-enameled medal object with a green ribbon fell from the pages to the floor. Tom reached over and picked it up gently.

“What is this?” Tom asked as he held the object. Now that it was closer to him, he could see that it was a medallion. It was the kind of medallion you would see pinned to the chest of a soldier or military officer. Within the medallion was an image of a knight on horseback, slaying a monstrous green dragon.

Tom handed the medallion to Elly so that she could see it too. Elly saw that there was an inscription in the medal. She looked it over and read it aloud:

“Honi soit qui mal y pense ... What does that mean, Dr. Beele?”

The curator smiled gently at Elly and softly beckoned for the medallion. Elly silently handed over the object to Dr. Beele.

Once in his possession, Beele rolled the medallion over in his hands a few times, as if he were remembering something fondly from his past.

“Ah yes, the Most Noble Order of the Garter,” Dr. Beele began. “I had almost forgotten that I still had this in my possession. If you must know, children, this medallion was given to me by a very special friend back when I was in England.”

Elly interjected, “But the inscription and the knight and the

## Book 1: *The Red Legend*

dragon – What does it all mean?”

The curator looked at both children with reassurance, “The Most Noble Order of the Garter is nothing more than chivalrous order – a club of sorts. The knight on the medallion is St. George, the patron saint of England, famous for slaying an evil dragon.

“As for the saying, ‘Honi soit qui mal y pense,’ it is the motto of this order in Latin. It means ‘evil be to those who evil think.’

“In more modern American English, one might say ‘If you have evil in your heart and mind, it will eventually come back to you in some way, shape or form.’”

Elly spoke up again, “So, are you a knight?”

“A knight?” Dr. Beele repeated with a slight chuckle, “Well, I guess in a way I am. But that is neither here nor there, children. Though I do find it quite peculiar that you would find such an artifact at this point in time, we do have much more pressing matters to discuss. So, for now, let’s set this topic aside and return to the issues at hand.”

With that, the curator took one last curious look at the object, quietly slipped the medallion into his left breast pocket and picked up the ancient book again. Turning around toward the children, he leafed through the pages and found the passage for which he had been looking. With only a brief pause, Dr. Beele began to read aloud:

*“You are invisible when you like it; you cross in one moment the vast space of the universe; you rise without having wings; you go through the ground without dying; you penetrate the abysses of the sea without drowning; you enter everywhere, though the windows and*

## Chapter 2: Bad Things

*the doors are closed; and, when you decide to, you can let yourself be seen in your natural form.”*

Upon finishing his reading, Beele closed the book and handed it to Elly. She took the book gently from his hands and held it so that both she and Tom could see it. Across the leather cover, in flecked, faded gold was inscribed the title, *Le Prince Lutin*. The children looked back at Dr. Beele.

“Elly, Tom, you must understand, there are many things that I know. However, there are even more things of which I know nothing at all. The book you are holding is a French fairy tale, dating back to 1697. I discovered this book during one of my internships at the Louvre in Paris, France. There was a small roadside bookshop, just outside of the city. Something drew me to the shop and, inexorably, to this book. It was not until today that I realized why I had purchased this quaint little story so many years ago. Now, things are being revealed that have been hidden for such a very long time, which only creates more questions for us all.

“From this story, I can tell you that Lutin is very powerful. He can go anywhere and take on any form that he likes. But he only shows himself in his “natural form” to those with whom he wishes to communicate.

“It is important that I share with you all that I know. Maybe you can help me find the missing pieces of the puzzle or at least help me understand the pieces we already have.”

Dr. Beele paused for a brief moment and then began again: “There is a bit more information I can share. What I do know is that ‘Lutin’ is French, and has come to mean a mischievous hobgoblin

## Book 1: *The Red Legend*

or house spirit. However, the little creature you ran into seems to be Lutin himself; he has said so. And he is not mischievous; he is evil. Unfortunately, there is much more to Lutin than I will ever know.”

Tom flopped back into his armchair, “Geez, doc, every time we ask you a question, the answers get worse and worse! What do you mean *he* said so?”

“Remember that horrible hissing, crying sound you heard just before you passed out? Well, that was Lutin calling out his own name. He wanted you both to hear it. The Nain Rouge’s cry is heard only by those to which it is intended. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

“But why, Dr. Beele, why?” interjected Elly.

The curator paused for a little while, as if processing multiple volumes of thought in rapid succession. Elly and Tom waited for his answer for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, the doctor took a deep, cleansing breath and softly said to both children:

“Because you have been chosen.”





### 3: *The Chosen*

**E**lly and Tom felt dizzy again. Dr. Beele's words wafted through their ears, encircling their thoughts like the heavy perfumed smoke of an over-packed hookah pipe. The rest of the conversation with the curator blurred into nothingness. Before Elly and Tom knew it, they were back with their group from Royal Oak Middle School, heading for the school bus that would take them back north, out of the city.

The yellow Bluebird school bus turned right onto Woodward Avenue and crossed back in front of the main entrance of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Elly and Tom had found a seat toward the back of the bus and slid close to each other, whispering quietly about the day they had just experienced. The bus made a slight detour off of the main street, avoiding the asphalt trucks and paving crews that routinely filled the ever-expanding ruts and potholes that dotted so many of the city's roads.

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

The children paused for a moment, looking up from their conversation; they noticed the new route the school bus had taken. As they looked out the bus window, they could see the Detroit Mounted Police station roll slowly past the side of their bus. How strange it was to see horses, barns and stables right in the middle of concrete, glass and cement. That familiar barnyard smell of hay, leather and manure seemed quite out of place in this bustling, urban environment.

Elly and Tom began to relax a little bit. They could feel their back and shoulder muscles release as their conversation faded into silence and they slid gently back onto the green vinyl seats of Row 24 on the right side of the bus. Maybe this had all been a dream or a figment of their collective imaginations.

As the bus completed its detour, it turned left to head back onto Woodward Avenue. Like the tail end of a yellow python, the rear of the bus slid quietly past the corner of the stables at the mounted police station. Without really thinking, both Elly and Tom peered out of the window at a broad-backed black stallion, roped to the white wooden fence at the edge of the stable.

The horse looked up from its bale of hay and stared right at them. Its eyes were as black as night and twice as deep. Elly gripped Tom's hand.

"Do you see that?" she whispered.

"I see it, I see it," Tom hissed back between his clenched teeth.

The dark horse never broke his gaze at the children. Elly and Tom were frozen in fear and fascination; like watching a car accident happen in slow motion right before your eyes. Elly squeezed Tom's hand even harder. The horse was smiling at them. It was



### *Chapter 3: The Chosen*

not a friendly smile. Actually, it was less of a smile and more of a grin; an evil grin. They had seen those eyes before. They had seen that grin before, too. Without realizing it, Tom pulled Elly closer. It was Lutin. He was watching them and they could feel it. They could feel it within every muscle, every bone, and every sinew of their bodies.

The bus bumped and jumbled back onto Woodward Avenue. Elly and Tom were still clutching each other, though no one else really noticed. As the heavy transmission clunked into third gear, the bus lurched forward, gaining a bit more speed as it went.

Elly turned quietly to Tom and whispered so softly that no one else could hear, “Why us?”



## 4: *Fast Friends*

**E**lly and Tom had grown up together in the mid-sized suburb of Royal Oak. Royal Oak was incorporated as a city in 1921, but its name was much older. As far back as 1819, Michigan Governor Lewis Cass and several companions set out on an exploration of Michigan territory to disprove land surveyors' claims that the territory was swampy and uninhabitable. On their journey, they encountered a stately oak tree with a trunk considerably wider than most other oaks. Its large branches reminded Cass of the legend of the Royal Oak tree, under which King Charles II of England took sanctuary from enemy forces in 1660. Cass and his companions christened the tree the "Royal Oak." And so the city received its name.

Oddly enough, the original "Royal Oak" tree was destroyed by a strange, unexpected storm that came up from the south, from Detroit actually, many years ago...

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

Now, Royal Oak was the kind of place where people loved to live. The tree-lined streets, sturdy homes and quaint downtown area seemed to lift you just out of reach of the big city problems. Yet, whenever anything bad happened in Detroit, its effects still reverberated out and up to Royal Oak, where the people would discuss matters quietly, in private. There was always a sense of silent thankfulness and uneasiness with the citizens of Royal Oak: they were thankful that the growing problems were not theirs, and uneasy that the negative vibrations were coming north, with increasing strength and frequency.

Elly and Tom had lived in Royal Oak all of their lives. Elly Williams had always been above average. In fact, one might call her an overachiever – in everything. Elly excelled in volleyball, tennis, track, mathematics, debate, English composition and language arts – just to name a few items on her long list of accomplishments. Despite her high achievements, though, Elly often appeared shy and slightly hesitant. There seemed to be an insecure energy about her that constantly drove her to achieve and excel at everything she attempted. It was as if she was being chased by the shadow of her true self, hiding behind the movement and activity until the dark shade passed by her unnoticed. The awards and accolades from her teachers and peers became a useful smoke screen to camouflage the fear and doubt that flowed so subtly, just below the surface of her thinly-veiled anxiety.

Tom Demine was aware of all of this. Well, actually, he had never really thought too much about Elly and her “emotions.” Tom just knew Elly, inside and out. They had grown up together on Cedar Hill and had been in school together since kindergarten.

## *Chapter 4: Fast Friends*

Tom was the kind of boy that let his actions speak loudly, instead of his words. He was not much of a talker; he was really more of a doer. As far as Elly went, Tom was never that impressed with all of Elly's medals, certificates and awards. In his mind, those were just ways of other people telling you how great you were. Tom didn't need any of that stuff. He was confident in himself. He could do just about anything he put his mind to do. The trick with Tom was actually being able to put his mind to do anything.

Tom was a scatter-brained free spirit who was often known to leap before he ever thought to look. That is why Tom was always getting into some sort of mischief. Oh, he never did anything really bad, just little things, like rolling smoke bombs down the hall on the last day of school, missing some of his class assignments, or forgetting to shut the water off when filling the neighbor's swimming pool (flooding their backyard and basement in the process). If they were giving out awards for forgetfulness and bad judgment, Tom would have more medals and trophies than Elly.

Maybe this is why Elly and Tom got along so well. Tom had the confidence that Elly was lacking, while Elly had the discipline of thought that Tom needed to get anything done. The fact that they had been together for so long allowed them to communicate instinctively, often without ever speaking aloud.

As the pair got older and moved into middle school, they both learned to keep their special relationship under wraps. A few kids had made comments about them being "lovebirds" or a "cute couple," so they were always careful about how much time they spent together during school hours. Other than that, though, Elly and Tom were inseparable. There was always a comfortable

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understanding that flowed between them, allowing them to communicate openly and freely, without ever having to explain too much.

During this time of confusion and mystery, it was a good thing that Elly and Tom were in this predicament together. For some reason, they both felt that if something bad was going to happen, it would be better if it happened to them both – together. After all, misery does love company.







## 5: *Marianne de Tonty*

**S**ince it had been an all-day field trip, the children had only a few minutes to gather their things from their lockers before the final dismissal bell rang. Tom told Elly to meet him after school in the library media center, so that they could figure out what was really going on.

The media center was a great place to meet. There were always after-school activities going on, so on most days the center was open for a few hours after school. Elly entered the room and found Tom already sitting in the computer lab.

“Elly, get in here! You’ve got to see this,” Tom called out from behind the flat-screen computer monitor.

“I thought we were going to talk, not play games on the computer,” Elly sighed in frustration, as she pulled up an extra chair and sat next to Tom.

Tom replied indignantly, “I’m not playing games. I’m doing

## Book 1: *The Red Legend*

research on the Nain Rouge, and look what I found. Remember, Dr. Beele said that the little monster was thrown out of Fort Pontchartrain over 300 years ago.”

“So, big deal, we already knew that,” Elly said.

“Yeah, but did you know that Fort Pontchartrain was also known as Fort Detroit, which is where the city actually started?”

Elly leaned in closer to the computer monitor, “OK, you’ve got my attention now. What else?”

“Here,” Tom continued. “Remember when we did that genealogy project in school last year? And you and I found out that we were related way, way back, many generations ago?”

Elly rolled her eyes, “Yeah, how could I forget? I’m still trying to get over the ‘Kissing Cousins’ nickname everyone slapped on us.”

“Well get over it, El – I did. Anyway, do you remember who our common ancestor was? It was Marianne de Tonty!”

Elly gave Tom a disconcerted stare, “So, what of it? I don’t even know who that is.”

Tom gently put his hand on the back of Elly’s head and pushed her closer to the computer screen. “Here, read this,” he said firmly. Elly looked at the web site on the monitor and silently read:

*“Pierre Alphonse de Tonty was born in 1659 to Laurent and Angelique (de Liette) de Tonty. Sometime after 1689 and before 1701, Tonty married Marianne la Marque, daughter of Francois la Marque. This was Marianne’s third marriage.*

*Tonty was the Captain of Cadillac’s party which founded Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit in 1701. He was a loyal, trusted officer. He was known to the Native Americans as ‘the man with the iron hand’ due to an artificial limb.”*

## *Chapter 5: Marianne de Tonty*

“Okay, I get it,” Elly said after a time, “We’re related to Marianne de Tonty, so what’s the big deal?”

“The big deal is that her husband was an officer in Cadillac’s expedition. He helped found Fort Pontchartrain!”

Elly paused for a minute to let this information sink in. She now knew that Tom and she were directly linked to the original French settlers. The blood of their ancestors now ran through their veins. After a few minutes, she leaned back her chair and pointed directly at Tom.

“I bet this is why we were chosen. Something must have happened with the Nain Rouge back then and, since we are related to these first settlers, we have to pay the price!”

The gravity of this moment soon settled on both Elly and Tom like a damp woollen blanket. For the first time, they realized that what had happened that day was just the tip of the iceberg. There was much more going on around them than what appeared to the naked eye. It was as if an invisible storm was beginning to swirl around them, creating a vortex of energy, information and strange history that was growing in its intensity. They were now mixed up with forces, dark and sinister, that were not going to go away easily.

Eventually, Elly and Tom became filled with a sense of urgency. They knew that something was not right and they were the ones who were going to have to fix it.

“We need to find a way to contact Dr. Beele,” Elly stated. “He is the one person who can help us.”

“Yeah, but how are we going to get all the way back down to Detroit without someone asking us a bunch of questions?” Tom

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

quipped back.

“Well, we will just have to find a way,” Elly snapped back. “We can’t afford to wait too long. I’m just afraid that something else bad will happen if we don’t do something right now!”

“Um, I could steal the principal’s car and we could drive down there right now, if you want,” Tom coolly suggested.

Elly gave Tom a piercing, daggered look.

“Okay, El, geez, I was just kidding, lighten up...” Tom tried to smooth things over; “Let’s talk to our parents and see if they will give us a ride down this weekend. We can tell them we have to do research for a paper or something.”

Elly’s stare mellowed into a more contented look, “Well, now you are back on track. That sounds like an idea we can make happen. I will start working on my mom and dad tonight.”

“Great,” Tom said, “I’ll see what I can do when I get home too.”

“Awesome,” Elly said, sounding a bit more satisfied, “I’m sure that Dr. Beele will be anxious to learn what we’ve discovered. This could be the big clue we’re looking for.”





## 6: *The Good Doctor*

**H**ieronymus Stanley Beele was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, to American missionary parents. After being born, he relaxed quietly in a modest clay-brick home just above the bustling city. This lasted for only the first few weeks of his life. He has been travelling and adventuring ever since.

Hieronymus's childhood consisted of attending various International American schools around the world. He spent months on end in England, Switzerland, Greece, Hungary, Finland, Nepal, China, Borneo, Russia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and even Easter Island.

As a boy, he learned to be inquisitive and resourceful, making friends easily and assimilating quickly into myriad cultures, in which he was constantly being dropped. He had more adventures as a boy than most people have in an entire lifetime. He had zip-

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

lined through the Costa Rican rainforest, climbed the Acropolis of Athens and even set up base camp at the foot of Mt. Everest – all of this before reaching the ripe old age of sixteen.

At the age of seventeen, he attended Corpus Christi College at the University of Oxford, England. It was there that he gained his appreciation for fine art and literature, earning dual doctorate degrees in European Art History and Medieval Folklore.

Yet, despite all of these high adventures and the great learning that was achieved during the first twenty-plus years of his life, Hieronymus Stanley Beele felt quite alone in the world. It seems that with all of his activities and moving about, he never allowed himself to spread his roots down too deep in any one place. After lengthy conversations in Oxford pubs or long lectures about Renaissance art, he often found himself walking down High Street alone, heading toward his bland, gray upper flat which he rented for just a few pounds a week.

It was not until he returned to his homeland in the United States that he really began to connect with people instead of with places. After his study at Oxford, he interned at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. His internship consisted of working with school groups and assisting teachers and students in the discovery of European Art from the Middle Ages to the present time.

As an intern at the Metropolitan, he discovered the joy of sharing his rich subject matter expertise with each young visitor to the museum. In return, he built many new friendships with both teachers and students, creating special bonds that would continue to grow and blossom for years to come.



## *Chapter 6: The Good Doctor*

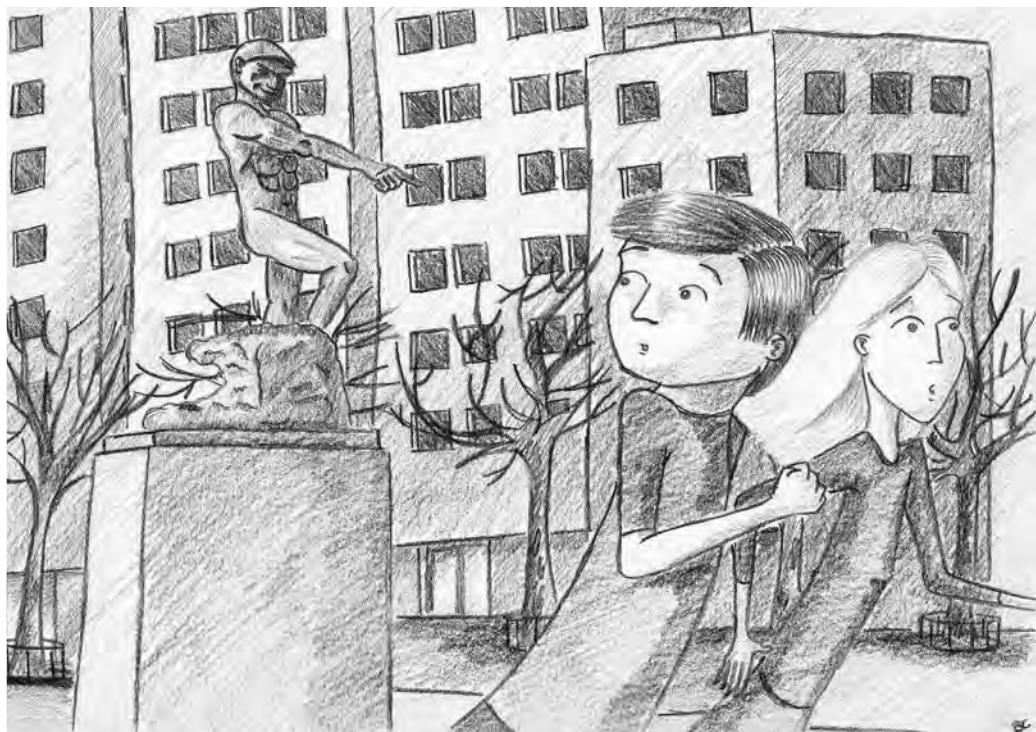
Eventually, he completed his education and became Dr. Beele, his internships growing into full-time positions. Even so, he moved around the United States, taking various assistant, and then director, positions in Atlanta, Cleveland, Miami, Phoenix, Portland and, eventually, Detroit. As the curator of the Detroit Institute of Arts, he found true happiness and harmony. His role as chief administrator of the DIA allowed him to maintain close contact with the public, while still being able focus on his love of art.

It was not until the strange happenings began within the walls of the museum that Dr. Beele started to see that he had signed up for more than he originally bargained for in his curator employment contract.

Initially, he thought that all the commotion would settle down; perhaps just go away on its own. But it didn't. The Nain Rouge was getting stronger. He could feel it deep down in his compassionate and introspective heart.

And now, there were children involved. In all of his travels and adventures, he had never felt as much anxiety and consternation as he felt at this moment. This situation was no longer just about him and his museum. It was about the lives of two young people, the city, the surrounding region and all of its inhabitants.

The sudden gravity and weight of the world around him settled down upon the shoulders of Doctor Hieronymus Stanley Beele. For the first time in his life, he did not know what he was going to do next.



## 7: *Answers and Questions*

**T**he next two days passed in a fog of mundane repetition. Elly and Tom went through their daily routines with robotic precision, not wanting to let anyone know what they had learned. They walked through their daily classes in a sort of a murky haze. When their friends asked what was wrong, they would just make up an excuse about not feeling well or state that they were worrying about some upcoming exams.

Though on the outside Tom and Elly appeared sluggish and disinterested, inside, their minds were racing with rapid conjecture and anticipation, wondering what was going to happen next.

Friday finally came with the hopes that they would be able to get back down into the city to see Dr. Beele. By Friday afternoon, Elly learned that their hopes would be realized. But the news was bittersweet.

Elly came home from school to find her mom and dad sitting

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at the kitchen table. She knew right away that something was very wrong.

Her dad worked at Compuware in downtown Detroit. He was in the Campus Martius building in the heart of the city. Elly's dad never got home this early from work, never.

"Honey, can we talk to you for a minute?" Elly's mom called to her from the kitchen.

"Sure, Mom, just a minute." Elly took off her shoes and jacket slowly, in anticipation of the bad news that she just knew was headed her way.

Elly came over and sat down next to her mom at the table.

Her dad was the first to speak. "Sweetie, I got some bad news from work today..."

Elly could see that her dad was starting to get choked up. His eyes began to water a little bit and his voice seemed to get caught in his throat. She thought she could break the tension by saying something, anything:

"Dad, don't worry. Whatever it is, I can take it, really..."

Unfortunately, Elly's words only served to get her dad more upset. Despite his sadness, he spoke up again, "Well, I just let your mom know that I was let go from my job. We thought you should know, too. This was my last week."

For some reason, these words seemed to hang in the air after her dad spoke them. For a brief, awkward moment, no one knew what to say. Finally, Elly's dad spoke again. "They said that I can come back and clean my desk out on Saturday. I guess they want to save me the embarrassment of having to face everyone at the office. At least they left me some dignity, I guess."

## *Chapter 7: Answers and Questions*

Her dad got quiet again, as if he was going to lose it entirely. But he didn't cry. He just sat back and stared ahead, focusing on nothing but the silence and emptiness of their blank kitchen wall and the mute, shocked faces of Elly and her mom.

A lot of people were getting laid off. Not just from Compuware, but all around the Detroit area. Houses were not selling. Cars and trucks were not selling. The banks were failing. It seemed as if the threads of society were loosening around the entire region, unravelling the very fabric of the region and dismantling people's lives. Now her dad was out of work and Elly was experiencing first-hand the sadness and despair that was sprouting up all around her.

Later that night, Elly called Tom and broke the sad news to him. Tom could really understand, since his mom had been let go from General Motors only one month before. The only good news was that they now had a way to get back down to the Detroit Institute of Arts to talk to Dr. Beele. Elly and Tom would ride down with her dad and he would drop them off while he settled his final affairs at his old office.

Saturday morning greeted Elly and Tom with a gray, drizzly reception. Neither of them had slept very well the night before and the bland morning air did little to lift their spirits. After a light breakfast, the children got into Elly's dad's car and headed down Woodward toward to their respective destinations.

The ride into Detroit was very strange. The clouds seemed to hang a bit lower as the expedition party approached Eight Mile Road; the city limits. Upon crossing over into the city, Elly and Tom noticed that quirky, unsettling feeling coming over them again. Simultaneously, the children began to taste the bitter, smoky



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flavor of burnt ashes in their mouths. Their noses picked up a faint whiff of brimstone and the rotting stench of landfill.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Tom groaned as he held his stomach.

“Don’t,” Elly warned, “That’s just what he wants from us. He’s trying to stop us from getting any farther. He knows we’re on to something.”

Tom heeded Elly’s warning and convinced himself out of asking Mr. Williams to stop the car. The clouds slid lower on the horizon and the day grew darker and more ominous, as the children quietly endured the last few miles of the journey to the museum.

The Ford Explorer pulled up in front of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Elly’s dad turned toward the children in the back seat, “Okay, kids, I’ll see you in a few hours. I’ll pick you up right here. Call me on my cell if you have any problems.”

They both thanked Mr. Williams, slamming the car door as they stepped up on the curb. Elly and Tom walked past the Auguste Rodin’s Thinker statue, on their way into the museum. They paused for a moment, looking up at the large bronze man, frozen in deep contemplation. There was a troubled, confused feeling that seemed to emanate from the statue. Then, without warning, the metal giant moved. His back straightened and his shoulders were drawn back, as his cold heavy hand released itself from under his chin. Before Elly and Tom could yell, scream or even utter a word, “the Thinker” stood up and pointed an enormous index finger directly down upon them. A wicked, evil sneer drew across his heavy face. Then the sound came. That horrible

## *Chapter 7: Answers and Questions*

nails-against-the-chalkboard sound.

Lutin was beckoning them. He was speaking his own name. The children ran. Out of fear and instinct, they ran up the many steps of the museum and yanked open the thick, brass doors with adrenaline strength, stumbling in to the main hall of the Detroit Institute of Arts.





## 8: Legacy

**D**r. Beele was just inside the doors, ready to greet Elly and Tom. “Did you see that?!” yelled Tom at Dr. Beele, as he regained his breath and balance.

“If you are asking whether or not I saw you and Elly blow through my museum doors like a rogue tornado, then the answer is yes. I did see that.”

“No,” Elly interjected; “Tom was asking if you saw the statue. It was the Nain Rouge! It’s after us!”

A look of great concern came over the curator’s brow. He went over to one of the brass doors, opened it and looked out at *The Thinker*. The statue was still there, where it always had been; sitting in its thoughtful pose, staring out upon Woodward Avenue in perpetual rumination.

Dr. Beele turned back away from the door and looked at Elly and Tom. He could see that they were very upset and quite

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

frightened. Forcing a slight smile and a warm, reassuring touch on their shoulders, he said, "Come with me."

With that, Dr. Beele escorted the children up to his office. The familiar room seemed less intimidating than before, and Elly and Tom were happy to see that the cookies and tea had been restocked since their last visit. Both children quietly took their assigned seats in the squeaky leather arm chairs, as the curator poured them each a cup of Earl Grey.

Tom was the first to speak, "Doctor, you wouldn't believe the things we've seen since we talked to you the last time."

Elly added, "It's as if the Nain Rouge is following us, like he wants something from us."

The curator had pulled up an extra arm chair and was sitting directly across from the children now.

"Elly... Tom... Remember I told you when we first met that there are many things I know and many more things of which I know nothing? Well, Lutin is one creature that falls deeper into my 'not-knowing' category."

Tom spoke up again, "Well, there are a few things Elly and I can share with you that may help. Last year, we learned that we were both related to Marianne de Tonty. We just found out this week that she was married to one of the captains at Fort Pontchartrain."

The curator's eyes widened, "Is that so? Well, this is very interesting, very interesting, indeed. She was married to the man with the iron hand..."

Elly looked at him, puzzled, "How did you know that, Dr. Beele? We read on the internet that the Native Americans called her husband, Pierre, that name because he had an artificial hand."

## *Chapter 8: Legacy*

“Yes,” Dr. Beele acknowledged, “And do you know how he lost that hand?”

Both children replied in unison, “No.”

Dr. Beele took a deep sigh, sat back in his chair and calmly spoke the word, “Lutin.”

After a period of stunned silence, the curator went on to explain the entire story, as he had heard it:

“It seems that during the founding of the Fort Pontchartrain, Cadillac and his expedition had made a deal with the Native Americans to settle certain tracts of land near the river. The natives had warned Cadillac about the Nain Rouge. They had told him that this creature was part of the land and needed to be appeased in order for the settlers to work and farm the land in peace. Cadillac brushed away their warnings as silly, primitive superstitions and allowed his people to begin building houses, plowing fields, and planting crops. After a short while, the settlers began to notice that some of their livestock was missing. Then, crops began to dry up and wither without warning or reason. In short, the settlement was failing.

One evening, when Cadillac and his officers were in their cabin, they heard a mournful, terrible cry outside their door. Upon opening the door, they looked down upon a small, little man, no higher than a yard stick.

The tiny stranger stepped inside the cabin and introduced himself as ‘Lutin: The Steward of the Straits.’ Lutin was very cordial and friendly. In fact, he made it clear that he wanted to work with the settlers to build a great city upon his spot in the wilderness. He was willing to share his knowledge of the land, the flora, the

## Book 1: *The Red Legend*

fauna, its people and everything around them. It was at that point in the conversation that things turned ugly. Cadillac and his men laughed at the little man. They mocked him and called him a fool. They stated quite clearly that they would take whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, from whomever they wanted.

At this, the slight stranger began hopping and jumping up and down. His once pink-peach skin turned an angry, hot red. His fingernails manifested into claws and his face gnarled up into contorted knots. One of Cadillac's officers, Pierre de Tonty, reached out to subdue the creature and was bitten most fiercely upon his left hand. A great commotion ensued and Lutin escaped. But before he did, he hissed out these parting words,

*"Keep what you steal and steal what you keep.  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep."*

Now, ever since that fateful night, Lutin has appeared just before any disaster befalls the city of Detroit."

The curator stopped, a bit winded, and caught his breath before he spoke again. He took a gentle sip of his tea and looked softly back at Elly and Tom, "It all makes sense now. The story goes on to say that Pierre de Tonty lost his mangled hand after the bite the Nain Rouge had given him became infected. The curse that Lutin uttered before he disappeared has been cast upon both of your families. I am afraid to tell you, that you two are the sheep that Lutin was talking about. This curse is your legacy."







## 9: *Across Town*

**E**lly's cell phone rang just as Dr. Beele's words dropped like a bomb explosion. Tom was sitting next to Elly in a sort of motionless, stunned stupor. Elly's dad was on the phone. He wanted the kids to walk a few blocks over to his office. He had gotten tied up in some clean-up issues at work and planned on meeting them down at the Hard Rock Café for lunch.

Elly hung up the phone just as Tom began to mumble, "D-D-Dr. Beele? What does all this mean for us? I mean, for Elly and me?"

The curator got up from his chair and began to pace slowly and softly around the room.

"As I told you two when we first met, there are things I know and things I do not know. This I do know; you are the heirs to stolen land; the land upon which this entire city was built. Lutin seems to believe that there is a debt that remains unpaid and you

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

two are the debtors.

“Now, that explains the ‘why you’ question. But what I fail to understand is the ‘why now’ question. Why would Lutin want to call in his marker now?”

Beele stroked his chin repeatedly, puzzling over this question. It was clear that life in Detroit was getting progressively worse. Economic woes, people losing their jobs, political corruption and a professional football team that had not won a championship since 1957!

Tom asked an even more pointed question, “So how are we supposed to pay back a debt that some distant relatives owed 300 years ago?”

In his gravest and most somber tone yet, Beele spoke softly to Elly and Tom, “That, I’m afraid, you will have to ask Lutin himself.”

“Ask him himself?” Elly quipped. “And where are we supposed to find him? He seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time.”

Beele replied, “I suspect that in his own good time, he will find you.”

With heavy hearts and spinning heads, Elly and Tom thanked the curator and made their way out of the museum and down Woodward toward Campus Martius. Both children walked south down the avenue in a heightened stupor, both acutely aware, yet unaware, of the city that wrapped around them as they walked.

Neither child knew whether or not Lutin would jump out and attack either of them on the spot. It would almost be better if it had happened that way. It was the anticipation of not knowing that was killing them. He was the predator. They were the prey. There

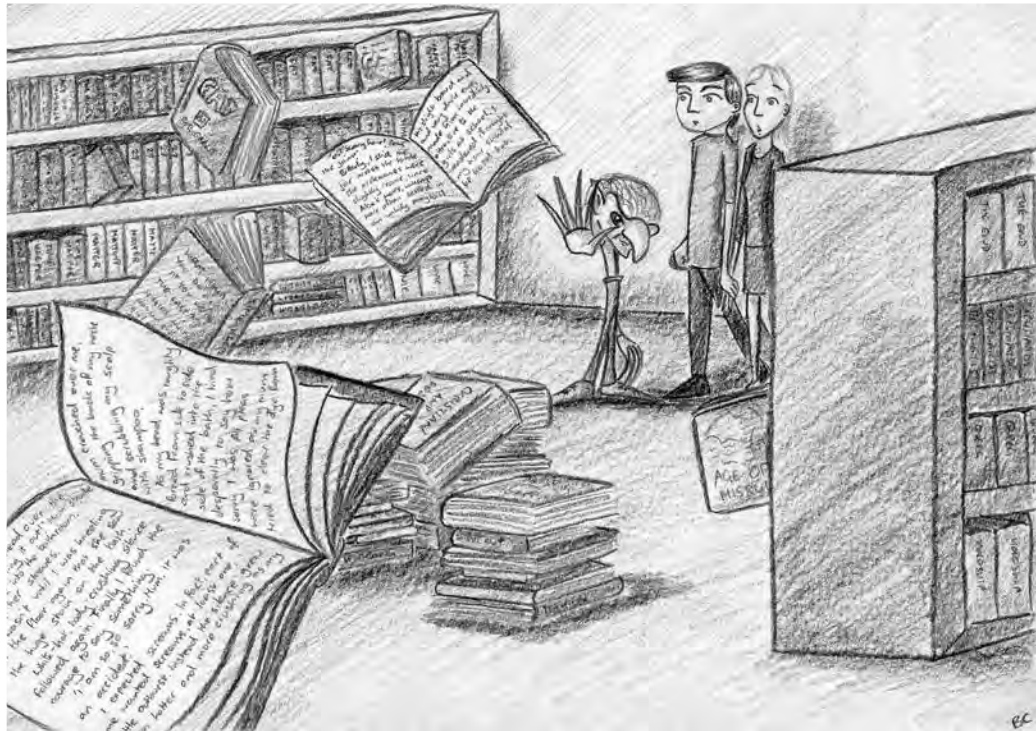


## *Chapter 9: Across Town*

were too many places to hide; too many shadows to camouflage the evil that they knew was watching, waiting in the urban jungle in which they travelled.

Hostile, aggravated thoughts had a way of quickening one's pace along city sidewalks. Elly and Tom had every reason to move with swiftness and determination toward the Compuware Building. On the streets, it appeared as if two young adults were flying quickly across intersections; past empty churches, abandoned buildings and dotted specks of urban renewal.

Yet, inside their heads, Elly and Tom felt as if they were in a dream. The world seemed to move in slow motion, as every sound, every shaft of light between brick buildings, each shift of their feet inside their sneakers became amplified. This hypersensitivity was infused by fear – a fear of the inevitable, the unknown, and what was surely to come.



## 10: *Lutin*

**W**ith breathless relief, Elly and Tom finally reached the address of 1 Campus Martius. The winds off of the river seemed to swirl up and around them, as they forced their way through the revolving glass doors of the main floor entrance.

As the children entered the glass atrium, they looked up to see the giant wall of water that rose and fell off of the western wall of the main lobby. The din it created drowned out any quiet conversations that may have been going on between the daily bustling of people in business suits and skirts. Abstract art, like hang gliders of yellow, orange and green hung from the ceiling, giving a soaring, uplifting feel to the entire building. Both of their spirits rose with the lightened atmosphere, allowing them to briefly forget about the heavy words Dr. Beele had shoveled into their heads only moments before.

Elly checked in with security, asking them to dial up her father

## *Book 1: The Red Legend*

and let him know that they were in the building. The security officer called up to the Compuware offices and handed Elly the phone. It was her father on the other end, telling Elly that he was running a few minutes late. They were to meet him in the restaurant in twenty minutes.

The Hard Rock Café was located right there in same building, along with a number of other shops and galleries. Elly suggested to Tom that they browse around the shops for a little bit, before sitting down in the café. Tom agreed, hoping that a little loitering would take his mind off of the Nain Rouge and the dire news that had been delivered that day.

After some shop circling, Elly and Tom decided to enter the bookstore for a few minutes of browsing. Upon entering the clear glass doorway, they both turned toward each other with mutually odd expressions.

“Do you smell that?” Tom asked Elly.

“If you mean that rotten egg smell, yes, thanks for asking,” Elly replied curtly.

“It wasn’t me,” Tom retorted, “And I know I’ve smelled that smell before ...”

Then they heard it. That noise, that terrible sound. That low hissing, laughing, meowing sound ... but it was as if no one heard it but them.

Just then, an extremely short and nattily dressed sales clerk approached them. His hair was wiry, but well-maintained, his manner cordial and his eyes as black as coal.

“Good day to you,” said the man in a low, faint whisper.

“Hello,” the children responded, hesitantly.

## *Chapter 10: Lutin*

“I have been expecting you both for some time now.” The little man breathed out in a sort of a sigh and rasp combined.

The children stood there stunned.

“Nain Rouge,” Elly let the words fly out at the man like a hot coal spit from her charred mouth.

“My name is Lutin,” the little man replied coolly; “And you are impertinent.”

Tom instinctively grabbed hold of Elly’s right hand as they both wondered why the Nain Rouge had not attacked them on the spot.

Lutin spoke again, this time in an even quieter tone. “I know that you know who I am. I certainly know who you are. I also know that curator in the museum has shared with you the little he knows about me; the very little, I must say.”

Lutin beckoned them back behind a stack of fantasy books, where he could speak with them more privately. Although Elly and Tom knew better than to go with this demon, they could not help but be drawn behind the books with him. Lutin waved his hand and built two short stools out of individual books that stacked themselves upon his command. He did the same for a third, slightly larger stool, upon which he sat, rising just a bit higher than his new audience.

“Since you will soon be mine, I think it only fair that you know the total tale of your unfortunate fate.”

Lutin began to tell his version of what Dr. Beele had shared with Elly and Tom:

“I am as old as the land; as old as the river, the trees and everything that grows here. The Native Americans understood this.

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They respected me, honored me. But then your people came. They scarred the land, cut down the trees, and bridged the river. They bought some land from the natives and then stole away the rest. I attempted to befriend them, I warned them and they laughed at me. I tried to make peace. They wanted war. I told them to stop. They only wanted more. They brought this curse upon themselves.”

Elly and Tom noticed Lutin changing color. His peachy flesh was slowly becoming a deep crimson, as his clean-cut, academic veneer peeled away a bit, revealing the seething terror that bubbled just beneath the surface.

Tom could see Lutin’s anger growing and quietly interjected, “What is the curse?”

Lutin’s voice became more harsh and gravelly, as he continued his story, “They cursed the land with their deeds. The curse is collective; it grows over time. With every act of unkindness, treachery, boorishness, slander, greed, avarice, pride and wilful injustice – evil grows.”

Elly piped in gently, “Is that the curse then?”

Lutin sat back, less agitated than before. He smiled that horrible smile and spoke with a sickly sweetness, “Evil grows, my child. It grows in me. It is me.”

There was a pause of excruciating silence as both children felt flushed and dizzy.

Lutin started in again, “If you really must know the entire story, I will tell you. Your good doctor friend has probably filled your heads with too many lies and falsehoods already. Now, it is time for you to know the truth. It is only fair after all, for it is your story, as well. Let me show you.”

## *Chapter 10: Lutin*

With that, the dizziness that Elly and Tom had been feeling overcame them. They felt as if they were spinning up and out of the aisle and out the doors of the bookstore.

They were flying. They had no idea how, but they were flying; coasting over tree tops, houses and buildings. In a single thought, they knew that this must be Lutin's magic. He was doing all of this.

Then, just as quickly as they had taken to the air, their bodies slowed and gently settled down on some soft green grass near a flowing river. The landscape was completely unfamiliar to them.

Elly and Tom then heard Lutin's voice penetrate the atmosphere all around them, "Here is your beloved city," Lutin's words echoed. "Here is where it all started, when the land was fresh and undefiled."

The disembodied voice pointed them to a group of cabins near the river. It was a small settlement, like the kind they had seen in pictures in their history books.

Without speaking a word, Elly and Tom now realized where they were. Somehow, some way, Lutin had transported them back to Detroit when it was Fort Ponchartrain. They were standing in the year 1701.

"Now, let us go inside that cabin and see what hospitality your kinfolk have in store," the smarmy voice prodded from over their shoulders and around their ears. Almost immediately, the children found themselves inside a small, rustic log cabin. It was clear that through Lutin's dark magic, they could not be seen or heard, even though they could see and hear everything.

Elly and Tom observed six men sitting around a large wooden table. The cabin seemed very rustic, indeed. There were a few books

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set on a side table, a few simple wood-framed beds in opposite corners of the room, and almost a dozen wax candles casting light and shadows against the log walls around them.

The men spoke loudly and guzzled wine out of green glass bottles. Their mood seemed to be quite jovial and they appeared to be in high spirits. The children recognized at least one of the men. From their history books, they recognized the face of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. They thought that one of the other men might have been Pierre Alphonse de Tonty, but they could not be sure.

Suddenly, Elly and Tom and all of the men at the table heard a terrible wailing outside of the cabin. All the men looked at each with concern. Elly and Tom knew better. They knew whose cry that was and they knew what it meant.

Cadillac stood up, "Open the door and see what that noise is!" he ordered one of his men. A single man stood up and opened the door. No sooner had it cracked open then a dark shadowy figure, covered with animal fur, spun through the door.

The initial shock of this fantastic entrance faded away into laughter and general merriment from the expedition party.

"I seek to speak with the one in charge," said the dirty little man.

One of the men questioned sarcastically, "Who are you, little man of the woods, to demand an audience with anyone?"

The small visitor bowed earnestly and began, "Gentlemen, I come here to you on a mission of peace and diplomacy. You have come here and settled lands for which I am responsible. I come here to work with you, to ensure that all of our needs are tended to properly. There is much I have to offer."

There was a brief pause, as Cadillac's men looked around at



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each other. The amusement had left their faces. In its place was a look of disdain and outrage.

One of the men spoke out roughly, “Why, you impertinent imp! You dare to speak to the great Cadillac in such a manner?! You speak out of turn and far beyond your station. Be gone, fool, before I squash you like a bug under my boot!”

Without warning, the man seized the Nain Rouge. The children watched helplessly, as the frustrated dwarf struggled to break free. More men were required to keep hold of the Nain Rouge. Three officers held him tightly, then four, then five. It became increasingly difficult to maintain control of the wild, elfish man. He began biting and gnashing at Cadillac’s men, writhing and spinning with growing fury.

“Throw him out!” came the order, shouted by Cadillac.

All of Cadillac’s men were yelling back and forth at each other. The Nain Rouge was glowing now, a hot red ember, thrashing and scratching at whomever he could. There was blood, hair and flecks of skin flying into the air. The dust from the clay floor had been spun up into a hazy cloud of desperation and confusion.

One of the men managed to open the cabin door. With great effort, all of the soldiers gathered up the whirling mass of anger and rage, and threw it out of the cabin and into the night. The door was slammed sharply, then barred and bolted.

