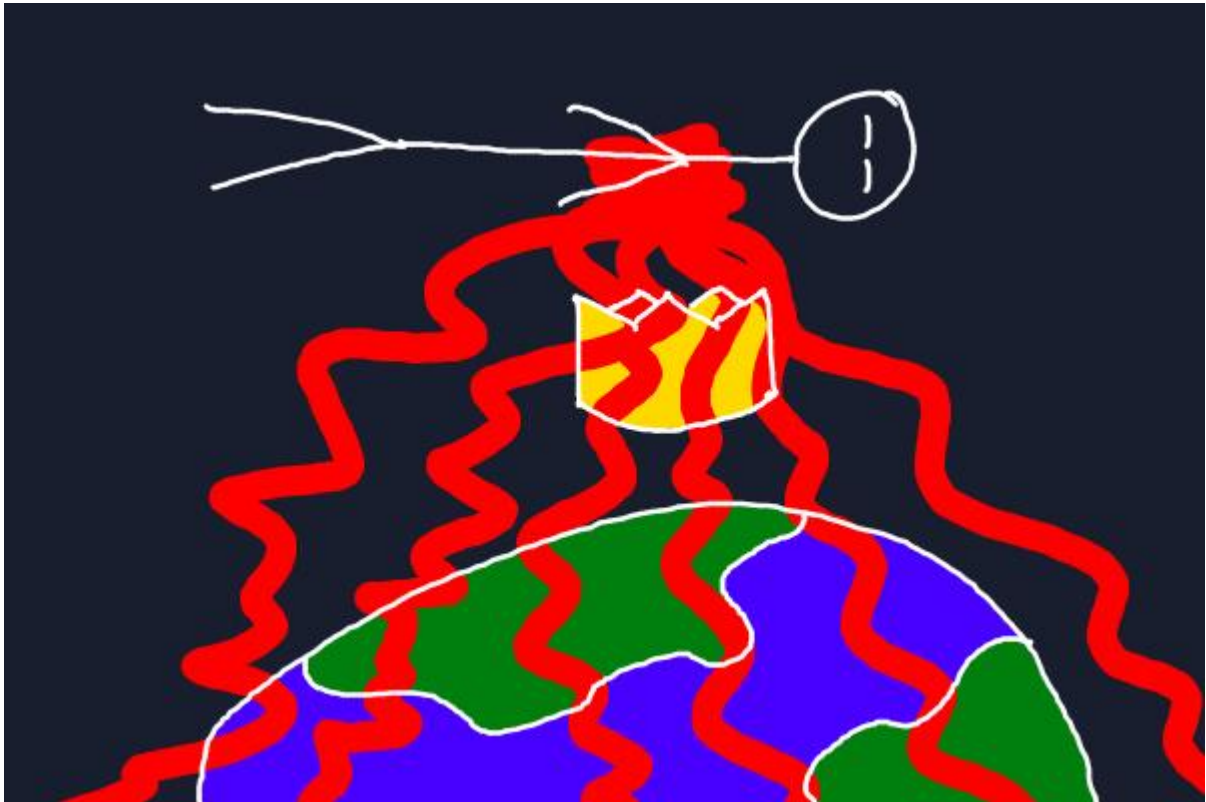


The Prophet

Part 1: The Awakening

Chapter One



Moses was a writer. A good writer. Jesse King was his protagonist, his avatar in the world of writing. Jesse King solved mysteries. Jesse King was smart, good-looking, strong and fast. Jesse King could woo and charm. Jesse King was who Moses wished he could be.

Moses was a loner. His breath was mostly terrible, and his physique was appalling. He ate a lot of fried chicken. Well, he ate the skin, the chicken was up for grabs.

His parents had never wanted him, and although their recent attempts at love touched him, it wasn't enough to change his mind.

He was alone. Alone and lonely. Except for Jesse. Jesse was his companion, his comfort.

Jesse King could do anything, and Moses made it so. His avatar was famous. Since his first King novel, the letters had poured in, and they continued to do so, years later. Jesse King spoke to people. He was a rogue, but loveable. He battled against demons that people faced themselves, and he came out victorious, mostly because of his own strength.

It was funny how many letters were actually addressed to Jesse. It was as though people wanted to believe so much, they would suspend reality to continue that belief.

Our story, or at least, the story that is documented here, began the day before Moses' thirty-third birthday. It was stark, this beginning. White and pointed. It stuck in the memory, and not just because of the blood and death. There was more. It was prophetic. Part of a greater story.

Moses knew he was getting old. His belly was a rubber tire of fat. He had no friends to celebrate birthdays with, not that he wanted to.

His house was tidy enough, just enough to be normal. Nothing out of the ordinary. An aerofit sat in one corner, in another some weights were scattered next to a bench. A television, old and battered, sat against the wall. A saggy couch lay in front of it, and there Moses was now. It was the kind of couch that was impossible to gracefully exit from.

The phone rang.

Moses looked up. The only people who rang him were his editor (Ted) and some other executives connected with publishing. Ted liked Moses the way he was. Reliable. Moses had nothing else to distract him, and so was the best and biggest seller that Hendant Publishing had in their books (so to speak). Moses understood this, and didn't really mind. Ted was nice enough, and usually didn't try with small talk.

"Moses, it's Ted."

Moses waited, letting the machine catch whatever it was Ted wanted.

"I know you're there. Pick up."

He hauled himself out of the couch, and crossed to the phone.

"Come on Moses, pick .."

Click. "I'm here."

"Ahh, that is good." Ted stopped a moment, then continued. "Moses, I need you to come and see me tomorrow."

Moses stood still. "Why? I've got the new book almost done."

"Yes I know." He paused again. "Tell me, are you ever going to kill off King?"

Ted always called Jesse King by his last name. Never the first, always the last.

"Perhaps."

"Moses. Think about it before you come tomorrow."

In his heart Moses knew he would never kill off Jesse King.

"You might see me tomorrow Ted." And he hung up the phone.

The death of King was something that Moses had thought about. He'd planned a number of different ways it could happen. And planned ways he could return again alive and hale. In his head, there were a multitude of scenarios, but they lay unused.