An awkward silence now filled the room. Cadillac’s men collapsed in exhaustion. All of them were covered with scratches sores, bumps and bruises. One of the men began wrapping his hand with his torn shirt. He had sustained a terrible bite between his thumb and index finger. The wound was bleeding profusely over the clay

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floor; already his hand was taking on a dark, sickened look.

In this eerie calm after the storm, a hissing voice seeped in, under the cabin door. Though they tried not to listen, Cadillac and all of men heard the low, reptilian words:

*“Keep what you steal and steal what you keep;  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep.”*

Then all fell silent.

Elly and Tom were being pulled back. A great suction was vacuuming them out of the cabin and into the air again. They flew backwards, as if a giant rubber band that had been stretched forward as far as it could go was now being snapped back in the opposite direction. Trees, houses and buildings flew by in a backwards blur.

The children landed with a thud. Slowly, but surely, the dizziness subsided and the room came back into focus. Elly and Tom were sitting on the stacks of books again. Lutin was sitting directly across from them. It was as if they had never left their seats. He looked at them with a knowing glance, but said nothing about the journey they had just taken. He had wanted them to see with their own eyes, hear with their own ears, and feel what really had happened.

“You see,” Lutin went on, as if without interruption, “I was once upon a time the steward of the land. But I am now, and have been for centuries, the steward of the curse. Each act of evil upon this land resides in me. For many years, there was a balance of good and evil in Detroit, controlling my power, diminishing

## Chapter 10: Lutin

my presence. But lately, I grow strong. The acts of humanity have erred to the side of wickedness, serving only to feed my insatiable appetite. This cursed land has become my Garden of Eden.”

Over the course of this horrible conversation, Lutin became almost giddy in his speech. The manic chortling under his breath served only to unnerve the children even more.

“But why us and why right now?!” Tom blurted out. Lutin calmed himself a bit and looked with great satisfaction upon Elly and Tom, “Why, we are at the tipping point, my boy, the tipping point.”

Tom asked again, “What do you mean ‘the tipping point?’”

Lutin answered, “The tipping point between good and evil. The point where the good of the people is no longer strong enough to hold back the evil that has been building up underneath their feet.”

Elly sat up for a moment, mustering up what seemed like her last bit of courage, “And what about us then?”

“Oh, you,” Lutin quipped, looking deliciously at both children, “Why, you are the legacy, the ransom that fulfills the curse.”

Just then, the children were reminded of the words that had been repeated to them only moments earlier:

*“Keep what you steal and steal what you keep;  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep.”*

Tom stepped in again and finally demanded, “Tell us, tell us what’s going to happen?!”

Lutin, as if in a delightful trance, breathed in deeply through his nose and simply uttered, “Your deaths will be my rising.”





## 11: *Time and Hour*

**T**here is a primary reaction to danger that resides in all animals, including humans. It is called the “flight-or-fight” response. This reaction is triggered when we sense that a threat is directly upon us. When this happens, we are inclined to either run away or fight for our lives.

Upon absorbing Lutin’s words, Elly and Tom felt both; and neither. Tom was inclined to jump off of his stack of books and grab the little man by the throat, choking him into extinction. Elly, on the other hand, was compelled to run; run as fast as she could out of that bookstore.

But, instead of a flurry of activity, nothing happened. The children just sat there, frozen. The gravity of what Lutin had revealed had yet to weigh upon them with its full depth and density. The few seconds that passed between this awkward trio seemed like hours, as the silence roared in their ears with a dark

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and powerful emptiness.

It was Lutin who broke the silence with words that flowed out like an incantation, “I must apologize for my bluntness. I can see that I shocked you with what I have revealed. And now, I am sure you look to run away and hide, or muster up your remaining crumbs of courage and attack me directly. If either of these things has crossed your mind, I encourage you to let go of such silly schemes. You see, it will not be me who ends your lives; it will be the land.”

With a groan of rage and frustration, Tom gritted through his clenched teeth, “What the heck is that supposed to mean? How can the land kill us?”

With an air of exasperation, Lutin declared, “My silly boy, did I not tell you that I was the keeper of land, the steward of this region? As steward, I must administer to the business at hand. I am no cheap killer. I am merely the executor of debts that have accrued for centuries. Now the payment has come due.”

In a broken, anguished voice, Elly asked, “So, when will it happen? How much time do we have?”

Lutin looked upon the girl with cold satisfaction, “To be exact, my dear, it will be at midnight on July 24th. Now, I imagine that you both are wondering why I know that all these things will occur on that date. If you must know, that is the day that Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac began the settlement of Detroit, over three hundred years ago.”

What Lutin had told the children was true. Historical records still exist regarding Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac’s expedition, noting that his party reached the Detroit River on July 23, 1701.

## *Chapter 11: Time and Hour*

At that time, they did not stop in the immediate Detroit area, but rather travelled slightly south to Grosse Ile. He and his men set up camp there and spent the night south of where the city lies today. It was not until the following day, July 24, 1701, that Cadillac's party travelled north along the Detroit River, looking for a place to build their settlement. It was at the narrowest part of the river, where the banks were high, that he and his men began construction of Fort Ponchartrain du Detroit.

It was also at that spot where the Nain Rouge first observed the strange, pale creatures, levelling trees and gouging into the land he had sworn to protect.

"Yes," Lutin continued, as if he were bringing simple closure to the entire matter, "That is the day the curse first formed, and it will be the day that the curse comes to fruition ... and I will rule the land once more."

With that, Lutin sat back in quiet satisfaction, revelling in the cold, blank emptiness that hung from Elly and Tom's faces.





## 12: *The Waiting*

**L**unch at the Hard Rock Café tasted like ashes and soot. Normally, Elly and Tom relished the upbeat surroundings of music videos, vintage guitars and Detroit rock memorabilia that covered the walls of the restaurant. Elly's dad did not even notice the dreary mood of the two children as they ate their ranch chicken sandwiches with little zeal or interest.

Just think of the situation they were all in: an unemployed father and two children who knew that, in a few months, they were going to die. Their predicament seemed terminal.

Elly's dad decided to take the long way home and headed south down Woodward, all the way to the river. They ended up at Hart Plaza, directly in front of the modern fountain that looked like a giant doughnut propped up on two legs. They turned onto Jefferson Avenue and headed north along the river, past the Renaissance Center, the Winter Garden and the River Walk.

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Tom and Elly could not help but feel a twinge of happiness, of slight joy beneath the low hanging clouds. They were overcome with a beautiful sadness. Despite the evil that swirled all around and underneath them, they could still feel flecks of light and hope amid the ever-present shadows. Somehow, these subtle, brilliant glimmers made them feel both optimistic and distraught at the same time. Like the deep, heavy currents of the Detroit River, their stomachs churned with the undertow of emotions that rolled back and forth inside them.

It was as if they were entering in and out of a shadowy tunnel of grief. A back-and-forth cycle of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance swirled around inside their heads as they tried to cope with the realization of their own deaths.

As they got back into the car to head toward the suburbs, the grieving process began. Both of them went back and forth, questioning whether any of this had really happened. Maybe it was all a long, drawn-out dream? It all just seemed too implausible – crazy, in fact. They were about to be killed by a red troll in a few months just because some distant ancestor stole his land and kicked him out of town? If they were to tell this to anyone, they both would be in therapy for sure. Elly and Tom were in denial. Over the next few days, Elly and Tom spent almost all of their time together. Their conversations shifted from denial to anger, as the realization of their fate became more apparent. What did they do to deserve this? How could they be held accountable for something someone else did hundreds of years ago? Life was not fair.

Once the anger passed, Elly and Tom began to bargain with themselves. Maybe they could pay Lutin off in another way?

## *Chapter 12: The Waiting*

Maybe if they were better people, did more for others, then their inevitable outcome could change. There had to be a way to avoid the prophecy Lutin had foretold.

But there was no solace in bargaining. After a while, Elly and Tom became depressed with the ever-present thought that they were doomed. The summer that they normally looked forward to all year long had become a dark waiting room of despair. Elly and Tom still made a few trips to the beach, went to a couple of summer concerts and even saw a Tigers' baseball game. Though there were moments of excitement and joy, they could not help returning to the overshadowing thought that their time on this earth was waning. Soon, they would be no more.

A shroud of helplessness came over the two children for weeks, as they sat in the darkness of Tom's basement, listening to music, wallowing in the low-volume gloom of unspoken anguish.

It was during one of these basement moping sessions that Tom looked over at Elly and said quietly, "Well, El, I guess this is it. In a few weeks, we will be toast."

In a typical grieving process, the final stage is acceptance. It is the time when you accept your fate and tell yourself that you are ready for whatever may come. But, for some reason, acceptance would not come. Elly sat there with her arms folded. Her brow was furrowed, as if in great thought or concentration. Tom, on the other hand, lay back with his hands webbed against the back of his head, looking slightly confused. He could not help wondering what the end was going to be like. He just could not wrap his head around the whole idea that in a very short time, he would cease to exist. This one, single thought expanded inside his brain,

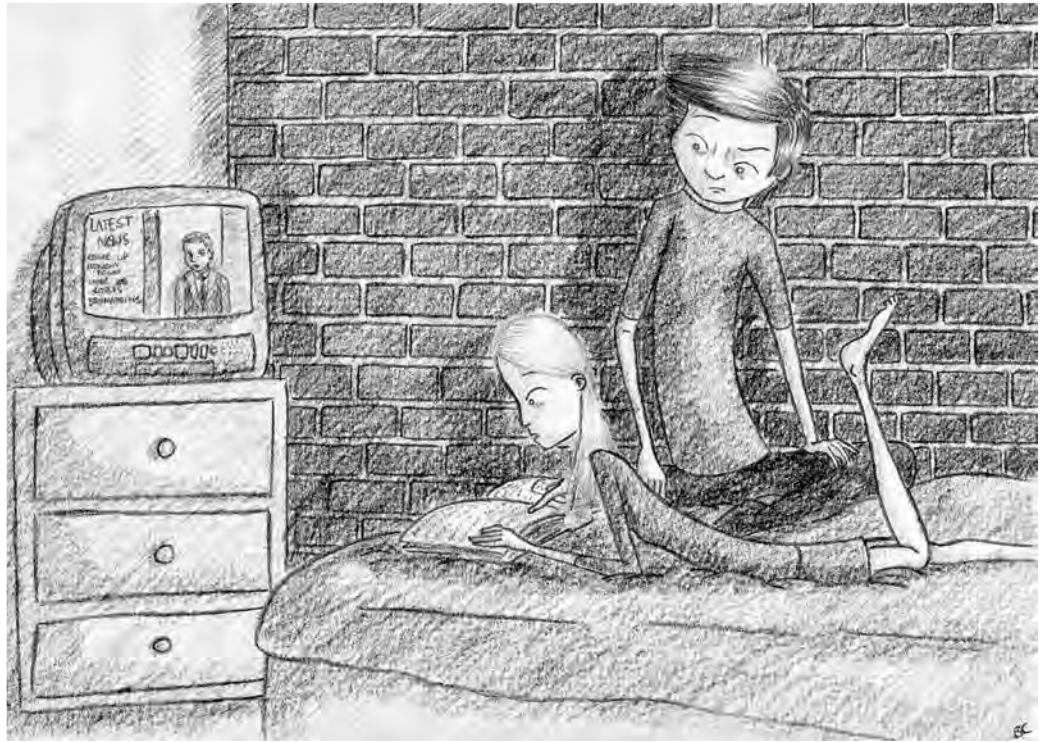
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like a giant soap bubble – spinning and growing futilely until the inevitable “POP!”

Elly readjusted herself on the bed. The deep thoughts that had been etching lines in her face seemed to subside for a moment. She turned her face away from the wall and looked back out into the open room. A new look of determination came across her face. Elly straightened her back, stood up and made direct eye contact with Tom. A new thought was now making its way from her active, excited brain to her waiting, determined lips.

“Tommy, we aren’t toast yet... and I have a plan.”





## 13: *Revelation*

**E**vil lies. It feeds upon lies. It builds itself up, upon a foundation of distrust, fear, coercion and ego. It moves in shadows, in smoke, in illusion. Evil shrinks and grows within us all and will manifest itself whenever our collective energies accept the darkness as light.

Elly and Tom understood all of this now. It was a matter of life and death that they did. It may not have been fair that they were the ones who had to pay for the sins of their forefathers, but that was their truth now, their reality.

There were only a few weeks left before the 24th of July.

The sightings of the Nain Rouge had become more and more frequent, as news stories and magazine articles chronicled the misdoings and misdeeds of the red dwarf.

Most people still brushed off these increasing occurrences as media hype, superstition, or just the general trials and tribulations that were prevalent in a big city. But Elly and Tom knew better.

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They knew what was going on. They knew that things were bad. They knew things were only going to get worse if they did not do something about it.

The television in the basement murmured in the background. Both children could hear the five o'clock evening news stories coming out of the flickering video screen:

"In Detroit today, the mayor has been forced by his constituents to address all of the recent disasters that have befallen the region. During his speech, in front of the 'Spirit of Detroit' statue, Mayor Stuart assured the citizens that he would get to the bottom of things and that law enforcement and high-level city officials were working overtime to insure the safety and well-being of city residents.

"In other news, three more water main breaks have been detected in the northwest corner of the city. Violent crime totals have increased 13% since last month and unemployment rates are up 9% since this same time last year..."

"Oh, when will it all end?" Tom mumbled over the television.

"July 24th, unless we do something soon," Elly muttered back.

Tom looked up from his knees, as he cradled his legs in his arms while sitting on the basement floor, "So, what about your plan?"

Elly looked across the room at a blank paneled wall, "I haven't told you because I was still working some things out, but I'm pretty sure I've got an idea."

"Well, what is it?" Tom prodded.

"I've been thinking about this whole thing," Elly repeated; "This whole thing, everything that's going on, everything that is happening to us, it's all about vengeance; vengeance and energy."



## Chapter 13: Revelation

Tom questioned, “What do you mean ‘energy’?”

Elly continued, “Remember that science project we did last month? About electromagnetic fields and how the earth has its own electromagnetic field?”

“Yeah, so what? What does that have to do with an ancient troll that plans on killing us and reclaiming the city for himself?”

Elly went on, “Listen, I’ve been doing some research and I think I have found something important.” Elly took a hard-bound textbook out of her backpack. It was a book about Earth Science. She opened up the book and began to read off of a bookmarked page:

*“The earth’s natural electromagnetic field has a frequency measured as about 7.8 Hertz. This is documented in the Schumann Resonance, measured daily in seismology laboratories. People give off electromagnetic energy as well, their brains emitting alpha frequencies of 7 to 9 Hz. The human brain in a relaxed state will have the same frequency of vibration as the energy field of the earth.”*

“You’ve lost me completely, El,” Tom gave in.

Elly sat up and hunched down right next to Tom, face to face, locking her eyes with his. “Don’t you get it? It’s all about energy. It’s all about the energy in the earth, the energy we create. It is all about the bad energy that has been building up around here for so long. It started with our forefathers and has been growing ever since. We’re either in harmony or in discord with the land. Science has proven that when we are at the same frequency as the earth’s energy field, we’re at peace and we’re happy. But when we

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do bad things and create bad energy, the earth responds negatively. Lutin is tied to the land; he said so. He's the tipping point. He is the incarnation of bad energy, of evil!"

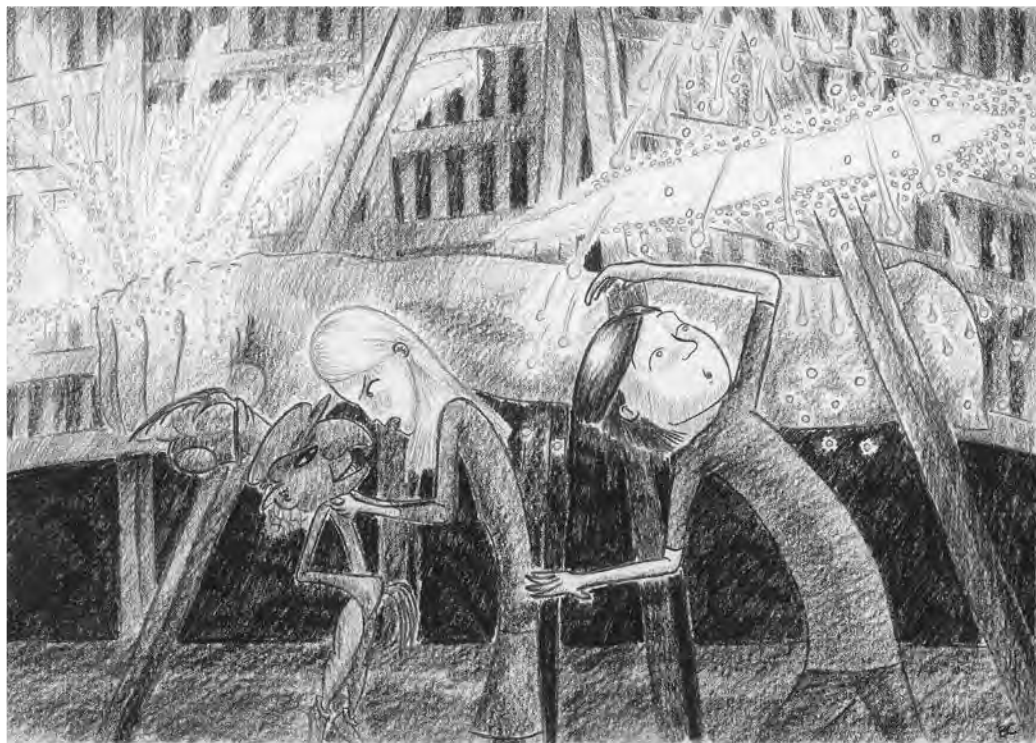
Tom's eyes registered with Elly. He finally understood everything she had said. He even understood her plan, though she had yet to tell him.

"Release the energy," Tom whispered in blinking revelation, "We need to release the evil. We need to bring the harmony and balance back to the way it was before our relatives started this whole mess."

Elly put her forehead against Tom's forehead and squeezed his shoulder gently, "Yes, Tom, we need to get Lutin off the land, somehow. It won't be easy, but I think it can be done. It will be like pulling a plug from a socket."

Tom breathed deeply, "Yeah, as long as we don't get electrocuted first..."





## 14: *Subterfuge*

**T**he Windsor-Detroit International Freedom Festival was in full swing. The event is recognized and respected as the best festival that represents the peace, unity, freedom, and friendship shared between Canada and the United States. The festival combines Independence Day and Canada Day, and lasts several weeks in July, culminating in a spectacular fireworks display over the Detroit River.

Along with hundreds of thousands of other people from the area, Elly and Tom always enjoyed the Freedom Festival. This was a time of year when Detroit could celebrate its freedom with Canada, its international neighbor across the river. It was a chance for their families to get together and go downtown for all of the festival events. Tom loved to meet up with his friends at the Techno Music Fest, where he could listen to the latest techno sounds and meet people from all over the world.

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Elly, on the other hand, preferred the food festivals, where she could sample foods from many different countries, while joining in the dancing and parades from cultures around the globe.

Of course, the most fun of all was the night of the fireworks. Both sides of the Detroit River were always filled with excited spectators, waiting anxiously for nightfall and the largest fireworks display in North America. However, this year was not the same. Everything was different.

It was the perfect opportunity for Lutin to wreak havoc upon the city and drag his cloak of darkness completely over the region. Tom and Elly did not even want to go downtown this year, but they knew that they had to go. They had to be there just in case anything bad should happen. And they knew that it would. In fact, they were counting on it. On the evening of the fireworks, Tom and Elly decided to meet on Jefferson Avenue, by the “Joe Louis Fist” statue. This location put them right near the riverfront and directly in the middle of all the action and excitement. If Lutin was going to make trouble, this would surely be the spot where he would do it.

Lutin had been causing trouble throughout the week of the festival. Tents had fallen down, porta-johns had been tipped over and garbage had been inadvertently tossed around the festival grounds. City officials had blamed a bunch of trouble-making teenagers, but Elly and Tom knew better. They also knew it would get worse. That is why Elly’s plan had to be simple and direct.

The plan was two-fold: find Lutin and lead him into their trap. Finding him would not be a problem; fooling him would be a whole different story.

## *Chapter 14: Subterfuge*

Elly and Tom needed to expect the unexpected. The city was abuzz with energy. The smell of coney dogs, bottle rockets and fried elephant ears filled the air, mingling with the warm wind off of the water and the faint saxophone hum of a jazz musician on the main stage at Hart Plaza. Elly and Tom stood by the “Fist” statue, scanning the crowd for anything suspicious.

“Do you feel different?” Elly turned to Tom, as their eyes watched the crowd, moving back and forth like heads at a tennis match.

Tom answered, “Different? What do you mean?”

“I can’t quite explain it,” Elly continued, “I just feel drained. I feel kind of weak, emotionless ... like my soul is sick.”

Tom thought about it for a moment, “Yeah, I think I know what you mean. Here we are, knowing that we are doomed in a few days and, somehow, it really doesn’t seem to matter.”

“I think it’s the city. I noticed that these feelings get worse when we come down here,” Elly stated emphatically.

Just then, the children heard it. That sickly, high-pitched siren sound. They looked around to see if anyone else in the crowd had noticed or reacted. No one did. They were the only ones who had heard it. It was Lutin. He was near them. Somewhere in the sea of spectators, he was hiding. The faint wailing grew louder. Elly and Tom had the urge to cover their ears, but resisted, not wanting to draw attention to themselves.

“Hello, children ...” came a slithery sweet voice from behind them. Tom and Elly turned around to see a shortish, plain-looking balloon vendor staring up at them.

“Enjoying the festival?” the balloon vendor quipped with a

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knowing grin.

“Not as much as we could be,” Tom replied coldly.

Night was falling slowly upon the city as the three figures stood in a miniature triangle, exchanging words, while the rest of the crowd sizzled with the excitement of the impending fireworks.

“You two don’t look so well,” Lutin questioned, “Are you feeling a little down lately?”

Elly was the first to reply, “Not that it’s any of your business, but yes, Tom and I haven’t been feeling all that great – ever since we ran into you!”

Lutin made a few slight clicking sounds with his tongue in mock sympathy. “Well, not to worry my friends, it will all be over soon. By midnight tomorrow, all of your troubles will be over.”

Their stomachs churned, as the sinking feeling of their fates returned. The Freedom Festival had taken their minds off of their worries for a little while. But now, the gravity of the situation had returned with a weight and intensity that seemed so much heavier than before.

Tom growled at Lutin under his breath, “So, how are you going to do it?”

“Do what?” Lutin shot a false puzzled look at Tom.

Elly jumped in, “You know what he means. How are you going to destroy us?”

“Destroy you?” Lutin shot back again with dramatic, false indignation, “Why, I told you before, I am no killer.

“But I suppose I can share with you the means by which you both shall part from this earth,” Lutin confided. “Ironically, it has already begun. The change, the strange way that you both



## *Chapter 14: Subterfuge*

have been feeling. That, my children, is the beginning of the end. Your lives will not end as abruptly as you might have thought – or even as you might have wished. No, the curse that you were born into has taken these many years to come to fruition. It is a slow, absorbing curse that envelops you over time. That is why, by tomorrow evening, the Elly and Tom that the world has known for the past 13 years will simply fade away – disappear forever.”

The children were silent. What else could they say? Their fates had been sealed.

Lutin broke the silence with an awkward giggling, “Oh, let’s not be so gloomy. Cheer up, the fireworks are about to start!”

Lutin was right. Darkness had fallen completely around them. Within the shadowy water of the river, barges had been anchored as platforms for launching the giant mortars that would soon send rainbows of sparks and fire into the air. Within seconds of their awareness, the spectacle of lights and sounds began overhead. It seemed as if the entire world was cheering, as the first rocket of red, blue and orange exploded high over the water.

Lutin leaned over casually to Elly and Tom, barely able to yell over the noise of the crowd and fireworks, “I know what will lift your spirits... perhaps if I brought the show a little bit closer... so you can both see better...”

He made a small gesture with his hand. Suddenly the fireworks stopped and people could be heard booing and complaining all around them.

Then, voices near the river began shouting, “The barge! The barge! The barge is off its mooring! Get away from the shore! Get away from the shore!”

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Elly and Tom whipped around and faced Lutin. He was snickering under his breath and moving his hand in a sweeping motion.

What have you done?!” Tom yelled at him.

“I am doing you a favor. Don’t you want to see the show up close?”

The trail of a blue fireball whizzed over their heads. The crowd was rushing away from the shore, screaming and pushing to get out of the way of the flaming missiles that were being shot, perpendicular across Jefferson Avenue.

“Stop it! Stop it now!” Elly grabbed Lutin, screaming. As quickly as the chaos started, it stopped. The barge that had floated so close to shore began moving back into the middle of the river.

Lutin spoke softly, “I am so sorry that you did not appreciate my kind gesture. In fact, I am a bit hurt.”

Elly, still full of adrenaline and anger, shot back, “Kind gesture? Are you kidding me? The only ones really hurt are those people in the crowd!”

Lutin furrowed his brow and retorted, “Should I begin the show again, even closer this time?”

“No!” both Elly and Tom shouted.

“Well, why shouldn’t I? What do I care about the welfare of strangers?” Lutin asked with a coy, nonchalant smile.

Tom stated as firmly as he could, “Don’t do it, Lutin. More people could get injured, or worse. Besides, you already have us, what more do you want?”

“Not much more,” was Lutin’s response.

Elly and Tom looked at each other nervously.

Lutin continued, “All I ask is that you allow me the pleasure

## Chapter 14: *Subterfuge*

of your company in your final hours.”

Tom replied, “What are you getting at?”

“It is quite simple, my boy. I want to watch you die, both of you.”

As if by intuition or choreography, Elly and Tom bent over at the waist, holding their stomachs in gut-wrenching pain. It was as if Lutin’s words were daggers, shredding the very fibers of their beings, weakening their draining spirits.

Elly averted Lutin’s black eyes and asked, “Why? Why can’t you just let it happen? Let us pass on and be done with it.”

Lutin licked his lips avariciously, as if he had been waiting for that question for hundreds of years, “Oh, my sweet, revenge is best served cold, and I intend to savor the taste of my victory. Watching the two of you wither away into nothingness, while I rise in triumph. Well, that is a meal in which I have longed to partake. So, I am willing to spare a few of your human brethren in order that I might dine with you in your last moments on earth.”

Elly and Tom were quiet for a very long time. The crowd of people had settled down and returned slowly to their blankets and folding chairs down by the river. The fireworks soon began again, without incident. The children regained their composure and sat on the soft grass of the boulevard lawn between Jefferson Avenue. Lutin stood there, staring at them with anxious anticipation, waiting for their answer.

Elly and Tom appeared empty and broken. They sat there, heads hung between their knees, with faces drooped like melted candle wax. Lutin never moved or wavered. He just stood there, staring, waiting patiently for their response.

The answer finally came, “Yes,” was the one-word answer that

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came from both Elly and Tom.

Lutin's face lit up slightly, shining in the pyrotechnic glow that strobed over their heads. "Lovely, my dears, lovely. I look forward to seeing you both tomorrow evening. Until then, I bid you a fond adieu."

With that, Lutin disappeared in a tiny fog of sulphuric smoke, mingling with the rest of the fireworks that filled the evening air. His high-pitched cackle could be heard fading in their ears, like a distant emergency siren, warning of a far-off, approaching storm.

Tom breathed deeply and whispered to Elly, "Well, I guess this is it."

Elly turned her face to him and calmly replied, "Yup, he's fallen right into our trap."





## 15: *Darkness Before Dawn*

**T**he final event of the International Freedom Festival was to be held at the Michigan State Fairgrounds on the northern border of Detroit. The fairgrounds rested alongside Woodward Avenue to the north and south, and Eight Mile Road to the east and west. This would be the last big event at the old auditorium, arena and midway. The money had run out that kept the fairground up and running. Large billboarded FOR SALE signs had already been hammered into the ground in front of the main entry; another sad sign of how bad things had gotten. The fairgrounds were old. Over one-hundred years old, to be exact. Joseph L. Hudson, founder of a Detroit-area leading department store called Hudson's, gave the State Fair its permanent home and formed the State Fair Land Company in October, 1904. By February 28, 1905, this company, through three separate transactions, had acquired the land between 7 1/2 and 8 Mile Roads, east of Woodward Avenue. The area was



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truly rural then, farmland some seven miles from Detroit's City Hall and far beyond the populated streets of the city.

Now, it soon would all be only a distant memory. This center of civic and state pride would shortly be returned to its rural state, filled only with crabgrass, weeds, wildflowers and the faded cheers, shrieks and shouts of excited fairgoers, crying out like ghosts from a century gone by.

Elly and Tom woke up late on the morning of the 23th. Neither of them wanted to get out of bed. After the night they had been through, both children felt as if they had run a 20K marathon – weak, tired and out of breath. Ever since Lutin had come into their lives, they had grown weary. No one could tell that there had been a change in them. Oh, their parents had mentioned that they looked thinner or a bit tired, but everyone was so busy with their own problems that they failed to see that Elly and Tom's souls were slowly leeching out of them.

The day dragged on, as the cool morning sun burned into a hazy, humid afternoon. Despite their fatigue, Elly and Tom agreed to stick to the plan. They had to; it was their only choice – their only chance. By late afternoon, they were ready to take the bus down Woodward to the fairgrounds. The plan was to have dinner down at the fair, ride the rides, see the attractions and wait for Lutin to show up.

The bus ride to the fairgrounds was uneventful. Elly and Tom watched the buildings pass; old churches, the used bookstore, and numerous gas stations and fast food restaurants. The last thing they saw before they came to the fairground stop was Woodlawn Cemetery. The children used to play a superstitious game when

## *Chapter 15: Darkness Before Dawn*

passing a cemetery. They used to close their eyes and hold their breath until the vehicle they were in had completely passed the graveyard. The rule was that if you breathed or opened your eyes before you passed the cemetery, you would die. This time it wasn't a game, for the breath they were holding could be their last.

The hydraulic brakes hissed as the bus came to a complete stop. The children open their eyes and looked out of the window. Woodlawn Cemetery had disappeared onto the other side of the street. In its place, the Michigan State Fairgrounds loomed large in front of them. They had reached their final destination.

The evening sky cooled with the setting of the summer sun. Pale blue was replaced with the violet orange of the emerging darkness that filtered through warm and busy air. Elly and Tom felt completely out of place. The curse upon them had taken its toll, and it took almost all of their energy to make their way into the fairgrounds. They both wished that they could just curl up in a ball in a dark, quiet room. But here they were, amid the lights, noise and maddening activity of carnival games, Tilt-a-Whirls, and an electric, slow-spinning ferris wheel.

As Elly and Tom trudged passed a Skee-Ball tent, they heard a familiar yowling, like the cry of a tomcat.

"Hello, my friends," came a slippery, frothy voice from behind them.

The children turned around to see Lutin. He was formally dressed from head to toe in a tuxedo with tails, complete with top hat and cane. He could have easily been mistaken for a ringmaster, blending right in with the rest of the festival performers.

"I thought, since this was a special occasion, I should dress

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appropriately,” Lutin quipped with a devilish smile.

Elly and Tom were speechless. They could feel themselves growing weaker and weaker as they ambled aimlessly around the fairgrounds.

“Why not take a ride on the ferris wheel?” Lutin goaded them, “I mean, it is your last night on this earth; why not enjoy yourselves a little?”

Without really knowing, Elly and Tom found themselves rising up above the midway on the giant ferris wheel. Lutin sat between them, on the top of the car, dangling his little legs wistfully over the edge of the seat.

“So, what does it feel like, little ones? To know that, in a few moments, you will be no more?”

“What do you care?” Tom shot back.

“Oh, I care very much,” Lutin replied, “I cannot tell you how much I am enjoying watching you two slowly wither away. I have waited over 300 years for retribution and I want to savor this taste, this flavor for as long as possible.”

“You really are w-wicked,” Elly weakly stammered.

“That fact,” Lutin admitted, “I have never denied. But you must remember, it is you and your kind that fed me, nurtured me, groomed me with your lies, distrust, greed, violence, and anger. Humankind empowered me and made me what I am today. And for that, I thank you.”

The ferris wheel came to a slow stop and Elly and Tom stumbled awkwardly out of their car. It was very near midnight and both children felt completely empty. No one seemed to notice that they were being slowly drained of life right in the middle of

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the midway. An odd, out-of-body feeling came over them.

Tom remembered attending the wake for his great aunt. He remembered the casket in the corner, the people with drawn faces, whispering, mumbling, all the while ignoring the cold body that lay motionless at one end of the room. Tom felt like that body; an empty shell.

Elly was drowning. Drowning in a sea of darkness, surrounded by the joy and happiness of festival goers, moving past her with carefree purpose. She could only feel the shiver of black water filling her lungs, dousing the diminishing light of her spirit.

“We’ve got to get out of here,” Elly cried softly as she took Tom’s hand.

“Okay, let’s make it quick,” Tom croaked with a hollow voice.

Lutin had never left. He had been standing right there, all along, watching the two disintegrate before his eyes.

“Oh, and where do we think we are going?” Lutin questioned delightfully.

“We need to get some air,” they answered in unison.

Tom and Elly stumbled across the midway. Their feet felt like lead weights. Their arms felt as if they were filled with heavy, wet sand. They tried to hide for just a moment. Then without warning, both of them collapsed behind one of the concession tents.

“Tom, I don’t think I can make it,” Elly sighed.

“Oh, Elly, come on. It’s only a little bit further. We can’t let him win. We just can’t!” Tom pleaded.

Just then, the children each felt a warm hand on their shoulders. It was not Lutin; it couldn’t be. This touch felt warm and reassuring, not cold, empty and evil like the Nain Rouge. Tom and Elly

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looked up from where they had collapsed, now on their hands and knees, to see one of the carnival workers staring down at them. He was dressed in festive garb, complete with a multi-colored suit, covered with bright bows, fancy buttons, assorted pins and a large, flowered boutonnière. There was something very familiar about this man, but Tom and Elly could not quite figure out from where they knew him.

Quietly, the man spoke to them, “Children, listen to me – I know what you are up against. You can’t give up now. We are all counting on you.”

As the man spoke, Tom and Elly noticed a familiar medallion hanging, almost invisible, from the man’s lapel. There was an image on it of a knight slaying a green dragon. They read the words wrapped around the outer edge of the knight’s banner: “Honi soit qui mal y pense...”

Elly looked over at Tom and whispered, “The Order of the Garter!”

The children looked up at the man again and, suddenly, all was revealed. “Dr. Beele!” they both yelled.

“Yes,” Dr. Beele shushed them; “It is me. I have been following you for some time now. It is imperative that you both keep moving. I have faith in you. I have distracted Lutin just enough to give you a fighting chance to defeat him.”

It was true. Dr. Beele had diverted Lutin’s attention only minutes before, coercing him into playing a game of chance at one of the other gaming tents.

Dr. Beele continued, “Time is short; you must go. It is all up to you now. Just remember: It is always darkest before the dawn

## Chapter 15: Darkness Before Dawn

– and you are not alone...”

With that, the children held each other, got up and moved as quickly as they could off of the midway and out of the fairgrounds.

“Don’t hurry on my account!” Lutin suddenly reappeared behind Tom and Elly. His voice was filled with sarcastic glee as he chided them from behind.

Elly and Tom exited the fair and scurried, stumbling along the way down Eight Mile Road. Lutin followed them with ease, dancing around the two singing,

*“Keep what you steal and steal what you keep;  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep!”*

The two children held each other even closer and ran across the intersection. Once they reached the other side, they turned to face Lutin.

The clock at the fairgrounds began the first strikes of midnight. Subconsciously, Elly and Tom began counting the chimes in their heads.

ONE.

“So,” Lutin spoke, a bit winded from his dance, “How does it feel to die?”

TWO.

“How does it feel to know it is all over?”

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THREE.

“How does it feel to know that all you have ever worked for and dreamed about is gone?”

FOUR.

“Why don’t you answer?”

FIVE.

“Are you afraid to die?”

SIX.

Elly straightened up, finally willing to address Lutin directly, “Are you asking if we are afraid to die?”

SEVEN.

“Yes,” Lutin grinned feverishly, “*Are You Afraid To Die?*”

The answer came back, “No, are you?” At that moment, Elly and Tom straightened up. They appeared to have regained a little strength. In a single motion, Tom boosted Elly up a pole that held the street signs. Elly reached up and slowly swiveled the two signs that read “Woodward Avenue” and “Eight Mile Road” back to their original positions.



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EIGHT.

“What have you done?!” Lutin howled, as his skin flushed red as fire.

NINE.

Elly, still out of breath, replied, “It’s not what we did, it’s what you did. You crossed the line.”

TEN.

Tom added with equal breathlessness, “You thought you were headed west, when you were headed north. So much for being in touch with the land. You’re out of your territory, Lutin.”

ELEVEN.

“You crossed the line, Lutin,” Elly said again.

Tom chimed in, “You left the city.”

The Nain Rouge was glowing red now; screaming in a horribly, screeching wail – spinning madly out of control.

Elly and Tom were regaining more strength. They could feel the life coming back into their bodies. A confident, secure warmth flooded over them, as their spirits re-ignited, bringing the color and glow back to their faces.

Lutin continued to spin and shout, faster and louder, screaming with a rage that echoed over hundreds of years, pulsating red and

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orange into the night sky.

Elly and Tom covered their ears, shielding themselves from the destructive decibels being shot from Lutin's flaming, gaping mouth.

### TWELVE.

An explosion erupted on the spot where Lutin had been whirling and gyrating. The force of the explosion was so strong that it knocked Elly and Tom back down onto the ground. Lutin was gone.

All that was left was a black, oily puddle on the sidewalk that reeked of sulphur and mineral spirits. Both of the children watched in exhaustion as the greasy, dark slick slid off of the sidewalk and down, out of sight, into a waiting sewer drain.

"Your plan, it worked," Tom said with breathless exuberance.

"Yes," Elly gasped, "I almost can't believe it. I knew that something good would happen if we could just get him outside of the city limits – like pulling a plug from a socket."

Their plan had worked. Elly and Tom had figured out the source of Lutin's power. As Steward of the Straits, the Nain Rouge was tied to the land. He drew his strength and power from the energy of the land on which Detroit was founded.

But the source of his power was also the source of his weakness. For Tom and Elly had guessed, and guessed rightly, that Lutin could not exist apart from his land. If he were to step off of his claimed territory, he would lose all of his power. And when he crossed north over Eight Mile Road, he unplugged his own

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power cord.

Tom and Elly had taken a big chance. Thank goodness they had guessed right.

Lutin was no more. Elly and Tom got back on their feet, feeling better than they had felt in weeks. The light had come back into their eyes and the rosiness of life now blushed their cheeks once more. Though their legs were still a little wobbly from their recent battle, Elly and Tom had returned to the world of the living.

Awkwardly holding hands, they both made their way back across the intersection to the fairgrounds. The lights from the fair twinkled into the night, like little beacons of hope amidst the inky black all around them.

The night was no longer restless. It was peaceful. Stars that once appeared veiled and muted now shined so brightly in the sky that it almost seemed like dawn.

The fair was closing. It was time to go home.



## Epilogue

**E**lly awoke in the morning as if it had all been a dream – the museum, the festival, the fairgrounds. She got out of bed feeling fatigued, but happy, like after working all day in her mom’s garden.

As she went downstairs for breakfast, she heard her dad in the kitchen, already busy making breakfast. He seemed to be more cheerful than he had been for the past few weeks. Elly even thought she heard him whistling under his breath.

“Guess what?” were her father’s first words of the morning.

“I don’t know, what?” Elly replied sleepily.

“They called me back to work. I start on Monday.”

A smile came across Elly’s face. It was the first time she had smiled in weeks.

After breakfast, Elly stopped over at Tom’s house. Tom was helping his mom clean out the front study, making way for her new home office.

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“Hey, Elly, come on in,” Tom said when he saw Elly at the front door. “I’m helping my mom get ready for her new business.”

“That sounds great! Did she get a new job?” Elly asked.

“Well, sort of,” Tom replied. “She’s setting up her own photography business. She has a website and everything. She even has four clients already! Now she can be her own boss. The front study is going to be her new office.”

“That’s really cool! Oh, my dad got called back to work, too.” Elly responded.

“Well, I guess things are looking up for everybody,” Tom observed as he lugged another box of file folders into the front study.

“Yeah, things sure seem different since last night,” said Elly in a thoughtful tone, “I think what we did outside of the state fairgrounds is already making a difference.”

Tom gave Elly a “be quiet” look as his mom passed by on her way upstairs. With that, they both went out to the front porch to talk. While sitting there, they noticed that things did seem different; different in a better way. It was as if hope had trickled back into their lives, little drops at a time, falling into a well that had for so long been empty.

After sitting there in silence for a few moments, Tom spoke up, “So, El, how long do you think this will last, the good stuff, I mean?”

Elly was quiet. She leaned back against the porch step, pondering his question. After a long, thoughtful pause, she replied,

“I don’t know, Tommy. In a lot of ways, I think it may be up to us. I guess the good stuff lasts as long as we want it to...”









Part 2

# The Red Tide

*Honi soit qui mal y pense*  
(Accursed be a cowardly and covetous heart)



*“Nae Man Can Tether Tide Nor Time.”*

*~From the Statue of Robert Burns in  
Midtown Detroit*

## Prologue

**I**sn't it interesting how just when one story ends another seems to begin? As the Folkteller, this happens to me a lot. Just when I think that the story I'm sharing with you is over; suddenly another one begins – and we're drawn back together again.

Well, the Nain Rouge has that quality about him, as well. Lutin (that's his real name) is the type of creature that lingers on, long after he's disappeared and gone away. Evil seems to work that way. You always have to keep your eye on it, because you can never be too sure where it will pop up or what it will do next.

It's true that I've returned to you for a reason, and that reason is to share another story about the Nain Rouge with you.

If you're ready, we'll pick our story up a little further down the road...



## 1: A New Beginning

**I**t was hard to believe that the school year was more than half over. Winter had washed over the city like a thick, cold ocean wave, ebbing and flowing below the frozen shoes that moved swiftly along the all-too-vacant streets.

Elly and Tom had made it through the first half of their freshman year at Royal Oak High School – barely. The high school was such a big change from their middle school days that both teenagers nearly drowned in the overwhelming size of the school, the number of kids and the variety of classes that they attended.

It was as if their lives were in constant motion now. Elly had signed up for far too many clubs again. Between Drama Club, Yearbook and Forensics, there was barely enough time to get through all of the homework from her honors classes.

Tom found high school to be a challenge, as well. He quickly learned that there would be no way for him to breeze through

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

his school work without studying or cracking open a textbook. Tom had gotten mostly B's in the first semester, but that was only through great pain and some last-minute cramming for the big tests.

If Elly and Tom had learned anything from the first half of their freshman year of high school, it was this: life had changed. Gone were the days of just sitting around on Elly's front porch, drinking Pepsi and counting the cars that breezed down their quiet, tree-lined side street. It also seemed like it was ages ago when they were drained of their life on the electric midway by that ancient, crimson creature. They often wondered whether it ever happened at all.

Now Elly and Tom saw each other often, but not really at all. They would wave at each other between classes, and chat briefly about nothing when they were surrounded at lunch. But there was little to no time after school or on weekends to get together as in the past. Time seemed to be speeding up for these young adults, as their worlds expanded and accelerated simultaneously.

The third-hour bell rang, and soon the halls of Royal Oak High School were flooded with shuffling, swinging student bodies that flowed out of the classrooms and into the narrow passageways. The noise and commotion, accompanied with the forward energy of teenage inertia, was reminiscent of a flock of migratory birds, sweeping across the sky in a cluttered, controlled formation.

"Tommy!" a voice rose above the shifting crowd.

Tom looked in the direction of the voice, as he stood by his locker, talking trash with his friends, Vic and AJ. He could barely make out Elly's voice above the din, but he knew that it was her.



## *Chapter 1: A New Beginning*

“Hey, El, over here!” Tom shouted.

Elly worked her way back upstream from the power current of student traffic flow, sliding in between backpacks and book bags until she landed directly in front of Tom’s locker.

“El,” Tom spoke with great familiarity, “You know Vic and AJ, don’t you?” He pointed to the boys standing one on either side of him. El looked at each boy for a few seconds and smiled at them both. Vic and AJ returned the greeting with a silent nod and a shy smirk that seemed to form and stick to most teenage boys’ faces quite nicely.

Vic and AJ had become a pair of complimentary bookends to Tom since the beginning of the year. Both boys were a little shorter than Tom and they always seemed to be standing one on either side of him, sideling up against him like fleshy, flying buttresses against the Cathedral of St. Thomas.

AJ appeared to be a quiet, thoughtful young man, who never said too much, but always conveyed a sense of deep knowing and understanding. His short, curly hair and medium-brown skin were in stark contrast to his jade green eyes. AJ liked to listen to Tom tell stories, though he never spoke about his adventure with the evil red dwarf.

Vic, on the other hand, preferred to go toe-to-toe with Tom Demine. Vic and Tom had become good friends over the past few months, despite their penchant for arguing, rough-housing, and picking each other apart at almost every opportunity. Vic was a lot like Tom in many ways. Both boys were strong-willed and self-assured. They both had their own opinions about things and they were not afraid to express themselves with great volume

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

and force. The biggest difference between them was that Vic was a born leader, an over-achiever. Where Tom was content to go with the flow and make the best of his surroundings, Vic was a hard driver who had a vision of how things should be. When he set his sights on something, it was very difficult to stop him from reaching his target. Because he was shorter in stature than a lot of the other boys, Vic more than made up for it in his determination, fearlessness and unwillingness to give in – on anything.

This was probably why the three boys were getting along so well. AJ, Vic and Tom all had something inside each of them that the others lacked.

Before any awkward silences could set in, Elly spoke up, “Hey, guys, are you going to the basketball game on Friday? If we win, we will be in state finals!”

“Of course we are going, El,” Tom replied quickly.

“Yeah, you would have to be some sort of loser or geek to miss that game,” Vic shot back glibly.

“Shut up, Vic-tor,” Tom snapped and swung his elbow directly into Vic’s rib cage. Vic hated when anyone called him by his full name.

“Ow! What the heck did you do that for?!” Vic yelled as he shoved Tom’s elbow away from his midsection.

“Your tone . . .,” Tom replied as he stared Vic down, “That was for your jerky tone. El asked a simple question. You don’t have to play ‘Mr. Cool’ with her.”

“Geez, okay, sorry,” Vic responded, looking quickly up at El and then back down again, feeling a little embarrassed.

AJ broke the brief tension between the other three teens,

## *Chapter 1: A New Beginning*

“Why don’t we all go together? We could meet up at my house before the game and just walk over to the field house together.”

“I’m up for it if you guys are,” Elly responded.

The boys looked at each other and soon their eye contact transformed into bobbing, nodding heads.

“Sounds like a plan,” Tom confirmed.

It was settled; they would all meet at AJ’s house after dinner on Friday and head off to the game together. It’s funny how even the simplest plans can become very complicated very quickly. For some reason, that Friday night would become much less simple than anyone could have planned for or even expected.



## 2: *Shadows*

**T**he sun set cold and early on the February Friday before the big basketball game. The Royal Oak Ravens were playing the Cass Tech Technicians from Detroit in the Southeastern Michigan Interleague playoffs. The winner of the game would be headed to the state finals in Lansing.

Tom left his house at dusk and headed out to pick up Vic before they made their way over to AJ's house. Vic's house was only a few blocks away, past Waterworks Park. But for some reason, on this particular evening, the trip seemed much longer. As Tom walked along the familiar sidewalks, an eerie feeling came over him. It was as if someone was watching him from all sides. He turned to look over at some bushes, then into the street and then behind a parked car. Nothing ... There was nothing there. But still, something, something dark and shadowy seemed to swirl around Tom as he quickened his pace toward Vic's house.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

Elly was in her room, getting ready for the game. She had on her black and blue Ravens jersey and was now busy putting black and dark blue ribbons in her hair. For the big games, the school would sponsor “Black-Out” nights, where all of the fans were supposed to wear black shirts to show support for the team. Elly wanted to be sure that she looked just right so that everyone would know whose side she was on.

As Elly sat in front of her mirror, continuing her preparations, she felt a slight, cold breeze coming from the small crack in her opened bedroom window. Her curtains billowed gently, as the frigid February air carried across the room, settling on Elly’s shoulders like icy fingers pressing against her flesh. She shivered slightly and got up to close the window, mumbling something about her mother always wanting to air out her room.

As Elly moved toward the window, she too got an eerie, slightly breathless feeling like she was being watched. It was as if the entire mood in the room was slowly transforming from the excitement and anticipation of a Friday night out with her friends into a darker, more sinister sinking feeling that settled in the pit of her stomach.

Elly reached the window with great trepidation. She glanced out on the yard. She could have sworn that she saw a dark shadow sweep across her front lawn, moving first from the hedges and then disappearing behind the elm tree in McCreeley’s side yard.

Then it happened – to both Tom and Elly – at the same time ...

Tom was frozen on the sidewalk, only a few houses away from Vic’s front door.

Elly reached out to shut the slightly opened window.

They both smelled sulphur. They both heard a faint hissing



## *Chapter 2: Shadows*

sound that seemed to build into an otherworldly cackle. Tom and Elly's heads began to spin simultaneously. The dizziness was beginning again, as was that all too familiar feeling of nausea and panic that had dominated their lives barely more than a year ago. The smells, the sounds and the continued caterwauling grew inside their heads, like the storm warning sirens that the city tested on the first Saturday of every month – starting quiet and low, and then growing into an ungodly crescendo.

Elly wobbled by the window, barely able to stand. Tom held his head in his hands, trying to shake the noise out of his ears. Both teens fell to the ground, succumbing to the spinning of their brains and the churning of their stomachs. In the moment before they finally fell onto the damp, dewy grass and the soft, beige bedroom carpet, they both, as if in some unifying trance, whispered simultaneously, "Oh no, it's happening again..."

Tom struggled his way up and off of the sidewalk, like a newborn colt, swaying his way into equilibrium. After rubbing his forehead a few times, he looked around to get his bearings, only to discover that he was standing right in front of Vic's house. He stumbled his way to the side door of the house and knocked weakly.

Vic opened the door to discover his slightly dishevelled pal leaning against the old milk chute by the side of door.

"What the heck happened to you?" Vic asked, half smirking.

"I don't really know..." Tom mumbled as he fell into the hallway, "I must have passed out or something on the way over..."

"Well, don't get too excited, the game hasn't even started yet," Vic joked cautiously.

Tom grumbled quietly, "Yeah, thanks for being so understand-

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

ing, I.. I ... I guess I'll save it for game time.”

With that, Vic grabbed his jacket and gently nudged Tom back out of the door. Both boys scooted down the driveway and north on Crooks Road toward AJ's house.

“Come on, man, pick up the pace!” Vic yelled at Tom, who was still lagging behind. “We are already late and everyone is going to leave without us.”

“Okay, Okay,” Tom said, making a feeble effort to quicken his steps, “You haven't even given me a chance to tell you what happened back there.”

On the other side of town, Elly was slowly pulling herself up off of her bedroom carpet. Fortunately, her head had just missed the corner of the window sill when she collapsed in a heap upon the floor. She propped herself up against the side of her bed and brushed her long brown hair away from her face.

After stabilizing herself, Elly stood up straight and made her way toward the vanity mirror. Despite her sudden fainting spell, she surprisingly looked no worse for wear. Her hair ribbons were a bit askew, but nothing that a little tightening and adjusting couldn't fix. The clock on the vanity table read 6:30 PM.

“Oh geez, I better get going!” Elly said to herself, “I'd hate being the last one to show up at AJ's.”

With great speed and precision, Elly finished putting on her make-up and thundered down the stairs.

“Be home by eleven!” her dad yelled to her from the family room.

“Okay, Dad, got it!” Elly yelled back, as her last words slammed in unison with the front door that closed behind her.



## *Chapter 2: Shadows*

In her rush towards AJ's house, Elly almost ran into her friend, Lynni, right on the front porch. Fortunately, Lynni heard the door and saw Elly coming right at her just in time to hold her hands up and slow down the runaway freight train.

"Hey, what's the hurry?!!" Lynni yelled as she pushed Elly back onto the porch.

"Oh, Lynni, you startled me!" Elly exclaimed, "I almost forgot that you were going to meet me here."

"Gee, thanks, El, and I'm your best friend, right?" Lynni replied, rolling her eyes.

"Oh, shut up," Elly shot back, "I just got pre-occupied with something, that's all."

Lynni looked at Elly's face and could see a look of worry. It was a look like she'd never seen before. Whatever had pre-occupied Elly enough to almost knock her best friend off of the front porch had to be pretty serious.

"Alright, El, give it up. What is floating around that little head of yours?" Lynni questioned.

Elly looked down at the ground for what seemed like an eternity. She couldn't look Lynni in the eye. She had never told anyone about what had happened two summers ago. And, besides, she was probably just over reacting, letting her imagination get the best of her. She needed to talk to Tommy. That would make her feel better. She could clear everything up at AJ's house before the game.

"Nothing," was Elly's response to Lynni, "Let's get going and we can talk on the way. I think I just got over excited about the big game tonight."

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With that, Elly took Lynni's arm and the two girls slipped deeper into the February darkness, making their way across frozen lawns and driveways toward the pre-game party.





### 3: *The Company Misery Brings*

**A**J's house was abuzz with excitement. His parents had let him set up the basement for the pre-game festivities. By the time Elly and Lynni arrived, Vic, Tom and AJ were all relaxing on the futon couch, watching TV and eating Doritos.

AJ's dog was the first to greet the girls as they thumped down the basement steps. Everyone loved AJ's dog, Pippi, who was called "Pip" for short. Pip was a West Highland White Terrier, with big brown eyes and a scrappy, friendly disposition. AJ's mom had named the dog after Pippi Longstocking, a character from a book she had loved as a child. Pippi Longstocking was an independent, strong-willed girl, who lived alone in a crazy house by the ocean, while her sea captain father was away on his ship. Pip the dog seemed to exude a lot of the same qualities as the character from the book. She was willful, smart and full of energy.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

Pip jumped up to meet the girls and revelled in the attention. Their high sweet voices and pats on the head made Pip flatten her ears and wag her tail wildly. Pip led the teens over to where the boys were sitting.

“Hey, guys!” AJ greeted Elly and Lynni, as they sat down in the two beanbag chairs to the right of the couch.

“Hey, what’s goin’ on?” Elly replied, slightly uneasily.

AJ whispered, “Well, Vic was just telling me about Tom passing out on the way to his house.”

Elly suddenly sat up with complete alertness and panic. She shot a look over to Tom that penetrated right through his heart and into his soul. Tom locked eyes with Elly, knowing that something was not right. The next few minutes seemed to pass like hours between the two of them. Their gaze never broke as they tried to decipher each other’s thoughts in the awkward silence of that lingering moment.

Vic finally broke the tension, “Okay, you two, what the heck is going on? You both keep staring at each other like a couple of zombies.”

Lynni added, “Yeah, El, you have been acting weird ever since I got to your house. Now you and Tom are having a crazy-eyed staring contest.”

AJ pointed out, “I get the feeling that there’s something you haven’t told us yet...”

All of this questioning broke the spell. Tom and Elly’s stare snapped in half, as they turned away from each other and faced the center of the room again. It was at that moment that a deep realization came over the both of them. Despite everything that

### *Chapter 3: The Company Misery Brings*

had happened to them over the past couple of years, they had never told anyone. Not a soul knew about Lutin (the Nain Rouge's real name), the legend, or how close Tom and Elly had come to meeting their doom. Once high school had started, Tom and Elly had gotten so caught up in all of the activities and the big changes that were happening all around them, they had shoved the whole Nain Rouge experience back into the recesses of their minds.

Now, the events that had taken place that night had brought everything back – the fear, the anxiety, the sense of loneliness – that had drained them of their life and energy once before. Neither of them wanted to go through that experience again. They couldn't do it, even if they wanted to; they just did not have the strength to deal with all of that bad energy alone.

Tom looked over at Elly with his lips pursed. His eyes questioned her as to what he should say next. Elly returned the knowing look with a reassuring nod of her head that was so subtle, only Tom had noticed it. Elly and Tom were ready to talk. They needed to tell their story.

“Um, you guys probably are not going to believe this...” Tom began, “Actually, El and I have never told anyone about this before.”

“What's the big mystery Tom?” Vic quipped, “Are you sick or something?”

Lynni sat next to Elly and turned her head toward her in dramatic fashion, “Oh my gosh, El, is everything okay?”

AJ sat there looking around the room at the worried expressions that hung from all of the teenagers' faces. Even Pip sensed that the mood had changed in the room, and began brushing her head gently against the various legs that rested on the floor or

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

dangled down from the futon couch.

Tom hunched over from the chair in which he was sitting, leaning into the center of the group. “Guys, there is nothing to worry about. It is just that a lot of weird stuff happened to El and me a couple of summers ago. We never really had a chance to talk to anyone about it. Tonight, when I passed out in front of Vic’s house, well, it just kind of brought it all back.”

Elly jumped right in the middle of Tom’s confession, “Tommy, you fainted tonight?!”

Tom responded quietly, “Yeah, I got that weird feeling again, like we used to get when, uh, um, when he was around, you know?”

Elly’s eyes widened as she stood up with a sick, grave look on her face, “I passed out, too, just a few hours ago, in my room. I had the same cold, uneasy feeling – just like before...”

The tension in the room was now even higher. Glances and looks shot around the room like super balls dropped into a clear, plastic cube. Lynni yelled, “Guys, what the heck is going on? We’re flippin’ out here, wondering what you both are talking about!”

Tom motioned for Elly to sit back down so that he could continue his story.

“Well, guys, the reason we never told anyone about everything that happened to Elly and me is that we thought that no one would ever believe us. But now, since this weird stuff is happening again, we need to trust someone. We need to trust all of you.”

Tom paused for a moment and searched the faces of his new friends. He was looking for any sign of fear, confusion or disbelief before he went any further. As he scanned their eyes, Tom could see that everyone was riveted with what he was saying. They were



### *Chapter 3: The Company Misery Brings*

hanging on each word with a concern and care that he could never have hoped for, but was really grateful for having.

Tom cleared his throat and continued, “Well, about a year-and-a-half ago, Elly and I were on a field trip with the middle school. We were down at the DIA looking at the Diego Rivera murals when we saw something. Actually, we heard something – a something that made a huge noise and knocked over a bunch of knights’ armor. Once we saw it, we passed out.”

As if in unison, Vic, Lynni and AJ blurted out simultaneously, “What was it?”

Elly answered, “It was the Nain Rouge.”

Tom continued, “Nain Rouge is French for ‘red dwarf.’ After the incident, the curator of the museum, Dr. Hieronymus Beele, took us up to his office and explained that this red dwarf was a harbinger of doom that had been plaguing Detroit for centuries. There was a curse, a curse on the city that we had just gotten pulled into.”

Tom took a breath and looked around the room again. All eyes were fixed directly on him and no one said a word. Tom looked a bit winded, and so he directed Elly to pick up the story from where he had left off.

Elly stood up and moved into the center of the group. “Like Tommy said, we were sucked into some ancient curse. We had no idea why all this stuff was happening to us. That was until we did a little research and found out that we were related to some of the original settlers of Detroit. Tommy and I learned that we were the ransom to this curse.”

AJ leaned forward a little and questioned, “How did you find

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all of this out, from Dr. Beele?”

“No,” Elly continued, “From the Nain Rouge himself! We actually met this little troll and he told us that he was the product of all the evil that had been building up in the city over the centuries. Since our ancestors tried to kick him off his land when Detroit was founded, he cursed them ... and all of their descendants ... including Tom and me.”

Tom added, “Yeah, he basically tried to kill us, always mumbling this curse:

*‘Take what you steal and steal what you keep  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep.’”*

Vic looked over at Tom, leaning his head to one side with an expression of disbelief, “For real? You’re kidding right?”

“No,” Tom said quietly and gravely, “I wish I was. That red dwarf was slowly sucking the life out of us. We were goners for sure until Elly came up with a really clever plan. She got him to cross over the border of the city, right by the State Fairgrounds during the Freedom Festival. He fell for it and burned up into nothingness. The only thing that was left was a slick puddle of black goo that slid into the sewer.

“After all that happened, things seemed to get better, that is until now.”

Elly added, “Tommy and I figured that the problem was solved. Then tonight, those old feelings came back. It was as if it was starting all over again...”

With that, Elly broke down and cried. Lynni jumped up and

### *Chapter 3: The Company Misery Brings*

wrapped her arms around Elly, gently guiding her back down to the couch, where Elly buried her face in Lynni's shoulder. "I just can't go through this again, Lynni, I just can't!"

Tom rubbed his forehead roughly with his hand, trying to take in what had happened this evening, along with the powerful memories from the past that were now spinning around his head in endless cyclones of confusion. Vic and AJ got up and put their hands on Tom's shoulders.

"It'll be okay, man," Vic said comfortingly.

"Yeah, you're not alone this time," AJ added with thoughtful assurance.

Eventually, the energy in the room settled down, and the teens' emotions ebbed slightly. Tom and Elly were glad that they had shared their adventure with their new friends, even though they had a feeling that their troubles from the past were beginning to resurface.

After a little while, Lynni broke the silence, "You know, we can just hang out here. We don't have to go to the game if you guys don't want to."

"No," Tom replied, "I still want to go, what about you, El?"

Elly agreed, "Yeah, let's go. I didn't spend all that time getting ready just to sit in AJ's basement all night."

It was agreed. After a little cleaning and straightening up, the small group of friends headed up from the basement out into the subtle sting of the cold, empty evening. Pip ran after them from the basement, scooting around the teens to stand at attention near the front entrance. AJ tried to shoo the little white dog away as he opened the door. But when AJ opened the main door, Pip pressed

## Book 2: *The Red Tide*

even harder against the storm door, growling in a low, menacing gurgle at something unseen in the darkness of the evening.

“Wow, she’s never growled like that before,” AJ said with a bit of concern in his voice.

Pip continued to stand rigid, with her eyes fixed on the blackness that draped over the entire evening.

“Do you think there’s something out there?” Lynni asked with trepidation.

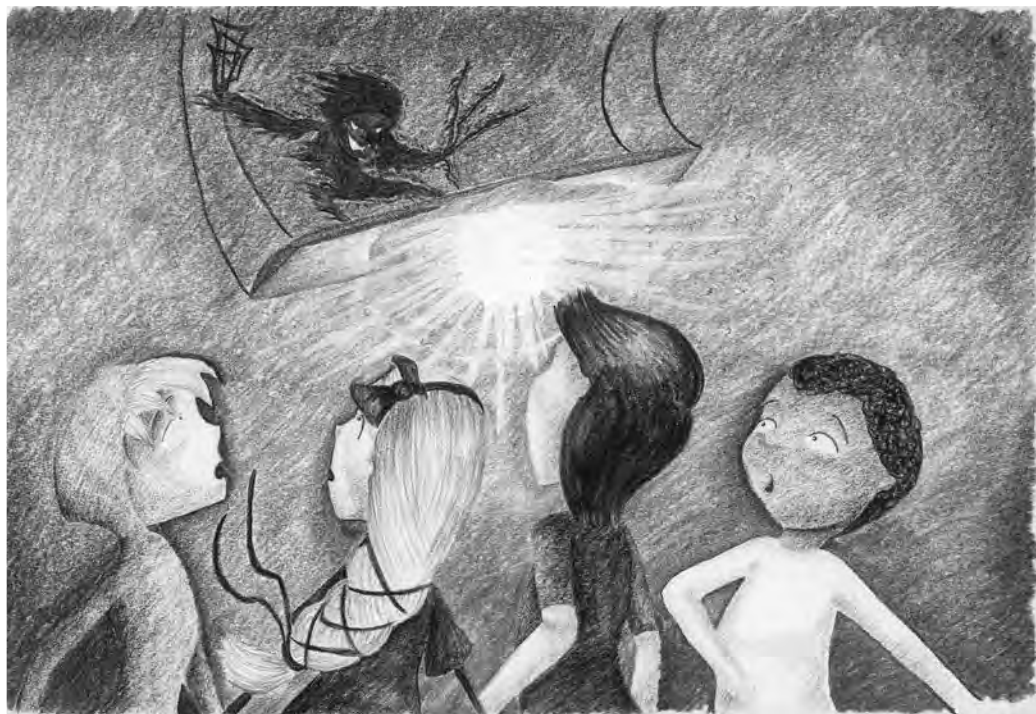
Tom interrupted, “Okay, guys, let’s stop spooking ourselves and just go already!”

“Yeah,” Elly added, “It won’t do us any good to keep hanging around here.”

Everyone seemed to agree. It was not like they could hide from what may or may not happen to them. They were going to have to face whatever was out there, if there *was* something out there at all.

AJ scooped up Pip and set her behind the doggie gate in the family room and the team made their way out through the front door. As they closed the door, everyone could still hear the high-pitched “yap” of Pip’s warning bark. She was sounding the alarm that something may be lurking in the unknown darkness of a night that was growing stranger by the minute.





## 4: *Black Out*

**A**s they made their way up Crooks Road, the teens could hear the muffled roar of the crowd, already packed into the field house. Soon, they would be smack-dab in the middle of the signs, cheers and waving arms that signified the black and blue Ravens' spirit.

The visiting side of the Ravens field house was jammed to the rafters with visiting fans from Cass Tech, decked out in green and white. The usual swell of supporters that came to cheer on the Royal Oak Ravens filled up the home side of the arena as the party of teenagers entered the building. Tom, Elly and the rest of the gang made their way over to the student section, blending into the sea of blue and black.

There was a great feeling of electricity in the air as the players took to the court for the opening tip-off. Both sides moved up and down the court with such great speed and precision that the

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

fans had trouble swiveling their heads in time to catch each block and basket.

Near the end of the second quarter, Elly, Tom and the rest of their friends could hardly speak. They had been yelling so loudly that their voices were hoarse with the non-stop excitement. On both sides of the field house, fans were so absorbed in the game that no one noticed the overhead lights beginning to flicker – one by one.

Light by light, the arena grew dimmer. As each light faded, it would expand into a blinding brightness. Then suddenly, it would explode in a pyrotechnic display of sparks and shattering glass.

What happened next is still disputed to this very day. Some say they saw a shadowy figure run across the court and out the side doors of the field house as the fans scattered and players ducked their way back into the locker rooms. Others say they saw a wild animal circling the sidelines, growling menacingly as darkness fell upon the arena.

Tom, Elly, AJ, Lynni and Vic knew better. As the lights overhead began to explode, Elly grabbed Tom's arm and pointed toward the ceiling. The rest of the group looked up as Elly motioned skyward. Above their heads, they saw a small troll-like man swinging from light to light. As he touched each light with the tip of his long, pointed finger, the light would fade, then expand in an explosive flash that shattered each bulb completely.

“Oh, my gosh!” Lynni yelled, “Run!”

“No!” Elly shot back, “That is just what he wants us to do. Follow me!”

With that, Elly led the group to the top of the bleachers, where



## *Chapter 4: Black Out*

they huddled together until the chaos subsided. As they sat there, all hunched together, they watched Lutin destroy every light in the arena. Soon, the building was left empty and in complete darkness.

Just before the last light went out, all of the teens' eyes were drawn to center court. In the middle of the blue R.O. emblem, they saw the tiny creature, glowing in an incandescent red, spin gleefully amidst the shards of glass now strewn on the wooden floor. With a final cackle and a deft pirouette, the Nain Rouge evaporated and simply disappeared right before their eyes. But just before he disappeared from view, he hissed in a low raspy voice. Both Tom and Elly could have sworn they heard him whisper in their ears:

“You have done it, children... You have released me...”



## 5: *Sorting Things*

**E**lly looked over at Tom from the top of the bleachers. Tom stared back at her, half in disbelief, half in sickened terror. Vic, AJ and Lynni hadn't moved, still curled up from the darkness and noise that had swallowed them up just a few minutes before.

Tom tapped AJ on the shoulder, "C'mon, man, it's okay now. You can get up."

Elly roused Lynni and Vic from their balled-up state, letting them know that they could safely look out from the top of the field house.

Vic was the first to speak, "I guess you guys weren't kidding when you told us what happened to you in middle school."

Tom replied with a dazed and confused look as he looked down at the vacant, glass-covered basketball court, "I just don't get it ... How? How could he be back?"

Lynni piped in, "Didn't you guys say that you destroyed him?"

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“Yes,” Elly replied thoughtfully, “We did. We made him cross over the city limit. That was the boundary that trapped him in the city. It was all part of the curse. He burned up, melted away. There was nothing left but a scorch mark on the sidewalk. I was there. I saw it all happen. I know it wasn’t a dream...”

Elly’s voice trailed off into the darkness that shrouded the arena. She could not figure out how it had happened. How had Lutin come back? Why was he showing his twisted face outside of the city now?

After the group had regained their senses a bit more, they stumbled down from the top of the bleachers and made their way toward the exit doors. They each tip-toed lightly across the basketball court, carefully avoiding the bigger shards of broken glass as the tiny, shiny bits crunched beneath their feet.

Once outside the building, the teens regrouped by the old oak tree that loomed in shadowy silence on the outskirts of the school yard. In the distance, they could hear police and ambulance sirens coming closer. It seemed like they had been huddled inside the field house for hours, when actually it had only been a few minutes since the chaos had passed.

The night had grown a bit darker, a bit colder than when they had left AJ’s house earlier that evening. They all knew that they were safe in the shadow of that old tree, just far enough away from the school and just camouflaged enough to remain hidden from the inevitable questions and concerns that would be coming from the police and ambulance personnel.

In the temporary security of their hiding place, the friends attempted to make some sense out of the bizarre events that had

## *Chapter 5: Sorting Things*

taken place that night.

In the silence, each head seemed to turn to where Elly was leaning against the trunk of the great tree. They could see that Elly was deep in thought, recalling events and details from the last time she had run into the red dwarf. She was racking her brain, trying to figure out how Lutin could have escaped.

Elly thought to herself, “Hadn’t they broken the curse? Weren’t they free from the Nain Rouge’s power? How could he be outside of the city? And what was he up to now?” All of these thoughts repeatedly circled and cycled through her mind like the handle of a jack-in-the-box, cranking until the answer popped out suddenly from out of the top of her head.

“I think I’ve got it!” Elly burst out from beneath the oak tree branches.

“Shhhhh!” the rest of the teens whispered.

Vic added, “Someone will hear us if you keep that up.”

“Sorry,” Elly whispered in a much lower tone. “I was just thinking... maybe, when we broke the curse, we accidentally let him go!”

“What do you mean, let him go?” Lynnii questioned.

At that moment, Tom piped in thoughtfully, “El, I think you may be right. Maybe when he crossed over the border of Detroit, it not only broke the curse, but released him too! Think about it – Lutin himself told us that he was tied to the land. He was part of the energy of the land and actually became more powerful as the negative energy increased over hundreds and hundreds of years. The curse was the only thing keeping him in Detroit. Maybe it was the curse that created the boundaries that held him within

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

the city!”

“That would mean that the source of his power was also the source of his confinement,” AJ concluded, as he hunched close to the trunk of the oak tree.

As the teens huddled together in the shadow of the high school, they notice a strange, cold wind beginning to blow through the leafless branches of the giant oak. As the bitter breeze nipped their cheeks and noses with increasing intensity, a pungent whiff of sulphur mingled with the air, creating a cold, foul smell that made some of them cough and gag.

Through the air, a dark shadow, like a wisp of midnight, filtered down from the sky, slithering through the bare branches of the ancient tree. From directly above the youngsters, a high, raspy voice emanated down from the treetop. “Clever... children...” the voice hissed.

All heads immediately looked up through the branches to see the Nain Rouge manifesting himself on one of the sturdier boughs of the tree, like an evil Cheshire cat, complete with menacing grin and glowing ember eyes. “Clever children,” he repeated, “You have found me out all too quickly. You’ve left me little time to thank you for your thoughtful gift of freedom.”

“But how?” were the only words that could come out of the teens’ mouths. No one was quite sure who had even asked the question as they huddled even closer, staring at the red dwarf that sat so proudly above their heads.

“Now is not the time for explanations,” Lutin stated curtly. “Suffice it to say that these two were correct in their assumption. The broken curse has set me free,” Lutin’s voice grew with excitement

## Chapter 5: Sorting Things

as he pointed at Tom and Elly.

“Now, I have much to do and little time for dawdling with you pests.”

With that, Lutin returned to his smoky form, entwining himself within the branches of the tree. As his elongated body wrapped around the trunk of the tree, a strong gust of wind rose up from the west.

Lynni looked up from the gathered group and yelled, “Run!”

As the children scurried out from underneath the outstretched oak tree, they could feel the power of the wind pulling on the roots of the oak, prying it violently from the ground. Just as the friends pulled away from the shadow of the tree, they heard a great crashing sound, like a tornado blowing through a wood-framed farmhouse.

*The thunderous crash felt like a freight train rolling off its tracks.*

As they all lay on the ground, barely past their outstretched feet, there lay the remnants of the ancient oak, now shattered and splintered all around them. As the wind continued to howl, they could hear a faint, high-pitched cackling in the distance.

Lutin was back.

The year of calm and quiet that had settled into Tom and Elly’s lives disappeared altogether.

Nothing would ever be the same again.





## 6: *The New Alliance*

**O**ne by one, they gathered themselves up, dusted themselves off and began a rapid retreat back to AJ's house. Pip was at the door to greet them, barking and agitated, as if she knew what had happened to them that evening.

The teens flicked on the basement lights and scurried down into their safe haven, flopping with great exhaustion on both the futon and the floor.

Vic was the first one to break the silence, "Man, what a night!"

Tom replied calmly, but with concern, "That's just a little taste of what Elly and I had to go through a couple of years ago... I was hoping that we'd seen the last of Lutin back then... I guess not..."

Lynni wondered out loud, "Do you think anyone saw what happened to us? I mean, we were almost killed!"

"I doubt it," AJ interjected, "We were too far away from the crowd and, besides, people were more focused on the noise and

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

the damage to the gym to notice anything else.”

As the others in the group pondered the evening’s events, Elly sat quietly, as if in deep thought. Her brow furrowed in deep concentration, as she rubbed her temples with her thumb and forefinger. She could not help but wonder...

“What is he up to?” she finally questioned out loud.

Everyone turned to meet Elly’s questioning, as they had been in deep conversation, rehashing every minor detail of Lutin’s reappearance.

Elly continued, “He has to be up to something. He even said that he didn’t have time to waste on us. That means he must have more important things on his devious, little mind.”

Tom answered her directly, “El, we aren’t important to him anymore. The curse is broken; he doesn’t need us – He’s got his freedom now.”

“Then why did he try to kill us?” Vic shot back.

“That’s the funny part about it,” Elly continued, as if she was still thinking it all the way through. “He could have killed us if he wanted to. Like Tom said, he’s not bound by the curse anymore. But he didn’t. What he did do was deliberately pull that stunt at the field house. It was for our ‘entertainment.’ The Nain Rouge wanted us to know that he is back in grand style.”

“But what about the tree?” Lynni said, “Wasn’t he trying to kill us then?”

“No,” Tom replied gravely, “If he had wanted us dead, we wouldn’t be here talking about it now. Lutin just wanted us to know how powerful he’s become. He wanted to make it clear that he’s unstoppable.”

## *Chapter 6: The New Alliance*

“How can you be so sure?” Vic debated.

“Listen, guys,” said Tom, as he leaned forward, sliding his backside onto the edge of the futon couch, “I’m still not sure what’s going on here, neither is Elly. All I know is that Lutin is back, we aren’t dead and some more bad stuff is going to happen. The Nain Rouge has bigger plans this time, bigger than snuffing out a bunch of freshmen.”

It was Tom’s directness and clarity that caused a hush to fall over the entire basement. Everyone sat back in their spots and contemplated the gravity of Tom’s stark assessment and bold prediction. At least when it was just Tom and Elly, they knew what they were up against. Before, Lutin made it very clear what his intentions were and what Tom and Elly’s fate would be. Once they discovered his intentions, they were able to craft a plan to defeat him.

It was different now. There were more people involved. There was no curse to contain him. Most of all, Lutin revealed nothing to them, only that he was free. That was the worst part about it. It was the “not knowing” that caused them the greatest fear.

The silence was broken by a faint, mourning sound, like a wounded dove. AJ looked over to see Elly weeping into her hands. Tom pursed his lips when he discovered what AJ had already picked up on, trying bravely to not start crying himself.

There were no words of comfort that anyone could find to console Elly at that moment. Tom and AJ bent down on either side of her and began gently rubbing her shoulders. Tom leaned over and put his forehead against Elly’s.

“It’s going to be alright, I promise.” Tom said softly.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

Yeah,” AJ added, “You’re not alone this time, remember?”

With that, Vic and Lynni joined the others, gathering around Elly in an impromptu group hug. It was true – this time, Elly and Tom were not alone. Whether they liked it or not, they had dragged their new friends into one of the most dangerous and exciting adventures of their lives.

No one knew what was going to happen next. All they did know was that they would go through it together. In the years to come, each of them would look back on this moment as a time when they all grew up a little bit.

They would soon learn that troubled times have a strange way of either tearing people apart or bringing them closer together.





## 7: *Back to Beele*

**A**nother late February morning broke faintly through the clouds. A feeble sun made an anemic attempt to lift the gloom of a late winter dawn. Tom stirred from his bed, awakened only by the electric buzz of his alarm clock, sounding the warning that another day of school was upon him.

In other houses around Royal Oak, similar scenes were playing out in the bedrooms of Elly, AJ, Lynni and Vic. Despite their bodies' desires to remain beneath the warmth and security of their cotton comforters, the teens knew that school waited for no one – they would inevitably have to get up. So, with a succession of grumbling, mumbling and inaudible groans, each of them stumbled from their beds and began their unique morning rituals of high school preparation.

AJ tumbled down the staircase like an over-stretched slinky. He made his way into the kitchen, where his mom and dad were

## Book 2: The Red Tide

already pressed, dressed and ready for another day of work. Pip scooted over to AJ and rubbed her white head against his ankles. Her brown eyes reached way up to AJ's face in anticipation of a breakfast treat or some of his cold cereal that he had begun to pour into his bowl.

"No more Cheerios for her," Mom said to AJ, "She's had enough already."

"Did you see the Web News Network this morning?" Dad said, as he unfolded his laptop computer. He angled the screen so that both AJ and his mom could see the headlines on the main page of the web site:

***"14th Street Bridge Collapses in Washington DC, Dozens Injured."***

AJ's dad began to read the first paragraph of the article:

*"Late last night, structural supports gave way on the 14th Street Bridge, which connects Arlington, Virginia and Washington DC. Dozens of motorists were injured when the bridge collapsed beneath their moving vehicles, plunging them into the Potomac River.*

*Sergeant William Edmunds of the DC police noted, 'It was a good thing this didn't happen during rush hour. We could have had a real tragedy on our hands.'*

*Cause for the collapse remains unknown, though the case is being investigated by both local and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as by the Army Corps of Engineers."*

AJ almost dropped his cereal bowl on Pip's head. There was something about that story that didn't sit right with him.

"Well, I'm just glad no one was seriously injured," Mom said,



## *Chapter 7: Back to Beele*

with a deep sigh and a slight shaking of her head.

AJ finished his breakfast quickly. Now he had a really good reason to finish getting ready for school. He was not quite sure why, but he had a peculiar feeling that the newspaper headlines and the events from last night had something to do with each other. Either way, he had to meet up with the others to see what they thought.

It was still a few minutes before the first bell, when the teens had gathered around Lynni's locker. AJ came running up to Vic, Tom, Elly and Lynni with a look of such energy and intent, that they all stopped talking, right in the middle of their conversation.

"Did you guys see the news this morning?" AJ blurted out.

"What?! Was there a story about a tree nearly falling on us?" Vic quipped sarcastically.

"Not funny, Vic," AJ stammered, "I meant the story about the bridge collapse in Washington DC..."

Elly and Tom looked at each other with an uneasy feeling.

AJ continued, "I know it sounds crazy, but I just have a feeling, right in my gut, that what happened to us last night and what happened on that bridge are connected in some way."

"That's crazy," Lynni said dismissively. "Disasters happen every day, all around the world. So how does being attacked by a red dwarf in Michigan connect to a bridge collapsing in Washington DC?"

"Now, hold on a minute," Tom stepped in to defend AJ, "I don't know if there is a connection here or not. But I do know that Lutin is capable of pretty much anything. The Nain Rouge is the kind of creature that works his way into your gut, as well

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

into as your head.”

Elly agreed, “I haven’t seen the paper this morning, but as soon as AJ started talking about the bridge, I had that queasy feeling in my stomach too.”

Just then the first bell rang.

Tom pulled everyone together before they took off toward their first classes of the day, “Listen guys, we can’t prove anything by ourselves. I think we should go talk to Dr. Beele.”

“Yes!” Elly exclaimed, “I was going to suggest that just from what happened last night. He at least needs to know that Lutin is back on the prow!”

“Can everyone make it after school?” Tom questioned the entire group. Everyone said that they could make the bus trip downtown to the Detroit Institute of Arts. Tom would call at lunch and make a special appointment to meet with Dr. Hieronymus Stanley Beele, Curator of Art, Antiquities and Keeper of Unknown Knowledge.

The rest of the school day passed at a painfully slow pace for the anxious teenagers. Even the afternoon bus ride downtown proved uneventful. After checking in at home, the small band of friends was to meet at the SMART bus station near 12 Mile Road and Woodward Avenue. Elly and Lynni showed up first, since Elly’s house was within walking distance of the intersection. The two girls stood there silently in the giant stone shadow of the Shrine of the Little Flower. The Crucifixion Tower drew a cold, dark curtain across the avenue, blanketing both teens in an enduring, foreboding chill that crept into the bus-stop waiting station.

“Why do those guys always have to be late? I’m freezing out

## *Chapter 7: Back to Beele*

here.” Lynni complained.

“Uh, probably because they’re guys; it’s their nature.” Elly replied coolly.

Just as the words slid out of Elly’s mouth, they saw Vic, Tom and AJ approaching the bus station from across the boulevard. Vic waved his arm vigorously to catch their attention, while the girls stood there with their arms folded, staring back at the boys with frozen looks of impatience.

“What took you guys so long?” Lynni asked with a curt, steely tone in her voice.

“We’re sorry,” AJ explained, “We all met at my house to come over here. Pip was acting crazy and didn’t want us to leave. I tried to put her behind the dog gate, but she ran outside after us. Vic and Tom had to help me chase her down to get her back in the house. It was weird; she’s never acted like that before. It was like she didn’t want us to go, like she sensed that something bad was going to happen.”

“Well, I’m glad you caught her, but we’ve missed seven buses already just waiting for you guys.”

“Sorry, El,” Tom said humbly, “But we’re here now and another bus is on its way right now – Look.”

The boys were fortunate that another bus was heading south toward them. This meant that they could get on the bus, get out of the cold, afternoon air, and minimize the complaining and griping that they were sure to hear from their miffed counterparts.

Once everyone got on the bus, it made its way down the familiar route, south into the city. On the 20-minute ride, they drove through Royal Oak, Berkley, and Ferndale making frequent

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

stops along the way. The stop Tom and Elly remembered most was near the series of red lights at the intersection of 8 Mile Road and Woodward.

When the hydraulic brakes hissed the bus to a slow stop, Tom and Elly were still caught off guard. They had become so accustomed to the frequent stopping and starting that they had been lulled into a sort of dreamlike state by the white noise of the engine, the conversations between friends and the rumbling movement of their 12-ton vehicle.

Suddenly, there it was, right in front of them. The traffic lights marked the city limit, the entrance and exit to the city of Detroit. Out of the bus window they could see the old state fairgrounds. On the other side of the boulevard, they could see the stone and wrought iron fencing surrounding Woodlawn Cemetery.

“It happened right here...” Tom’s voice trailed off into an ethereal, faint whisper, like a ghost struggling to tell the story of its demise.

Vic shook Tom and Elly back into reality, “What are you two babbling about? You’re starting to freak me out with the creepy way you’re staring out the window!”

The trance was broken and Elly turned her face away from the bus windows toward the group of friends.

“Sorry, guys, it’s just that ... that, well, uh, Tommy and I haven’t been down this way since everything happened. I think we kind of forgot about this spot.”

“What spot?” Lynni wondered.

“The spot where we battled the Nain Rouge. It was right here at the city limits,” Elly pointed over to a north side corner of the

## *Chapter 7: Back to Beele*

intersection where Woodward Avenue crossed over 8 Mile Road.

“That was right where he burned up and melted,” Tom cut in, pointing his finger toward the back of the bus, in parallel with Elly’s already outstretched hand.

All of the teens followed the pointing fingers to the spot near the street where Lutin had been destroyed. They could still see a thick black stain on the sidewalk that had faded little in the years that had passed.

As the bus churned through the green light, the kids were pulled back into their seats by the force of the forward movement. The dark shadow on the sidewalk pulled out of view and the bus continued its way south toward the DIA. An odd silence seemed to fall over the group once they had crossed into the city. For some strange reason, no one knew what to say as they prepared their individual thoughts and questions for the great and mysterious Dr. Beele.

Perhaps it may have been that Vic, AJ, Lynni, Tom and Elly didn’t lack for things to say – but, instead, couldn’t find the words to describe the evil they were up against.



## 8: *The Curious Curator*

**T**he steps of the DIA were slick and wet from the snow that had been melting all day in the late winter sun. It was four o'clock and the band of investigators only had an hour to speak with Dr. Beele before the museum closed and they would have to head back to Royal Oak.

As the teens approached the path up to the main doors of the museum, Tom and Elly stopped dead in their tracks. Directly in front of them loomed Rodin's "Thinker" statue, sitting upon its granite pedestal, staring out onto Woodward Avenue in perpetual contemplation. The memories of the last time they had passed the statue came flooding back.

"What's wrong now?" Lynni approached Elly, following her friend's gaze upward to the statue.

"Nothing, nothing's wrong," Elly responded, "Everything is fine, really."

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

“It’s okay, guys,” Tom explained, “It’s just that the last time we passed this statue, it came to life and tried to kill us – no big deal.”