The truth was that Jesse King gave Moses purpose, and comfort.

I know this is true.

And he did. Moses was good at being honest with himself. He knew he was fat. He knew he lacked social graces. Without a doubt Jesse King was all that was good in his life.

Moses didn't have the courage to kill Jesse King off, because there would be nothing more for him. King was his creation. His lifeblood. King was part of him, and part of his own. Over the years, his character had developed into something Moses saw as amazingly unique. Unique and special. Not boring, but special.

Why would I take that out of my life? Why remove the only thing that is joy to me?

Moses Lawd was lonely. But loneliness can be a precursor to something far more powerful. The greatest of us are marked by our nadir points, those events and times that are our lowest. What happens at those times define us. For Moses Lawd, his nadir was coming, although he wouldn't have thought it.

His nadir was coming and the night would fall.

Chapter Two



The morning of Moses Lawd's birthday brought with it the sun. Moses woke as it rose above the hills that lay east of his house.

Moses began to get up, reaching for his watch. It was while doing this that he remembered.

The day of my birth. How sad.

But strangely enough, Moses didn't feel sad. He felt a little bit excited. He felt anticipation, although he couldn't work out why. He stopped his hand from getting the watch. He got up and walked toward the doors that led out onto a balcony.

The sun was now visible above the hills. There was a refreshing chill in the air. Moses stood back and sucked it through his nostrils.

Ahhh. What has changed?

It was his birthday of course. But more than this, it was the day that things *did* change.

As he walked into the kitchen, Moses thought he'd try something different. There was nothing but wheatbix in the way of cereal .. He always ate wheatbix. Always. But not today.

He opened the fridge and saw the eggs that Jasmine had dropped off yesterday. She loved him, that much was sure. Better than his own mother, that too was sure. Jasmine had looked after his house for the past nine years, and had taken to this shy skinny (although pot-bellied) writer man.

She was selfless in her efforts to take care of Moses. Once a week cleaning the house, but always keeping an eye on him, making sure the man still lived, still breathed. She had even invited him to Christmas dinner once, with her numerous family members, but that is another story.

Moses took the carton and went to the stove. Cooking eggs had once been a joy for him, like a lot of things. He found out that it still was, and had a wonderful breakfast of eggs, toast and some lettuce and tomatoes.

An hour later Moses was driving into the city, towards the offices of Hendent Publishing.

What is happening to me?

The feeling of excitement and anticipation had not dimmed since waking. In fact, it had grown, and was continuing to do so. His vision was fresh. The clarity of his senses was different.

Something has changed. Or is changing.

Perhaps that was it.

Maybe it is the present. I'm not sure, but it seems that way.

Moses parked as he always did, on the rooftop parking. It was further to walk, but he'd always tried to convince himself that it would do him good. More than that, today, he wanted to look out over the city.

Standing against the railing, Moses looked out across the expanse that was Jericho City. It hadn't changed, except that it *had*. His eyes saw more, ears heard more, his mind took more in. It was alive like never before. Or perhaps,

Maybe it is me that is alive. What is happening?

As he turned away, for the briefest of moments, Moses caught a glimpse of gigantic walls surrounding the city. He stopped and looked back. They weren't there. And all of this was very strange.

Travelling down to the bottom floor in the well-oiled lift, Moses wondered what it was Ted wanted him for. And why the question about killing off Jesse King? There wasn't anything Moses could see, unless Ted was getting pressure from his superiors. Ted didn't have many superiors, and why would he get pressure anyway? Moses Lawd's books were selling more than ever. Time Magazine credited him with bringing back the love of reading into the population. People now read more than ever. And it had begun with him, or so they said. And other authors *had* written and called and visited, all with words of thanks.

The first event was close. Not so much an event, but a shaking of fabric. A rippled that foreshadowed something far greater. As Moses stepped outside, through the doors of the parking garage foyer, he looked upwards. Hendant Publishing was across the busy street. It was a few minutes wait at the lights. But Moses wasn't thinking about that. He looked up, and saw the *garishka*. Straight out of Jesse King's world.

The *garishka* were part of an ever-growing presence of evil in the world that Jesse King inhabited. They looked something like a gigantic bat, but also had been affected by Peter Jackson's vision of the Nazgul.

In my mind, I see them .. But here, it cannot be.

It was. As Moses watched the *garishka* hover above the Hendant tower, it's long sinewy neck moved around, and Moses *knew* it's eyes were on him.

Moses had written the *garishka* as hunters, malevolent beasts that were driven by their need to feed. All the time. There wasn't any downtime for these beasts, once a kill was finished, they went to the next. But the trick was that they wouldn't attack people that didn't run, or who weren't afraid. What they

truly fed off was the chase, the fear. And so, like the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal in Douglas Adams' book, if you pretended they weren't there, they would generally not even know you were there.

But this one knew. Moses' only chance was to show no fear, and continue on his way. The *garishka* could cover the distance between the top of the tower and the street in moments. Propelled by gravity and magic.

What if the magic doesn't work the same way here?

So Moses waited at the lights for the green man. The Green Man. Another creature out of his books. Jesse King had met the Green Man on a couple of occasions. The symbol at the pedestrian crossing had nothing to do with this being, but it brought the remembrance nonetheless.

I mustn't look up. I am no Jesse King.

Jesse King had looked into the eyes of a *garishka* and survived. He had taken the beast and beaten it down, forcing submission. The most recently published book had ended with the *garishka* at Jesse's side, as he stood amidst the wreckage of burning cars and buildings, after the battle with Daerin Sarvant.

Daerin Sarvant.

The nemesis of Jesse King, Daerin first made small appearances in the books, but it soon became apparent to the reader that Jesse truly had an equal in Daerin Sarvant. He was a complex character, marked by his experiences as a child and a young man, and driven by his calculating need to become King. Not Jesse King, but King in word and deed. Ruler, Lord (not Lawd), and most probably to usurp the place of God Himself.