AJ, Vic and Lynni took a long, slow look at “The Thinker,” scanning their eyes from the base of the statue, slowly, all the way up to his pensive head, resting upon his tightly clenched fist. At that moment, the entire party half expected the statue to break its present pose and reach down and grab them all. Thankfully, that didn’t happen. Instead, each teen scooted quickly around the pedestal and ran for the front doors as fast as they could. “The Thinker” never altered his expression, remaining forward focused in his deep study of the boulevard that stretched out in front of his stone perch.

As the group gathered at the front desk, they were met by a friendly docent who seemed to know who they were and what their purpose was for being there.

“Are you children here for Dr. Beele?” she asked with a reassuring, welcoming tone.

Tom answered for the group, “Yes we are. I called ahead to let him know that we’d be visiting.”

The docent smiled and handed them each a visitor’s badge. “You can go right up, dears. Take the private elevator. He’s already expecting you.”

With that, AJ, Vic and Lynni followed Tom and Elly as they snaked their way down hidden corridors and hallways to the private elevators. When they reached the executive office suite, the doors opened upon the familiar and welcoming office of Dr. Hieronymus S. Beele.

“Well, this is quite an entourage you have brought with you!”



## *Chapter 8: The Curious Curator*

Dr. Beele exclaimed as he got up from his mahogany desk. With a glinty grin and a cheerful expression, he greeted each of the teens, one by one. The final greetings fell upon Tom and Elly, and both of them noticed a slight, disconcerted change in Dr. Beele's face as he shook each of their hands warmly.

After these brief, yet hospitable, introductions, the curator guided the teenagers deeper into his office, where a familiar silver tea set had been arranged with six cups and saucers and an assortment of tea cookies and scones. Dr. Beele poured the piping hot Earl Grey tea, while he began his gentle questioning.

"It certainly was a nice surprise to receive your call today. But I am curious as to what brings all of you back into my neck of the woods?"

Without any vote or anyone really talking about it, Tom became the unofficial spokesperson for the group, "Well, Doc, Tom began, "It's like I said on the phone. A lot of weird things have been happening to us lately and now we know why – the Nain Rouge is back!"

No one had gotten used to hearing that statement delivered so bluntly. You could see the rest of the group cringe a little as Tom told the story of eerie feelings, the basketball game, the appearance of Lutin, and then the odd story about the bridge in Washington DC.

Beele seemed less affected by the news. It was clear that he was listening intently by the way his eyes moved and his brow furrowed, as Tom relayed the tales taken from the last few days. When Tom finished, Dr. Beele moved slowly away from the teens and made his way back to his desk chair. He sat down, still in deep

## Book 2: The Red Tide

thought and adjusted the computer screen that sat squarely to one side of his massive desk.

Without speaking, Beele typed a few things on his keyboard and continued to stare, concentrating on the information that was appearing rapidly upon his desktop screen. These few minutes of awkward silence left AJ, Vic and Lynni confused and feeling a bit unsettled. Tom and Elly were used to it. They knew that Dr. Beele was assessing their situation and searching for more information before he would weigh in on the issue at hand.

From behind the computer, the children began to hear broken phrases from the good doctor: “Intriguing ... most interesting ... and, still, quite puzzling ...”

“What is going on?” AJ finally broke the uncomfortable spell, “Can you tell us ANYTHING, Dr. Beele?”

The curator peeked out from behind his computer, adjusting his glasses slightly away from the end of his nose, “Well, AJ, I won’t tell you just anything. But I will tell you something – something quite fascinating.”

With that, Dr. Beele waved the children over to the computer screen on his desk. He pointed to a small article listed under “Science and Nature” on the national news web site. The children began to read the tiny text that spread across the bottom of the screen:

*“... Unusually high water levels have left residents in Midwestern flood plains concerned about increased danger of late winter flooding. In seemingly unrelated news, both the eastern and western coasts of the United States are reporting more frequent storm surges*

## Chapter 8: The Curious Curator

*from both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Scientists do not see the rise in water activity related and are still researching various factors that may be causing these activities around the country...*

Elly looked over at Tom from the other side of the desk with a puzzled, almost frustrated, expression, “Looks like another puzzle from our doctor friend.”

Tom nodded in agreement and stepped back from the desk to face the curator as he sat in his wheeled leather desk chair. “So, what does all this mean, Doc? You seem to know something that you aren’t sharing with us.”

“Well,” Beele began, as he pushed himself away from his desk, stood up and walked around to the front of the room; “There seems to be a common theme or thread that is tying all of these activities together – water.”

“Water?” Lynni piped up, “What does water have to do with the Nain Rouge?” “Yeah,” Vic added, “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Well,” Beele continued, “It would make sense if you knew that Lutin was a water spirit...”

A sudden, surprised look leaped across the faces of the group. Lynni shot a look at Elly. Elly looked at Vic. Vic locked eyes with Tom. AJ just stared blankly at the computer screen again.

As the teens struggled for a deeper understanding of Dr. Beele’s words, they watched as he made his way over to the wall of ancient books that had revealed other mysteries about the Nain Rouge a year or so earlier. The curator rolled his wooden step stool over to one section of the bookshelf and reached up for a single volume, “Westminster’s Catalog of Spirits: Volume III – Woodland and

## Book 2: *The Red Tide*

Water Creatures.”

The group re-gathered in their chairs and on the soft couch as Dr. Beele leafed through the book to find the exact information that he was looking for.

“Ah, yes, here it is,” he said with quiet satisfaction, “I remember discovering this passage some years ago.”

The curator turned toward the teens and began to read a passage, describing Lutin as a water spirit, who “may draw strength and power from various sources of water, including the ability to manipulate the movement of water, its ebbing, flowing and tidal cycles...”

Beele then flipped over a few more pages. “There is actually a quote in here, attributed to Lutin himself, if you would believe it. This author’s convinced that people have heard the dwarf chant:

*‘Where the water meets land and land meets the sea,  
Between shadow and sun is where I shall be.’”*

Elly looked over at Tom, “That sounds like something Lutin would say...”

“That may be our explanation for the sudden increase in water-related incidents around the country; for the bridge in Washington DC.” Dr. Beele concluded as he closed the book and returned it to its place on the massive shelf, “Now that he is free, he could be getting more powerful in areas where the land meets the water.”

Elly was the first to speak, “I think that you’re on to something. Remember, Lutin was the ‘Keeper of the Straits,’ he protected

## *Chapter 8: The Curious Curator*

the water and the land around Detroit until Cadillac and his men shunned him and brought the curse to the city.”

“That’s right,” Tom added, “Now that he’s free, maybe he can draw from the water and land as an energy source, making more trouble for everybody.”

Things were starting to make a bit more sense now. Vic, AJ and Lynni were beginning to see how much trouble Elly and Tom had been in when they fought Lutin the first time. The realization that they too were being sucked into the vortex of his power was now becoming apparent to them.

“What I still don’t understand,” AJ asked after a brief moment, “Is how did the Nain Rouge get to Washington DC from Royal Oak so quickly? I mean, it’s not like he can fly... Can he?”

“That is a valid, yet puzzling, question,” Dr. Beele responded. “To my knowledge, Lutin cannot fly, glide or even propel himself great distances. His ability to appear and disappear at will seems to be more of an illusion than any tangible, actual imbued power or talent. These facts, along with Lutin’s unexplained targets for trouble, serve only as added pieces to our ever-expanding puzzle.”

Why had Lutin broken up a high school basketball game in Michigan and then attacked a bridge outside of Washington DC on the same night?

The curator returned to his tea service, refreshing everyone’s cup with more hot tea. The group sat quietly, mulling over the discoveries that had been made in their brief meeting with Dr. Beele.

Hieronymus sat across from the teens, rubbing his chin between his thumb and forefinger, as if this gentle motion might release

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

some stuck thought or an undiscovered idea that may have become lodged in that complex brain of his.

But it was no use. As the sun sank over the Detroit Historical Museum, so did everyone's hopes of coming up with any more ideas regarding Lutin's return or his motivation for disaster and destruction. Worse yet, neither Dr. Beele nor the teenagers had any idea as to where the Nain Rouge might strike next.

As late afternoon subtly slipped into evening, the entire entourage sat in thoughtful silence, subconsciously agreeing that, as so many thoughts ran through their heads, it was the "not knowing" that was the scariest thought of all.







## 9: The Not Knowing

Splashed across the morning paper was the headline:  
**“Double Trouble: Natural Disasters Hit San Francisco”**

**V**ic came down for breakfast and saw the front page of the paper flutter softly between his dad’s hands as he sat at the breakfast table, enjoying his morning coffee. Vic grabbed his dad’s hands to hold the newspaper steady, as he read the news article, still floating in front of his dad’s face:

*“... San Francisco was rocked last night by 6.3 magnitude earthquake, accompanied by scattered flooding throughout regions of Northern California. Damage assessments have yet to be officially released, but early reports by local news agencies indicate severe damage to urban areas, major buildings and transportation systems...”*

Vic dropped down onto his kitchen chair like a 50-pound bag

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

of Idaho potatoes. In any other situation, he would have not even noticed the grim front page headlines. Like most teenagers, Vic was usually more concerned with homework, girls and hanging out with his friends. A natural disaster halfway across the country would not normally get his attention, especially first thing in the morning. But now things were different. For some reason, Vic knew that the headline was linked to the Nain Rouge.

The worst news was that his sister was out there. His older sister, Rachel, had just moved out there last fall for college. She was attending Santa Clara University in the San Francisco Bay area.

“What about Rachel, is she okay?” Vic asked his dad, who finally set down the paper, revealing the deep concern on his face.

“She’s okay, Vic,” his father reassured him. “We were able to get a hold of her last night, once we heard the reports on the late night news. Her dorms were damaged a little, but the campus took less of a hit than the city center. She’s fine now and she’s safe; that’s what matters most.”

Vic felt a little better, but not much. He really needed to talk to his friends. Maybe that would help slow the racing thoughts that were whizzing around in his head.

It was not until the afternoon that all of the teens had a chance to re-connect. After the last bell from the end of sixth hour rang, Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Lynni met in the courtyard with a few hundred other students, waiting for their rides home from school.

“Did you guys hear about San Francisco?” Vic began.

The group looked back at Vic with a mixed bag of faces. Some faces looked serious and knowing. Others looked confused and concerned.

## *Chapter 9: The Not Knowing*

“What did you hear?” Elly asked in a low whisper.

“It was on the web,” Vic answered, “Flooding and earthquakes mostly... sounds like the work of Lutin to me...”

Tom became suddenly aware of the dozens of people around them. He took out a notebook and opened it up, creating a distraction that would draw his friends into a tighter circle, while allowing for the other outsiders to move away with disinterest.

“Okay, guys,” Tom spoke quietly, “These could be just natural occurrences. But I’m beginning to doubt that. Things are just happening too frequently now, all over the map. We have got to find out what the Nain Rouge is up to... and fast.”

“What’s your hurry?” came a slithery, raspy voice that seemed to emanate from the backs of the teenagers’ throats, “You youngsters are always in such a hurry to figure things out – never take any time to just slow down to stop and smell the roses...”

The tight circle broke into five large pieces as the teens jumped back away from each other. Each child looked at the other, thinking that the ominous, intimidating words had come out of someone else’s mouth like some sort of ventriloquist under demonic possession.

In their panic, AJ had turned around and noticed a little man sitting casually with one leg crossed over the other on one of the courtyard benches.

“Look!” AJ directed the group’s attention over to the occupied bench. “Lutin!” Vic yelled and without warning, dove at the creature that sat so serenely and self-assuredly just a few feet away. Vic smashed his elbows on the braided steel bench and came up with nothing in hand but some foul-smelling air and a little smoke.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

Lutin stood behind the boy, clicking his tongue in mock shame and disgust. “Now, now, is that any way to treat a guest? And, what did you think you were going to do if you caught me, stupid boy? I am free and unfettered now, like wind through the trees... whether fallen or upright...”

With that statement, Lutin grinned with evil delight, looking over in the general direction where the great oak had fallen and nearly killed the teens only a few nights earlier.

Tom came over and helped Vic up off of the ground.

“What do you want with us?” Tom spoke plainly and forcefully to the Nain Rouge.

“I am not at liberty to discuss that with you, Thomas,” Lutin replied coolly, “I have realized the error of my ways in sharing too much information with you in the past. No, what I want from you and your friends, you are already giving to me. So, please continue with your conjecture and puzzling...” With those words, Lutin smiled a wicked smile and evaporated into the air with his fiendish feline grin smeared like grease paint across his face.

Everyone in the group looked around the courtyard to see if anyone had noticed the commotion. Strangely enough, no one had. Everyone appeared to be talking, walking and moving about as if nothing abnormal had happened, nothing absurd like an evil dwarf popping up out of nowhere, heckling and tormenting a small group of teenagers.

Lynni looked more worried than ever, “Guys, this is really bad. I don’t like what’s happening to us – It is like things are getting worse and weirder all the time.”

“Well, I don’t know about things getting worse,” Tom interject-

## *Chapter 9: The Not Knowing*

ed, “But they sure are getting weirder... It’s obvious that Lutin is enjoying playing with our heads. He wants us to know that he is up to something, but he doesn’t want us to know exactly what it is”

“Tom’s right,” Elly added, “We defeated him last time because he made the mistake of revealing too much. I know he’ll never make that mistake again. We are going to have to figure this out for ourselves.”

“Yeah, and we’d better hurry up. I think Lutin’s trouble making has just begun,” AJ piped in. “I think that Washington and San Francisco are just the start.”

With that heavy thought, the weight of silence fell over the teenagers as they sat in the courtyard trying to figure out what to do next. It was as if they were trying to sort out a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle without any picture on the box. In reality, they had very little idea as to what the mystery was that they were trying to solve.

As the friends made their way down Crooks Road toward their respective subdivisions, they continued to talk and conjecture as to what the possibilities of Lutin’s return could be. Just as they were passing Oakridge Market, the troop stopped at the traffic light where Crooks Road met Webster Road. This was the spot where the friends usually dispersed, making their individual ways down other side streets to their own houses.

It was at this point, just before everyone began saying their goodbyes and see-ya-laters, that AJ got a wild, almost wonderful look in his eyes.

“What is it, AJ?” Vic said as he grabbed AJ by his upper arm.

“I think I’ve got it,” AJ replied in a sort of dreamy, far-off tone.

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“What’ve you got?” the group seemed to ask in unison.

“Part of the puzzle...” was AJ’s vague response, “I don’t really know why the Nain Rouge is doing what he’s doing, but I might know how he’s doing it.”

“Really, how?!!” said the group again, each at a different time, but all within a few seconds of each other.

“Let’s go back to my house and I’ll show you,” said AJ as he looked more and more sure of himself.

So they did. AJ led Tom, Elly, Vic and Lynni back to his house, refusing to acknowledge any more of their persistent questioning until he could show them what he had to show them.







## 10: *Underground*

**A**J's backyard stretched behind his tri-level house for an extra two lots. When the architects designed his subdivision after World War II, they skipped one through-street on the planning grid, giving his block deeper backyards than the rest of the neighborhood.

His house was located near the corner of Main Street and Vinsetta Boulevard. The boulevard had once been part of the southeastern Michigan watershed that flowed into Lake St. Clair. Before the 1930's, the boulevard had actually been a river called the Red Run. As the city grew, new homes were designed for the valley around the Red Run. Since the area tended to flood quite often in the spring, city planners diverted the river with a giant drainage pipe. They then covered the river and pipe with dirt, grass and shrubs to create the boulevard that now separated the

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

two sides of AJ's street. It was now a ghost river; still running and flowing underneath the ground, yet quiet and invisible to the people above.

AJ's dog, Pip, met the teenagers at the backyard fence. AJ led everyone to the far corner of the yard, near some large, looming silver maple trees. This corner of the lot seemed so much darker than the rest of the area. Even though it was mid-afternoon, and there were no leaves on those frozen, ancient trees, it felt much darker, colder and desolate than the rest of the neighborhood.

"Where are you taking us, AJ?" Elly questioned from the back of the group.

"Yeah, what gives?" Vic pestered, "Did you want to show off the snowman you built or something?"

AJ was silent as he bent down and wiped the frozen snow away from what looked like a rusted, old manhole cover. As the rest of the group watched, Tom wondered aloud, "What is a sewer cover doing in your backyard, AJ?"

Just then, Pip began barking wildly. She sprinted over to where AJ was kneeling and began ducking her white head under his, as if to push him away from the heavy metal cover that rested firmly in the ground.

"Pip!" AJ yelled, "Settle down!" AJ scooped up Pip and shuffled through the melting snow to put her back into the house. As he returned to the corner of the yard, he could see the rest of the teens still standing around the covered hole, silently trying to figure out what could be beneath the ground under their feet.

"Sorry guys," AJ said as he returned to the group, "Pip never likes it when I go back to this part of the yard... Well, anyway,

## *Chapter 10: Underground*

this is it. This is what I wanted to show you.”

The group stared at AJ, looking rather underwhelmed.

“So . . . what’s the big deal?” Vic quipped.

AJ stood to one side of the heavy iron lid, “No one is supposed to know about this . . . It’s a passageway, a passageway down to the ghost river.”

The teens all looked at each other with a sort of knowing confusion. They all knew that this hole in the ground had something to do with the mystery that they were caught up in, but no real connection had been made yet.

Tom broke the awkward silence, asking, “Why are you showing this to us, AJ? What does it mean?”

AJ crouched down on one knee and tapped the cold metal cover with his index finger, “I think this is how he’s been traveling.”

“Who has been traveling?” Lynni asked.

“Lutin.” AJ responded bluntly. “Ever since I learned that he was a water spirit, I have been thinking about this place. When they covered up the Red Run, they created a few service access points for the water department. This manhole leads directly down to the river that’s still running beneath our feet. Lutin could be using these access points to appear and disappear at will.

Not one of the teenagers doubted what AJ was saying. It all seemed quite plausible that the Nain Rouge could be using these portals to move about the city and the region.

“I say we go down and check it out!” Tom exclaimed with a new sense of excitement and anticipation. His renewed energy was met with a mixed reaction of fear, doubt and some lukewarm support for his impetuous plan.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

“Are you nuts?” Vic wondered, “You have no idea what’s down there or even where that tunnel leads. We could be walking into our own funeral.”

“I’ve been down there before,” AJ interjected. “There are some service lights along the passageway, so you can see where you are going for at least a little while. I’ve never gone too far past the entrance, though. There’s a catwalk along the side of the river, so if you’re careful, you won’t get wet.”

“I say we go for it!” Elly stated firmly. “If we all stay together we should be fine.”

The only one who did not weigh in on the plan was Lynni. She just stood there quietly; staring at the iron cover like it was some fascinating work of abstract art. Her eyes seemed to pulse back and forth with an eerie, mesmerizing stare that no one in the group had taken the time to notice. Everyone was too busy to notice Lynni staring intently past the iron cover, as if she were being drawn down into the darkness just beneath the frozen surface where they were standing.

AJ ran back into the house to grab some flashlights, some rope and an emergency medical kit. His dog, Pip, had never stopped barking. She seemed to know what the teens were about to do and her animal instinct was telling her not to let AJ and his friends go down into that dark hole.

By the time AJ returned with the supplies, Tom and Vic had pried the cover off of the manhole with a thick, short branch that had fallen from the maple tree.

“Okay, I’ve got everything we need,” AJ said, a bit out of breath.

“So, who’s going to be the first to slide down into the creepy

## Chapter 10: Underground

hole?” Vic asked with an over-dramatic, pseudo-scary tone in his voice.

“Cut it out, Vic,” Elly shot back, “I don’t see *you* jumping up to volunteer...”

Elly was right. Everyone was scared to climb down into the shadowy unknown. Vic was just trying to make light of the situation in order to break the tension a little.

After a brief discussion about how to proceed, Tom volunteered to head down into the hole first. AJ would then hand down the supplies and the rest of the team would follow. A steel ladder mounted to the side of the entrance made the climb down much easier than Tom expected. It was about a 10-foot drop from the ground to the surface of the tunnel, so Tom was very grateful that the ladder supported his weight so easily.

Once Tom let everyone know that he had made it safely to the bottom, AJ lowered the supplies to him in a bucket tied with a long nylon rope. Tom then used his flashlight to illuminate the entrance while the rest of the group slowly lowered themselves down to where he was waiting.

The last one to remain on the surface was Lynni. She had barely budged since the teens began their journey downward.

“C’mon, Lynni!” Elly yelled from below the ground, “It’s easy to get down here now.”

Lynni finally moved. She got down on her hands and knees on the wet, cold ground. Elly, Tom, Vic and AJ could see her face looking down at them, backlit by the late afternoon sun that hung weakly in the winter sky.

The children were horrified at what they saw. Suddenly, the

## Book 2: The Red Tide

face that peered down at them no longer looked like Lynni. Her blue eyes were now a crimson red and her face had been contorted into an evil, menacing grin.

“Fools...” hissed a voice that seemed to come from Lynni’s lips but was not her own, “You underestimate me...”

“Lutin!” Tom yelled, “Leave her alone!”

“I am not the one who left her alone, boy. You did,” Lutin replied through Lynni’s mouth, with sickly sweetness.

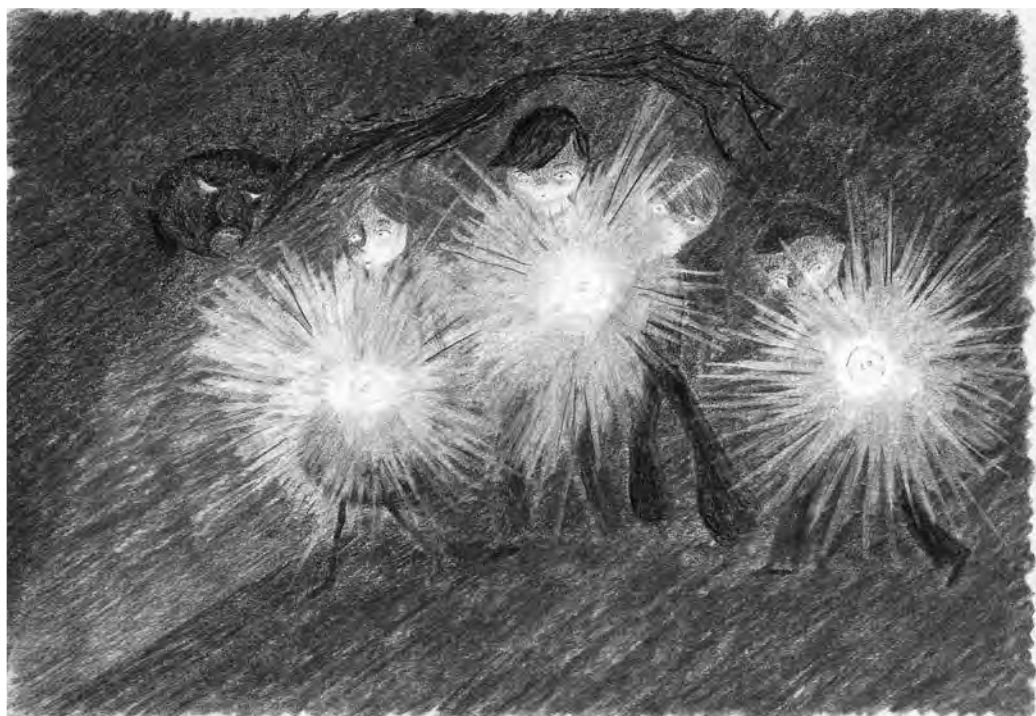
With that, the iron cover began to slowly slide back over the hole. All of the teens could hear Lutin cackling and hissing in gleeful delight. Just before the natural light from above was completely snuffed out, they all heard the Nain Rouge whisper through Lynni:

*“Oh how lost are the sheep that are ne’er to be found  
Left now for dead by the wolf underground...”*

Lutin’s voice trailed off as Lynni’s face disappeared completely. The iron lid shut with a dull, heavy thud, sealing in the darkness that could only be fought off by the pink-white glow of their weakening flashlights.

In that instance, no one said a word, no one breathed and no one knew what would happen next.







## 11: *The Ghost River*

**A**J climbed quickly up the ladder and pushed as hard as he could against the cover. It wouldn't budge, not even an inch.

"Lutin must have blocked it with something. It won't move!" AJ called back down to his friends.

The friends stepped slowly away from the entrance of the tunnel as AJ made his way back down the ladder. As the initial shock of their entrapment wore off, they began to survey their surroundings. Though their vision was limited by the weak beams of their flashlights, they could begin to make out the overall shape of the tunnel, the directional flow of the river and the amount of space they had on the walkway.

"Do you think Lynni is alright?" Elly blurted out with a sense of deep concern.

"I think she'll be fine," Tom answered with quick reassurance. "Lutin only uses what he needs and then discards it. He probably

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

picked Lynni because she was the most scared and vulnerable. The Nain Rouge feeds on fear, remember? He used Lynni to do his dirty work and trap us down here. What use would he have for her now?"

As the teens pondered Lynni's fate, they each noticed that the air in the long chamber had become a warm mix of ozone and sulphury metal that stung their nostrils when they inhaled too deeply. Despite the late winter that froze the ground above their heads, this elongated cavern was not cold at all. In fact, the teens began to sweat a little bit from the humidity of the warm air that circulated above the rushing water.

As they took their winter coats off, Tom was the first to speak. "Guys, I think our best bet is to start walking and look for another way out of this place."

"Yeah," AJ agreed, "I've never walked too far down the tunnel, but I know that it goes on for a long way. There must be another entrance somewhere."

"Well, I say we get going then," Vic interrupted. "I'm tired of standing here waiting for something else bad to happen."

The group quietly agreed and began to make their way down the dark corridor, led only by the dimming yellow glow of their plastic flashlights.

As the teens walked along the dark, foreboding passageway, the only sounds they heard were the gentle whooshing of the Red Run beside them and the infrequent squeaking of unseen water rats that inhabited the forgotten tunnel. It seemed as if hours were passing, as the investigators searched every nook and cranny for another way out.

## *Chapter 11: The Ghost River*

Time has a way of slowing down in the darkness. Without any point of reference or anything new to look at, it seemed as if the kids were on some sinister steel treadmill, walking and walking and walking without ever really getting anywhere.

“How long are we going to keep walking?” complained Vic, “Let’s just turn back before it gets too late!”

“No!” Tom and Elly both said firmly.

Tom added, “We have to just keep moving forward. It only makes sense that there would be another access point somewhere along this passage – there just has to be.”

AJ broke into the conversation, “I don’t think that is our biggest problem right now. Look!”

AJ was right. At the very edge of the flashlight beams, the group could see their singular tunnel splitting up into multiple waterways. Each tributary flowed away from the main tunnel that they were in, pulling the water in both eastern and southern directions.

“Which way do we go now?” AJ questioned.

Tom answered quickly, “Let’s keep on our same course, south. This water is flowing right toward Lake St. Clair.”

“Tom is probably right,” Elly added, “The closer we get to the big lakes, the more likely we are to hit another entryway.”

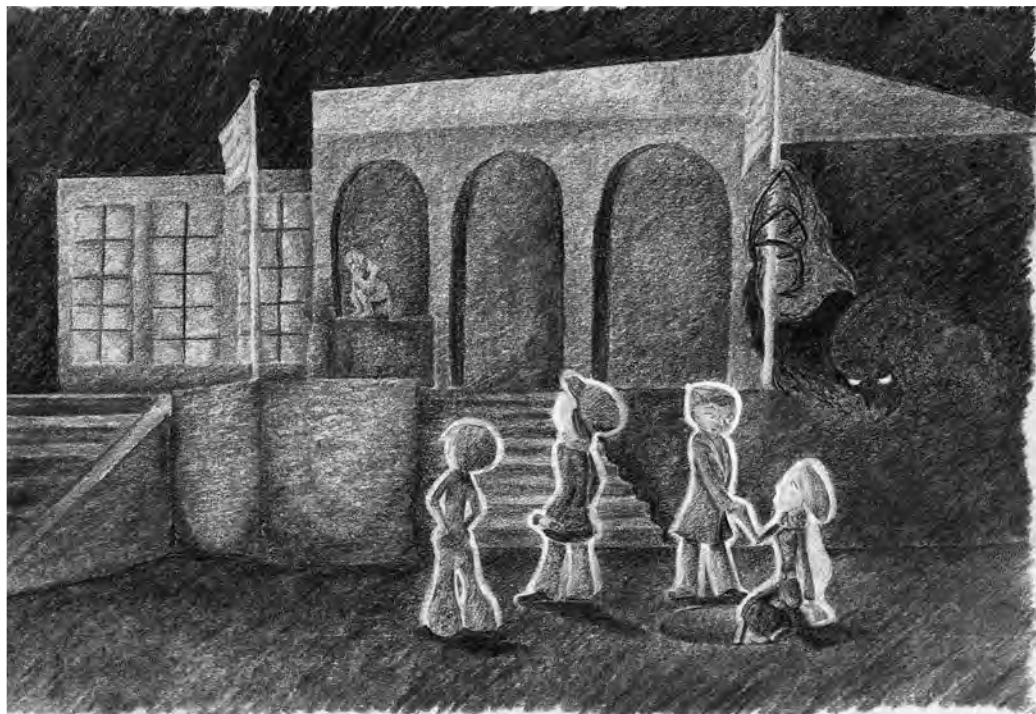
No one disagreed with this logic. The teens followed the same direction they had been traveling all along, moving along a single artery of the river for what seemed like miles.

In the time that passed, little was said between the friends. It was as if the tension and pressure of the day had been slowly building up in the shadowy, confined space that had become their

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

prison. Nobody wanted to acknowledge that they might never see the light of day again. The silence they created in their constant movement forward was a way of denying the inevitable danger that they were in. By simply moving, they were telling each other that there was still hope. No one wanted to break that spell with words of discouragement, fear or panic; even if these were the very things that ran through their thoughts.





## 12: *Ley Lines*

**T**he flashlight beams were fading. Elly, Tom, Vic and AJ had been walking for hours, maybe even days. No one knew where they were or how far they had traveled. What they did know was that they were exhausted almost to the point of giving in to Lutin's infernal trap.

"Look, over there!" Elly shouted in a weary, raspy voice.

The teens slowly turned their heads over to a corner of the tunnel. There, about five feet above the catwalk they saw it.

"An opening!" Vic shouted with renewed energy.

Vic and AJ charged over to the heavy iron circle that sat just above their heads. Vic climbed a service ladder that had been bolted to the side of the passageway.

"I think I can push it up if you help me, AJ." Vic grunted as AJ stepped lightly next to him on the ladder. With the two of them pressing their shoulders up against the heavy cover, it began to

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

move. Tom and Elly watched from below as Vic and AJ carefully lifted the manhole cover up, away from the recessed hole.

In an instant, dull, gray light pierced the darkness of their steel and concrete tomb. The smell of fresh air and asphalt filled the entrance to the cavern as Tom and Elly smiled widely up at Vic and AJ.

“You guys did it!” Tom yelled with excitement and relief.

“We all did it.” AJ shouted back down with renewed confidence.

“Yeah,” Vic added. “And you’re not going to believe where we are.”

Tom and Elly looked at each for a brief second and then clambered up the service ladder to the surface. As her head peeked out from the hole first, Elly looked like an inquisitive groundhog, assessing the late winter wind for signs of an early spring. AJ and Vic helped Tom and Elly out of the entrance and onto a grassy area near a familiar street and sidewalk.

“No... way...” Elly gasped as she finally took in all of her surroundings.

“Way...” replied Tom with equal disbelief.

As the scene came into greater focus, the group realized where they were. They had popped out of the ground like four, worn winter daisies – right behind the Detroit Institute of Arts!

It was night time and the stars shined brightly in the late winter sky. The DIA cast a shadow on the children as they looked across John R Street at the Center for Creative Studies and down the block at the Detroit Science Center, which led further into the center of the city.



## Chapter 12: Ley Lines

“Who would have thought that we’d end up here?” Tom wondered.

“I guess it makes sense,” AJ replied, “I mean, we know that Lutin has been seen where we came in and where we came out of the tunnel, right?”

“That means that he has been using these tunnels to appear and disappear for sure!” Vic concluded.

“You’re partially right,” Elly added. “There is more to the story than just that. And I know who could fill in the details for us.”

With that, the boys watched as Elly pointed skyward to one of the upper floors of the DIA. A light was on in a third floor window. “Dr. Beele is still in his office working. Let’s see what he has to say about all of this.” The teens moved quickly through the chilly night air, leaving a smoky trail of hot breath that mingled with the sewer steam rising up from the iron grates in the street. As they reached a service entrance at the back of the DIA Administration Building, they jumped back a little in surprise. Already in the doorway was a familiar, shadowy figure, gently pushing the door open for them.

“Good evening, my friends,” the shadow said softly. “I saw you in the street from my office window. I assumed that you were coming to see me.”

“Dr. Beele?” Tom asked, still slightly startled.

“Who else would you expect at such a late hour?” Dr. Beele quipped as he stepped into the light, “The Nain Rouge, perhaps?”

“Not funny, Doc.” Vic shot back, “If you knew what we’ve been through, you’d see how NOT funny that really is.”

“I apologize for my attempt at levity,” the curator said with genuine contrition, “I meant nothing by it and I can see by your

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

faces and your clothes that you have been through much tonight. Come then, let's go up to my office and you can tell me all that you need to tell me."

In a matter of minutes, the entire crew was warmly wrapped up around the fireplace in Dr. Beele's office, sipping China Black tea and nibbling on the best tea cakes and scones in the city.

The young gatherers were so fatigued from their journey that it seemed no one had the energy to speak. Finally, Elly mumbled a quiet question directed at the pensive curator.

"Dr. Beele, do you know what's going on?"

"Perhaps," was his equally quiet, but thoughtful response.

"It seems to me that you have inadvertently discovered ley lines."

AJ and Vic questioned in unison, "Ley lines?"

"Yes," Beele responded with little emotion, "Ley lines. There are some people that believe that there are lines of actual psychic, electromagnetic energy running through the earth. Many sacred, significant buildings and monuments around the globe have been built at the points where these ley lines intersect, points of powerful energy. Stonehenge, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Taj Mahal, and the Washington Monument are just a few examples of the places where these ley lines are purported to intersect. Ironically, even this museum has been rumored to have been built above an intersection of ley lines."

"Unbelievable!" Tom blurted out. "Do you mean to tell me that Lutin has been riding some sort of psychic highway underground, causing trouble wherever he wants?"

"It would not surprise me in the least, given the fact that you

## *Chapter 12: Ley Lines*

have found his secret passageway. It would seem quite logical that the sewer systems were built along ancient ley lines. As the water flows, so does the natural energy that is all around us. If this is true, with the curse broken, the Nain Rouge is now empowered to travel along his ‘psychic highway,’ as you so colorfully put it, as he so chooses.”

It was after this statement that Dr. Beele’s face finally began to show some emotion and concern. It was as if his assessment of the situation was just becoming as real to himself as it was for the teenagers. He was beginning to acknowledge that the ultimate intent of the Nain Rouge was far more real and dangerous than even he had imagined.

The room had grown very still and quiet. No one was willing to look at anyone else, for fear of what they might see in each other’s eyes.

For now, they all knew for certain that the Nain Rouge was back and free to roam anywhere he wanted. It was as if they all heard the distant horn of an oncoming freight train, growing closer and more powerful in the distance. As they sat in the comfort of the curator’s office, no one wanted to admit that the train was bearing down upon them and there was nothing they could do to stop it.



## 13: *Water, Water, Everywhere*

**L**ynni woke up on the cold, snowy ground as moonlight tried to pierce through the heavy, gray clouds that had gathered once again in the February sky.

“Lynni!” voices joined in unison and called out in the distance.

She wanted to respond, but was still too dizzy to even stand up. In less than a moment, she was surrounded by Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Dr. Beele.

“What just happened? Where am I?” Lynni babbled incoherently.

Dr. Beele did not bother to respond to her ramblings and, instead, instructed the children to get her back into AJ’s house to warm her up. With very little effort, the group gathered up the flopping legs and arms of their friend and brought her into the house.

Once Lynni was sufficiently wrapped up in a few colorful

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

quilts and AJ's favorite blue Snuggie (with a cup of hot chocolate to bring her back to life) the teens felt better about asking her some questions.

"Lynni, what do you remember about the past few hours?" Tom asked her calmly.

"Well," Lynni responded in a quiet, slow whisper, "The last thing I remember was staring down the manhole at you guys. I was thinking about how I really didn't want to go down there. I was hoping that you guys would come back up and we could just forget the whole thing. Then it happened..."

"What happened?" Vic asked anxiously.

"Well, I'm not really sure," Lynni continued, "I was just about to take my first step toward the ladder, when a voice began to hiss inside my head. It kept mumbling something about a wolf stealing sheep, or something like that."

Lynni shuddered and grew strangely quiet again. The teens watched as the images that ran through her head were displayed in the furrows and frowns that now danced across her face.

"Lynni, what is it?" Elly gently shook Lynni by the shoulder, as if to bring her out of a terrible trance.

"That voice... that voice" Lynni repeated in a hushed whisper. "The voice grew louder in my head; I couldn't stop it. It was like it was taking me over – first my head, then my heart, then the rest of my body. That voice – it was like a cold, damp net that was thrown over me – dragging through me – trapping me, taking me over... I'm sorry you guys... I'm so sorry..."

"It was Lutin, my dear." Hieronymus Beele's voice broke the tension that had been building within Lynni's revelation. "It was

## *Chapter 13: Water, Water, Everywhere*

Lutin who did these things, not you. You are a victim of his evil, not the perpetrator.”

The rest of the teens gathered around Lynni, reassuring her that everything would be alright and that she wasn't to blame for anything. Lutin was the cause of all this trouble and he now had resorted to possession in order to his will upon others.

The curator pulled Tom and Elly aside, as the others continued to console Lynni. “Tonight has been very illuminating on many fronts.” The doctor spoke discreetly. “Lutin is clearly working toward some sort of master plan, of which I fear is bigger than the personal revenge he pursued in the past. I still have more questions to be answered before I can say for sure. There are a few matters I have to take care of out of town, specifically related to this matter. Unfortunately, these activities will separate us for a few weeks. That is why I need you two to help me.”

“Sure, Doc, anything you need,” was Tom's quick reply. Elly looked at Tom and Dr. Beele and nodded vigorously.

“Excellent, I need you both to keep an eye on things while I am away. On the 19th of March, I will require your presence in my offices at the DIA at precisely three o'clock. I should have much more to share with you at that time.”

Tom and Elly looked at each other, a bit puzzled and slightly nervous at Dr. Beele's request.

“What's going on, Dr. Beele? Where are you going?” Tom asked directly.

“Tom, Elly,” Hieronymus began in quiet seriousness, “The events of these past few days have solidified for me the grave nature of Lutin's intent. Where I am going is less important than what I

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

have to do. I will reveal all upon my return, I promise.”

“When will you be back?” Elly asked.

“It should not be more than a few weeks, by the 19th of March for certain,” Beele replied matter-of-factly.

With that, the curator gave them both a reassuring smile and returned back to the group.

The doctor spoke firmly, with great clarity to the teens, “I am glad we are all safe and sound. Now you all should go home and get some sleep. We can sort this matter out when we have all had some rest and have given ourselves sufficient time to clear our heads. I am confident that we will all be busy sorting this mess out for weeks to come. We all must work together, for I fear that the water is rising around us more quickly than we think.”







## 14: *Small Hopes*

**I**n the weeks to come, it was all over the news: increased flooding in the Mid-Atlantic and Plains States, property damage throughout the country and people left homeless. Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Lynni felt helpless as they trudged through the late winter and into spring. Dr. Beele was nowhere to be found

It was finally Friday and the kids could not wait to unplug their brains for the weekend. No one had any specific plans. They agreed that just hanging out, watching movies and playing video games were probably the best and safest ways to numb their skulls and forget about their situation until Dr. Beele's return.

Friday night found the group right where they wanted to be, down in AJ's basement, playing his 3-D Pomuchi Game. In five-player mode, the teens traveled through a fantasy role-playing world, where each player was imbued with certain powers and

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

abilities to help them on their quest. Tom was a white-fanged battle beast, Elly a stealthy ninja, Vic a nomadic warrior, Lynni an emerald enchantress, and AJ a crafty archer. The team traveled together down dark roads and through forbidden forests in search of the twelve stones of Ularga.

“Hey, does it seem like it is getting darker in here?” AJ asked, looking away from the TV screen.

“We’re in an enchanted forest, you dink. It’s supposed to be dark,” Vic spat out these words as his eyes never left the action on the screen.

“No,” AJ insisted, out here, not in there. It is darker than it was...”

Just then, in the middle of their battle, there appeared an odd character on the video screen. It looked like some sort of dark dwarf. The only difference was that this figure pulsated with clarity and dimension. There was no fuzziness or pixilation about this image. It danced, jumped and hopped around just like ...

AJ’s dog, Pip, began to bark and howl at the TV as if in great alarm and pain.

“N-Nain Rouge!” Lynni screamed.

It was right at that moment that all five game controllers glowed red and intense like burning embers. The teens dropped the burning controllers, shouting in surprise and pain.

“Hello, fellow travelers, and welcome to my humble world,” came a familiar, slimy voice from the Pomuchi Game.

No one knew what to say. Vic was inclined to put his foot right through the TV screen, but he was still too stunned to do anything at all.

## Chapter 14: *Small Hopes*

“I don’t want to keep you from your fun,” Lutin cooed with mock sincerity, “I just wanted to check up on my favorite children to see how they were faring.”

AJ was about to say something, but Elly grabbed his arm and looked at him with a stern eye. Dr. Beele had warned before he left that Lutin might return, seeking information about how much they knew about his plans. The curator cautioned the teens that Lutin would taunt them, goad them into revealing anything they might know about all of his evil activities.

So, instead of yelling at the Nain Rouge or trying to capture or secure him, they simply sat there in stunned silence, repressing any urges to attack or take flight.

“What’s the matter, little ones, cat got your tongue?” Lutin egged them on, but to no avail. The teens just continued to sit there, staring at him upon the screen.

“Nothing to say? Well, that’s just fine! Keep your mouths shut for an eternity for all I care. You see, my power grows. It grows every minute of every day. With each bridge I knock down, with each river or lake I swell to flooding, it grows! I am becoming all-powerful and there is nothing you can do about it! It’s just fine, just fine with me if you want to watch silently as I tear your little world apart. It will all be mine soon – rightfully mine!”

With those final words, there was a bright flash from the video screen. The little red dwarf shot a bolt of lightning from his fingers and blew up the warrior, the archer, the enchantress, the ninja and the battle beast within the game. Their characters were destroyed. A loud electrical POP came from the TV and then complete darkness. Lutin was gone and all that remained was the faint whiff

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of ozone and a lingering charge of static electricity in the air.

AJ was the first to move. He groped his way along the floor and wall to the circuit box. He flipped a number of circuit breakers until he found the right one and the basement lights came back on.

As the light returned, the teens slowly began to break free from the trance that had held them so tightly only minutes before.

“Is everyone okay?” Elly asked out loud as she looked around the room.

“Yeah, we’re all fine, I think,” Vic responded in a slow, stupefied tone.

Pip went around the room with quiet, happy concern, sniffing the feet and licking the faces of the five friends. This small act from such a small dog had a powerful recuperative effect on the entire group. Soon, they were all chatting and discussing the meaning of Lutin’s latest visit.