The last book concluded with the general agreement that Daerin Sarvant was dead. Killed in the battle. But alas, his body could not be found, apparently burned to a crisp. It wasn't the truth of course. Daerin Sarvant could only die properly when Moses was ready to finish the stories of Jesse King.

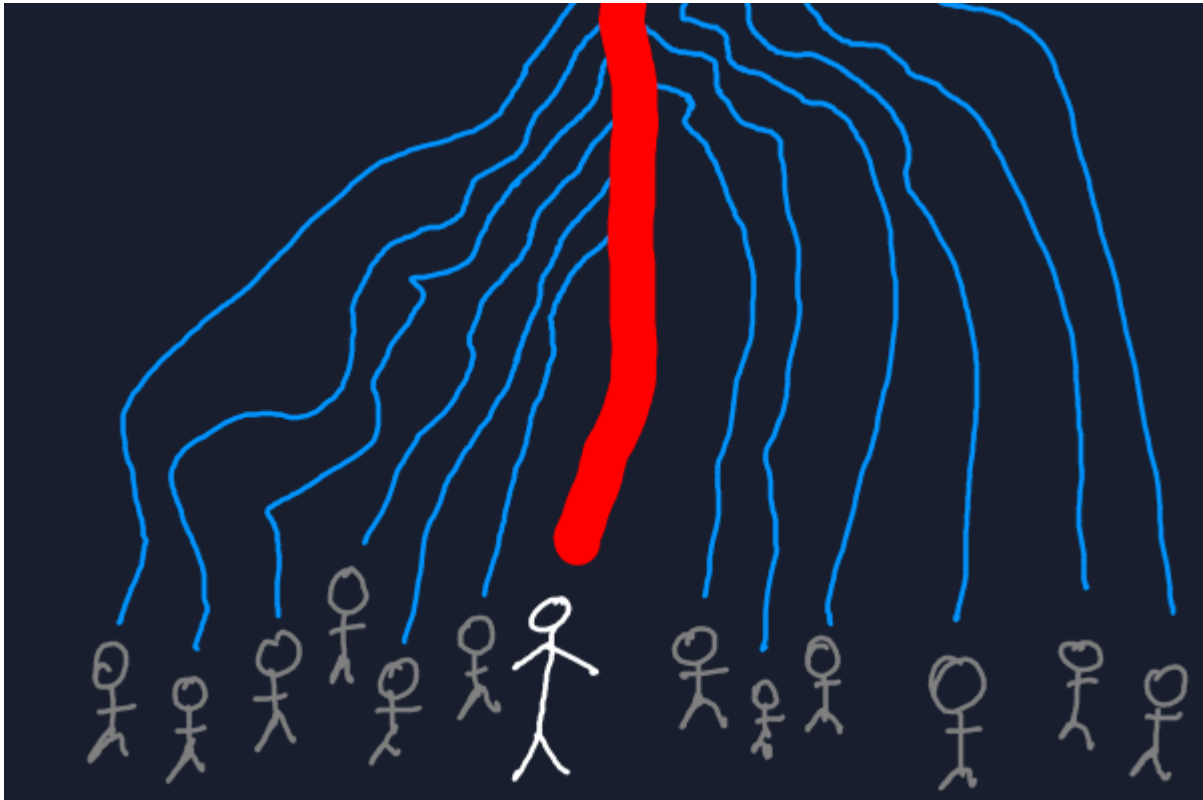
"Are you ever going to kill off King?"

All things were possible with storytelling, but this could not happen. Too many of Moses' dreams had gone into the creation of Jesse King, creation and evolution into the character he was now.

I cannot kill off King any more than I can change who I am.

This may have been true, but Moses Lawd was soon to experience great change in his life. And so, anything was possible.

Chapter Three



"Moses." Ted walked forward and shook Moses' hand. "This is Thomas Rein and his associate, Evan Coolin." Ted paused a moment. "They wish to talk to you about your books."

Moses shook their hands in turn. Thomas Rein was tall and fit. His grip was strong. Evan Coolin was similar, although of darker complexion.

"Moses," It was Thomas that spoke. "You have been writing Jesse King for some time."

Moses nodded, not saying anything. It hadn't been a question anyway.

"I'm not sure if Ted told you, but we want to ask you something." Thomas looked at Evan, who nodded imperceptibly. "Have you thought of killing Jesse King?"

The question was phrased different than that given by Ted yesterday.

Moses didn't really like the situation he was in. There was something happening here that bugged him, and he also felt a stab of fear.

The anticipation and excitement hadn't faded though. In fact, it continued strong and stronger than before.

"I do not discuss that sort of thing, even with Ted."

Ted nodded as if in agreement, but Thomas paid no attention. Evan shifted a little in his seat.

"I think it would be in your best interests to dwell on the matter. There are greater threads in movement than yours."

What did that mean?

Moses looked the man in the eye.

"Thankyou for your .. concern, but nothing doing."

Thomas laughed. Evan gripped his hands together, arm and shoulder muscles straining underneath his shirt.

"I was told you were nothing like your protagonist Moses Lawd. It seems you do have some character traits in common."

Moses didn't think so. He wrote Jesse King the way he wanted to be, not the way he was.

The two men looked at each other and then stood up.

"We are very happy to have met you Moses Lawd. If you ever do decide to think on the question, .."

Evan cut Thomas off quickly. Speaking for the first time, his voice soft but steady.

"You must do this Moses Lawd, for it cannot happen any other way. There are greater threads than yours."

And with that, they left.

As the door was closing, Moses turned to Ted.

"Who were they?" The anger crept into his voice.

"Some powerful people who wanted to meet with you."

It wasn't much of an answer, but Moses was done. He needed to get out and find someplace alone.

Chapter Four



The coffee shop was a block from the Hendant building. There was an area with comfy couches where people could sit, and talk, and read.

A couple was in deep discussion as Moses sat with his crushed ice and coffee drink.

"We're two sensible adults, and I realise it probably meant nothing to you. I just want you to acknowledge that you stopped calling me because of that other woman you left the party last night with."

"Were you at the party?"

"No. Tabby told me."

"Listen, Susan, I stopped calling you for a completely different reason."

"Yes?"

The man grew a little flustered. "Listen, why the third degree? I thought we had something, I mean, I really like you."

"The feeling is definitely mutual."

The conversation continued.

What lives we lead.

It was amazing to see a girl, who had been hurt by a guy she might have fallen in love with, listening to the waffle coming out of the man's mouth, taking it in. Perhaps she knew the lies and didn't care.

"It's up to you to decide who I'm going to end up with."

This from Susan, the woman. Moses realised that there were two playing the game. Both hardened criminals in the prison that was love.

This is why I cast it aside. There is too much hurt involved. Pain and heartbreak. Better by far to write.

Moses had checked for the *garishka* when he left the Hendant building, but it had gone.

Or it was never there.

That was possible.

Moses probably would have filed it away after a few days, except that, as we know, this was the day that everything changed. And not just in the thread that was Moses Lawd's life.

A third individual came and joined the couple, who seemed to have reached an agreed stalemate. There would probably be no clear winner. Which meant two losers. After a bit of chatter, they got up and left.

Moses sat and cleared his mind. The energy that was within him this day could not be denied.

I'm going to get fit. Lose weight.

Moses had never been one to kid himself, at least not for long. As mentioned, his honesty with *himself* was his greatest strength. But this felt right. He *would* get fit.

In the end, it wasn't just a drive within him that caused fitness and weight loss. It was environment and events.

But it did happen. And much more on top of that.

Chapter Five



A lot of things had influenced Moses in his writing of Jesse King.

Movies, books, people, real world events.

Braveheart, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, X-Men, George Bush Junior and Senior, U2, the Bible, Beethoven, Brotherhood of the Wolf, Jim Carrey .. The list goes on. Stephen King's Dark Tower series. George R R Martin's A Song Of Ice And Fire series. Robert Jordan's super-epic Wheel Of Time. The original Deus Ex game from Ion Storm. Planescape:Torment.

At this moment however, none of that was on Moses' mind. He sat in the coffee shop, a startled look on his face. A woman had just walked through the main doors, and was coming over to him.

Mischa White.

She who Jesse King loved.

Surely this was imagination. Moses closed his eyes, rubbed them with his hands, then opened them. Before him stood Mischa. He'd gotten her name from an old teen soap.

D.C.? No, that's the comics. Fruit, why fruit?

His thoughts were broken when Mischa spoke.

"Prophet."

Moses looked at her eyes. They were the purest blue he had ever seen.

"Prophet."

She was talking to him, calling him prophet. What did that mean?

"I'm not a prophet." He said to her, and couldn't look away. She was beautiful beyond his imagining. And indeed, it was his imagination that had created her.

Mischa smiled. "You are, and denial will not change the truth." She glanced down. "You let your body waste away. This should not be."

Forthright. Just as I wrote her.

"That is probably true Mischa," The name came out different than before. "But you cannot exist. You are a character out of my mind."

Moses shook his head, closing his eyes again.

She is still there. I can hear her breathing.

The excitement within him, the feeling of joy, or something, was reaching boiling point. There was a song, jubilant singing, in his ears. It reminded him of his grandmother.

"I am here Prophet. That is enough. I don't know this place, or these people, but I am here nonetheless."

"Go down, Moses. Way down to Egypt-land."

Deep sonorous tones rang through him. A song sung on the cotton fields, and many other places besides. His grandmother had sung it to him as he fell asleep. Other songs too.

But this one I always remembered. It was about me.

"Prophet, you must come to Jesse's land. Travel with me, for I have been sent to pull you to us."

What is she talking about? None of this exists. Perhaps Jasmine put hallucinogens in the eggs.

He stood up, wanting to try and ignore this apparition and walk outside, run, escape his own mind. But she grabbed his wrist.

Real enough to stop me. And strong. Like I wrote her.

Mischa had many secrets, but probably the greatest was her parentage. Her father did not know he had a daughter. Her mother was dead.

At least, that's the way it is in my head.

"I must leave now, the power of the Three is waning. But I will return again, and you must be ready. Ready to come. It may be tomorrow, or not. But be ready. Watch and .."

Moses, who wrote the language she spoke, finished the saying for her. ".. And stay on guard for the dark." He laughed. "This is too much. Whoever put you up to this is having a big joke. You're a very good actor."

But her words stuck in his head. No one else knew about the Three. It was something that had been developing in his imagination for some time now, and only vaguely hinted at in the last few books.

The stunning figure, the presence, the beautiful face of Mischa White departed from San's Coffee House. Although they were unaware of it, people looked up, as though they were missing something.