“I wish Dr. Beele was back,” Lynni said with a twinge of sadness in her voice.

“I think we all do,” Elly responded with reassurance.

“Well, what are we supposed to do now?” Vic piped in with aggravated frustration, “I don’t think there’s any way to stop Lutin.”

Tom sat in the corner of the couch, thinking quietly to himself and mumbling, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely...”

“What are you babbling about Tom?” Vic questioned.

“I said, ‘Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ Dr. Beele told me that a long time ago. He was quoting Lord Acton, a 19th Century British historian.”

“So, what is it supposed to mean?” Lynni wondered.

## Chapter 14: *Small Hopes*

“I think I get it,” AJ jumped in, “Maybe, it means that Lutin thinks he’s all-powerful now since he’s free from his curse. He can’t be stopped, right, Tom?”

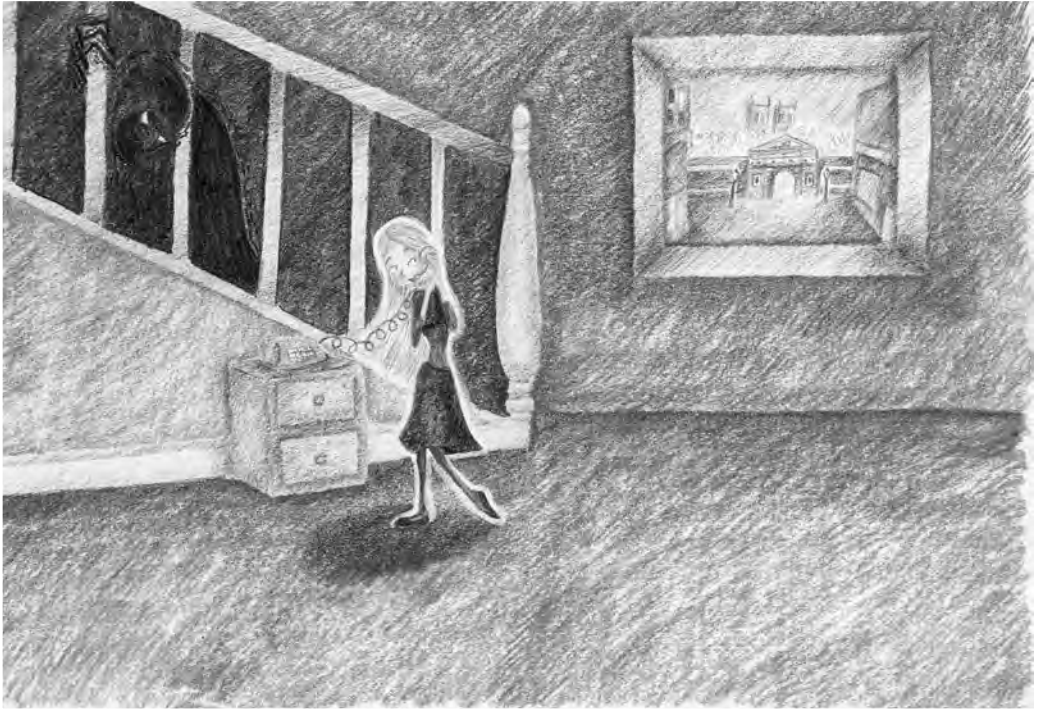
“You’re kinda right,” Tom noted thoughtfully. “Lutin is free from his curse, which does make him more powerful. However, the fact that he believes in his absolute power means that his mind is completely corrupted.”

“So where does that leave us?” Lynni asked again.

“It doesn’t leave us anywhere,” Tom answered. “What it *does* do is give us hope. If Lutin feels his power is absolute, he is completely corrupted and overconfident. He thinks he can’t be defeated. His twisted mind may blind him to the good we can do. That means he has a blind spot, a spot where hope can hide until it turns into action.”

“I wish Dr. Beele was back,” Lynni repeated.

“We all do,” Elly said with renewed assurance. “And maybe when he gets back, we can turn our tiny hopes into actions.”





## 15: *Beele's Return*

**I**t had been over three weeks since Dr. Beele's departure to places unknown. Spring had come to southeastern Michigan, pushing away the cold and the clouds to make way for an unfamiliar sun that had returned to the eastern sky.

While the doctor was away, Elly, Tom, AJ, Vic and Lynni did their best to get through their classes, homework and the mundane routine of freshman life. Multiple natural disasters were being recorded all over the country. People from different regions were reporting sightings of an odd little creature near some of the disaster sights.

The return of Hieronymus Beele became the only beacon of hope for the confused and frustrated teenagers. They all knew that there was nobody else that they could confide in. No one would believe them, as most of the sightings and disasters were being

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

attributed to natural causes or freak twists of nature. People were writing Lutin's presence off as hearsay or as a figment of the active imaginations of local attention seekers.

As far as the group was concerned, Tom, Elly, AJ, Vic and Lynni were bonded together with one giant secret. It was a secret that no one wanted to keep. But it was a secret that could not be revealed, since no one else would accept it as the truth. The truth that evil was spreading throughout the land, bit by bit, little by little. The Nain Rouge was gaining strength right under everyone's noses.

Elly's phone rang after school, at four o'clock sharp. It was Dr. Beele. He was home; he was finally home. Elly felt so much better just hearing his voice. The knot that had been tensing in her stomach for weeks finally began to release its hold.

The curator gave her the following instructions: "Meet me in my offices after school on Friday, just Tom and yourself." His message was brief and to the point and made her feel better with its stark directness.

As soon as Elly got off of the phone with Dr. Beele, she called Tom and let him know the news.

"That's great, El, but why just the two of us?" Tom wondered from the other end of the receiver.

"I don't know, but he seemed quite specific in his request." Elly answered, equally puzzled.

"Well, I don't think the others are going to like it one bit," Tom continued, "I mean, we're all in this together, right?"

"You're right Tommy," Elly said, "But I'm just telling you what Dr. Beele told me, that's all."

Tom was right. At lunch the next day, Elly passed the news

## *Chapter 15: Beele's Return*

on to the rest of group. No one could believe it.

“What’s the deal?” Vic asked indignantly. “I thought that we were all in this together?”

“That’s just what I said when I heard!” Tom added.

Everyone else nodded in agreement with Vic. After everything that they had been through, it seemed like a slap in the face to have only Tom and Elly invited back to the curator’s office. With arms folded and brows furrowed, the group stared back and forth at Elly and Tom to see how the two would respond to their disappointment and anger.

Tom looked at Elly for a brief moment before he spoke. “Guys, I don’t care what Beele said about us coming alone. We’re all going to be there. He doesn’t know the half of what we have been through – first Elly and me, and then you guys... We stand together, no matter what.”

Elly quietly added, “Tommy is right. We all go or nobody goes.”

After that, the mood of the group changed for the better. Vic, AJ and Lynni seemed satisfied that Tom and Elly were being supportive, regardless of Dr. Beele’s instructions. After all, they had agreed from the very start that no matter what happened, they would all stick together. They had made a pact and it was good to see that Tom and Elly were not willing to break it.

As far as Hieronymus Beele was concerned, he would just have to deal with them directly– all of them.



## 16: Cartography

**F**riday finally came and dragged its long feet through the slow morning, creeping into the greatly anticipated afternoon. The teens boarded the downtown bus and headed directly down Woodward to the DIA offices.

No one paid much attention as they passed previous points of interest, including the very spot where final conflict with Lutin occurred – at least the spot where the final conflict was thought to have taken place.

The young ones entered the DIA through the impressive arches of the front entrance. Vic swung open the polished brass doors with the same familiarity of sliding through the side door of AJ's house on his way to the teens' basement hangout.

The security guard stopped them, looking a bit surprised.

"Hey gang, hold up there!" she called to the group. "You are here to see Dr. Beele, right?"

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The group nodded in unison.

“Well, I only have clearance for two of you on my security list... Hold on and let me call up to the doctor.”

Tom looked over at Vic, who looked over at AJ and Lynni, who were looking at Elly. They were all thinking the same thing, “Maybe we made a mistake.”

But it was too late. The security guard was already on the phone to Beele, explaining the situation to him. Her call was brief and before they knew it, they were all being waved over into the staff elevators, heading directly up to the offices of the curator.

Hieronymus Beele met Elly and Tom, blocking his broad doorway with his slender frame and a look that could melt metal.

“Could I have a word with you two, for just a moment?” Beele uttered with deep restraint through his clenched teeth.

Tom gulped and Elly instinctively grabbed his right hand as the two made their way into a side room behind the curator. The rest of the crew filed into Dr. Beele’s office and waited quietly, straining to hear what was going on behind those thick, mahogany doors.

“What in the world were you thinking?!!” Beele unleashed an anger that Tom and Elly had never seen before. “I gave you strict instructions to come alone. Now you have dragged your friends along with you. Do you realize the mess we are all in now?”

“Dr. Beele,” Elly replied calmly, “We know what you asked, but we’re all in this together. We promised AJ, Vic and Lynni that no matter what happened, we would stick together...”

Tom added with a bit more fire in his voice, “You’re the one who disappeared for a month and left us hanging. We had to stick it out alone. Now you want to break us up? Forget it, Doc.”

## *Chapter 16: Cartography*

Dr. Beele stepped away from Tom and Elly, creating a less confrontational atmosphere. With a bit more distance between them, he turned his back to the teens, his face much warmer than before, but with a look of great concern. “I’m sorry. Truly, I was only looking out for everyone’s welfare. What I have discovered, what I now know... I just didn’t want anyone else getting hurt. But you are right, both of you. We are all in this together. I was foolish to think otherwise... No more of this now, let’s return to the others. It is rude to keep them waiting. Besides, I have much to tell you about my journey; a very interesting journey, indeed.”

The curator led Tom and Elly back to his offices where the others were waiting. AJ, Vic and Lynni looked curiously at the trio, trying to gauge the content and results of their recent conversation through the expressions on their faces.

“Friends,” Dr. Beele said warmly, “I made an error in judgment by not inviting all of you to our meeting today. I am sorry and I hope that you will forgive me for my thick-headedness. It was pointed out to me just this afternoon that we are a team. I never really looked at the situation that way before. Until now. Now I know how true that statement is.”

“Don’t worry, Doc. We forgive you.” Vic said plainly.

“Yeah, all for one and one for all, right guys?” AJ added.

“We’re glad to be here, to help any way we can,” Lynni concluded.

Everyone nodded in agreement and Dr. Beele continued, “Well then, I am glad that we have settled this affair. Let’s not waste a minute more. I have everything ready in the conference room. This way, please.”



## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

The curator slid open the heavy, paneled pocket doors leading into his large conference room. In this impressive room, the teens' eyes panned up to see the great crystal chandelier that hung high above the giant oak conference table, balanced in the middle of the room. Beautifully carved cabinets and cupboards ran along either side of the massive table, creating a cathedral effect of height, depth and breadth within this long, narrow room.

Upon the oak table lay a multitude of maps, legends and atlases. The southern wall was completely covered with an oversized map of North America. The map was unlike any other map they had ever seen. From a distance, it appeared to be just an ordinary (albeit very large) topographical map. But as you moved in for a closer look, you could see much greater detail come into focus. It seemed almost magical and surreal how one step forward or one step back could change the focus and detail of the great map.

On it was every state, every city, every town, every lake, river and stream in full color and topography. The detailed representations of the places on the map were uncanny. It was as if someone had taken a satellite picture from space, exploded the view onto the wall and then drawn all of the states, regions cities and streets in minute detail.

Even more striking were the large red push pins that had been driven into various points on the map. A silver thread had been strung between many of the red push pins, creating an intricate web of crisscrossed lines that shimmered in the chandelier light. It was like some oversized arachnid had snuck into the room and spun a web, creating a new, delicate trap for the unsuspecting youths. Everyone wanted to reach out and touch it, but refrained for fear



## *Chapter 16: Cartography*

of becoming hopelessly entwined in the points of intersection.

“What the heck is all this, Doc?” Vic asked.

“They are maps.” Beele said with droll discretion.

“We know what maps are,” Lynni added a bit indignantly, “But what are all of those pins and lines and string about?”

“Allow me to demonstrate,” Beele answered. “AJ, come here and assist me, if you would, please.”

The curator handed AJ a large box of red push pins and a short spool of silver thread.

“AJ, I will call out points on the map. As I do, I would like you to place a pin at each point.”

“Sure, Dr. Beele. No problem.” AJ answered with ready determination.

The curator picked up a few sheets of paper and began to read aloud slowly and clearly:

“Bangor, Maine – the Cole Land Transportation Museum. Scranton, Pennsylvania – the Everhart Museum near the Lackawanna River. Yuma, Arizona – the Cocopah Tribal Museum near the Gila River. Las Vegas, Nevada – the Atomic Testing Museum near Lake Mead...”

The list went on and on as Dr. Beele rattled off the names of more cities, more museums and more bodies of water. Eventually, the rest of the teens grew curious and began peering over the curator’s shoulder. Over the top of his shoulder, they saw a chart that contained various cities and states that were associated with specific museums and regional bodies of water. All of these locations were broken up into specific regions around the country:

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

- Northeast
- Mid-Atlantic
- South
- Southwest
- Midwest

Beele seemed to ignore their interest as he continued to dictate more locations to AJ with a bit more rhythm and velocity,

“Syracuse, New York – the Erie Canal Museum near Onondaga Lake. Lake Charles, Louisiana – the Calcasieu Museum near Lake Charles. Appleton, Wisconsin – the Outagamie Museum near Green Bay. Redding, California – the Schreder Planetarium near the Sacramento River. Wilmington, North Carolina – The Museum of Aviation near Cape Fear...”

Nobody said a word as Dr Beele went through his entire chart, calling out all of his points of interest. The locations on the map magically rose to meet AJ’s pushpins. He feverishly placed the red push pins into the appropriate locations on the map, while stringing all of them together with long lines of silver thread.

After what seemed like an entire evening had passed, Lynni broke the spell by being the first to speak up, “Uh, Dr. Beele, are you going to tell us what this all means? What are all of these places and points and threads supposed to mean?”

As if being lifted from a trance, Beele set down his papers and gently shifted his spectacles down onto the end of his thin, narrow nose. “Quite right, Lynni, quite right. I’m afraid I was drawn too deeply into my work again.”

The museum curator then drew back from the great map and beckoned the rest of the group to do the same. As they all stepped

## *Chapter 16: Cartography*

a few feet away from the cartographical masterpiece, they were again awestruck by the intricate web that had been spun during Beele's and AJ's feverish activities.

"So, what is this we are looking at, Doc?" Vic piped up as he stared at the massive web covering the giant map.

"What you are seeing, ladies and gentlemen, is a grid."

"A grid?" Elly asked slightly confused. "What kind of a grid Dr. Beele?"

"The Red Tide Grid, to be exact, Elly" the curator replied, preparing himself to reveal even more than the teens were expecting.

"When I left all of you a few weeks ago, I had a hunch, an idea, a hypothesis, if you will. I conjectured that the disasters caused by the Nain Rouge all had something in common. The common threads – in this case, silver ones – were water and places of historical significance."

Tom interrupted, "Dr. Beele, we knew that Lutin drew his power and energy from water. We also knew he was drawn to the negative energy of certain places, where he could become even more powerful and cause more trouble. We even figured out how he was traveling, using the ley lines. We just never knew why he was doing all of these things."

"Precisely, Tom. That was why I had to leave." Beele continued, "After all of you appeared that evening from the sewers, I postulated that our DIA may be a part of this evil equation. So, in my absence, I traveled to areas where I knew Lutin had been. Sure enough, in every spot, there was a museum nearby. Being a curator with many years of experience to my name, I know quite a few other curators around the country. My network of friends

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

and associates allowed me to confirm what I had suspected for weeks now.”

The curator paused to catch his breath and settle his nerves a little. It was becoming quite clear that the grid on the map in the long, narrow conference room was a display of epic, evil proportion. The entire group hung on Dr. Beele’s every word and waited anxiously for him to finally reveal the rest of his discoveries.

After a small sip of water from a crystal pitcher, and a few more deep breaths, the curator was ready to continue. “As I was saying, my suspicions were confirmed upon the conclusion of my journey. The museum sites on this map are points of intersection on the ley line system. Lutin has been using these museums as portals to enter and exit waterways all around the country.”

“But why would he use museums, Dr. Beele?” AJ asked, as if in deep thought.

“A valid question, AJ,” Beele replied, “Museums are centers of culture and learning and contain various objects and artifacts. These objects often hold energy left over from their places of origin. This energy can be either good or bad. Great works inspired by love, bravery and concern for humanity generate positive energy. Conversely, objects of war, torture and human strife often carry negative energy. Lutin can use any of this negative energy to add to his power.”

“How can a couple of rocks and some statues help him?” Vic chimed in.

“Another fine question,” Beele responded, “But it is more than just the artifacts. It is the very location, the very spot on which these museums are built. Many of these museums are built at the



## Chapter 16: Cartography

intersection of the ley lines, which creates powerful energy for those who know how to use it.”

Elly walked over to the wall on which the map hung. She began to trace her fingers along the silver threads that criss-crossed over various regions, states, cities and towns all over the country. “It is a grid ... a grid of negative energy.”

“Precisely,” the curator acknowledged with a voice so quiet and tentative that the rest of the group could hardly hear him say it. “It is the Red Tide Grid. The newspapers and television stations have been reporting on the disasters, but very few have even mentioned the strange discoloration of the water in these regions.”

“What is the Red Tide?” Lynni questioned from the back of the room.

“Under normal circumstances, red tides occur when algae blooms and increases rapidly in an aquatic system. It can happen in the ocean or even in freshwater. It is a natural occurrence that may damage the environment and even kill many living creatures in the water.”

“But these are not normal circumstances,” Tom reminded Dr. Beele.

“Indeed,” the curator replied. “It seems a Red Tide has been associated with all of the other natural disasters that have been occurring. Until now, I was the only one who had put the puzzle pieces together and had seen the larger picture.”

“But what about the grid, Doc?” Vic insisted, “What does the Red Tide have to do with the grid?”

“The grid is the vehicle that allows Lutin’s evil to grow. He is playing a game of connect-the-dots to build up his power. The

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Red Tide is the lingering proof of his presence. He is connecting these points of negative energy to create a grid –  
a powerful grid of evil.”

“I don’t get it,” Lynni stated bluntly. “With all of this talk about a grid, red tides, ley lines and museums, I am thoroughly confused!”

“Hold on a minute, Lynni. I think I can show you ...” Elly stood up and made her way over to the magnificent map. She moved her hand over various push pins and silver threads strung along the length and width of the great chart. As she did this, as if by magic, the lines and cities and streets rose up from the two-dimensional graph into spectacular 3D imagery. The map came alive. AJ smiled with the satisfaction that he wasn’t hallucinating.

After a brief pause to get her bearings, Elly continued to run her finger along the map. “See Lynni, this is what I think Dr. Beele is trying to explain to us. We know that Lutin is using the ley lines to travel; the silver threads on the map represent his route. The red pushpins are the portals he is using to enter and exit places from the ley line grid. These portals are located where the ley lines cross, which happen to be at specific museum sites.”

“Oh, I think I get it now,” Lynni exclaimed with a look of understanding. “Lutin is traveling in a grid pattern, like Dr. Beele said.”

“Precisely, ladies,” the curator interjected. “Fortunately for us, Lutin’s grid or matrix is incomplete.” Beele pointed to the map, outlining open loops in the webbed pattern of silver thread. “What happens when the grid is finished?” Vic asked ominously.

Dr. Beele turned away from the map on the wall and faced the teens directly. He had a look of deep concern and seriousness about him. “When the grid is complete, the Nain Rouge will rule

## *Chapter 16: Cartography*

the land and water.”

An eerie silence fell over the room for what seemed like an eternity.

Beele broke the tension by continuing his revelation, “The grid that Lutin is creating will tie together all of the negative energy along the ley lines. The small amounts of red tide that we have seen in these targets areas will continue to rise, grow and spread, as will all of the other natural disasters. If Lutin is able to complete his grid, he will trap us all in a giant red net of evil.”





## 17 : *The Rising Tide*

**J**ust as Beele finished his speech, the heavy wooden doors of the conference room blew open with great force. A strong, putrid smelling wind whipped in from the hallway, causing the group to cough and cover their eyes for protection.

“Fools!” screamed a high-pitched voice from the whirling maelstrom. The giant, magnificent map was ripped off of the wall as the teens dodged flying pushpins that seemed to bombard them from everywhere. Yards and yards of silver thread flew through the air and with deadly accuracy, wrapped around the crouched figure of Dr. Beele. Again and again, the thread wound around the curator until he disappeared inside a silver cocoon.

“You think you are so wise!” screeched the voice from inside the swirling tornado, “My power is unstoppable already!”

The wind in the room was picking up, lifting pictures off of the walls and chairs off of the deep burgundy carpet. The creature

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

could barely be seen within the cyclone of fury that brought him into the room. The pictures and chairs hung in the air for a brief, dramatic moment and then were smashed against the walls with unspeakable force. The teens huddled helplessly under the grand conference table, thankful that its heavy wooden structure was still too massive to be moved by the terrible wind.

A mournful, triumphant cry came again, "I am all-powerful! The Nain Rouge will destroy you all!"

Then, without warning, the tempest of sulphuric smoke and wind retreated out of the room and dissipated into the air. He was gone, leaving the conference room in complete shambles while the teens remained shaking in fear under the oak table.

Across the room, a muffled cry for help came from Dr. Beele's mummified remains, still wrapped in shiny silver bandages. AJ and Vic ran over to where the curator was lying and began to unravel his shiny bonds as fast as they could. "Hold on, Dr. Beele. This will only take a minute," Vic reassured him as they removed the threads that had been wrapped around his head and face. In a moment, the museum curator could breathe freely again.

"Thank you both," Beele inhaled deeply, "I didn't get much of a chance to see what all of the commotion was, but I am assuming that we all just had the displeasure of another visit from our not-so-dear friend, the Nain Rouge."

The rest of the group came over to where Dr. Beele was and helped remove the rest of the silver thread from his body. The room was a complete mess. It looked like a massive tornado had hit the conference room, leaving only destruction in its wake, while the rest of DIA offices remained untouched and intact.

## *Chapter 17: The Rising Tide*

“So, what are we to make of all this?” Beele stood up and asked this question aloud, directing it at no one in particular. It is clear that Lutin is gaining strength, the proof of that is scattered all around us. So, again I ask, what are we to do?”

No one said a word. What could they say? They had all seen with their own eyes how powerful Lutin had become. Tom and Elly thought back to the time where they fought the Nain Rouge and barely escaped with their lives. But now, things were different. Lutin was free; free to wreak havoc wherever and whenever he wanted. There was no longer a curse to tie him down.

After a long period of uncomfortable silence, Elly finally spoke up. “Dr. Beele, we need help. We can’t do this alone.”

Vic added, “Yeah, we need to let other people know what’s going on.”

The curator smiled. It wasn’t a happy smile, but more a smile of reassurance and understanding. “You are precisely right, both of you. A greater force than just our little, merry band will be required to stop Lutin. But I will still need help – from all of you. Let’s clean this place up a bit and I will explain to you exactly what I mean.”

Beele and the teenagers spent the next few minutes straightening up the conference room as best they could. As they re-attached the map to the wall and discarded pieces of broken lamps, vases and wooden picture frames, they could not help but feel that a new, dangerous and exciting journey was just about to begin.



## 18: *The 24*

**B**eele called down to the commissary to have refreshments brought up for his guests. He knew that once the adrenaline from Lutin's afternoon visit wore off, the children would be famished.

He guided the group back into the comfort of his office, which had been spared Lutin's destruction. "Before we can begin this journey together," Beele announced, "I need to be completely forthright and honest with all of you. To do that, I will have to reveal some personal information about me that has never been shared before."

Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Lynni continued to eat their cucumber and chicken salad sandwiches, but chewed much more slowly, as their attention was drawn to the weighty words of the mysterious curator.

"In just a few short months," Beele began, "I will be gathering with my fellow knights from around the world. These meetings,

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

which will be taking place around the country, will culminate in a final battle with the Nain Rouge; at least that is what I suppose will happen ... We can never be too sure about these sorts of things.”

“Okay, Doc,” Vic spat out between large bites of cherry cobbler, “What the heck are you talking about? I’m completely lost.”

“Again, I am sorry,” Dr. Beele blushed slightly and cleared his throat, “I seemed to have gotten ahead of myself again. One thing this journey will require is complete and full disclosure. I intend for all of you to know all about me before you make your decision whether or not to join me on this once-in-a-lifetime adventure.”

The teens stared back and forth at each other, looking around for some sign of logic or reason. It was useless. No one could figure out what the curator was talking about. However, they knew that if they waited long enough, all would be revealed. So, without interruption, they each made the silent decision to let Beele finish what he had to say, regardless of his stops and starts.

“As I was saying,” Beele began again, “Complete disclosure. It is important for all of you to know that I am one of the 24. The twenty-four knights of Sir Gawain’s Most Noble Order of the Garter.”

With that brief announcement, Hieronymus walked back to his desk drawer, opened it, and removed a small, forest green felt-covered jewelry box. He opened the box and lifted a large blue and gold-enameled medallion from the silk-lined box.

“The medal!” Tom and Elly shouted at the same time. It was a medallion very similar to one that had fallen out of one of Dr. Beele’s books almost two years before. It was also the same sort of badge they had seen dangling from the curator’s costume on

## Chapter 18: The 24

the night they battled Lutin for the first time.

The medallion depicted a magnificent knight, decked in blue armor, on horseback, slaying a green dragon with his extended lance. Around the border of the badge were the words:

*“Honi soit qui mal y pense”*

The curator handed the large pin to Elly, who passed it around to Vic, AJ, Lynni and, eventually, Tom. Each one of them perused the shiny figure, running their fingers along the gilded lance and armor, while lingering over the strange words along the border of the golden badge.

“So then, you are a real knight!” Elly blurted out while the others remained intrigued with Dr. Beele’s artifact. “I knew it from the first time you told us the story of the Order of the Garter.”

“Yes, it is true,” Beele began. “Of course, there is a bit more information that I failed to share with you. I purposely did not disclose the mission and charter of our order. Since King Edward III of England founded our order in 1348, we have been sworn to protect any land in which we dwell from the manifestation of evil. There have always been only 24 of us since our founding. When one of us dies, another is chosen to take our place.

“The Knights of the Garter have been aware of the Nain Rouge for centuries. We have battled his dark deeds and malicious forces across many continents since the time of St. George. Normally, we keep our activities quiet, acting in secrecy to avoid disturbing the everyday worlds of ordinary people. But the times have changed; and with change comes the requirement for support from those

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

outside of our order.”

“So, you want us to help you fight Lutin?” AJ asked inquisitively.

“This very group, all of you, in fact.” Beele responded directly. “There are a number of Knights of the Garter right here, scattered about North America. A few are museum curators, just like me. Our task will be to join with these men and women to stop Lutin before he completes his negative energy grid.”

“I’m in.” Vic spoke without hesitation, “When do we leave?”

“Not so fast, young man,” Beele gently chided; “I will need to make travel preparations to secure our safe passage. All of you will need to gain permission from your parents. I am confident that your impending spring holidays from school will give us ample time to complete our journey, as well as our mission.”

The discussion that followed was both spirited and anxious. The curator had disclosed all of the details of his previous journey and how he had notified all of the knights from around the country.

As the late afternoon melted into the low, purple evening, Hieronymus instructed the teens to return home and explain everything to their parents and family. He made it very clear that there were to be no secrets kept from their families, as Lutin would feed off of any deceit or dishonesty from within the group. They had all agreed to go with the curator. In many ways, they felt that they had no choice. No matter what happened, they had agreed to stick together – no one was willing to break such a sacred pact.







## 19: *Minus One*

**T**he week flew by rapidly, like thickening clouds pushed across the sky by an approaching storm. Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Lynni tried to maintain some sense of normalcy at school, but they all failed miserably. No one could concentrate on their schoolwork, with thoughts of good and evil swinging like subconscious pendulums inside their heads.

Spring Break was only a few days away. At lunch, the teens met at their usual spot near the Student Commons area. Everyone was there except for Lynni.

“So, did you guys get everything settled with your parents?” Tom asked the group.

“I told them everything, like Dr. Beele said,” AJ answered.

Vic added, “Yeah, at first my parents didn’t believe me. My dad even called down to the DIA to make sure that Beele wasn’t some nut job or something. But after a long conversation, they agreed.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

You have to admit it does sound crazy – chasing a psychopathic troll around the country trying to save the world.”

“Our parents were just happy that we finally leveled with them,” Elly said. “Tom and I had kept all of this stuff quiet for so long; it was such a relief to let our family know what was going on. I was always afraid that they would think I was crazy or, even worse, stuck in some emotional, teenage fantasy. I’m just glad that they didn’t laugh and that they’re letting me go on this trip.”

As the band of adventurers was talking, they could see Lynni running toward them from across the commons. Her head was down as she ran, with her hair flying wildly from side to side. In a moment, Lynni stood in front of them, her eyes red and puffy from the tears that stained her pale cheeks.

“What’s wrong, Lynni?” Elly asked with deep concern, as she got up and put her arm around her friend.

“M-m-my mom and dad... th-th-they won’t let me go...” A hush fell over the group.

“Why, Lynni, why can’t you go?” Tom asked with a gentle, calm voice.

Lynni gathered herself a little and blotted the black eyeliner streaks that ran down her face. “I told them everything, everything. I told them the truth about what happened at the secret tunnel. I told them about the power grid. I even told them all about the Nain Rouge. They just sat there and listened. They didn’t say a word for an hour... then they told me I wasn’t going...”

Lynni started to cry again. Elly held her tighter and the rest of the teens gathered more closely around her, shielding Lynni from the prying eyes of the other lunch goers. After she gathered herself

## *Chapter 19: Minus One*

once more, Lynni explained that her parents believed everything – just like her friends. Only their belief backfired. Because they believed what their daughter had told them, Lynni’s parents knew how dangerous the spring break journey would be and refused to let her go. All the begging and pleading in the world would not make them change their minds. Even a visit from Dr. Beele could not make Lynni’s parents budge. They decided that their daughter had been through enough stress and trauma and they were not willing to put her in harm’s way again. The answer was “NO” and that was final.

As the teens listened to Lynni, the realization that they would be setting out on their adventure without Lynni began to set in. The final lunch bell rang, signaling the end of the period and the beginning of a new one. Tom, Elly, AJ, Vic and Lynni gathered up their empty bags and apple cores and headed off toward the main hall, together, for at least a little while longer.



## 20: *The Silent Embarking*

**S**pring break had finally arrived and Tom had all of his gear in a pile at the bottom of the stairs. A duffel bag, a back pack and his sleeping bag would be the only equipment he would carry in a week-long journey across the country. Dr. Beele had instructed the teens to meet him in the high school parking lot just before dawn.

Tom's parents were up long before he was. They were sitting at the kitchen table talking when Tom came in to say goodbye. Thankfully, his mom and dad did not get too emotional. Tom knew that if his mom started crying, it would set him off and then he might just lose his nerve to leave the house. No, in a strange way, his parents knew that this trip involved something that Tom was destined to do. He had been through so much already and they just wanted some closure for him. Sure, his parents were scared, but they knew Tom was growing up and that in life, there were some battles that had to be faced head on. This was Tom's fight

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

and they would have to be content to sit on the sidelines, and hope and pray for the best.

Similar scenes were being played out in other houses around town. Elly, AJ and Vic were all gathering their supplies and equipment and saying goodbye to their families.

At AJ's house, Pip kept blocking the door, trying to keep AJ from leaving. She knew that there was danger beyond the door and she wanted to protect her best friend in any way she could. AJ scooted the little Westie away from the front door and made his way down the driveway and into the street.

The high school parking lot was as empty and dark as it could be. The black-top surface seemed to absorb the night, reflecting only darkness against the cloud-covered sky. The four teenagers met on Crooks Road and headed north past Thirteen Mile Road. The only light came from the blinking yellow traffic signal and the dim headlights of a newspaper van making its way toward its early morning deliveries.

Though it was just before six o'clock in the morning, the dawn seemed to be hours and miles away. No one said a word. Maybe, it was because they were all so groggy from lack of sleep. Maybe it was just plain fear that no one was willing to share. There was an ominous loneliness that enveloped the adventurers as they turned down Lexington Boulevard, heading into the school parking lot. It was the feeling one might have upon approaching the dark edge of a cliff; looking down into the inky unknown, wondering what it would feel like to fall that far down.

As the teens stood shivering in the pre-dawn morning, they realized how much they missed Lynni. Though she could be a pain



## *Chapter 20: The Silent Embarking*

sometimes, she was kind, loyal and always a great friend. Thoughts of Lynni served only to fuel their anxiety and depression, as the cold wrapped around them, creeping underneath the cracks and crevices of the nylon winter jackets.

Two headlights bounced up and down into the empty parking lot. The group could make out the faint outline of a gray Ford Econoline van. As the vehicle lurched toward them, they could read “Detroit Institute of Arts” on the side of the large van.

The vehicle circled around the teenagers and stopped directly in front of them. After a brief moment, the driver’s side door opened and Dr. Hieronymus Beele stepped down from the running board. With the door wide open, the teens could smell the warm and inviting scent of hot chocolate. Beele stood before them now, holding a cardboard tray of styrofoam cups filled with steaming hot cocoa. The smile that spread across his face was contagious. Soon, everyone was sipping their hot drinks, chatting and loading up the back of the van with various sleeping bags, duffels and backpacks.

Once the van was fully packed, Dr. Beele explained that their first stop would be Chicago, where they were to meet with a fellow knight from the order. The mood had changed for the better now. There seemed to be a revived sense of excitement as the vehicle began its final turn out of the parking lot and onto Lexington Boulevard.

“Dr. Beele, stop!” Elly shouted without warning from the back bench seat.

Beele slammed on the brakes, jerking the van to an abrupt halt. Elly stood up quickly and pointed dramatically out the side window.

## *Book 2: The Red Tide*

From the window, the entire vanload of adventurers stared in wonder at a figure moving rapidly across the baseball diamonds toward the school parking lot. As the dark shadow grew closer, Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Dr. Beele could begin to make out a familiar shape emerging from the mist that still hung in the grassy outfield.

As two fast-moving legs sped across the parking lot toward the van, a collection of smiles and raised eyebrows filled every side window of the gray vehicle. In spontaneous unison, the van erupted with cheers.

“Lynni! It’s Lynni!”

It was Lynni, coming closer and closer to them, with a sleeping bag in one arm and her powder blue duffle bag dangling from her other shoulder. She lumbered into the side door of the waiting van, breathless, but smiling from ear to ear.

As the van began its forward motion again, you could hear the muffled chatter and excitement from all of the teens. Now there was full confidence that their adventure had begun in earnest. The whole team was now intact.







*Part 3*

# The Red Truth

*Honi soit qui mal y pense*  
(Spurned be the one who thinks evil of it)



## Prologue

**M**ost Folktellers understand the importance of history. We love to weave events from the past into the stories that we tell. A famous general named Santayana once said, “Those that forget history are doomed to repeat it.”

That’s some good advice that we would do well to remember. Frankly, I think history has a way of hiding and revealing the truth about almost everything. This applies to both human beings and magical creatures. Take the Nain Rouge and Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, for example. Who would have thought that one small, seemingly insignificant, interaction would change the course of history forever?

And it’s that event that seems like a wonderful place to return to our story.

The forty-two year old explorer stood in the Paris crowd that had gathered at a party in his honor. Antoine de la Mothe

Cadillac moved slowly about the room, mingling with disinterest and subtle aloofness.

It was April, 1700, and Cadillac had already spent too much time in France trying to convince the king to let him build a settlement near the straits between the Great Lakes. He had finally gotten his wish and was now anxious to get back to the Americas.

A restless soul, Cadillac never could settle down completely; his joy was found in discovery, exploration and conquering the unknown. It was this restlessness that he had to keep in check as he shook the hands of his countrymen, made small talk and smiled with all the sincerity of a floating crocodile in a stagnant swamp.

Cadillac worked his way toward the outskirts of the palace ballroom. As he turned to greet another admirer, he came face to face with a fortune teller. Performers had been hired to entertain the party guests with magic tricks, juggling and various other marvellous acts. The fortune teller had been wandering about the ballroom, reading palms and forecasting future events for the delighted Parisians.

The small, dark-eyed woman instinctively took the explorer's hand and was met with no resistance. Cadillac watched as she ran her forefinger along the creases in his right palm. The fortune teller shuddered a little as she looked back up at the explorer.

"Beware the Nain Rouge..." she whispered in a raspy, ominous voice.

Cadillac smiled uncomfortably, "Silly woman, what do you mean by this?"

"The Red Dwarf. Appease him, show him respect and honor. If you fail to do so, it is at your own peril."



Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac quickly pulled his hand away. He stared down at the fortune teller with a diminishing look of surprise and slight confusion. After a brief, awkward moment of silence, he chuckled loudly so that it appeared he was slightly amused by the whole affair.

The crowd chuckled with him as he shook his head gently, waved an affectionate goodbye and made his way out into the cool Paris evening.



## 1: *Into the Storm*

“**M**om, you just don’t get it!” Lynni yelled with a hoarse, raspy longing in her voice.

“Oh, I do get it, Lynni! That is exactly why you are not going,” her mother replied calmly, yet firmly.

“They need me ... I promised ... I have to go! Don’t you trust me?” Lynni pleaded.

“Lynni,” her father spoke in a very serious and quiet tone, “We have been through this with you all week. This is not an issue of whether or not we trust you. Of course we trust you. Our decision is really based on keeping you safe; it is as simple as that. You’ve been through so much already. Your mom and I aren’t ready to put you back in harm’s way.”

There was a brief moment of silence as the gears turned inside Lynni’s head; she readied herself for her next attack in their ex-

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

tensive argument. Slowly, she got up from the living room couch and circled around her parents until she was facing them.

Instead of yelling hysterically or crying her eyes out, Lynni sat down on the edge of the coffee table and leaned forward toward her parents with silent seriousness.

“Mom, Dad, it’s really important that you understand where I’m coming from. I know that you spoke with Dr. Beele and he gave you all of the gory details about the Nain Rouge and why this trip was so important for everybody, but he didn’t tell you what it means to me.”

Lynni’s parents looked at each other with a renewed sense of worry. They had never seen their daughter appear so serious and foreboding. Her mother couldn’t help but lean forward and rub her daughter’s knee in comfort and reassurance.

Lynni took a deep breath, sighed slightly and began to speak, “What Dr. Beele couldn’t have told you was how I felt when Lutin was inside of me ... It was as if he stole something, part of my soul. When I was possessed, I felt such darkness, such a deep, heavy evil that I thought I would suffocate from the weight of his anger. When he finally let go, it felt like a little piece of me was missing, like he took something away and left an empty space in my heart.”

Lynni’s parents were silent as stone and didn’t interrupt her as she continued, “That’s why I have to go with them. I need to get back what he took from me, the part of me that’s missing.”

To say that Lynni’s parents were stunned would be the understatement of the century. They had never heard their daughter speak with so much power and conviction. There was no whining or complaining in her voice, only the deep-seeded knowledge that

## *Chapter 1: Into The Storm*

this journey was one she had to make, no matter what the cost.

Lynni's mom was the first to speak after a brief moment of awkward silence, "I'm at a loss, here, Lynni. We're dealing with things that are beyond the normal parenting things your father and I are used to."

"Your mom is right, sweetie," her dad added, "This whole situation is really hard to take in all at once."

Her mother continued, "But the one thing we do know is that we believe you. We believe everything that you have told us and we're so thankful that you've been so open and honest with us."

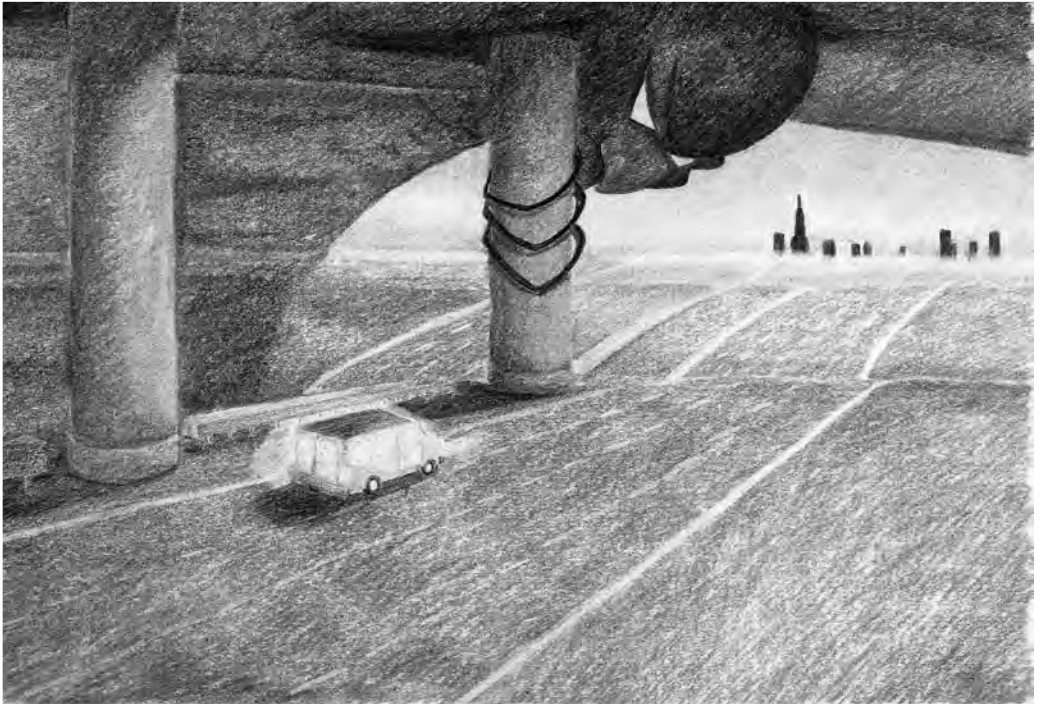
Both parents looked at their daughter with a deep, heart-felt reassurance, as if to say that even though they didn't have all of the answers, things would eventually work out for the best.

"So, I can go?" Lynni asked directly without missing a beat in the conversation.

Lynni's mom and dad looked at each other and then back at her. They did not say a word, but nodded their heads slightly.

"Oh, thank you! Thanks so much, you guys!" Lynni jumped up with renewed excitement. "Thanks for believing in me. You know that this is something I have to do."

Her parents smiled quietly and nodded again. With that, Lynni jumped up from the edge of the coffee table and ran upstairs to get everything ready for her journey. As she raced up the steps to her room, her parents remained seated in the living room, almost frozen with the knowledge that they had just agreed to send their daughter into the darkness of unknown dangers. All they could do now was hope and pray for the best.



## 2: *The First Leg*

**T**he van had barely entered Marshall, Michigan, when Lynni finished telling the story of her surprise appearance in the darkness of the school parking lot. Tom, Elly, AJ, Vic and Dr. Beele were all surprised at her parents' change of heart at the last minute.

"Basically, they said they trust me and they understand that this is a trip that I have to make," Lynni said as she ended her story.

"We're all glad that you're here, Lynni," Elly smiled confidently.