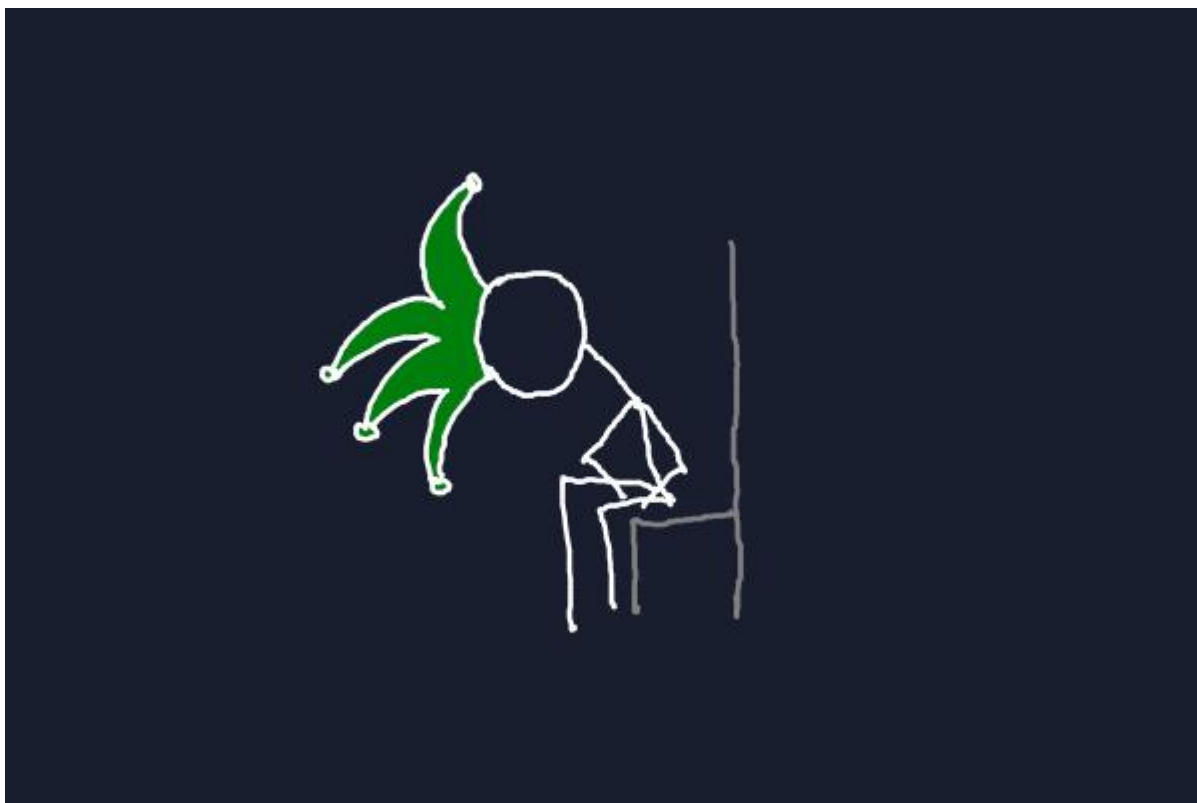
She is as I wrote. When leaving the room, Mischa White takes part of her surroundings with her.

Moses put his hands up to cover his ears. The song now rose in volume. Not like a rock and roll band, but like a choir. Crystal clarity. It hurt his mind. But he found he didn't care.

His own creation, a work of fantasy, was alive before his eyes. Like some kind of Stephen King tale, but more.

Because it's me. Everything is changing.

Chapter Six



"Go down, Moses. Way down in Egypt-land."

Moses Lawd woke to the sound of his grandmother's voice. Except joined with it were the voices of yesterday. They had dissipated slowly the night before, as he lay in bed, waiting for sleep to come.

The anticipation was there also, excitement in his veins as he pushed himself out of bed.

"Tell old old Pharoah, To let My people go."

He was now thirty-three years old. He looked out at the sun rising over the hills. Yesterday's strangeness had begun with the dawn.

As if to welcome the sight, that bright orb in the sky, the song in his head rose in exultation.

Moses turned away, and thought about eggs for breakfast. The phone rang, putting an end to that. It would be a long time before he ate food cooked in his kitchen. But Moses didn't know that yet.

"Moses, it's Ted."

Moses waited, as per usual, but there was a different tone in Ted's voice. Strained.

"They have Sue and the kids. They're going to kill them if I don't get you to come."

Ted never joked about his family. This was serious.

"Ted, *who* has them?"

There was shaking on the phone, noises in the background. A muffled thump, bam, crash. Then another voice came on the phone. "Mr Lawd. You would be wise to stay at your home until my people arrive for you. Do not leave, we will find you. If you do leave, this man's family is dead. As it is, they are nearing death. Perhaps it would be merciful to kill them."

Moses heard Ted shouting, "Noooo! Moses, I don't want them to die!"

This is crazy. What is happening?

"Stay where you are Mr Lawd. All will be well .. For them at least. Possibly for you, but time will tell us the answers."

Another saying from his world. "*Time will tell us the answers.*" Allan James was fond of that. A father figure to Jesse, he died early in the stories. Giving his life for Jesse, who had betrayed the old man at the end. It had brought Jesse back from the darkness.

"Listen, what do you want? I'm just a writer, and Ted is just my editor. What's the problem? Money? Is that what you want?"

The laughter at the other end of the phone-line was deep and abrasive.

"Fool." *Click.*

The phone went dead. Moses wondered whether he should call the police.

And tell them what? But if I do nothing ..

He was dialing the number for the local police station when the doorbell rang.

Moses froze, hand halfway up from the phone. He waited, listening.

".. Police Station, how can I help you?"

Moses put the handset down, cutting off the call. He crept along to the stairs. He looked down through the windows. There were no cars in sight, and a single old woman stood at the door. Something made him look across the fields that lay between him and the main road. Coming into view was a line of black station wagons.

What was that movie? Twister. Ha.

But he had the lady to deal with, and pushed the entourage of black out of his mind.

Coming to the front door, he brushed his hair back before opening it. Reaching for the handle, the song within him burst forth anew.

"Hello Prophet."

It was Mischa. At least, a very old Mischa. Seventy years if a day.

"I have returned for you," She looked back over her shoulder. "And you must come now. They are approaching."

Chapter Seven



Moses stood looking at Mischa White. Her eyes were the same, and her voice. But just yesterday he had seen this woman in vibrant strength and beauty. The figure before him was grey-haired, and *handsome* instead of stunning.

"This is not a request Prophet, you will come now."

She grabbed his wrist with strength, still iron regardless of apparent age. Moses looked up at the sky. The world spun, turned into grey, and then there was blackness.

Mischa's voice spoke.

"Rest easy Prophet. You are travelling between the worlds. This place is peace. But even it is passing."

Moses looked about. There were cracks appearing in the fabric of whatever reality they were passing across. Glaring red light broke through, and he could see it eating away at the darkness. Although it wasn't darkness. His eyes were adjusting, and it was not dark. There was light, but it was fading.

"Careful now, we pass the boundary."

There was a flash and Moses felt his body gain weight. His legs were unprepared, and he stumbled to the ground. Mischa's hand was still grasping his wrist. He pulled his arm slowly away. Where their flesh had touched was pink, like newborn skin. It tingled, and for an instant Moses thought he saw blue flash across it.

"We have arrived."

It was the land in his mind, but more .. And less.

"How long has it been since you came to me the first time?"

Mischa looked at him, speaking with some regret. "Three score and ten. The power of the Three .."