"Yeah," Tom added, "We had no idea how much Lutin had messed with your insides ..."

Elly elbowed Tom in the ribs, giving him the stink eye – that look that said to stop being so blunt and unfeeling.

"Uh, what I meant to say was that we know how you feel. We've all been there ... and we're all here to help, okay?"

Lynni smiled at all of them. She knew she had made the right decision.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

As the conversation waned, Dr. Beele pointed out that the DIA van was now traveling through Marshall, Michigan, and informed them that the city marked the midpoint between Detroit and Chicago. It rose to greet the excited travelers in all of its 19th century glory, as they glided down Michigan Avenue, through its picturesque streets and past its stately homes and mansions. The children felt a strange sense of excitement and energy as they passed through the town. It was an odd sort of static electricity that ran through each of them.

“You can probably feel the energy around here, can’t you?” Dr. Beele questioned from the driver’s seat of the van.

The teens looked at each other, wondering if Dr. Beele was also a mind reader. How did he know what they were feeling?

As they drove through town, Dr. Beele pointed out that Marshall was intersected by Michigan Avenue, the old military road that ran from Detroit to Chicago. Though the new interstates that were built in the 1950’s and 1960’s now bypassed many of these old trails, Marshall remained directly in the path of this historical, horizontal line. The group was, in fact, traveling directly along one of the ley lines that Dr. Beele had mentioned to them previously. These were the energy lines in the pattern that Lutin had been connecting over the past few months. Michigan Avenue ran right through the Nain Rouge’s power grid.

“That energy you feel is from the ley line we are on,” Beele shouted from the front. “This is one of the lines that connect the lower waterways of the Great Lakes to all the great cities where the lines intersect. That wobbly feeling will subside once we get back onto Interstate 94.”



## *Chapter 2: The First Leg*

Beele's brief description of the energy grid was a quick wake-up call to the entire group. They had been so caught up in Lynni's story that they had forgotten why they came on this trip in the first place. By feeling those initial electric vibrations, they were gently zapped back into the reality of their situation. They were on a mission; a mission to stop the Nain Rouge from completing his energy grid and controlling the land and water with his evil power.

With that common dark thought now fresh in their brains, the team noticed, once again, that Hieronymus Beele was right. Sure enough, once the van reached the city limits and got back onto the interstate, the jittery, electrical sensation subsided and the group's sense of calm and relaxation returned. They were back on track to Chicago.

The name "Chicago" was first recorded in 1688 in a French document, where it appears as Chigagou, an Algonquian word meaning "onion field." The document stated that wild onion and garlic grew profusely in the area. Now, hundreds of years later, this small band of adventurers was headed toward the same swamps, marshes and fields, unaware of the strange smells that were growing heavy in the air around them.

"Dr. Beele," Elly spoke up once the van was back underway on the interstate, "Where are we stopping first, once we get to Chicago?"

Beele peeked at Elly in the rearview mirror and smiled slightly, "Our first stop is the Museum of Science and Industry. Once there, we will call on the curator and fellow Knight of the Order, Ms. Margaret Anne Bellflower."

"What does she have to do with the Nain Rouge?" AJ asked

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

with growing interest.

“Much,” Beele replied curtly, but respectfully. “She is well aware of our predicament and stands at the ready to help us in our quest. I just hope that we can get there in time to do what needs to be done.”

With that, the doctor went silent and re-focused his attention on the road in front of him. The teens had grown used to Beele’s vague and often ominous statements, like the last one. So, instead of piling worry upon worry, they silently agreed to just enjoy each other’s company for the rest of the trip. After all, even though they were entering deep water, they were all in the same boat. Being together meant more than anything.





### 3: *A Dark Palace in the White City*

**T**he foundation of every city is “people.” Wherever people gather together to live, conduct business and grow, cities will form. In these places, everything multiplies upon itself. As more people arrive, cities grow in size and complexity, encapsulating all that is good and evil within the brick, concrete and heart of every citizen. Within this flux of growth and change, once in a while, all of these forces come together in a physical manifestation so grand, that its impact lingers on over the centuries.

The World’s Columbian Exposition opened to the general public on May 1, 1893, in Chicago, Illinois. The fair was launched as a tribute to Christopher Columbus’s 400th anniversary of discovering the western world.

They called it the White City. All of the great buildings had been painted white, and the streets were lined with the new

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

technology of electric light. It created a stark contrast to the gray, low-lying buildings that slumped deeper within the inner city.

From May until October of that year, the exposition covered more than 600 acres, featuring nearly 200 new buildings of classical architecture, canals, lagoons, and people and cultures from around the world. Over 27 million people (almost half of the U.S. population at the time) attended the exposition, which became a symbol of the emerging industrial might and power of America.

But despite this great expression of innovation and light at the turn of the century, the fairgrounds proved to be a magnet for the shadowy side of the human soul. This great gathering attracted the likes of Dr. H. H. Holmes, a silent, serial killer, who quietly took the lives of dozens of unsuspecting women and children. Using the fair as a distracting backdrop for his mayhem, the “good doctor” disposed of any guilt or evidence in a custom furnace in the basement of his own office building.

Holmes cast an eerie shadow over the White City. His dark deeds seeped into the land and water, and were in stark contrast to the joyful energy created by a world’s fair that showcased such great potential and hope of a people on the threshold of the twentieth century.

Holmes was not the only evil lurking in the White City. As Mayor Carter Harrison, Sr. prepared to conclude the exposition, he was assassinated by Patrick Eugene Prendergast only two days before the falling of the final curtain. Prendergast claimed he had been slighted by the mayor, overlooked for a position within the mayor’s administration. Ultimately, the closing ceremonies were cancelled.

### *Chapter 3: A Dark Place in the White City*

This energy permeated the ground now. It flowed within the water that surrounded Chicago. Smack dab in the middle of this play between light and darkness was the Palace of Fine Arts. The south entrance, which faced the center of the fairgrounds, could only be approached by boat from a greenish-blue lagoon. The great building housed famous works of art for the fair. The building was so large that it was said that to spend only one minute at each exhibit, it would take a fair-goer twenty-six days.

Truly, this was fertile ground for the powers of humanity – energy both good and evil.

When the Columbian Exposition of 1893 ended, decay set in. The Palace sat abandoned for almost thirty years and fell into ruin. The other great buildings were either moved, burned or torn down. It was not until the 1930's that the Palace of Fine Arts was resurrected to its former glory. It soon became the permanent home for the Museum of Science and Industry, housing the history, the hope and all too often the unseen hatred that bleeds through the dual nature of our humanity.

The Nain Rouge felt quite welcome at this intersection of ley lines, in a city so rich with darkness that it rippled beneath the water and saturated its swampy ground.







## 4: *Lutin's Trail*

**T**he marshland that surrounded Chicago had been rising for weeks. Throughout the country, the water table around lakes, rivers and oceans had been steadily increasing for months. Flooding had become common in these late winter months, and thousands of people were losing their homes every week.

To make matters worse, the rising tides brought with them an invasive and dangerous fish. No one really knew how these strange fish had gotten into the river. Some say that they were dumped there by bored collectors. Others say they came into the water from bilge tanks on international freighters. But, for most, the rising waters and these foreign invaders remained a great, dark mystery. Asian carp were moving north, up from the Mississippi River. They could grow to be up to 100 pounds and could jump eight to ten feet in the air. The fear was that they would soon be migrating into the Great Lakes, killing off smaller fish and

### Book 3: *The Red Truth*

destroying the fishing and gaming industries for years to come.

These fears led the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to construct an electric barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the only aquatic link between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River drainage basins. Fish were now being electrocuted to prevent them from entering the lakes.

A brief news article last Friday mentioned that when the barriers were activated, a small, odd-looking man was seen tampering with the power grid near the mouth of the canal. The article stated:

*“Officials noted a temporary malfunction of a barrier that left the lakes vulnerable for a few minutes. When security went to investigate, they found only traces of potential human tampering – small footprints near the banks of the canal. One officer did report hearing a distant, odd laughter and the faint smell of sulphur near the area in question.”*

AJ read the article aloud to the rest of the van as they continued their way toward Chicago. “This sounds like Lutin’s work,” AJ stated, half under his breath.

“It certainly does sound like something the Nain Rouge would find great pleasure in,” Dr. Beele responded, unaware that AJ was only talking to himself and didn’t really mean for anyone to hear.

Lynni added, “It’s not really a surprise, is it? I mean, it’s what we are here for, right – to stop him?”

“That is precisely why we are here,” Beele responded firmly.

“Yeah, but I wonder sometimes, Doc. Are we following him or is he following us?”

Tom looked over at Elly with a knowing glance. It was as if

## *Chapter 4: Lutin's Trail*

they could almost communicate telepathically now. All that they had been through together had created a subconscious bond between the two teens.

Elly turned around in her bench seat and looked directly at Vic, "I think the answer is a little of both, Vic."

"Huh?" Vic replied, a bit puzzled.

"What she's saying," Tom piped in, "Is that Lutin can be anywhere at any time. Now that he's free, he can go wherever he wants, whenever he wants."

Elly added, "I think he knows that we are following him and he is definitely following us. It's all a game to him ... a sick, twisted, dark game."

"That may all be true," the curator interjected, "but we have one, small advantage over Lutin. The Nain Rouge may know that he's being followed, but he could not know for what purpose. Remember, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Vic wondered aloud from the back of the van.

"What it means, Vic," Beele yelled over his back shoulder, "is that Lutin believes he can't be stopped, which leaves him open to our plans to stop him."

These words had an oddly calming effect on the entire group. A gentle quiet settled over the teens as they pondered Dr. Beele's words once again. Each of them wondered what they were really getting themselves into.

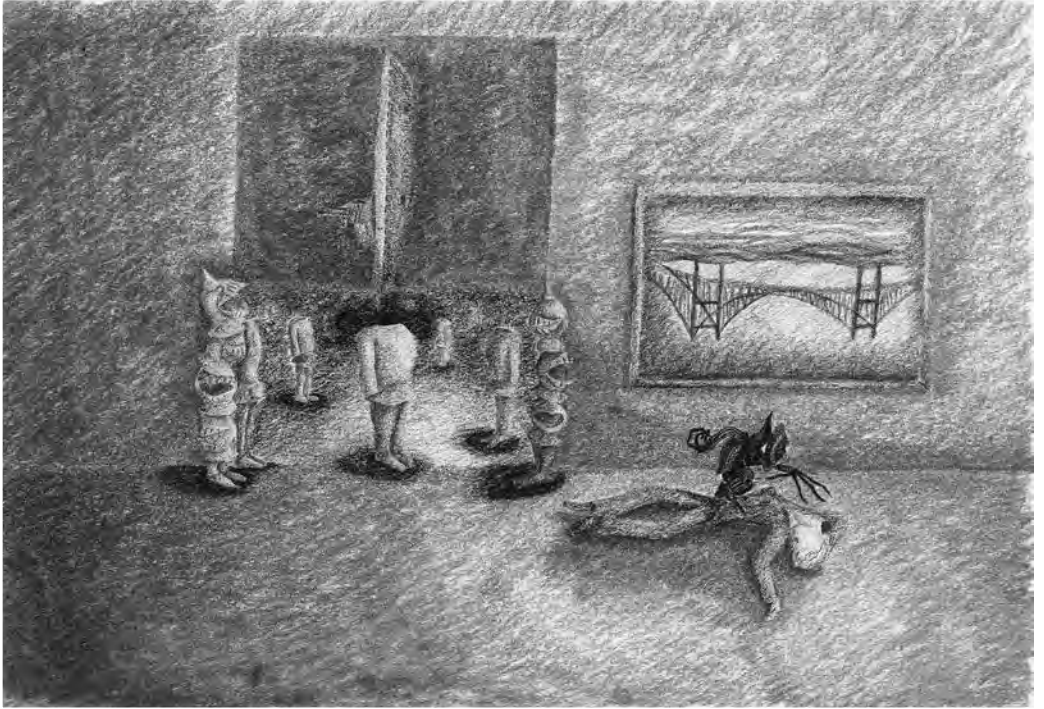
The Ford Econoline van had reached the marshes that surrounded the city and, in the distance, they could begin to make out the shapes and angles of the magnificent Chicago skyline.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

Interstate 94 rose out of the swampy grasses, wrapping its way around Lake Michigan and unfolding itself right into the heart of downtown Chicago. The late winter wind whipped around the van. The Hawk was strong and menacing that day. The wind in Chicago was so famous that it even had its own name. Natives called it “Hawkins” or the “Hawk” and would comment on particularly blustery days: “Hawkins is really out today.” This was one of those days.

In just a few exits, they would be at the Museum of Science and Industry, the welcome and honored guests of Ms. Margaret Anne Bellflower.





## 5: A Bellflower

**T**hree docents came running down the great north steps of the museum. They made a beeline toward the van full of Michiganders.

Dr. Beele made sure the doors of the van were locked as the three strangers began to pound violently on the driver's side window.

"What the heck is going on?" Vic yelled from the back of the vehicle. Lynni, AJ, Tom and Elly echoed his sentiment, as they all braced themselves against their seats.

"I am not quite sure," Beele retorted with a curt nervousness that was very out of character for the usually subdued curator, "but we will certainly find out shortly."

Beele acknowledged the person pounding on his door by rolling down his window ever so slightly. He smiled at the man and nodded at the others standing by his side. He then waited patiently to see what this anxious group had to say.

### Book 3: *The Red Truth*

“Dr. Beele?” they asked frantically.

“Yes, I am Hieronymus Beele, how may I be of service?”

“Dr. Beele,” an unknown woman stepped up, “we’ve been expecting you, all of you. But things are happening – We need you – Dr. Bellflower sent us to get you. Please, come with us quickly!”

Beele looked back at the children and nodded his head. Without even knowing their names, he knew he could trust these people. The doctor unlocked the doors and instructed the group to follow the docents into the Museum of Science and Industry.

The entire entourage made their way rapidly up the museum steps, leaving the DIA vehicle right where it was – in the middle of the museum’s circular driveway.

Upon entering the great brass doors of the museum’s main entrance, Dr. Beele, Tom, Elly, AJ, Lynni and Vic stopped dead. The museum was in shambles and Dr. Bellflower was nowhere to be found.

One of the docents spoke up, “We found the museum this way when we came into work this morning. We had to shut down for the day.”

Lynni looked up above the main door. The mission statement for the museum was supposed to read: “To inspire the inventive genius in everyone.” But someone had spray-painted over the word “*inspire*” and scrawled “*DESTROY*” underneath it.

“Whoa! What the heck happened in here?” Vic gasped under his breath.

In a very serious tone, Hieronymus turned his attention to one of the nameless docents and asked, “Where is Dr. Bellflower?”

“The last I saw her, she was checking out the other exhibits



## *Chapter 5: A Bellflower*

for further damage. She told us to keep watch for you by the front door.”

With that, Dr. Beele ran deeper into the museum, the teens following close behind. As they passed through each chamber and room of the museum, it was clear to them that much had been disturbed. The odd thing was not how much damage there was, but rather what had actually been damaged. The vandalism was not one of rage or uncontrollable anger. It seemed like the destruction was quite cold and calculated, executed with great precision and determination.

The small group called out Dr. Bellflower’s name as they made their way into the deeper recesses of the darkened museum. They stepped into the unlit space that housed Colleen Moore’s Miniature Fairy Castle. This elaborate miniature house was created by silent film star Colleen Moore in the 1930’s, and was donated to the Museum of Science and Industry in 1949.

As they shined their small flashlights into the exhibit, they could see that the miniature mansion was in complete disarray. The little chairs were stacked on top of each other, forming a tiny pyramid. The golden cups, jeweled goblets and silver plates that had been set at the large table in the banquet hall no longer rested in their place settings. Instead, it appeared that all of the dinnerware had been glued to the ceiling, along with all of the faux food ... turkey, mutton, waxed fruit and cranberry sauce included.

Oddly enough, throughout the castle, nothing seemed to be broken, just re-arranged and misplaced in a methodical, mischievous manner. The adventurers shook their heads in confusion at the oddity, and made their way into the next exhibit hall.

### Book 3: *The Red Truth*

The greatest surprise came when they turned the corner and entered the gallery housing a giant World War II submarine. The U505 submarine that had been captured from the Germans in World War II loomed in front of them. But it was not right side up like it was supposed to be. No, the submarine was standing up on its propellers, completely vertical from floor to ceiling! The underwater vessel looked like a giant, steel cocoon that was ready to burst open to reveal a mammoth moth or butterfly. Its shadow was so large that it cast another layer of darkness upon the dark that already permeated the exhibit hall. They knew that this great war machine could fall on them at any minute, crushing the entire team with one, mighty blow, but they couldn't worry about that right now, because there in the exhibit, in the low light of morning, they saw Margaret Anne Bellflower, lying full-length across the center of the floor. Next to the curator squatted a red, grinning creature that seemed to be whispering something into her ear.

Beele's stomach dropped at the sight of this twisted, bizarre picture. The whole scene looked like one of his paintings that hung in the DIA galleries; a painting by Fuseli, called *The Nightmare*, which depicted a sleeping woman lying down on a bed with a dark troll-like creature sitting on her chest.

Now, this horrific image was illustrated for real, right in front of his own eyes. It was Lutin, reveling in the chaos that he had created, sitting right beside Dr. Beele's friend and colleague. In this odd, twisted moment, time stood still. The curator from Detroit and his young friends stood silently in the doorway, staring at the scene that seemed to hang before them like a giant, grotesque portrait. In this frozen moment, a wispy, shivering sound rose

## Chapter 5: A Bellflower

from Lutin. Lutin looked over at the group and smiled wickedly. His lips did not move, but a strange musical noise, almost like the faint pulses of a calliope elevated to the ceiling of the great exhibit hall. Slowly swirling through the air came the foreboding sing-song verse:

*“So on his Nightmare through the evening fog  
Flits the squab Fiend o’er fen, and lake, and bog;  
Seeks some love-wilder’d maid with sleep oppress’d,  
Alights, and grinning sits upon her breast.”*

A sick churning began to roll in Beele’s stomach. He recognized these words. They came from beneath an etching of *The Nightmare* painting that hung in the DIA. The Nain Rouge was mocking them and enjoying every minute of it.

Lynni was the only one from the entire group that didn’t hesitate. As soon as she saw Lutin next to Dr. Bellflower, she began running directly toward them. On sheer instinct, she knew that she had to separate the Nain Rouge from the museum curator if there was any hope of Dr. Bellflower surviving. Lynni was running at full speed toward the odd pair, ready to pull Lutin off of the good doctor, but as soon as she reached out to grab the sinister little troll, he disappeared in a plume of yellowy, sulphuric smoke, cackling wildly in an echo that soon faded away.

“Dr. Bellflower, are you alright?” Lynni whispered, as she knelt beside her.

The Chicago curator stirred a little, but did not sit up right away. Everything had happened so fast. Dr. Beele was still standing

### Book 3: *The Red Truth*

in the open archway with Tom, Elly, AJ and Vic. They were all sort of stunned and frozen by Lynni's actions. Each one felt a little sorry that they didn't follow her right away.

In the calm that followed, the rest of the team caught up with Lynni and hovered quietly around Margaret Anne Bellflower. They stared down at the dazed curator with great concern and wonder. After what seemed like an eternity, Dr. Bellflower began to come around.

Dr. Beele had warned the teens not to try to lift her, just in case she had suffered some sort of head or neck injury. His precautions were warranted, but unnecessary, as Dr. Bellflower finally sat up under her own power.

"What happened here?" Dr. Bellflower said in a raspy voice, "Who has done this to my museum?"

"Maggie, please," Dr. Beele replied in a hushed, comforting tone, "rest easy now, dear, everything is alright now..."

The teenagers had never heard Dr. Beele speak so tenderly before. He was always controlled and calm, but now the tone of his voice seemed to be filled with a depth and emotion that only comes with the love and affection for someone who holds a place close to your heart.

"I'm fine, Hieronymus, really." Dr. Bellflower responded as she lifted herself off of the floor. "I am just very curious as to what happened. I was opening the museum for the day when everything started going haywire. I heard loud noises, objects and exhibits started flying around, and then ... and then *it* appeared."

"What appeared?" Vic stepped up and asked.

Dr. Bellflower continued, as she brushed the dust off of her

## *Chapter 5: A Bellflower*

dress slacks, “I’m not sure, really. It was a little red creature. He was hopping around the exhibit hall, laughing, cackling and mumbling to himself as everything went flying about. Then he looked at me... directly at me...”

The curator shuddered and began to fall back again, as if the recent memory of her horrible experience was just too much for her to bear. Fortunately, Dr. Beele and Elly reacted to her swooning and caught her mid-fall.

Tom and Elly knew exactly what she was talking about. They had the same experience when they were on their 7th grade field trip to the DIA, when they first encountered the Nain Rouge and got sucked into his deep, dark stare. They both passed out, as well, waking up in dizzy confusion. Tom and Elly had no idea at the time how much their lives would change because of that one terrible moment.

Dr. Bellflower regained her composure. “I’m fine now... As I was saying, he looked at me and, after a while, I felt as if I was being pulled into his gaze, almost as if I was being hypnotized. I felt nauseous and then everything went dark. When I awoke, this young lady was tending to me. That is all I can remember.”

“We have much to share with you, Maggie,” Dr. Beele stated as calmly and as matter-of-factly as he could. “Is there a place where we can all sit down and chat?”

“Yes, my office is quite comfortable and there is plenty of room for all of you. Please, follow me.”

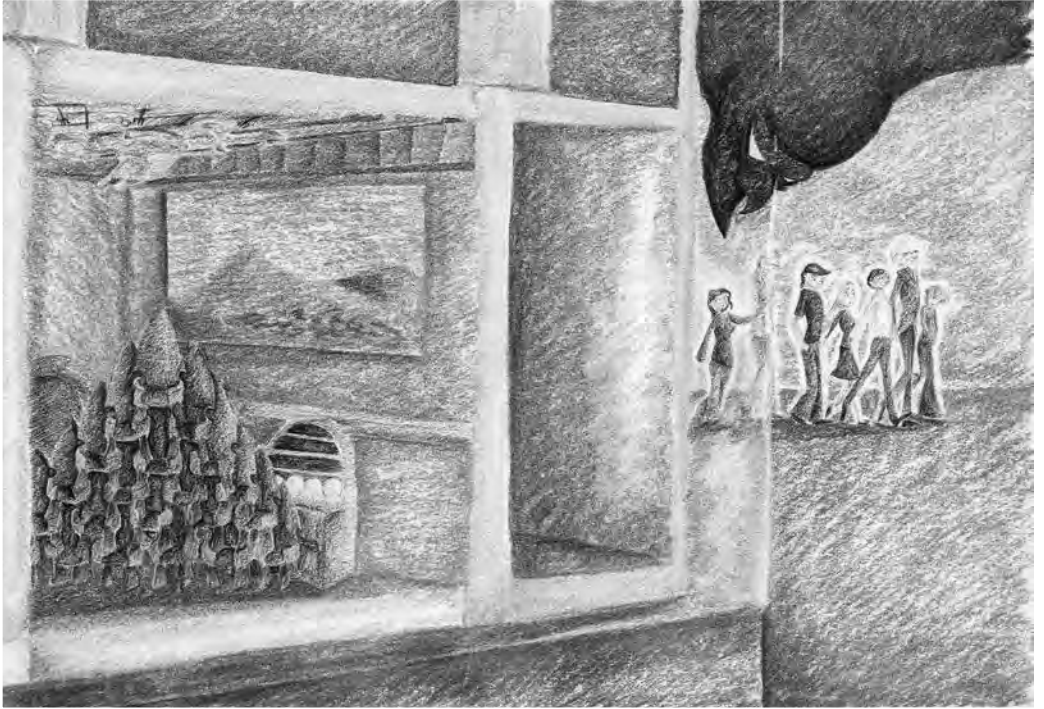
Dr. Bellflower guided the group through the darkened rooms of the museum, avoiding or jumping over objects and artifacts that had been upset or overturned in the chaos as they went.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

No one said a word during this short journey. Everyone was on guard, wondering what may happen next, as they slipped deeper into the dangerous unknown.









## 6: *Secrets Revealed*

**M**argaret Anne Bellflower's office was decorated in complete contrast to her colleague's in Detroit. A bright blue, modern cloth sectional couch angled itself in the corner of the room, while a narrow, stylish European desk had been situated in front of a large, picture window that brought warm light into the entire environment.

A number of sleek chairs made of light wood and metal had been positioned around a large, circular table, indicating Dr. Bellflower had been ready for the arrival of her visitors. In the center of the table sat a beautiful tea service. Tom and Elly looked over at each other, while the rest of party was still scanning the room. The tea set looked very familiar. In fact, upon closer inspection, Tom and Elly realized that it was an exact duplicate of the teapot, cups, saucers and tray that they had used in Dr. Beele's office back at the DIA. Elly smiled at Tom knowingly, as they both realized

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

that maybe Dr. Beele's relationship with Dr. Bellflower was a bit more involved than just being colleagues in the business of running museums.

"I apologize for not being able to greet you properly upon your arrival," Dr. Bellflower said as she motioned for the group to sit around the table. "I had planned for a much calmer, more cordial introduction," she added, as she poured tea for everyone and brought out a tray of croissants and small breakfast pastries.

Hieronymus smiled at her warmly. He then set about introducing the entire team to his colleague. Tom, Elly, AJ, Vic and Lynni all smiled and nodded as their names were called and they made eye contact with Dr. Bellflower. The good doctor returned each smile and nod, and refilled all of their tea cups.

"So then, my Detroit guests, maybe you can help me understand what has happened at my museum this morning?" Bellflower began as she sat across from Hieronymus.

The Detroit curator responded with a deep breath, as if what he was going to say would be full of lengthy, detailed description, "You, Ms. Bellflower, have just had the displeasure of experiencing the Nain Rouge first hand."

The head of the Museum of Science and Industry gave Dr. Beele a bemused, dissatisfied look, "Perhaps you could provide a bit more detail, sir?"

Beele smiled coyly and began once more, "I'm so sorry. Yes, quite right. As you know, we came here to meet with you and the other knights of the order to discuss the strange and disturbing disasters that have befallen our nation in the past few weeks. I explained in my letter to all of you that I believed Lutin, the

## Chapter 6: Secrets Revealed

Nain Rouge, to be the cause of all of this trouble. I had no idea that we were being followed. When we arrived this morning, the docents came running out to our van and brought us in to find your museum in shambles ... and you unconscious.”

“But, why my museum? And why me?” Dr. Bellflower wondered aloud.

Elly interjected, “Lutin had been trapped in Detroit for centuries. He had cursed the city, but in the process, had become part of the curse himself.”

“Yeah,” Tom added, “Elly and I found out that the curse was tied to the first settlers of Detroit and the land around the city. The settlers kicked him out and he cursed them. He told them:

*“Take what you steal and steal what you keep  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep.”*

Elly broke into the conversation, “Tom and I found out that we were the last descendants of the first French settlers, so the curse fell on us. We were the ransom to the curse. So, if we died, the curse would be complete – Lutin would rule the land once again.”

“But they tricked him!” AJ exclaimed, as he slid forward in his seat. Everyone was a bit surprised, as AJ was usually the quietest in the group. “Tom and Elly got the Nain Rouge to cross over the city line, outside of the city limits. He melted! I saw the spot where it all happened.”

“It’s all true,” Tom confirmed, “The only down side was that when we broke the curse, we thought it was all over. Boy, were we wrong. A month ago, all the bad stuff started up again ... and

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

it was even worse this time.”

Elly added, “It looks like when we broke the curse, Lutin didn’t die – he was just released out into the world to cause more trouble.”

A look of guilt fell across the faces of both Tom and Elly. They couldn’t help feeling that they were at fault somehow. Everyone else in the room sensed their shame, too.

“Come now,” Dr. Beele said firmly and clearly, “What’s done is done. Tom and Elly acted heroically in defeating the Nain Rouge once. If it wasn’t for them, he would have taken over the water and land already and none of us would be here.”

“That is quite true,” Dr. Bellflower smiled reassuringly, “Such bravery from ones so young. That goes for not only Tom and Elly, but for all of you. I am both thrilled and comforted to have you here with me today. Now that I understand what has brought us all here in this moment, I am confident that this is the right group to accomplish the task at hand.”

“To be sure, Maggie, to be sure,” Dr. Beele concluded. “Now we had better check into our hotel before the meeting of the Knights of the Order of the Garter is called into session. We will all need a good rest to undertake what is about to come.





## 7: Gas

**D**r. Margaret Anne Bellflower led her new companions out of her executive offices and down the employee elevators. As the elevators opened up onto the main floor of the museum, the entire troop was enveloped by the dull darkness that permeated the unlit exhibit halls.

The clustered group weaved slowly through the museum, being careful to avoid any fallen objects or overturned artifacts. As they were nearing the north doors, Elly stopped suddenly and looked over at Tom, AJ and Vic, “Guys, that’s really gross. C’mon, stop it.”

“What the heck are you talkin’ about El?” Vic shot back, a little annoyed.

Elly shook her head and tried to be a little more discreet, whispering under her breath, “Um, that smell... like someone has a rotten egg in their back pocket.”

All of the boys looked at each other, back and forth, in com-

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

plete denial. Despite her efforts to keep her conversation private, everyone could hear the dialogue between Elly and her male counterparts. Dr. Beele and Lynni looked at each other and chuckled a bit as they walked to the exit.

“No, wait!” Dr. Bellflower shouted in a way that stopped everyone in their tracks. “I smell it, too, and it’s not coming from over here!”

The whole group began sniffing at the air, in an effort to pick up the scent that Elly and Dr. Bellflower had uncovered. Gradually, the entire entourage began nodding their heads and saying, “I smell it, too,” at different intervals.

“That odor is not from any teenager,” Dr. Beele concluded, “It smells like natural gas to me. That is a distinct odor, indeed. Pure, natural gas is colorless and odorless. I have been told that this somewhat offensive scent we are now smelling comes from a chemical added to natural gas for the purpose of detection.”

As Dr. Beele finished his assessment of the smell, an unnatural rush of foul wind blew through the museum. Everyone covered their mouths and coughed violently as they were nearly overcome by a woozy wave of rotten eggs.

“It’s a gas leak! We’ve got to get out of here!” Dr. Bellflower screamed. “This place could blow up any minute!”

“Maggie, where is the gas shut-off valve? We may still have time...” Dr. Beele gently grabbed Dr. Bellflower by the arm, “You get the children out to the street. I will shut the gas off.”

“The main valve is right below us, down the stairs, over there on the right, but it is too dangerous...”

Without warning, before Dr. Beele could make a move to the



## *Chapter 7: Gas*

basement stairs, Vic bolted to the right and was already making his way down into the basement.

“Vic, no, wait!” Dr. Beele had lost all of his composure and was screaming for the teen to come back to the group. Just then, another blast of foul air exploded into the main hall. There was no way to get to the basement stairs now. Dr. Beele corralled Margaret Anne and the rest of the teens and herded them outside as quickly as possible.

Down in the darkness of the basement, the air was actually much more fresh and clear. Fortunately, Vic had kept the flashlight from his earlier excursion through the museum, in his back pocket.

He looked up and saw a series of pipes running back and forth across the ceiling of the basement. For the first time, he was glad he had helped his dad remodel the family room last summer. Despite his attempts to avoid hard work at all cost, Vic had learned a little bit about electrical wiring, plumbing and heating when working with his dad. He knew that a gas line looked different than a water line. He also knew that the shut-off valves would be different, too.

Even though the pipes were a lot bigger than ones you’d find in a residential home, Vic was able to figure out which was which, and he began to follow the gas pipe along its route under the museum.

“I hope I’m going the right way,” Vic muttered under breath. He had no idea which way led to the main valve. He just had to guess at which direction to turn and hope for the best.

What started as a slow walk along the pipeline transformed into a jog and then a full sprint. Vic just had a feeling that he was headed in the right direction. Fortunately, he was right. After a few minutes of running, he stopped directly in front of a gray

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

cinder block wall. Running up and down the wall were large pipes connected with valves, gauges and compression dials. The gas valve was clearly marked “MAIN” and Vic breathed a sigh of relief.

Upon closer inspection, however, the teen realized that the handle on the main line had been snapped off. It looked like something or someone had twisted the valve so violently, that it stretched and bent in an elongated fashion, until it finally gave way and twisted off.

After a brief moment of panic, Vic smartly walked backwards, staring above at the gas line he had just passed. A few feet down the line, he happily found an auxiliary valve with the handle still intact. The valve turned rather easily and soon the gas was shut off completely.

As Vic made his way back upstairs, he could already sense the air was clearing. Upon reaching the main hall, he could hear a great commotion, as if the entire building was swarming with panicked activity. The hall was filled with masked firefighters, paramedics and utility workers, all scrambling around. Some were looking for stranded staff that may still have been in the building. Others were looking for the source of the gas leak that had caused everyone to evacuate.

“Are you okay, son?” a firefighter asked Vic, his voice muffled through his mask. He was quite surprised to see Vic walking upright around a hallway that was still half-full of invisible, toxic fumes.

“I’m fine,” Vic coughed.

Without another word, the firefighter wrapped his arms around Vic’s shoulders and hustled him briskly out of the museum.

## *Chapter 7: Gas*

A crowd had gathered in the back of the museum parking lot. The rescue worker guided Vic to the corner of the lot, where he was reunited with all of his friends.

“Vic!” Elly and Lynni yelled as they came running toward him. “We’re so glad you’re not – well, we’re just so glad to see you!”

“Don’t worry, I know what you guys meant... I’m glad I’m not dead either.”

Tom and AJ came up right behind the girls. They were as concerned as everyone else; they just didn’t think it was very cool to jump on top of him the minute he returned. Maybe it was just a guy thing, but the other boys could tell Vic appreciated them holding back a little, based upon the way he was squirming with the girls hugging and pawing him all over.

Tom patted Vic on the shoulder, “Hey, I’m glad you’re all right, man. Really.”

“Yeah, what happened in there?” AJ added in wonder.

“Well, I just reacted, I guess. Before I knew it, I was down in the basement looking for the shut-off valve. I didn’t know the fumes would get that bad. Kind of stupid, huh?”

“Stupid and brave,” Tom corrected him.

“The weirdest thing was that when I found the valve, it was snapped off. It looked like someone with one powerful giant hand had twisted the handle hard – so hard that it yanked it right off!”

“That is strange...” Dr. Beele’s voice floated over the top of the teens’ conversation. “I must commend you for bravery, Vic, but admonish you for your impetuosity. That was a dangerous thing you did.”

“Sorry, Doc. I guess I just didn’t think,” Vic apologized.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

“Well, lucky for us your instincts were spot-on. The firefighters informed me that if you hadn’t shut off the gas when you did, the entire building would have exploded. I shudder to think what would have happened then.”

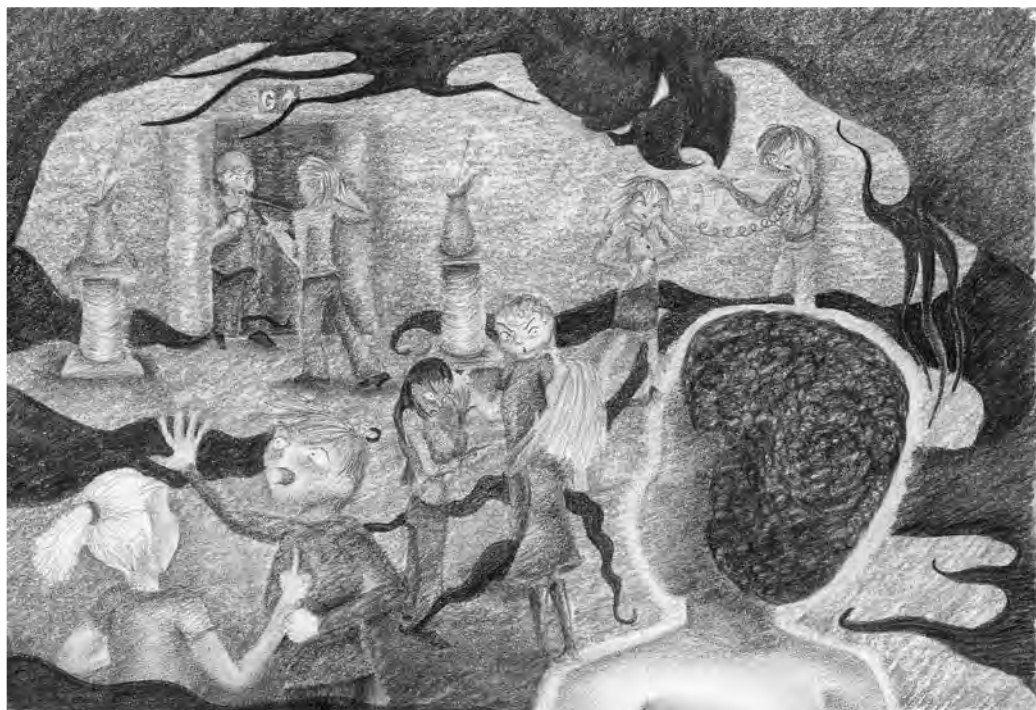
“All’s well that ends well,” Dr. Bellflower stepped up reassuringly. “Let’s not fill the boy with ‘what-ifs’ and ‘almosts’, Ronnie. We all have been through enough and it is not even noon yet. Let’s just be thankful we are safe and sound.”

The teens looked at each other and smirked a little. The subtle grinning soon turned into muffled, repressed giggling. As if in unison, the group of youths blurted out, “Ronnie?!!”

Dr. Beele’s face turned a deep crimson as the tension of the moment was broken with deep, heart-felt laughter. It was just the release that everyone needed. Without ever saying it, the entire entourage knew that the Nain Rouge was the cause of this near-disaster. Things were getting worse and the darkness seemed to be rolling in much more rapidly.

The council meeting at the Union League Club was not until tomorrow morning. Secretly, everyone was hoping and praying that nothing else would happen before then, though they all suspected that hoping and praying would probably be of little help right now.





## 8: *Subtle Changes*

**I**n 1891, a high-pressure gas deposit was tapped in central Indiana, and a 120-miles-long pipeline was built to bring the gas to Chicago, Illinois. By the year 2000, there were over 600 natural gas processing plants in the United States connected to more than 300,000 miles (480,000 km) of main transportation pipelines. These facts meant very little to people on the surface. Never before and never again would those above ground care so much about the pipes that lay beneath them.

The hotel parking attendant was not too happy about having to valet park the museum van. A vehicle of that size posed a problem equal to the biblical task of passing a camel through the eye of the needle. Regardless, Beele did not mind the dirty looks or grunts from the attendant, for he had much more weighty matters on his mind at that moment.

There seemed to be an inordinate amount of commotion



### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

around the city as they drove to their hotel. In the main lobby, strange commotion and anxious activity permeated the cavernous room.

The curator from Detroit approached the front desk, “Good day, we are checking in this afternoon. May I ask, is there a convention here today? I noticed a great amount of hustling and bustling about the hotel.”

“No sir,” the desk clerk responded, “Everyone is talking about the explosions. Didn’t you hear?”

“You mean the gas leak at the Museum of Science and Industry?” Dr. Beele answered nervously.

“No, that was just a gas leak,” the clerk continued, “I’m talking about the explosions that happened all around the country... all near museums, too... how weird is that?”

“Very ‘weird’ indeed.” Dr. Beele replied, as if he had been put into some sort of a hypnotic trance. He was trying to sort out and process everything that he had just heard.

The curator took the room keys and guided the troops up the elevators and into their rooms. Beele was ominously quiet the entire time and all of the teenagers knew that something else was happening. Despite their questioning, Beele waved off their requests for more information, indicating that now was neither the time nor the place for such conversations.

After freshening up a bit, the entire group gathered in Dr. Beele’s suite. Everyone was anxious to learn what heavy matters were weighing on Beele’s overtaxed cranium, so they waited quietly.

The television was on and the twenty-four-hour news channel



## Chapter 8: Subtle Changes

was broadcasting stories of destruction and mayhem from all around the United States. The teenagers couldn't help but be sucked into the baritone reporter's broadcast, as he announced:

*"A panic-stricken nation braces itself against a rash of natural gas explosions. Museum districts around the country are reporting strange natural gas leaks, with some leading to fires and explosions within the buildings and surrounding areas.*

*Gas explosions at The Cole Land Transportation Museum in Bangor, and the Everhart Museum in Yuma, Arizona, have yielded the greatest casualties. Emergency crews are reporting several people injured and five fatalities at these remote locations.*

*Authorities fear that the prevalence of these leaks and explosions in more heavily populated areas may result in more injuries and fatalities..."*

Elly's mouth opened slightly as she watched the TV in horror. "He's making it happen. He's connecting the grid..."

"All those people...just innocent people..." Lynni said to herself in a faded voice of drifting sadness.

Vic, Tom and AJ were staring at the TV, as well, though they seemed too entranced to say anything. Everyone in the group knew that they were on a mission to stop Lutin. They just had no idea how powerful he had become. What began as an adventure of empowerment and excitement was rapidly turning into a helpless excursion of danger and despair.

Dr. Beele's voice floated from behind the youths and rested in each of their ears, "These are grave times..." his words were filled

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

with an ominous anxiety that sent a shiver down the teenagers' spines, "... and grave times bring out the best and worst in people. I am fortunate that these events from the past few months have brought out the best in all of you." Beele's tone had moved away from its foreboding sounds into a warmer, more reassuring melody.

"Yeah, Doc, but look what's happening now!" Vic pointed to the television, "This is bad, Doc, really bad!"

The curator suppressed a quick, anxious response and let Vic's statement float in the air for just a little while.

"I cannot deny what you are saying, Vic. In fact, I think that you are spot-on in your assessment of the situation. This is what Lutin wants. He wants to create fear and panic across the country. He's using natural gas as one of his agents of evil. What better way to do it than a pyrotechnic display within the cultural centers of major cities and small towns? I suspect there is even more to it than that. Has anyone else noticed a slight change in things since we were evacuated from the museum?"

The teens looked around the room at each other and then back at Dr. Beele.

"What do you mean by 'change,' Dr. Beele?" Elly asked, as if she was already in deep thought about his choice of words.

"How do you feel? All of you?" Beele questioned again.

"I don't know," AJ responded first. "I guess a little scared, a little angry, um, and maybe a little depressed."

"Yeah, me too, pretty much the same as AJ..." Tom added.

Elly, Vic and Lynni nodded in agreement. They were all feeling the same way without really knowing it.

"Okay, Doc," Vic asked the curator directly, "what's going on

## Chapter 8: Subtle Changes

that you're not telling us?"

Hieronimus Beele furrowed his brow slightly and stroked his chin gently, "I believe that he has released the energy from the ground."

"What energy?" Lynni asked anxiously.

"The negative energy, Lynni. The evil power that has been trapped underground for centuries – Lutin is releasing it through the gas lines."

"How can you be so sure?" Tom wondered aloud.

"I am not so sure, Tom," Beele replied, "but from what I have seen, it is all beginning to make sense to me."

At that point in the conversation, the wise curator asked his young friends to think about what happened *after* they left the museum.

Tom remembered the rescue workers being very helpful at first, but once they knew that everyone was safe, some of the workers began complaining about people being ungrateful, how dangerous their jobs were, and how they never got paid enough money to do the work that they did.