Moses cut her off. "I know, I wrote this remember?" He grinned, in spite of the growing fear within him. The song was sweeter here, if possible. Resounding in his head. It should have hampered his thoughts, but he found himself thinking very, very quickly.

"Why did you call me Prophet?"

Mischa looked away. "I cannot tell you. It was the only name I was given."

Moses could see her tiredness.

But he needed time to think. If this was his world, then it should abide by his rules. The ones he had created. However, seventy years is a long time. A lot could happen, if the world was alive and breathing.

This place certainly looked alive. They had arrived on a slight hilltop, lush short-cropped grass was under their feet. A line of stone made a circle around them, deep blue color moving through the stone. This signified it's power. Moses had been fascinated by the mythos that was Stonehenge. The Druids, their magic, their respect for nature. It was here.

Still. First things first. He needed to find the Three. That was important. They, from the beginning of the tales of Jesse King, were the key to everything. They were the cords that held creation in place.

A three-fold cord is not swiftly broken.

Mischa turned away and began walking south. "Follow me Prophet. The King wants to see you immediately."

The King? Is that Jesse?

Moses had put within the story the similarities between Jesse King and a ruling king. But Jesse King had so far abandoned and refused all attempts to make him leader. His was a single journey, a lone wolf, like the Phantom. Although not dressed in purple tights.

If seventy years has passed, who knows what is different. King could have died. If the world grew on as I wanted it to, anything could have happened.

He followed Mischa White along the road, through the woods. Sounds of life echoed across the ground. Birds, animals. Fish danced through the water of a creek they walked over.

Ulrik's Stream. And the standing stone .. Jesse's Door.

Coming out of the woods, they reached another road. A car was driving around the bend, it's motor noisy. Mischa kept to the side of the road. Moses followed. He had a pretty good idea where they were going.

Jesse King had owned a mansion. It was large, sprawling, and very debonair. Lavish parties were held there, the beautiful and famous congregating to socialise at the home of one of the richest men in the land. Of course, to Jesse it was a game. His riches had come in the first books, after rescuing various people, and investing in some good projects. Henderson was the brains behind Jesse King's money. Jacob Henderson. A man with the golden touch.

As they came to the edges of the city, Jericho, the Jericho of this world, Moses was struck by how real everything was. Moving. Alive.

This is real, as real as anything can be. I can touch the ground, feel the air. I can walk, run. I can probably be killed.

Jericho had been a magnificent city. Afterwards it became a broken place, retaining some vestiges of the haunting beauty that once brought the greatest of kings and presidents to visit.

They would gaze upon it's beauty and be lost for words.

Jericho had sung with magic. It's fall was terrible, and the magic broken.

But the city before him had taken on a look of new life. It sparkled.

The magic is here again.

Jesse King's mansion had been on the outskirts of Jericho, and as they crested a hill, it's towers came into view. Almost. They shimmered, as though a mirage. Moses looked *hard* at the buildings, and saw them fall away. There was nothing but a lonely house there. Single and desolate.

"What happened here?"

Mischa did not look back.

"Madness came upon the King. Daerin Sarvant returned from the dead and befriended the King. Nothing is as it was."

Moses stopped. "Wait a minute. We are talking about Jesse King right?"

At that Mischa also stooped, and turned to face him. There were tears in her eyes. "Jesse King has been dead almost seventy years. Not long after I first visited you."

Though vigor still remained in her body, and her mind was sharp, Moses saw the pain that rested in Mischa White.

Mischa had been experimented on as a child, and this probably accounted for her long life. Her other talents, her *mutations* had come about during and after the experimentation.

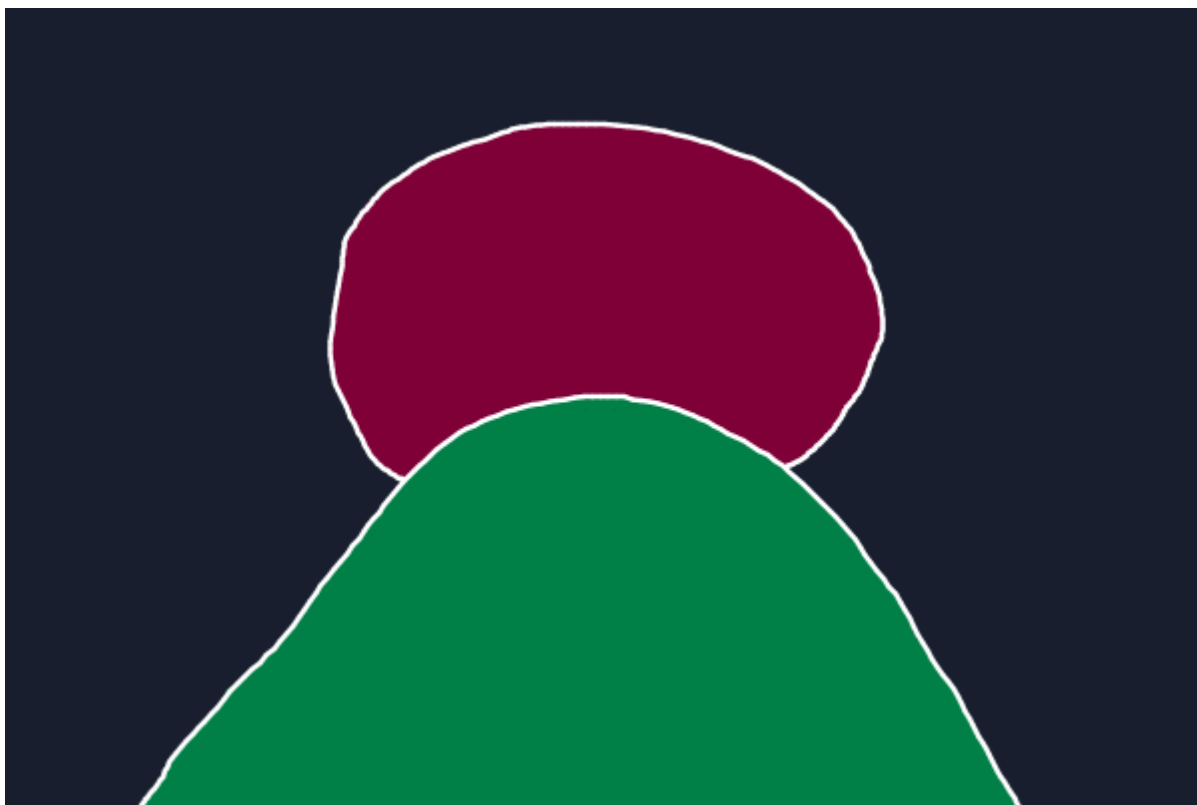
"Prophet. You should have come back with me."