Elly thought about the trip over to the hotel. Even though they were in a big city like Chicago, the drivers seemed more aggressive and unfriendly than any she had ever seen. People were leaning on their horns and shouting at other cars and trucks to get out of the way.

Then there was the hotel lobby. AJ remembered that just a few minutes ago, they were all standing in the middle of chaos. At first, he thought that the commotion was caused by the news of the explosion at the museum. But after what Dr. Beele said,

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AJ began looking at the scene in the lobby from a much different perspective.

“Guys, downstairs, in the lobby, remember?” AJ tried to jog everyone’s short-term memories, “There were people fighting and arguing about a bunch of different things. I heard some of what they were saying and it wasn’t about the museum explosion.”

‘You’re right, man,” Vic added, “I heard people fighting, too. Now that you mention it, it seemed like they were fighting about a bunch of dumb stuff, too, like who’s going to pay for the cab and whose morning paper got taken from the breakfast table in the lounge.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Beele interrupted, “I believe these happenings are the direct result of Lutin. What you have been witnessing is the direct result of the negative energy that the Nain Rouge has released all over the country.”

“But how does he do it?” Lynni asked. “I know he’s trying to connect the energy grid, but how does releasing negative energy from the ground make it happen?”

“I think I know,” Elly said quietly but thoughtfully.

In the recesses of her brain, Elly remembered the dog-eared page from the Earth Science textbook that revealed some of the Nain Rouge’s secrets to her and Tom back in middle school. She could actually see the text on the page in her head:

*“The earth’s natural electromagnetic field has a frequency measured at about 7.8 Hz or Hertz. This is documented in the Schumann Resonance measured daily in seismology laboratories.*

*People give off electromagnetic energy, as well, their brains emitting*

## Chapter 8: Subtle Changes

*alpha frequencies of 7 to 9 Hz.*

*The human brain in a relaxed state will have the same frequency of vibration as the energy field of the earth”.*

“Lutin is releasing the negative energy under the ground to create an imbalance,” Elly stated clearly.

“An imbalance?” Lynni asked again, “An imbalance of what?”

Tom chimed in, “Yeah, Elly’s on to something here!” He stood up from his seat, clearly agitated and excited. He knew where Elly was going with her thought processes. “We saw something in our science book a few years ago that said our brain waves, our thoughts, and our energies are tied to the energy in the earth. It said something about balance. When our energy is in balance with the earth, we will feel happier and relaxed ...”

Elly finished Tom’s thought, “And when our energy is not in balance with the earth, we often feel angry or depressed.”

“I do believe that you are on the precipice of solving this riddle,” the curator acknowledged.

AJ pointed out to the group, “Maybe Lutin’s trying to create that imbalance of energy, then?”

Vic jumped up as if something had clicked in his brain, “That’s it! That is how he’ll connect the grid! He’ll dump all of this negative energy around the country until everything is saturated with it! With everyone off-balance and in a bad mood, the negativity will just keep growing and feeding upon itself.”

“I am afraid that you are all correct in your assessments of the situation.” Dr. Beele said calmly. “Lutin has discovered humanity’s greatest weaknesses – pride and ego.”

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

Now Tom seemed a bit confused. He thought that he had the whole thing figured out until Dr. Beele threw that curve ball at him; “What does ego have to do with it?”

“He is feeding our greatest weakness, Tom,” Beele answered curtly. “The negative energy that has been released creates a negatively-charged field all around us. This field is always there, along with a positively-charged field. Under normal circumstances, the positive and negative forces balance each other out, but Lutin has changed the game.

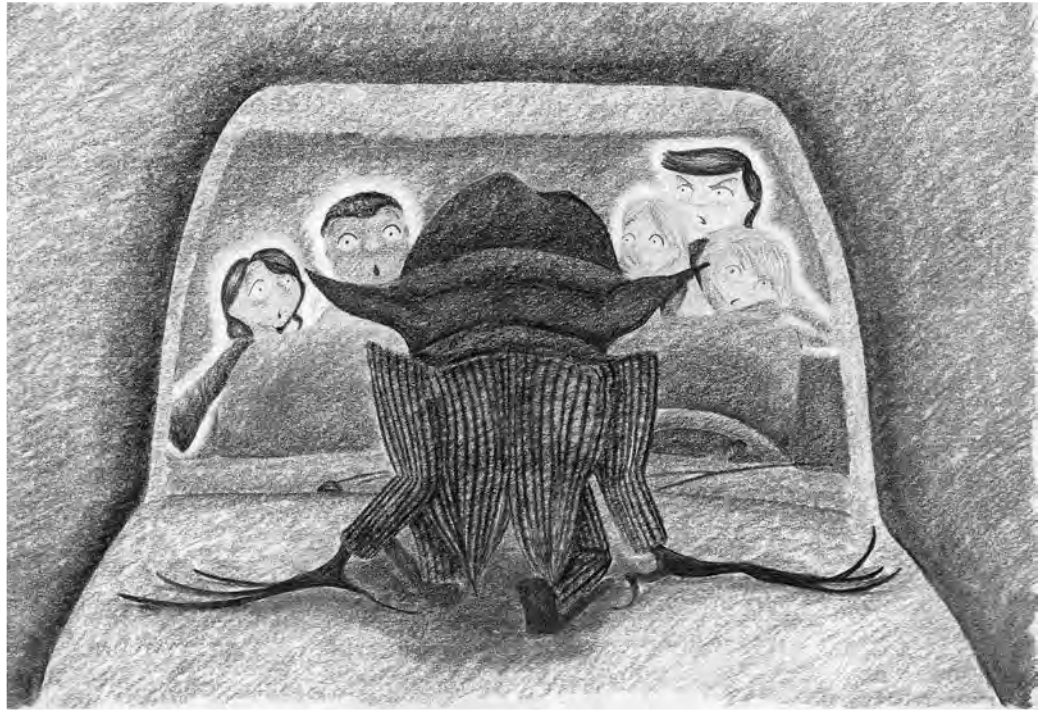
By flooding the world with all this negativity, he has created an environment of evil. This evil seems to be seeping into all of us, feeding our basest desires and fertilizing the bad seeds within each of us. Our egos will deny that this dark energy even exists. Our pride will rationalize it away and allow those shadowy seeds to germinate and flower within us. These are the black blossoms that the Nain Rouge has been cultivating for centuries. The season is ripe for planting and I fear the harvest will be fruitful.”

The curator delivered his speech in a trance-like, prophetic state. The teenagers had nothing to say. Something inside each of them told them that Dr. Beele was right.

What were they to do now? The damage had been done and the process of transformation had already begun. They had seen it with their own eyes – the hearts of people were changing and not for the better.

Perhaps the Knights of the Garter had an answer. Of course, that would have to wait until morning. It was this time before dawn that seemed like the longest wait of their lives.







## 9: *The Union League*

**T**he DIA van pulled up to 65 West Jackson Boulevard. A stately gray building rose before them. Their view was interrupted only by the slight flapping of a giant American flag, waving gently above the main entrance.

Established in 1879, the Union League was founded to uphold the sacred principles of citizenship, to promote honesty and efficiency in government, and to support cultural institutions and the beautification of the city. Like any club, the Union League had its secrets. Now, 11 of those secrets were waiting for the 12th to arrive.

Beele pulled into the parking garage located next to the Union League building and eased the van into a larger parking spot normally reserved for delivery trucks and limousines. As he went to unlock the vehicle's doors for the teenagers, he found that the automatic button was stuck. The doors wouldn't open. He tried to push the door open with his shoulder, but to no avail.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

Vic saw the curator struggling with the driver's side door and made an aggressive attempt to pry open the side door of the vehicle, pushing at it with all 125 pounds of his teenage force.

The doors would not budge.

Then, without warning, a dark, crimson figure thunked hard on the hood of the Econoline van – BOOM!

“Greetings, fellow travelers!” a snide voice slid right through the front windshield like a foul, muffled breeze, “I trust that you are enjoying your stay in this wonderful city?”

“Lutin!” everyone seemed to yell in simultaneous surprise.

As the group stared at the copper-colored troll sitting on the hood of their vehicle, they couldn't help but notice how he had grown in size and stature since their last encounter. The Nain Rouge looked more powerful than ever. His scrawny, stubby arms and legs seemed to have grown. There were noticeable muscles on all of his appendages. He also appeared less slouched and curled than before. There was a menacing vitality in the way he sat upright directly in front of them.

“Let us out!” Lynni yelled in fury and panic, “Now!”

“As you wish, child...” Lutin said dismissively.

With that, he waved his hand and the door locks popped open. Vic reached for the door handle immediately, but it was burning hot. The handle singed his fingertips and he cried out with a painful yelp. Lutin smiled with fiendish glee and slid toward them from the hood of the vehicle, seeping through the front windshield like eerie liquid smoke. With great deft and dexterity, he stepped onto the dashboard of the van, sitting comfortably in front of his captive audience.

## *Chapter 9: The Union League*

“What’s the matter?” Lutin chided, “Did you change your minds? How sweet, that you wish to stay and chat with me for a while.”

“Stop messin’ around!” Vic yelled, “You can’t keep us here!”

“Whether I can or cannot keep you here is irrelevant,” the Nain Rouge responded coldly. “In fact, all of you are irrelevant. The changing times are upon us and there is nothing that any of you can do about it. Do you think these explosions and disasters are the end of it? Ha! They are just the beginning...”

Lutin sat up and then stood on top of the dashboard, pulsating red with power and energy.

“How pathetic! You thought you could catch me, Lutin, by following me around the countryside in an old truck? You are more ridiculous than you could ever know!”

Lutin’s arms were pumping up and down and his head was oscillating wildly, back and forth.

“I cannot be stopped! Soon, humanity will feel what I have felt for the past three hundred years. Soon, the hatred, the anger and the pain will be yours to wallow in like the sad little pigs you are.” Lutin smiled with great satisfaction, “And do you know the most delicious morsel of it all? The fact that you and your kind are doing it all to yourselves.”

Lutin looked right at Tom and Elly. He had vowed not to reveal any of his intentions ever again, yet somehow, he felt that Tom and Elly might possess some secret knowledge like the last time they confronted him. The Nain Rouge’s eyes glowered deep into the teenager’s faces. He was searching their expressions, their thoughts for anything that might expose any unseen information

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

that could be used against the red dwarf.

The teens knew better, though. They refused to meet Lutin's glaring red eyes with their own. Instead, they hung their heads down, nearly pressing their chins against their chests.

"Oh, the clever lambs have grown shy," Lutin mocked them. "To no avail, young ones. The die has been cast and your futures are in the rubbish heap with the rest of your kind. Breathe deeply, my friends; there is freedom in the air!"

On that bizarre, unsettling note, the door locks of the vehicle closed and opened in violent repetition as Lutin vanished in a confusion of sulphuric smoke.

Like deer in the high beams of an oncoming Jeep, all of the occupants of the van sat stunned. Though the events that just occurred took only a few minutes in real time, it seemed like they'd been trapped for hours inside of the vehicle. Lutin's presence had a strange way of twisting time into disorienting and surreal knots.

Dr. Beele broke the frozen trance with a clarity that blew the smoke out of everyone's brains, "Let's get inside now. We needn't keep the council waiting any longer."

The dizzy troop fell out of the van and stumbled slightly on their way to the main entrance of the Union League Club. The spinning of the heavy brass revolving doors only added to their disorientation, as they soon stood huddled together in the front lobby of the old, stately building.

The lobby of the Union League Club stood in stark contrast to our weary, wobbly travelers. There was nothing weary or wobbly about these grand surroundings. Enveloping the group were the polished dark mahogany moldings, checker-tiled floors and heavy

## *Chapter 9: The Union League*

wet-plastered walls that echoed the strength, endurance and fortitude of old Chicago. There was an honorable energy in the club; an energy that seemed to have been created over generations, by souls that sought something better for humankind.

This was just the kind of energy that Dr. Beele, Tom, Elly, Vic, AJ and Lynni needed to revive their spirits. It was as if they had found sanctuary from the negativity that continued to grow throughout the rest of the country.

“May I help you?” a friendly voice said from behind a dark oak desk.

It was the first friendly voice they’d heard since meeting Dr. Bellflower back at the museum.

“Yes, you may,” Dr. Beele replied with a bit of hesitation, “We are looking for the meeting of the National Art Council.”

“Yes, sir. That would be on the third floor, in the St. George Conference Suite.”

The desk clerk escorted the party of six across the grand lobby to the waiting elevators. Soon, the slightly shaken group was on their way upstairs to meet the other Knights of the Order, masked by their professions as art scholars and experts in antiquities.

The elevator was old and slow. What it maintained in traditional style and grandeur, it lacked in speed. The ride up to the third floor seemed to take forever.

“What do you think Lutin meant when he said we were ‘doing it to ourselves’?” Lynni broke in from the back of the Otis lift.

Elly wondered, as well, “Yeah, we know that he’s releasing the negative energy all over the country, but why would he say that we’re the ones doing it?”

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

“Maybe he doesn’t want to take responsibility?” Vic conjectured.

“No, that’s not it,” AJ answered. “I don’t think the Nain Rouge cares a bit about responsibility. Actually, I think he gave us a clue without even knowing he did.”

“What clue?” Tom asked.

“He just confirmed what Dr. Beele said about how the negative energy is spreading. This is the clue that shows us how Lutin will complete the grid.” AJ seemed quite sure of himself and the rest of the group listened intently. “When we’re exposed to the bad energy, we can either fight it or fall for it. Most people will fall under its power without even realizing it. I’ll bet when that happens, it just creates more negative energy. He’s using us like bees to pollinate our own black flowers, cultivating our own destruction!”

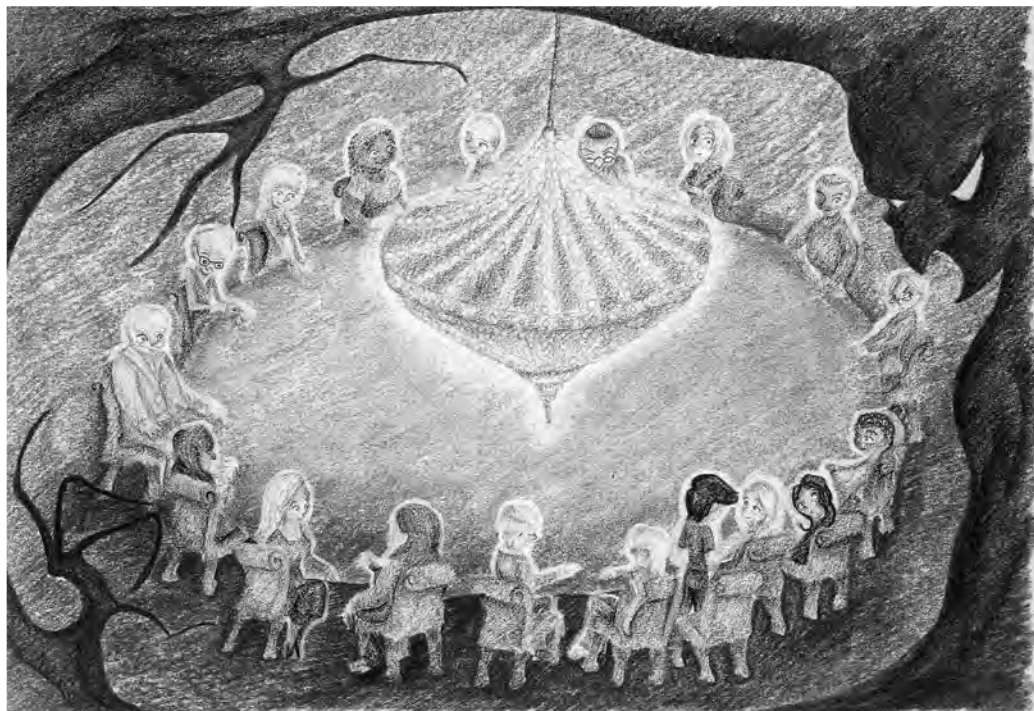
“It’s like a virus, a disease! It will grow and spread no matter what we do!” Elly added as it clicked in her brain.

“A pandemic of evil...” Beele blurted out with an exasperated breath of horror and helplessness. “The natural gas is just one agent that’s bringing the negativity to the surface. Once above the earth, the bad energy will spread like the flame of a torch, passed from one branch to the next. The flames will multiply without ever losing their original strength, growing more powerful and destructive until the entire world is engulfed in an inferno of invisible fire.”

With a weakened sigh, Beele wondered quietly how or if the growing flames could ever be extinguished.









## 10: *The Art Council*

**T**he elevator doors to the third floor finally opened into a Victorian-style hallway complete with rose-colored, flowered wallpaper, antique, upholstered chairs, and a claw-foot coffee table.

Dr. Margaret Anne Bellflower was standing in the shadow of the conference room door, welcoming the group into the large and well-appointed room.

“Ronnie, children, welcome!” Dr. Bellflower stepped out of doorway and beckoned the group into the large conference room. She seemed to have regained the glow and luster in her cheeks that had been drained out in those dark hours in the museum. Her cheery demeanor had a strengthening effect on Tom, Elly, Lynni, Vic and AJ. Even Dr. Beele appeared a bit more at ease as the entire entourage made their way around the large oval, mahogany table to the six vacant chairs that were waiting especially for them.

As they walked around the table to their seats, they caught

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the eye of every individual already seated in their designated chairs. On the table, in front of each person, was a name card that identified each Knight of the Order. The teens scanned all eleven names, trying to gather in the information quickly, without staring or appearing rude:

Martin Mulholland – Albuquerque, New Mexico

Lilith Fairchild – New York City, New York

Malachi Randolph – Scranton, Pennsylvania

Wilson Gartner – San Francisco, California

Karen Scofield – Atlanta, Georgia

Julianne Lynn – Charlottesville, North Carolina

Bertram Bernhard – Los Angeles, California

Kevin Sticklely – Seattle, Washington

Cheryl Jones – Cincinnati, Ohio

Hollis Graveslee – Nashville, Tennessee

Nancy Feinstein – Dallas, Texas

Once seated, a few minutes were set aside for formal introductions. With each passing face, Tom, Elly, Lynni, Vic and AJ felt that they were in the company of greatness. They couldn't quite put their fingers on it, but something about this collection of people created such a strange force within the room, that the darkness that had previously permeated their thoughts seemed to slip into the pale shadows of the room.

Each introduction came with an odd smile and an acknowledging nod of the head from every member of the council. When Dr. Beele's turn came, he too spoke with a soft, reassuring tone

## *Chapter 10: The Art Council*

that only added to the growing oddness inside the room.

Now it was the teens turn to introduce themselves. They were more than a little nervous. It was very intimidating to speak directly to such an esteemed group of knights, professors and scholars. Tom began the introductions with a curt nod and an uncomfortable, crooked smile. Elly, Lynni, Vic and AJ followed suit, simply stating their names and nodding humbly in front of the council. Each nod from the children was greeted with a thin smile in return, providing a lukewarm sense of security or reassurance.

With the introductions and pleasantries properly exchanged, Dr. Bellflower began, “Well now, should we all get down to the business of the day, then?”

“Excuse me, Maggie,” Dr. Beele gently interrupted, “Before we begin, I think everyone should know about our confrontation in the parking garage just a few minutes ago.”

“Ronnie, don’t tell me you were accosted?!” Dr. Bellflower acted as if Dr. Beele had been attacked by a mugger or a street hoodlum of some kind.

“Well, in a manner of speaking, we were all accosted – by the Nain Rouge.”

An audible gasp filled the room as the council shot glances back and forth between Dr. Beele, the children and themselves.

Dr. Gartner of San Francisco questioned, “What’s the meaning of all this, Beele? Do you mean to tell us that the Nain Rouge is here at the Union League Club at this very minute?”

Hieronimus replied with great clarity, “No, the Nain Rouge disappeared from view only a short time ago. Please, let me explain. Lutin trapped us in our van down the parking garage as we tried

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

to enter the Union League Club. He inadvertently confirmed what we have suspected all along, that he's connecting a negative energy grid around the entire country."

"Does he know about us? About our council meeting here?" Dr. Jones from Cincinnati asked with a sense of deep concern and slight panic.

"If he does know about the council, he did not say. But what he did say was something quite curious and puzzling. He stated that we are doing this to ourselves."

Vic interrupted quickly, "We think he's talking about the negative energy. As he connects the grid, we're the ones who are spreading the negativity from one person to another!"

The council stared at Vic as if his interruption was one of impertinence and rudeness.

Lynni added, "It's like a disease that's spreading without anyone noticing!"

The faces of the council turned very grave and deeply serious. Private conversations sprung up between council members in the form of whispers and subtle tones, covered with cupped hands over hidden mouths. Their eyes moved back and forth from their mumbled rumblings, onto the teens and Dr. Beele and then back to their hushed discussions. This went on for a very long time.

Beele spoke quietly to Dr. Bellflower as the teenagers wondered aloud amongst themselves what all of the chatter could be about. After a few minutes, Dr. Beele nodded to Dr. Bellflower and began speaking again, "Friends, colleagues, let me be direct and to the point. Prior to this meeting, I had briefed all of you on the circumstances that lay before us. These dark times have necessi-

## *Chapter 10: The Art Council*

tated that we all convene as a group. We are here to define some solution, some answer to the problems that Lutin has created.”

Beele’s voice slowly became more forceful and compelling, as if a certain amount of frustration and anger was brimming, causing it to rise to the top of his throat and then to the tip of his tongue. “Whispering and private, unsolicited sidebar conversations serve only to further Lutin’s cause!”

A hush fell over the room as Beele’s voice continued to rise in both pitch and amplitude, “This should be a time of unity – not a time of gossip and conjecture! You may know of the events that have led us to seek your counsel and strength; however, you know nothing of the personal pain and human suffering that these children have faced at the hands of the Nain Rouge!”

It was as silent as an empty church. The Knights of the Order were dumbfounded. The teenagers were stunned. No one, not even Margaret Anne Bellflower, had ever heard Dr. Beele raise his voice in such a manner. She stared over at Dr. Beele for only a brief second, blushing slightly at the rush of tension and excitement that his powerful speech had induced in her.

Martin Mulholland of Albuquerque, New Mexico, was the first to regain his composure, “Now see here, Hieronymus...”

No sooner had the knight spoken, then he was cut off by Dr. Bellflower, “No, Dr. Beele is absolutely correct. We have no idea what our guests have been through. Far be it from us to question anything that they say. Our role here is to listen, to support and if possible, defend against the dark forces that are now swirling all around us.”

It was at the very moment that everyone in the room realized

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what was happening. Lutin was right. They *were* doing it to themselves. The field of negative energy that the Nain Rouge had created had permeated the Union League Club and infiltrated the very room in which the counsel was meeting. Any negative thought, any feeling of fear or distrust was now amplified and expanded into the rising flood of darkness.

But the speech from the Detroit curator had broken the spell – at least within that room. That message of truth, so clear and clean and direct, had sliced through the negative energy.

Elly spoke up, “Can you feel it? Can you feel the energy changing?”

AJ joined in, “I feel it! It’s like the tension is loosening. There is calm now, a more relaxing feeling.”

It was true. The anxiety and pressure that had been building up over their short time together was now dissipating. It was as if a pressure valve had been opened up and the dark steam had been released from the room. Sunlight, like the sound of bright harp strings, began to slip through the rectangular windows that framed the outside wall of the meeting room.

Hieronimus spoke once again, “So, I see now that it can be done.”

A puzzled look fell over the faces of the exhausted council members and the teenagers.

“Please, Hieronimus, we are all spent and now even more confused,” Dr. Feinstein pleaded, “We’re sorry that we were overcome by the invisible darkness, too. I fear that we offer little help to you and your friends. So, what do you mean by ‘it can be done’?”

“This was a test.” Dr. Bellflower stepped in. “Yes, I see it now.

## *Chapter 10: The Art Council*

Ronnie, you were testing all of us, weren't you?"

"Yeah," Tom concluded, "You knew the darkness was here, all around us. We could sense it, but you knew for sure. You wanted to see if we could fight it, beat it together as a group, right?"

"You are half right, young Tom." The curator continued. "Upon entering the room, I could feel the negative energy all around us. We have, however, been surrounded by it since our mishap at the museum, so that was no surprise. What was surprising was how aggressively the energy was affecting our hosts as soon as our meeting began. As the tension grew, I felt I had no other recourse but to speak my mind freely and directly. Frankly, at that point, I did not care what the results were; I only wanted the truth to be heard."

Lynni piped in, "It was the truth that freed us."

Dr. Beele smiled at her. The words of his favorite poet and artist, William Blake, rushed through his head, as he responded, "When I tell any truth, it is not for the sake of convincing those who do not know it, but for the sake of defending those that do."

It was clear now. The Nain Rouge could be fought. The negative energy that he was releasing could be diluted and weakened... maybe even destroyed. They had been able to break Lutin's spell on them, which was a great sign of hope. It was on a small scale, in a single conference room, but it did happen.

Yet, a bigger question remained. How could they help the rest of the country? How could they spread a message of truth and positive energy faster than Lutin could release evil?

It seemed the work of the Knights of the Garter had just begun.







## 11: To Tell the Truth

**S**o what is truth?

This was the question that dominated the rest of the meetings between the Knights of the Garter and the teenagers from Detroit.

How was this small band of do-gooders supposed to spread positive energy around the country in the form of truth? Is that what was going to defeat the ever-growing power of the Nain Rouge?

For the next few hours, there was a deep, philosophical debate about the meaning of truth. Dr. Beele pointed out that the negative energy dissipated only when he expressed his feelings directly to the group. So was that the truth, the willingness and strength to express one's feelings?

Dr. Malachi Randolph of Pennsylvania argued that truth was not about expressing one's feelings. Randolph asserted, "If we are to defeat the Nain Rouge, we must first agree that truth is based

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upon defining real events and facts, not opinions and feelings. We need to be objective about this and come to the same conclusion together.”

“Dr. Randolph, I disagree wholeheartedly,” came a Nashville twang from across the room. Hollis Graveslee stood up and faced Dr. Randolph. “Malachi, I have been sittin’ here listenin’ to y’all postulate about truth, philosophizing about what that word means, and it seems to be beatin’ around the bush, if you ask me. The way I see it, if you believe that there’s only one truth, and that you’re the only soul in the world in possession of it – well that’s the root of all evil. That’s what Lutin is counting on. That’s how he wins.”

“I think that you’re both right – in part,” Dr. Bellflower said as she deftly, yet graciously, inserted herself into the conversation. She got up from her seat at the table and directed her attention to everyone in the room. “Friends, I think we are over complicating the issue here, which is precisely what Lutin would like us to do. Even with the best brains in this room, there is no way in which we are going to define an abstract concept like truth – that should not be our charter anyway. We are here to stop the Nain Rouge. To do that, we need to uncover his weakness and exploit it.”

All eyes in the room were now directed on Margaret Anne Bellflower. It was as if she was cutting through the confusion and chatter, peeling away the layers of conversation to reveal something for which everyone had been looking.

“For our purposes here, truth is a combination of both head and heart. In our heads, we know that the Nain Rouge is physically releasing his negative energy into the world. Once his grid of evil is complete, his power will be unmatched. Now in our hearts, we

## *Chapter 11: To Tell the Truth*

know the effects of this energy. It causes us to snipe, bite and snap at each other, which in turn, creates more negativity. This is how the evil is spreading.”

“Spot on, Margaret!” cheered Professor Lilith Fairchild. “You have arrived at the point directly. Truth is at the same time conditional and eternal. It remains constant though its appearance may change throughout time. The truth is shaped by our unique circumstances, but its spirit remains the same. Our truth, here today, is to fight this evil by expressing the depth of our feelings for human kind and for each other.”

“Precisely, Lilith.” Bellflower agreed, “Dr. Beele shattered the darkness by expressing his deep feelings for our young guests. This depth of caring was a physical manifestation of truth and love – that is what broke Lutin’s spell and brought light into the room.”

Tom, Elly and the rest of the teenagers knew in their hearts that the Knights of the Garter finally understood now. All of their big words and lofty ideas had resulted in the revelation that the only way to combat the Nain Rouge was through tangible expressions of truth. That was the illumination they would need to pierce the veil of creeping darkness that continued to wrap itself around the country.

It was time to take action. It was now time to fight – to fight harder than they’d ever fought before.





## 12: *Sir Gawain*

“**F**riends, our time together grows short,” Dr. Beele began after many hours of deep discussion. “It is time for resolve and resolution. I do think it to be of the utmost importance that we remember the charter of our order – the Garter of Truth that drives us all.”

Lynni wondered aloud, “Dr. Beele, what’s the Garter of Truth?”

Beele began again, “An excellent question, Lynni. I would think this to be a critical and highly appropriate time to share with everyone the story of our founder, Sir Gawain.

“For those of you who don’t already know, Sir Gawain was a knight of the round table in King Arthur’s Court. During a New Year’s feast, he was challenged by an uninvited guest; a strange, green knight, who dared someone from the gathering to cut off his head with his own axe. If the challenger was successful, he would be named the victor. If he failed, he would have to meet

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the green knight again in one year's time. The green knight would then return the blow to the challenger's neck.

King Arthur was about to accept the terms of this challenge, but Sir Gawain stepped in at the last minute and took the king's place.

When Sir Gawain struck the green knight with the axe, his head came off immediately – with a single powerful blow. Then, after only a brief moment, the strange knight picked up his severed head and put it back on his body, as if he was completely unharmed.

Now Sir Gawain was forced to live up to his side of the bargain. After a year, he had to travel (through great trials and tribulations) to the green chapel to meet his adversary. During his journey, he stayed at a castle, where his honesty was tested three times by the lord of the castle, Bertilak de Hautdesert. He had agreed to share anything he received during this time with Bertilak, but he withheld a garter, given to him by the lady of the castle.

Upon leaving the castle, he finally met up with the Green Knight. As fate would have it, the Green Knight was actually the castle keeper, Bertilak, who had uncovered Sir Gawain's untruth and dishonesty.

When the time came for Sir Gawain to receive his blows from the axe, the Green Knight missed him intentionally on the first and second blows and then grazed his neck with the third, drawing a small amount of blood from the back of Sir Gawain's neck.

With that small dark mark, Sir Gawain was sent back home, wearing the green garter as a sign of his shame and dishonesty.”

Dr. Beele paused for a moment to catch his breath. It was at that point in the story that Vic interjected, “Doc, that doesn't sound like much of a brave knight to me. He hit on a married

## *Chapter 12: Sir Gawain*

woman, lost the bet, lied and then had to go home defeated. So why model yourself after a loser like that?”

Malachi Randolph stepped in before Beele could speak, “It’s what happened when he got home that changed Sir Gawain’s destiny, and our history, young man.”

“Precisely.” Beele had recovered his breath, “When Sir Gawain returned to King Arthur’s court, he was hailed a hero. He was a hero, not so much for his pure nature and for meeting the objectives of his quest, but for his ability to endure despite all of his flaws. Yes, despite his human failings, he eventually told the truth and was willing to own up to his mistakes. King Arthur saw these traits of humility, perseverance and forgiveness as admirable qualities that should be retained by each of his knights.”

Randolph added, “The garter that had initially been worn as a symbol of shame and defeat, became a symbol of human truth, solidarity and triumph over our inevitable human weaknesses. That is why our order exists. That is why we are here.”

There was a feeling of general acknowledgment and agreement in the room. The other knights appreciated how Dr. Beele and Dr. Randolph had been able to convey the true meaning of the Order of the Garter with such depth and clarity. The teenagers seemed to embrace the words that had just been shared with them. As they looked around at each other in silent unity, they felt as if they were now sharing a deeper connection with the entire council.

Before anyone had time to reflect upon the stories and conversations, Dr. Beele’s face lit up like an incandescent bulb. His expression changed from his usual calm, pensive look to one of agitated excitement. Nobody was quite sure what to make of this

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middle-aged man, now scrambling through his brown leather briefcase like an adolescent boy who had forgotten where he'd put his homework from last night.

"A moment, please, if you will!" the Detroit curator yelled out to no one in particular.

"What is it Ronnie, what's wrong?" Margaret Anne Bellflower asked as she came over to calm the curator down.

"The book! The book! It's all in the book!" Beele shouted out, with his head deeply buried within his luggage.

Before Bellflower could react, Dr. Beele popped his head out of the leather case, wearing a grin laced with great satisfaction and delight, "Aha! I've found it!"

Within the curator's hand was a small, ratty-looking book that appeared to be very old.

"*Le Prince Lutin* from 1697!" Beele affirmed as he dropped the book down on the conference table with a satisfying SLAP!

"What in the blazes are you talking about, Hieronymus?" Dr. Stickley of Seattle questioned.

"See here, Kevin. This book, this French fairy tale that I have had for so many years – it is the key.

Beele glanced over at the teens. "When Tom and Elly first came to me a few years ago, I referenced this book in my search to explain the Nain Rouge. In fact, here is the passage I found ..." Dr. Beele opened up the book and began to read the words that rang quite familiar in Tom and Elly's ears:

*"You are invisible when you like it; you cross in one moment the vast space of the universe; you rise without having wings; you go*



## Chapter 12: Sir Gawain

*through the ground without dying; you penetrate the abysses of the sea without drowning; you enter everywhere, though the windows and the doors are closed; and, when you decide to, you can let yourself be seen in your natural form."*

A chill ran through Elly's body, "Dr. Beele, we already know that stuff about Lutin, so what's the big deal?"

"The big deal, my dear, is in another passage from the book that I never read to you before. Its significance has always puzzled me...confounded me for years, until this very day. It speaks of how one might deal with Lutin, should he ever cross one's path." Beele read the following passage aloud for the entire room to hear:

*"Give what you took  
And return what you stole  
The nightmare will end  
With release of your soul."*

There was a long pause in the room. Nobody really knew what to say or think.

"So, what does it mean, Ronnie?" Dr. Bellflower said softly.

"It's in response to Lutin's first curse on Detroit. It's how we defeat him."

Tom stood up quickly and spat out, "Dr. Beele is right! Lutin himself told us about the curse he put on us, our forefathers and Detroit! When they kicked him out of Fort Pontchartrain, he told them,

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*'Take what you steal and steal what you keep  
The shepherd must pay for his sins with his sheep.'*

“That quote from Dr. Beele’s book must link directly back to the original curse!”

Elly added with equal amounts of energy, “It all makes sense now! The shepherd doesn’t actually have to pay for his sins with his sheep – he just has to tell the truth, to right the wrongs of his past.”

“Lutin lied to you, then,” Lilith Fairchild stated matter-of-factly.

“Of course, he lied,” Dr. Beele interjected, “He is evil and the lord of lies. By believing his untruths, these children were pulled right into his trap and almost paid for it with their own lives.”

“So, now what are we supposed to do, Doc?” Vic added, with AJ and Lynni wondering along with him. “How do the few people in this room make the world right again? How do we make up for the screw-ups our ancestors made? It’s impossible!”

Hieronymus Beele leaned back in his chair, almost far enough to lift the two front legs off of the ground. He stroked his chin thoughtfully, before slowly leaning forward, “You have come to the crux of the problem, Victor, my boy – the very crux. The answer to your questions is simply this: We will lead by example to change the hearts of humanity.

We must be the keepers of truth who spread its light deep into the darkness.”





## 13: *The Storm Upon Us*

**A**ll hell had broken loose.

In that short time within the Union League Club, it was as if the cardboard cut-out of society had come unglued. Phones were ringing off of their hooks, as each member of the Order fielded calls from around the country, documenting floods, minor earthquakes and multiple tornadoes. Outside the window of their Union League conference room, they could hear hail, pelting the building like small chunks of concrete thrown down from the sky.

Even worse were the reported crimes against humanity. Each knight learned of the rapid rise in crime, theft and fighting in the streets of their regions, towns and neighborhoods. In some cases, the National Guard had been called out to put a stop to all of the insurrection.

People reported seeing the Nain Rouge, too, though they had no name for the little red creature that danced with delight

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near each disaster or mishap. Seeing him didn't seem to matter anymore. It was as if he was everywhere all at once. The damage was being done whether people believed in him or not.

It was time for the meeting of the Order of the Garter to adjourn. The winter break from school was almost over, and Tom, Elly, Vic, Lynni and AJ had to get back home. Even though they all really wanted to help, they knew that the problems with Lutin were now far beyond their abilities alone. It would take a group effort, a greater force of good, to combat the evil that had been unleashed on the country. The plan of action had been agreed upon by the entire council, like Dr. Beele had suggested.

The truth would be revealed through the museums.

Before the final recess of the council, the Knights of the Order of the Garter had acknowledged that the seeds of distrust and evil had been planted in multiple places over the course of human history. The artifacts of human existence now resided in museum collections all around the world.

Dr. Bertram Bernhard of Los Angeles pointed out to the group, "Our museums, our centers of culture and learning, are filled with objects of historical and artistic significance. I must admit, however, and with a sense of growing shame, that a number of these objects were obtained from sketchy dealers or by less reputable means. I have no idea where some of our pieces belong. Our archives are filled with artifacts that originated from unknown sources."

There was a general consensus from the group that all of their museums may be filled with historic items that may hold the seeds of untruth and evil.

## *Chapter 13: The Storm Upon Us*

Dr. Scofield from Atlanta added, “As curators of the collections in our respective museums, the responsibility falls upon us to validate these objects. We must reveal the truth about these items, even if it means exposing fakes, forgeries, or objects that have been obtained unfairly over the centuries.”

AJ had been sitting for hours, listening to the Knights of the Order go back and forth on all of these topics. Thoughts had been swirling through his teenage brain and he finally had to say what he’d been thinking.

“Maybe that’s why Lutin started with the museums – those are the places where the best part of humanity is on display. Our history is scattered throughout your halls for everyone to see. It’s just that we never saw the bad stuff – but Lutin did. He knew what was there all along.”

AJ was right, and the Knights of the Order were quick to admit it. In fact, there was a firm agreement by the council to quickly try to rectify the situation in an effort to subdue the Nain Rouge. The plan was put down in writing and agreed upon with a unanimous decision.

Each curator would head home to their region of the country. They would work within their museum networks to find the truth about their collections and artifacts. Once they had done their research, they would announce their findings to the public, opening the doors of each museum for everyone to see the truth – uncovered.

Margaret Anne Bellflower took the written plan and reviewed it with the group once more. They committed it to memory. Upon final approval, Dr. Bellflower folded the thin sheet of paper and

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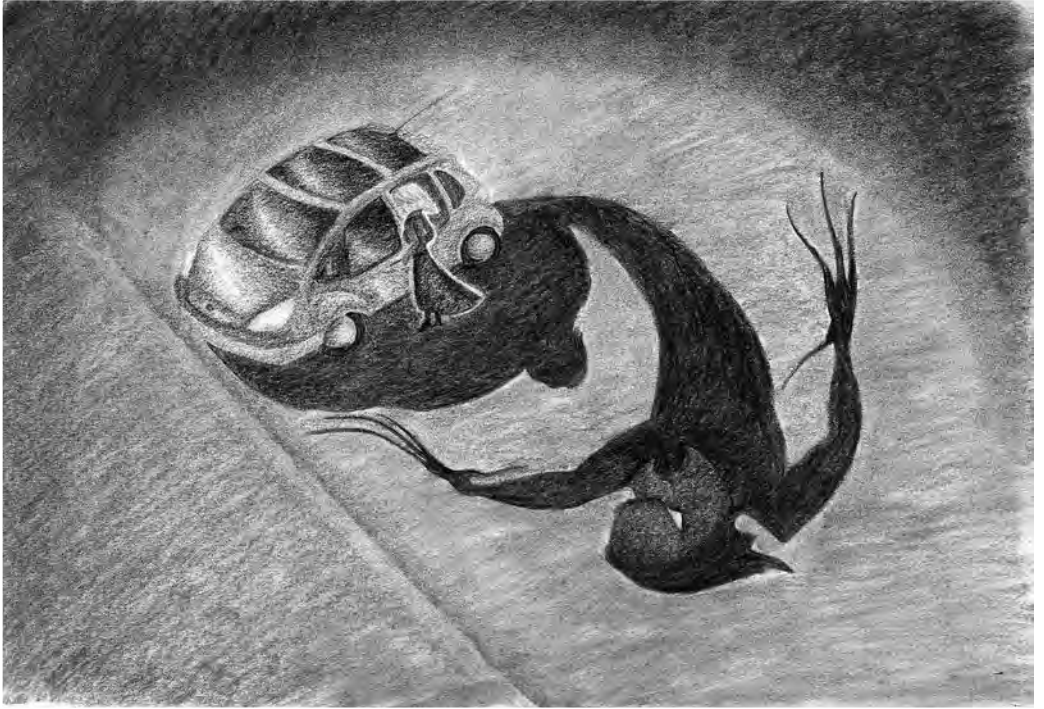
lit it on fire with a long stick match. As the plan burned in a large ceramic ashtray in the middle of the conference table, each Knight of the Order knew that their time had come.

Through the subtle smoke and ashes that rose up and curled darkly in the air, the faces of the council expressed a singular, determined thought.

It was time for battle.







## 14: *Moving Shadows*

**L**ilith Fairchild left the Union League Club quickly. She pulled her car out of the parking garage onto Wacker Avenue. She had scheduled an early evening flight back to New York, where she would begin her difficult mission to set up an exhibit that would purge her museum of negative energy.

As she headed out to Chicago's O'Hare Airport, she could feel the negative power all around her. Through the rain and hail that had been constantly pelting her car, she could sense the bad attitudes and anger of the other drivers and of pedestrians shuffling through the wet, cold streets.

The traffic light was yellow, but she was sure that she had enough time to get through the intersection.

A quick glance in her rear view mirror sent a sudden shock of terror through her entire body.

"Good day, Lilith," came a cold, slithery voice from the back

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seat of the sedan. “In a bit of a hurry, are we?”

“Lutin!” Dr. Fairchild yelled, “Wha – How – What are you doing?!”

“I should ask you the same question – Doctor!” Lutin shot back like a viper, spitting venom. “I’m quite sure that your desire to get back to New York so quickly is not due to homesickness. As a Knight of the Order, you are duty bound to battle me at every turn. And that is where you will find your efforts futile!”

Dr. Fairchild had completely forgotten that she was driving. The appearance of the Nain Rouge was such a shock, that her mind seemed to go into a trance, where she was totally unaware of her surroundings.

Suddenly, there was the sound of horns and screeching brakes everywhere.

CRASH!

BOOM!

THUD.

The airbag had exploded directly in Dr. Fairchild’s face, preventing her head from flying through the windshield of her car. The front of the vehicle was completely smashed in from the light post she had just rammed into. She’d made it through the intersection, but the distraction from the Nain Rouge caused her to lose control of the steering wheel, sending her onto the sidewalk and into the heavy steel street light.

A few people were now gathered around the smoldering, smoking car, trying to pry open the driver’s side door to get Lilith out of the wreckage.

Once she was safely on the curb, she noticed that only a few

## *Chapter 14: Moving Shadows*

people had stopped to help. Strangely, the rest of the drivers and pedestrians continued on their way, as if nothing had happened. Lilith was sure that this was another effect of the negative energy that continued to spread across the country. The incident left her with mixed feelings of sadness and hope.

She was sad that more people weren't willing to stop and help a fellow human being. But her hopes were raised by the handful of strangers who had fought off the negative energy all around them and proceeded to do the right thing by offering her assistance in her time of need.

Strangely enough, similar scenes were playing out as the other council members left the Union League Club to return to their regions.

Martin Mulholland's plane had to be rerouted on its way back to Albuquerque, New Mexico. The pilot made an emergency landing when someone claimed they saw a small, red creature pulling off one of the electrical panels on the wing of the plane.

Malachi Randolph got caught in a terrible snowstorm. It came out of nowhere, as he drove across Indiana and Ohio on his way back to Scranton, Pennsylvania. He was stuck on the roadside for an entire night until help finally arrived almost a day later.

Wilson Gartner was stuck in Chicago. He decided to stay put for a while, as the earthquakes in San Francisco were now too numerous and too powerful for him to return to the region.

Karen Scofield made it back to Atlanta, but when she got home, she found that there had been a terrible fire. Many of her prized belongings had been burned in the blaze and she was left with little more than a smoldering shell for a house.

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When Julianne Lynn got back to Charlottesville, North Carolina, she found her dog and cat had run away. They were nowhere to be seen. Fortunately, she found them a few days later, scared, clearly having been frightened by something. They had been hiding in the woods at the end of her street.

Bertram Bernhard also made it back to Los Angeles, but he felt that he was being followed the entire way home. It was as if a dark shadow kept looming over him everywhere he went. It didn't matter if it was dark or light out, the shadow never seemed to leave him.

Kevin Stickley finally returned to Seattle. His return trip was prolonged by a terrible case of the flu that hit just him before he left Chicago. On a layover in Denver, Dr. Stickley had to be driven to the hospital, where he laid for days, in a deep stupor from his illness.

Cheryl Jones drove back to Cincinnati with her engine smoking constantly. She too claimed to have seen the Nain Rouge, hitchhiking by the side of the road, with an eerie grin and a long, gnarled finger that pointed directly at her as she passed.

Hollis Graveslee had to call one of his friends to retrieve him from the Union League Club. At the end of their last meeting, an incredible fear overcame him and he was unable to leave the conference room. Despite everyone's best efforts, he would not get up from his chair at the table. Eventually, Dr. Graveslee, his chair and his luggage were transported back to Nashville. He had to sit upright and alone in his chair, in the covered bed of a pick-up truck that his friend had driven up from Tennessee.

Nancy Feinstein took the train back to Dallas. During her

## *Chapter 14: Moving Shadows*

journey, an odd little waiter offered her a complimentary cup of black tea. She didn't remember much after that, only waking up in the Dallas train station with a dizzying headache and her clothes slightly dirty and torn. Her jewelry and luggage were missing, as well. The only thing that remained was the strange taste of sulphur and almonds lingering in her mouth for days after her journey.

It was clear that the knights were off to a very poor start in battling the Nain Rouge. If these first few days of the fight were any indication... the war was far from over.







## 15: *The Return to Motown*

**W**inter break was over, and Dr. Beele and his group of teens needed to get back to Detroit and Royal Oak as soon as possible. School was starting again on Monday and Hieronymus Beele needed to marshal his troops at the Detroit Institute of Arts for the largest and most controversial exhibit of his life. Tom, Elly, Vic, Lynni and AJ were completely worn out from their harrowing journey. There was almost a sense of relief that they didn't have to shoulder the whole burden of battling Lutin anymore. The battle had begun, but they were no longer alone.

The plan the Knights of the Garter had formulated was for each region of the country to bring all of the artifacts, objects and works of art out of the archives of the museums throughout their network. The true history and origin of these objects would be presented to the public. This meant that any work containing a sketchy or dark past would be revealed in its entirety, as honestly

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and truthfully as possible.

These exhibits would be launched simultaneously around the country in hopes that the positive spirit of forgiveness, understanding and acceptance would break the spell that the Nain Rouge had cast over the land.

All of the presentations would be marketed and presented with the title:

#### **The Red Truth Exhibits**

The greatest challenge that faced all of the knights and their friends was “time.” Time was running out. The Nain Rouge had a death grip on the entire country. It was as if the grid he had created was now wrapped around the nation. Like a fisherman’s net cast out wide along the water, evil was pulling people in, snaring souls like unsuspecting fish being pulled to shore in angry, anxious bunches.

As the museum van crossed into Detroit for the first time in a week, there was a feeling of both anxiety and relief for the weary travelers.

Dr. Beele would spend a great many days in the basement archives of the DIA, working with his team of curators and conservators to catalogue and validate each object for the Red Truth Exhibits.

In the darkly lit archive rooms, a small group of men and women labeled artifacts to be displayed in the exhibit. Each item needed to be researched, tagged and cleaned before it would be ready for presentation to museum patrons in a few weeks.

The scene in the basement of the Detroit Institute of Arts was being played out all across the country. Every museum within the

## *Chapter 15: The Return to Motown*

network was preparing for their own Red Truth Exhibit, identifying, tagging and cleaning objects from their own collections.

The process was slow. In every city and town, curators were running into problems and issues with getting the exhibit together. One day, the lights stopped working and the power went out. The next day, the heat shut off and filled many museums with a creeping cold that froze the curators' hands and fingers. Some selected artifacts even disappeared, only to reappear in the men's bathroom or behind a coat rack in the main lobby. Yes, strange happenings became the norm for these dedicated workers; despite all the problems they faced, every museum trudged on with preparing the Red Truth Exhibits.

Tom, Elly, Vic, Lynni and AJ returned home on Sunday afternoon with barely enough time to prepare for school the next day. Nearly all of them had forgotten that they had a term paper due by Wednesday of that week. Ironically, the topic of the paper was to be a discussion of the impact of Art on modern society. Each of them could certainly put a new twist on that subject – if anyone would believe them.

The shortened weekend evaporated into nothingness and, sooner than expected, the teens found themselves in the familiar halls of Royal Oak High School.

Only now, things seemed completely different.

“Doesn't this feel weird?” Lynni leaned over to Elly as they stood by their lockers in the hallway.

“Yeah, it's weird, Lynni, but get used to it – we're in high school,” Elly replied matter-of-factly.

“No, you don't get it, El – Everyone seems even weirder than

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when all this stuff started. Nobody talks to each other. All I ever hear are people mumbling under their breath. They don't even look at you when you say, 'Hi.' The best I got today was a grunt from Steve DiPalma!"

Just then, Tom, Vic and AJ came up to the girls.

"Is this spooky or what?" Vic butted in.

Elly and Lynni gave Vic a look like they had no idea what he was talking about – but they knew exactly what he was talking about.

"Why is no one here hanging around after class?" AJ wondered aloud. "It's like everyone just goes to class and then goes home... very creepy, if you ask me."

"Guys, we all know why this is happening," Tom pointed out as he looked around the empty halls. "The negative energy has taken hold. It's gotten even worse since we left for winter break. Man, I hope Beele and the others can make their plan work... I just wish we could help somehow."





## 16: *The Basking Dwarf*

**L**utin sat inside his sewer, filled with great comfort and satisfaction. His plan was working to perfection. The negative energy grid was almost complete and soon he would have complete control of the entire country, and then the entire world.

He chuckled quietly to himself, “The fruits of my labor have finally ripened. How wonderfully delicious it is to sit here in my new-found glory and splendor, while those humans flop around above me like panicked fish on a wooden dock – how I love to watch them gasp for air!”

Lutin gingerly adjusted his seat against the slimy sewer wall, happy with the thought of the darkness that continued to descend upon the world. He knew that his time had finally arrived and that it would be impossible for anyone to turn the tide against him.

“They’ve had this coming for a long time,” he said to himself, “I tried to be nice, tried to be helpful, cordial... but their egos ...

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their greed... their selfishness – These are the blankets they have chosen for their beds.”

Lutin then thought about the Knights of the Garter. He knew what they were up to. It didn't matter anymore. Their efforts were so weak and futile that it only served to tickle his wicked brain. In his corrupted mind, he was unstoppable.

With that warm and reassuring thought, Lutin flew out of the lowest level of the sewer to the surface streets above, penetrating the walls, brick and concrete with ghostly ease. He was now happily resolved to take a personal view of the destruction and mayhem that he had caused around the entire country.

In an instant, the Nain Rouge was in the air, traveling faster than the speed of light. Streets, houses and cars flew past him like the blurred wings of a floating hummingbird. Mountains, rivers and fields approached and departed from Lutin's gaze in only an instant.

Despite his rapid journey, the Nain Rouge was magically able to view all the scenes that played out on the ground below him. With crystal clarity, he could detect the crumpled houses that had fallen into great gaps in the concrete, caused by recent earthquakes. Lutin gushed at the sight of hundreds of cars and trucks being swept away by the raging floodwaters of rivers overflowing their banks. He was filled with glee, watching a cluster of tornadoes rip through corn and wheat fields, chewing up everything in their path.

But the greatest, most satisfying spectacle for the evil little dwarf was the people. As he gazed down upon the land and water, he saw numerous people – men, women and children – in various stages of turmoil. Some were arguing over parking places at the



## *Chapter 16: The Basking Dwarf*

local mall. Some were fighting about whose turn it was to watch the children. And some simply watched and refused to help others who had been hurt or who were in need of some assistance.

Lutin took all of this in. Like a deep breath of stale, foul air, the Nain Rouge inhaled all of the evil and negativity that continued to blossom around the country.

As with most things in the world of the Nain Rouge, Lutin eventually began to grow tired of his travels. He became more and more curious and he couldn't help but wonder what was happening with those meddling teenagers and that ineffectual curator from the place where he was once imprisoned. He couldn't help himself. He needed to see the sullen, sad masks of defeat hanging from the faces of those who thought they could overcome the power of the Nain Rouge.

"I think it's about time to pay my friends a last visit – one final taste of victory in the land of my making."

On an imperceptible wisp of putrid air, Lutin was gone again, heading back to the city and the straits where his new reign over the land and water would begin.



## 17: *Let's Make a Deal*

**T**he early March skies over Detroit were strangely calm and blue, as the Nain Rouge broke through and crossed the border of the city. It had been a long while since he had penetrated the invisible wall that once held him captive for so many years.

Now, he could come and go as he pleased. No longer was he bound to the land that he had once sworn to protect. No longer was he a prisoner to his own curse, the curse that unwittingly locked him up in the city for over three hundred years.

It was with great satisfaction that Lutin was able to slither under the streets and through the sky at his own will. He revelled in his new-found freedom, a freedom that grew along with his increasingly evil power.

Yet, as he slid up from the sewer onto Woodward Avenue, he felt different. Something wasn't right.

"HMMMM..." he thought out loud to himself, "There is some-

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

thing different about this place now. What is wrong here?”

Lutin took a walk around the neighborhood. He was barely noticed by the heavy foot traffic along Woodward near Midtown and Wayne State University.

Students shuffled from class to class in the late winter cold with barely an acknowledgment of each other or Lutin. This pleased the Nain Rouge. He could see that his negative energy was still permeating the people here like it was across the rest of the country.

Still, something did not sit right with the red dwarf. The bad attitudes of the people seemed just fine, but where were the natural disasters? There should have been more flooding, tornadoes and power outages. This unsettled the Nain Rouge and heightened his anger, anguish and paranoia.

“I’ll pay a little visit to the good doctor to see what he is up to. It’s too quiet around here, if you ask me.”

In an instant, Lutin was slipping through the front doors of the DIA, discreetly making his way down the marble steps to the basement archives. When he reached the entryway door, the Nain Rouge creaked it open just a little, in order to spy on the activity that was taking place in the rooms beyond. Dr. Beele looked up for moment when he heard the noise, but resumed his work when he could see nothing of substance in the doorway.

To Lutin’s surprise, he could see the makings of a grand exhibit being put together by Beele and his team of conservators. There were objects from all different time periods, in many different styles and mediums.

“So, this is their plan to defeat me? An exhibit?” Lutin laughed

## *Chapter 17: Let's Make a Deal*

loudly. He shuttered and spit and guffawed like a braying donkey – hee-hawing at the top of his lungs. He laughed so loudly, in fact, that Dr. Beele stood up and looked around the room with great surprise.

With his spectacles firmly pressed on to the end of his nose, he cried out, “Lutin! I know you are here! Make yourself known!”

The Nain Rouge stepped out into the light, away from the boxes and crates, from where he’d been eavesdropping.

“Oh, Dr. Beele!” Lutin oozed with false apologies, “I’m so sorry to disturb you in your important work!” Lutin looked around at the artifacts and scoffed.

“What brings you here?” Beele demanded of the red dwarf.

“Curiosity and comfort,” the Nain Rouge replied with a long, snide, biting grin. “I was curious as to what you were working on and comforted by the fact that my work is nearly complete.

“You’re a fool if you think humanity can be overtaken so easily,” Hieronymus shot back at the red dwarf.

“Oh, am I?” Lutin chuckled. “See for yourself, it’s playing out right in front of you – right in front of them and they don’t even know it!”

With a great sweep of his little arm, the Nain Rouge began to generate a vortex around both the good doctor and himself. A great whooshing of wind filled the archive room and before Dr. Beele could utter another word, he found himself flying up and out of the basement toward the great coved ceiling of the main hall. Beele shut his eyes tightly as he braced for a powerful impact with the hard, white plaster of the museum’s inner roof.

The impact never came.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

Instead, Dr. Beele and the Nain Rouge penetrated the many layers of the DIA ceiling with great force and speed. With no effort of their own, the two dark figures were lifted skyward, beyond the trees, rooftops, and antenna towers of the city. If anyone had bothered to look up (which they didn't), they would have only seen two tiny specks in the sky, probably mistaken as lost balloons or maybe two small seagulls making their way across the river to Canada.

Eventually, the tiny tornado slowed its spinning and gently set the doctor and Lutin on top of the tallest building in Detroit. They were left alone on the lofty roof of the central tower of the Renaissance Center, a group of seven interconnected glass towers that loomed high above the Detroit riverfront.

From this perch, Dr. Beele grew dizzy looking at the land and water that rolled out before his eyes. Yet, despite the great height, he found that there was no wind or noise to trouble him or the Nain Rouge. It was as if the vortex that continued to swirl silently around them had created a comfortable vacuum, allowing both figures to sit, stand or move about without fear of falling.

“Take a look around you, Doctor,” Lutin offered, as he waved his hand again. “As far as the eye can see, the crimes of men and women continue unfettered.”

Dr. Beele looked south, down the river toward Lake Erie. Astonishingly, his vision suddenly became telescopic. The curator looked down from his airy seat, through the atmosphere, the clouds, and the trees until a small side street came into plain view. On this street, he saw two hooded figures knocking down a helpless pedestrian and stealing his wallet. It was all right there, as plain

## *Chapter 17: Let's Make a Deal*

as day. It was as if Beele could have reached out to intervene and helped the man who was lying on the ground. But he couldn't. He was miles away, stuck on a city skyscraper.

Lutin then pointed in a different direction, further out of the city. In fact, it was as if he could point to other regions, in the direction of other states and they would be drawn closer to his outstretched finger with the same telescopic effect. The Nain Rouge began to show Dr. Beele images of his dirty work in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Texas, Wyoming, California, and even as far away as Alaska.

Wherever Lutin pointed, some terrible image of the troubles in the world would play out before the tear-filled eyes of Hieronymus Beele.

“Enough! I’ve seen enough!” Beele finally cried out. “You’ve made your point, Lutin. Now, what do you want of me?”

Lutin sat back gingerly on a steel heating duct, “Well now, I’ve been thinking,” the red dwarf stroked his dirty red chin. “I must admit, it has been great fun exacting my revenge on humanity. Yet, as things continue to flow in my favor, I have grown bored of being alone in my glory. I need someone to share it with – a partner in crime, if you will.”

“What are you saying, Lutin?” Dr. Beele stated, a bit confused.

“Yes, yes, I was just getting to that. As things get progressively worse for your kind, I feel it important to have someone to bask in my glory with me. Over the years, I have watched you, Hieronymus. Once I thought you to be an old fool, an imbecile like the rest of your kind. However, you have proven to be an intelligent man; an individual who can truly appreciate the darkness that I have cast



### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

over the entire country. When taking all of that into consideration, I have chosen you to be my understudy – my right-hand man!”

“You’re insane!” Beele blurted out in disbelief. “What would ever make you think that I would side with you?”

“A valid question, my good doctor, and a question I have considered prior to you asking it. Your answer is this – as payment for your friendship and service, I will reward you with anything of this earth. You’re a man of the Arts, perhaps an ancient artifact, painting, sculpture or some other object? Actually, you can have as many of them as you like from anywhere in the world. All you must do is make a pact with me that promises your allegiance... forever.”

There was an empty silence after Lutin spoke those words. His offer hung above Dr. Beele like the silent Sword of Damocles dangling precariously overhead by a horse’s hair.

“Oh, and there is one more thing I have forgotten to mention,” Lutin broke the awkward silence. “If you come with me in loyalty and service, you will prevent this!”

Just then, the Nain Rouge pointed his finger in a northerly direction. In an instant, an image of Royal Oak High School came into view. The school was empty, except for five students who were very familiar to Dr. Beele: Tom, Elly, Lynni, Vic and AJ.

It was clear that something was very wrong at the school. There was smoke everywhere and flames seemed to engulf the outer façade of the building. Hieronymus could see the children in panic, running through the smoke-filled hallways in an effort to find the exit. He could hear them screaming for help, as if they were in the next room.



## *Chapter 17: Let's Make a Deal*

“So, what is your answer?” The evil dwarf asked softly. “Your time is running out, Doctor, as is the time for a few others that you seem to care about.”

Beele spun around quickly and put his nose directly against the gnarled nose of the Nain Rouge. “My answer is NO!”

No sooner had Beele said those words than the images of the high school, the fire and the trapped teenagers vanished.

There was a great sucking sound, as the vortex that surrounded them sped up again. In less than a second, Beele was whooshed back down into the DIA, back into the basement archives and dropped on the cold tile floor.

“Blast you, Beele!” screamed an angry voice that emanated from the basement walls in all directions.

The curator rubbed his head, still feeling dizzy from his harrowing journey. Lutin was furious that Beele had found him out and called his bluff.

It was all a trick.

“You and your stupid exhibit will fail!” Lutin’s disembodied voice echoed through the corridors of the archives. “You will all be destroyed!”

Hieronymus now knew that his friends were fine. The Nain Rouge had only created the mirage to bring Beele over to his side. Everyone was safe, for now, but the exhibit was in greater danger than ever.

Lutin had full knowledge of what the Knights of the Garter were trying to do and he would stop at nothing to defeat them.

After a few minutes, the red dwarf’s screams finally faded from the curator’s ears. Yet the cold shiver of his words resonated inside

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

his head like the chanting of hooded monks in a dark, sinister monastery.

Looming shadows of doubt were beginning to overcome Dr. Beele's deep conviction and belief in goodness. They wrapped themselves around his head and heart in a slow, suffocating constriction until he could think of nothing but failure and disappointment.

Maybe the national exhibit was a stupid idea; an idea that would never work.





## 18: *Opening Day*

**M**arch came in like a lion and was going out like an even more ferocious beast. The weather around the country had become more foul and unforgiving than when Lutin had begun his reign of fear and terror.

It was clear that the Nain Rouge was growing stronger every day. The fact that he was now aware of the Red Truth Exhibits only made matters worse. Though he thought the knights' plan to be laughably weak, Lutin could not help but feel a little nervous about how the public might react to such a presentation of humanity's mistakes, flaws and shortcomings.

After all, evil could never rest. Any ray of light was a threat to the delicate, dark web that Lutin had cast over the country. It was his job to keep humanity in the dark, unaware of the power of good that every person possessed – if they only acknowledged it.

Sunday morning came, in all of its drab, gray attire with a

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

steady downpour of rain added in for good measure. Tom, Elly, Vic, Lynni and AJ agreed to meet at the bus stop to get down to the DIA early for the grand opening of the Red Truth Exhibit.

Across the country, similar scenes played out, as multiple museums fought bad weather and various other mishaps in order to get their Red Truth Exhibit ready for display. The Nain Rouge was not going to make it easy for any of the museum curators.

In fact, Lutin has his own plan for ruining the Red Truth Exhibits and solidifying his evil reign across the entire country. Huddled under the streets of the city that once confined him, the Nain Rouge sat stewing in the cold, dark recesses of the sewer. For some odd reason, he still preferred the underground dwelling over the fresh air above. He was free to roam as he pleased, yet he still traveled and toiled in the empty, hollow passageways that hid his impish form and disguised his dark deeds.

With only an hour left before the grand opening of the exhibit, Lutin stood up in his desolate cavern, waved his arms slowly, and closed his eyes in deep concentration. An odd, humming sound emanated from his lips, like the sound of a summer cicada, rising in strength and pitch. His body began to glow and pulse with a powerful red light, like a blast furnace in full force. When the noise reached its apex, Lutin's arms shot up skyward with blue bolts of lightning shooting out of each one of his fingers. As he gyrated around his chamber, he chanted:

*"Take what you steal and steal what you keep.  
This breath is your last, so breathe it in deep!"*

## *Chapter 18: Opening Day*

Again and again, Lutin continued his chanting, increasing his speed and spinning motion with each turn.

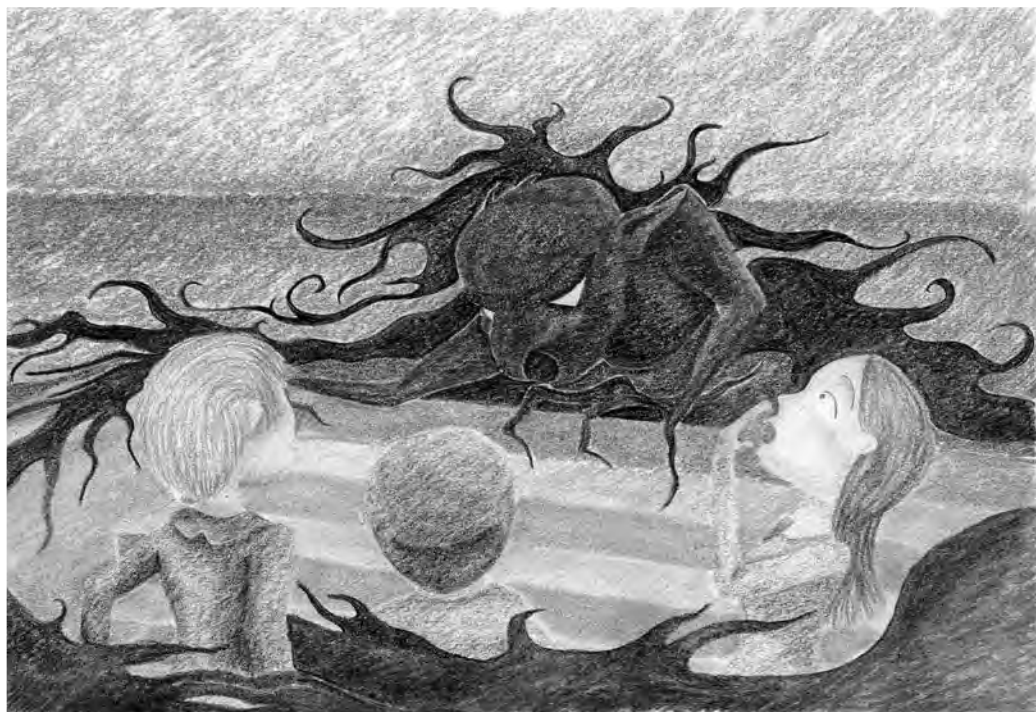
Above ground, blue flashes of lightning appeared in the sky for a brief moment, then shot back down, scattering back into the sewers in various parts of the country in a patterned grid. As each bolt of blue light hit the ground, it manifested into another version of the Nain Rouge! Thousands of red dwarves were now rising out of the sewers and heading for the museums that were just about to open to the public.

He was sending out one last blast of evil in his own likeness to stop the exhibits and destroy humanity forever.

It was nearly noon on the east coast, and almost 9 AM in the west. The museums had agreed to open their doors simultaneously, in an effort to generate as much good as possible to combat the spreading darkness.

Within the DIA, Dr. Beele and the children looked out of his office window and down upon the small crowd that had gathered below. They had expected a better turnout, but considering the bad weather, they were not going to complain.

In Chicago, Dr. Bellflower stood in the main hall of the Museum of Science and Industry, anxiously awaiting the opening of the doors. All around the country, curators, museum directors and docents were about to open up their collections for the most important exhibit of their lives – the exhibit to end all exhibits.





## 19: No Entry

**A**t the stroke of noon, the doors of the DIA were unlocked and opened to the waiting public. The crowd of visitors who had gathered began to make their way up the steps of the main entrance. Then, suddenly, they came to a dead stop.

From behind the small gathering, a smoky black cloud, like the sooty belch of a coal-driven steam train, rose above the people. It seeped around them, through the arms and legs of the innocent bystanders, coating their clothes with the foul smell of sulphur and tar.

Slowly, it began to take a familiar shape of something not quite human. Dr. Beele, Tom, Elly, Vic, Lynni and AJ had all run from the window to the stairs when they saw the smoke begin to billow – They knew exactly who it was.

“Lutin!” the winded group yelled in unison as they reached the main doors of the museum.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

The Nain Rouge ignored the cries from Beele and the teenagers. He faced the waiting crowd directly, presenting himself in his true, red dwarfish form.

In a bizarre series of events, identical red dwarves manifested themselves in front museum doors all across the country. They blocked the entrance to all of the Red Truth Exhibits with equal terror and surprise.

On the steps of the DIA, Lutin opened his mouth to speak, while the other versions of himself opened their mouths in complete synchronicity – one voice speaking with many devilish tongues:

“My brethren! You are all being deceived! You have been told that what lies beyond these doors is Truth, but I tell you that what lies before you is Death.”

“Anyone who enters this building will be filled with more than a thousand years of human poison.

“I have come to save you from this fate – once and for all!”

With those final words, all of the manifestations of the Nain Rouge blew through the front doors of all of the museums. At once, curators, docents and security guards were knocked back into the buildings as the dense fog of darkness swirled into each room of the exhibit. Throughout the halls and the corridors, the people on the outside could hear screaming, howling and wailing like the tortured souls of ten thousand lifetimes.

Beele sat up, watching the rolling thunder of smoke and ash ignite into spiraling flames. He fully expected his artifacts and objects to be completely destroyed in the tumultuous conflagration.

## *Chapter 19: No Entry*

The firestorm grew in size and intensity, continuing to swirl faster and faster around every object in the exhibit. The screaming and the wailing reached a crescendo that could be heard throughout North America. People around the country covered their ears and huddled together in preparation for the end of the world.

Then an odd thing began to happen ...

At the height of its chaos, the storm Lutin created began to subside. The fire circled around itself in its own fury, like a smoldering Ouroboros, smothering itself as it swallowed its own snake-like tail.

As rapidly as he had entered the buildings, the Nain Rouge and all of the various versions of himself shot out of each museum. Like charred bolts of lightning, they sparked and spat out the last drops of energy onto the cool marble floors and the polished brass fixtures as they passed by.

Something had stopped the destruction.

Lutin's plan to tear all of the exhibits apart had failed for some unknown reason. Now he had to retreat.

The people who were still huddled outside of the DIA saw the plume of thick blackness funnel out of the main doors, evaporating into the giant storm drain under Woodward Avenue.

Lynni, along with Dr. Beele, and the rest of the teens picked themselves up off of the floor inside the main hall of the museum.

"What just happened?" Lynni was the first to ask the question that was on everyone's mind.

The curator shook his head in wonder, "I am not quite sure

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

that I know what to make of all this, my dear.”

“I think I know,” Elly spoke up as she brushed the rest of the soot and ash from her pant legs. “Lutin can’t handle the truth.”

AJ added, “Yeah, maybe the exhibit couldn’t be destroyed because it’s all built on truth. His evil can’t touch it.”

Elly and AJ were on to something. Since the goal of the Red Truth Exhibit was to right past wrongs and bring the truth to the public, it only made sense that Lutin couldn’t destroy it.

Of course, there wasn’t any time to make sure. The real proof would be if the crowds were going to show up and what the overall impact the collections would have on people’s hearts and minds. It would take a massive change of hearts to turn the Red Tide of evil that Lutin had created with his energy grid.

The dust had settled and now it was time to welcome the public into the Red Truth Exhibit.

The crowd outside of the DIA had thinned considerably. It seemed that the Nain Rouge’s dramatic presentation of his awesome power had frightened away the weak-hearted patrons. Many of them fled during his attack on the museum, leaving only a small line of attendees queued up for entrance into the exhibit.

Dr. Beele greeted each person as they entered the main doors of the DIA. After everyone was safely inside the museum, the curator turned to his young friends and whispered with a twinge of anxiety and hope, “The hour of reckoning is upon us all.”





## 20: *The Exhibit*

**A**cross the country, the threat of the Nain Rouge had subsided for the moment. Each Red Truth Exhibit opened to the public despite all of the delays.

Initially, only a few people began to file through the artifacts, objects and collections that unveiled the tragedies, triumphs and mistakes that prevailed throughout our human history.

Visitors to the exhibit learned the truth about works of art – how they were created, who cheated the artist, and how many people were killed or robbed over the centuries in the effort to retain a particular masterpiece.

Other visitors learned about the Trail of Tears, Japanese Internment Camps and Andersonville – events and places in our American history that brought out the worst traits in our human character. But it was the truth, the truth that we needed to face if we were ever to defeat evil.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

In every region of the land, people came in contact with the real stories behind the objects and artifacts we had coveted for so long.

Back at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Beele and his young friends observed the tiny crowds with great interest. There were many different reactions that began to surface as people made their way through the exhibit.

Some people emerged from the exhibit in quiet contemplation. Their faces showed signs of deep thought and a resonating wonder at what they had just seen. Other people became emotional. Some patrons left the exhibit crying profusely, unable to control their feelings of deep sadness and grief, pained at the sight of humanity with all of its flaws and failings.

There were even a few patrons who came out of the exhibit terribly angry. Some were disgusted by the display and presentation, and gave Dr. Beele a dirty look and a few choice words as they stormed out of the museum.

“What a waste of money!” one yelled.

“Who wants to see this kind of garbage?!” another one grumbled under his breath.

“You should all be arrested for showing this trash!” a woman shouted as she shoved open the exit door.

It was true that the reactions to the Red Truth Exhibit were mixed. In other parts of the country, the reactions were exactly the same. There was acceptance, denial and even misunderstanding, as people filed through the galleries and halls of each museum.

All of the teenagers and Dr. Beele had been keeping close track of the number of people coming through the exhibit. Though the



## *Chapter 20: The Exhibit*

reactions remained mixed, a funny thing began to happen.

More people were coming.

It was true. What started out as a few curious onlookers was slowly growing into a deeply interested throng of patrons. Beele checked in with the other museums to see how their attendance numbers were doing. Strangely enough, the number of patrons around the country began to grow even more rapidly as the day went on.

Other strange things began to happen.

As the day progressed, there was a subtle change of mood around the museum. Guests began talking to one another more. People began to linger around the displays, instead of just leaving the museum immediately after viewing the exhibit.

Outside of the museum, other changes began to take place. The drab, gray morning burned away into a bright, beautiful afternoon. The streets, that once reflected only shadows, slowly warmed with the subtle sunlight of an early spring day.

Soon, the lines outside of the Detroit Institute of Arts began to wrap around the building and run all the way down Woodward Avenue.

Similar scenes started playing out all over North America. Crowds of people were entering the Red Truth Exhibits full of skepticism and curiosity. Yet, they were emerging with some new found understanding, knowledge or revelation – even if some still refused to accept it.

As Tom, Elly, Lynni, Vic and AJ walked around the exhibit hall again and again, they were overcome by the emotion of the moment.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

“I think it’s working,” Elly whispered to Tom as they both watched patrons gather around certain objects and artifacts. Vic elbowed AJ gently in the ribs, as they sat near the exit of the exhibit.

“Did you see their faces?” Vic asked quietly. “It’s like they’re glowing with a weird energy.”

“Yeah, some of them look like they saw an angel or something!” AJ answered, as the two teens continued to critique the responses people were having to everything they saw.

Out in the main hall, Dr. Beele and Lynni were deep in conversation when Tom, Elly, Vic and AJ came over to join them. The group had been at the exhibit the entire day. There was only an hour left before the museum would close for the day, yet the lines still grew longer and longer.

“What are you guys talking about?” Vic boldly interrupted Lynni and Dr. Beele’s conversation.

Lynni gave Vic a slightly nasty look, but then shoved him gently on the shoulder, letting him know that she was not really that mad.

“We were talking about the Nain Rouge and the exhibit.” Lynni answered. “I was asking Dr. Beele if he thought the plan was working.”

“It seems like it to me,” Elly added. Tom, Vic and AJ nodded in agreement.

“What do you think, Dr. Beele?” AJ wondered aloud.

“What I think, AJ, is that I am not quite sure what is going on. We obviously had a rough start to the morning. In fact, I thought for sure that Lutin would destroy everything. But that didn’t happen now, did it?”

“Since morning, I’ve been seeing signs of the positive effects

## *Chapter 20: The Exhibit*

of the exhibit. Though people's reactions have been mixed, I do detect a subtle change in the energy around the museum. I take this to be a very good sign ... a very good sign, indeed. I have checked in with the other curators and the reports have all been positive and quite encouraging."

"When do you think we will know for sure, Dr. Beele?" Lynni asked with a quiver of worry in her voice.

"Ah, now that is the million dollar question, Lynni. Actually, I think the answer will be a bit more complex than we would all like it to be." Beele stroked his pointy chin, like his next words were to be most thoughtful and profound, "For a very long time, we have set out trying to defeat evil and destroy the Nain Rouge. I have now come to the conclusion that doing so is impossible."

All of teens felt their stomachs drop, like descending that first, giant hill on a roller coaster at Cedar Point.

"Are we doomed, Doc?" Vic abruptly blurted out his concern.

"Not doomed, by any means," the confusing curator replied.

Beele continued, "Let's all think about this for a moment. Tom and Elly thought they had destroyed Lutin when they broke the curse, but in reality, he was only incapacitated for a little while. When he returned, he was stronger and more powerful, with the ability to move around the country at will."

The teens looked around at each other, knowing that the same thoughts were running through their collective heads.

Beele went on, "Now we gather to defeat the Nain Rouge by endeavoring to transform his negative energy to good, but what happens? He shows up to destroy everything – and fails. He fails miserably.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

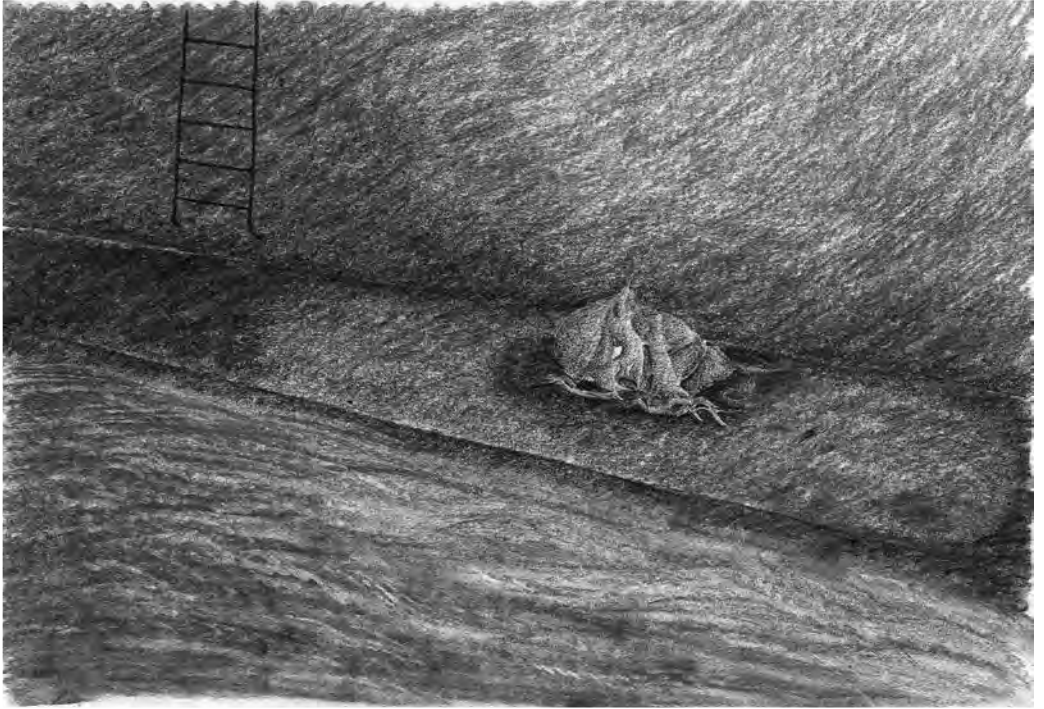
“So, our plan must be working, correct? We are beginning to see the goodness coming back to the people, back to the regions and back to the country.”

“Yeah, our plan is working finally... so what’s the problem?” AJ asked.

“The problem lies within this question, AJ, ‘Where is the Nain Rouge now?’”

The teens, like a number of other people outside the museum that morning, had seen the Nain Rouge vanish in a trail of smoke back into the sewer. Still, without ever saying it, they knew that Lutin was not gone forever; he had only retreated back from where he had started.





## 21: *Strange Success*

**T**he Red Truth Exhibit turned out to be a complete success.

After a rough start, crowds began to show up all over the country to see and experience the exhibits first hand. As each patron walked through the halls and galleries of the various museums, their moods began to change. In fact, it seemed that the mood of the entire country was changing for the better.

After a few weeks, the natural disasters that had plagued the nation began to subside. The flood waters receded, the tides weakened, and the shaken earth that had once quaked and quivered began to settle down into a much calmer state. Slowly, but surely, an overall sense of confidence and reassurance began to spring up over many regions across the land.

But the Nain Rouge was not gone.

Amid the newfound spirit and joy that was washing over the countryside, there lurked an all-too-familiar shadow. Deep down

### Book 3: *The Red Truth*

in the sewers of Detroit sat a faded, gray figure, hunched over and mumbling to himself, “Im-Impossible! Couldn’t be done! Shouldn’t be done! Wondering, wondering, how have they won?”

Lutin was beside himself with frustration and anger. How did they do it? How could they have foiled his most powerful plan and broken his grip upon the nation? The fact that a few kids and an incompetent professor had beaten him was just too much to bear. Such a small, weak little army to defeat a power such as his – ridiculous!

But it was true. The plan had worked and Lutin’s negative energy grid had been broken. Now, he would have to sit and ponder his fate once more. The Nain Rouge would have to wait patiently for his next opportunity to rise again and feed off the negative and destructive forces that humankind has the capacity to create.

*“Patience is a virtuous thing, the longer the wait, the deeper the sting...”*

Lutin sang this little song to himself, for some reassurance and comfort to help quell his bitterness and anger. He was willing to bide his time until the next opportunity, when humanity would fall into its bad habits once again. In the mind of the Nain Rouge, it was only a matter of time until people would forget and slip back into their dark thoughts of pride, greed and avarice.

For evil never really dies or goes away altogether. It’s always present in this world. That’s why it is up to each one of us to be diligent in the lives we lead. We all have the power and the choice to rise into the light or sink into the darkness.



## *Chapter 21: Strange Success*

And whatever choice we make, the world will feel its impact.



## 22: *The Marche du Nain Rouge*

**S**pring had come to Detroit in the form of the annual Marche du Nain Rouge, the parade that led revelers down Woodward Avenue all the way to the river.

An ancient tradition of brooming the bad energy out of the city had been renewed after the victory won by Dr. Beele, Tom, Elly, Lynni, Vic and AJ. The festival hadn't been celebrated in years. But now that the Nain Rouge had made himself known, everyone was more than willing to see him sent back to where he had begun.

This was a celebration to mark the defeat of Lutin and to renew the positive energy that had too long been absent from the city's streets. The small band of adventurers had been asked to be the Grand Marshals of the first modern day Marche du Nain Rouge. They all accepted with great pleasure and excitement.

### *Book 3: The Red Truth*

“Elly! Look over here!” Tom yelled from across the parade route.

No one could believe it. Each one of them was atop a giant float in a festival that seemed bigger than Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Dr. Beele led the way, as his float, shaped like a golden chariot, chased a costumed character dressed as the Nain Rouge back south toward the river. Beele looked a bit nervous, being pulled by a great white paper-mache horse, so high above the crowd.

Tom waved at Vic and Vic waved at Elly. Lynni’s face beamed over at AJ. Everyone waved to the crowd as their floats made their way through a sea of revelers, who threw multi-colored streamers, confetti and beads all along the parade route.

Today, and for many years to come, this was to be a most joyous occasion. A new tradition had begun in Detroit and across the nation.

The cold darkness of winter had ended and the warmth and hope of a new season was beginning. The Nain Rouge was banished again, for at least another year.

Every year thereafter, Dr. Beele, Tom, Elly Lynni, Vic and AJ would be there to celebrate. They would bring their friends and families, and everyone would march the Nain Rouge back to the river for another year.

Strangely enough, every year the Nain Rouge would be there, too. He was much smaller and weaker than he was before. His power had been greatly diminished, but he was there just the same... always present, always watching.

Sometimes, he would watch from the gutter, between the long legs of the onlookers. Other times, he would climb a high

## Chapter 22: The Marche du Nain Rouge

building to get a good view of the entire parade. But no matter where he stood, he would always grumble to himself that this state of happiness was only temporary. Lutin would remember the time when he had almost ruled the cities, the water, the land and the entire countryside; a time when evil almost won.

But evil didn't win, did it?

This city and its people, like many other people and places around the world, found a way to rise above. Back in 1805, Detroit burned to the ground. In the aftermath, Father Gabriel Richard wrote the following words that represent the hope, struggle and perseverance of all people. It's even emblazoned on the city's flag:

*"Speramus Meliora, Resurget Cineribus"*

*(We hope for better things, it will rise from the ashes)*

Maybe Elly was right when she said that the good in all of us lasts as long as we want it to last. Every day, we have to make a commitment to try to find that goodness in ourselves, as well as in others. That's how we conquer evil.

Every night before we go to sleep, we can measure our success or failure from the day's struggles. Did the Nain Rouge get the best of us, or did we get the best of him? What's hopeful, exciting, scary and wonderful about all of this is that either way, tomorrow is a new day.

And the battle begins once more.

*As evil be to those who evil think, so goodness and light come to those who choose to seek it.*

***The End***



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Josef Bastian is Midwest author and poet whose sense of humor, depth of spirit and reflective imagination resonate within his poetry and prose. He is a fresh, new voice from middle America, in the footsteps of Carl Sandburg and Garrison Keillor.

Josef is also a professional educator and thought leader, who specializes in developing experiential learning programs for both private and public business sectors. Mr. Bastian currently lives in the Metropolitan Detroit area.

**FROM THE AUTHOR:** I discovered the legend of the Nain Rouge right around the time I lost my job and the entire country was going through a major economic crisis. I kept wondering why all this was happening. Why were such terrible things happening to such good people?

And so my story begins... The Nain Rouge feeds on all of this negative energy and becomes the cause and the manifestation of evil.



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This original Graphic Novel was adapted by Joseph Bastin  
himself and Illustrated by Patrick McEvoy