Moses' anger flared. "How could I have known? You were my imagination!
None of this should be real!"

That doesn't ..

".. Make me any less alive." Mischa had anger in her too. "Come. We must go.
The King, Joshua King, son of Jesse, awaits us." In a lower tone, she added. "As
does the Sarvant."

Chapter Eight



Moses followed Mischa through the grounds of the King home.

As they approached the small building, the double doors swung open to greet them.

They entered a single room. Bare except for a row of wooden chairs along either side, and a larger chair at the end. Behind that, although Moses barely noticed it, was a ragged tapestry, showing the insignia of the King family. It had been stolen during the Hollow Years. Jesse had recovered it on one of his adventures.

There were two people in the room. One sat in the large chair, which was a throne of sorts. The other sat in the first wooden chair to the left of the throne.

His mind clicked together information like pieces of a puzzle.

The Council of Kings has grown small, and there is noone seated at the Right Hand.

These two ideas were extremely important in the books. The second much more than the first.

An old woman sat in the left-hand chair, watching them enter with rheumy white eyes. She said nothing.

Sitting in the throne was Joshua King. At least, that's what Moses thought. The man had his head buried between his hands. He was gaunt and haggard, like a stick figure. Skin and bones.

They waited before this man. Mischa said nothing, but there were tears in her eyes as she looked at the son of Jesse, and then at Moses.

"I'm sorry," Mischa White whispered to him, then grabbed his arms. "Do not forget the Three, Prophet. Whatever comes, remember them."

The man on the throne looked up.

"Hello Mother."

Moses had not written this, but it had been on his mind. Joshua King had more of Mischa than Jesse in his face, and more again of Mischa's father.

Daerin Sarvant.

As if thought could create reality, Moses heard the voice of evil behind him.

"Greetings Prophet. I am glad you have finally arrived."

Daerin Sarvant walked to the throne, and took his seat at the Right Hand.

"Prophet," His voice was everything Moses had imagined it to be. Smooth. Silky. Strong. The voice of the Serpent. "You are here in the flesh at last. Now, indeed, can my plans become truth. Your death will be long and hard. The more pain you go through, the better it will be. You are the Prophet, and within your lifeblood the greatest of power can be found. True magic."

Moses turned as he heard footsteps behind him. Clothed in black, the assassin stood there. One of the Sarvant Hounds.

My hearing must be getting better.

With incredible speed, the assassin reached up and squeezed his shoulder, and all went dark.

Chapter Nine



The old woman, who looked much older than the "old" Mischa, was standing at his bedside when Moses woke, leaning on a bamboo cane.

He pulled backwards immediately. She stood still, looking at him.

"Master wishes to see you after you have refreshed yourself."

She turned and headed for the door.

"Wait!" Moses wanted to know. "Who are you?"

The old woman didn't turn, but her shoulders slumped a little.

"I had a daughter. Susan. My husband died soon after her birth, along with my dear baby. This was after the Break, so you wouldn't know about it." Her voice was filled with bitterness. She wiped back tears, hobbled through the door, and was gone.

Moses sat on the side of his bed, and put his head between his hands.

How many characters did I write into these stories? There are some I can barely remember.

Moses sat still on the bedside. He began to run through his creation. Run through his memory of Jesse King, from the beginning.

I need a pen and paper. I need to write down my memories. Maybe then I'll remember something useful in this crazy situation.

Moses hadn't moved when the old lady returned, with two large, no, *huge* men, dressed in business suits. They were twins.

Samson and Heracles. They were babies, born to Timothy and Bress. Now they stand here, grown without my direction.

"You have not made yourself clean." The old woman shook her head. "Master will not be happy."

She tapped her cane, and the two men came forward and stood in front of Moses. Silent. Without compassion, but without anything else either.

They obeyed. That is what I had in store for them. Obedience. But obedience to the King, not this.

Moses got up and rubbed his shirt down. He wasn't too dirty, but he had come across the worlds in a t-shirt he wore to bed and a pair of shorts. The two men flanked him as they moved through the corridors of stone. The only light came from luminescent globes set into the roof, which was stone as well. They walked up two flights of stairs before coming into a small chamber.

Beyond stands the entrance hall we arrived into.

It was true. One of the suited men (Samson or Heracles, Moses didn't know) opened the doors, and they walked through. The old lady came last, beckoning him forward with her cane. The two men stayed either side of Moses as he walked toward the throne. Joshua King sat there, and the Sarvant at his Right Hand. Noone spoke as the old woman made her slow way to the left hand chair, and sat, taking her time. Of Mischa White there was no sign.

"Prophet. Your death begins today. A special day, and there is special power in the first blood spilled. Not as much as the last drop, but more than enough to begin the journey. The great journey foretold in prophesy. That which will lead us to the promised land. The golden lands, lost Albion, ravaged and broken, but risen again as the phoenix. We seek that place. And you are the key."

Joshua King sat slumped in his throne. He watched the Sarvant speak, and there was intelligence in those eyes, but all he did was watch. He turned those eyes (the eyes of Jesse King for sure) towards Moses, and the song within him, that had been so quiet he'd forgotten about it, burst forth. It's angelic tones thundering through those eyes. And the almost monotone of the spiritual sung at bedtime clashing with the voices.

"Tell old old Pharoah .."

Yet it *fit*. The song and the spiritual. As it clashed and bashed, it fit together in his head.

And then a thought occurred to him, as clear as the song within.

Jesse King is alive.

This could be true. Nay, it had to be true. Moses had to find the father of this pitiful wreck before him. But right now there were more immediate concerns.

The Sarvant noticed the contact of the eyes, and stepped between them, his own eyes blazing. The song quieted again. Soft, almost unheard, but Moses knew it was not gone.

"Enough. You will not look at the King again, or I will take out your eyes. There will be no more of *that*, until the appropriate time."

Moses wondered how much the Sarvant could hear. And he wondered if the Sarvant knew what the song was, what it meant.

Probably.

The Sarvant walked up in front of Moses. He waved a hand at the two large (almost giant) men, a grin on his face.

"I see you have met Samson and Heracles. They have grown into very handy individuals to have around. And no doubt, given the .. *Nature* of their mother, they will continue to grow, and *obey*.

He knows more than I do. He knows I created them with obedience in mind.

Samson and Heracles were born to a mother who was not entirely human. She looked human, and had fallen in love and married a normal human male, but what was within Bress was nothing close. People had been melded with magic long ago, mutated into something vastly *not* human. They had amazing powers, and were given to long life. However, they were small in number. Mutation did not lend itself to procreation.

The general public of Jesse King's world had labelled them *Mutants*, and in much the same way as the X-Men comics, prejudice had run it's bloody course. Thirty years before the Jesse King stories began, a number of battles rocked the lands. The Blood Wars, the Rebellion, the Last Battle of Truth and Gorgon's War. Gorgon was the leader of the Mutants. A tall long-haired warrior who carried a broadsword on his back.

Lives were taken on both sides, thousands of dead bodies had fed the carrion eaters. Magic and mutation (and muscle) lay waste to vast areas, and neither side won.

In the middle of the final battle the Mutants had retreated as one, as though given a silent command (as indeed they were). This was good for the human armies, who were being cut down after the death of Berek and James, the two cousins who had led the fight against the Mutants. Berek Staines stood over the body of his cousin James, and battled against Gorgon. Berek himself was a mutant, but held his secret until the duel. All his mighty power was unleashed, and they collapsed in each other's arms. Berek and Gorgon, dead.

The peace, what it was, held until the time of Jesse King.

In one of his journeys, Jesse King had come across Bress, and she joined his company. Timothy had been smitten from the first, although Bress took her time. After long decades of prejudice, it was hard for her to trust.

But trust she did.

They were married, and at the end of the second last Jesse King book, Bress gave birth to the twins. One book later and the Sarvant had murdered her, along with Timothy.

A surreal feeling had overtaken Moses as the Sarvant led him back down into the stone bowels of the castle remains. The old lady came behind, tapping her cane, the sound echoing loudly.

They arrived at the end of a corridor. The Sarvant put out a hand and the door opened. As he passed through the way, Moses saw they were within a torture chamber. Old instruments lay there, as well as new.

The song, though low, was still there. It gave him peace.

Do your worst Sarvant.

Daerin Sarvant turned to him. "The first drop of blood must come now. On *this* day. Do you remember what marks special this time?"

Moses looked at him. Of course he remembered .. He had *created* this place. But he wouldn't speak to the Sarvant.

"Perhaps your travel addled your wits. Today, many years in the past, marks the birth of Jesse King. *And*, his death." The Sarvant smiled, wicked and dark. "Of course, *that* was after the Break, so you wouldn't know."

The old woman had said something similar.

She moved forward, as the twins bodily took hold of Moses and strapped him to a table.

I remember this room now. The place where Wolverine flashbacked to in the first X-Men movies. Where he was experimented on. I'd forgotten that.

The old woman leant, one arm holding her back, as though supporting her frail bones. She whispered in Moses' ear, and he remembered.

"I am Sara, the Unloved."

She grabbed his wrist and held it high, above her face. A knife appeared in her other hand, and quick as a shadow, she made a slight cut. A single drop beaded, and began to slide down his arm. The wound healed immediately, skin closing and knitting itself together. Moses watched as the old woman, Sara, opened her mouth and took in the drop of blood.

Sara. You were loved .. What has happened?

Chapter Ten



Moses dreamed of a dragon, and a sword. A shield and a breastplate. He dreamt of battles between magic and magic, between the free and the slaved. Moses dreamt of Sara, the Unloved. She came towards him, her front teeth growing into long thin fangs, her eyes contracting like a cat's. Again and again he ran, but she kept coming.

"I am your bane, your dearth. Let me finish it Prophet, or things will turn out worse, much worse."

He fell, scrambling backwards, and the dragon came, burning all in it's wake, including Sara.

Dreaming again, he was on the battlefield once more. A lone drum beat somewhere in the distance. He couldn't hear the sound of the song within his head, or anywhere else. Moses came across a tall figure standing on a hill. A stone rolled down the hill, never stopping. By some trick of the mind, it continued rolling down the hill, over and over.

The figure watched him, a large hat adorning it's head. Long hair rustled in the breeze.

"Moses." The figure spoke, and it was the voice of the song. "You must go down. Tell Pharoah to let my people go."

Sweat beaded his forehead as Moses pushed himself up from the pillow. He was in bed, within the room (prison) again. They had moved him from the torture chamber. He wasn't in any pain.

Not much torturing went on.

Moses woke a little more.

The song.

Gone. Not even an echo. There was nothing. When he tried to listen harder, it hurt. As though pushing against an electric fence.

Perhaps not gone, but closed off.

Without the song Moses felt empty. It had been so present in his mind over the last few days.

Moses could barely remember the dreams that haunted his sleep. Something about a hill. And Sara.

The door opened and Sara stepped into the room, followed by the twins. She had changed. Her walking stick was in her hand, but no longer did she shake and limp.

My blood gave her something. Life. Health.

She didn't speak to him at first, but stood watching. Finally, in a voice stronger than yesterday, she addressed Moses.

"Prophet. You know me now. Today the real pain begins. Your first blood has given me new life, new power. I am more than I was. Mutant. Magic. It is melded in me with your blood."

Sara turned and walked out the door, nodding to the two giant-men.

Samson moved forward and stood beside him. It came to Moses, information from his memory, that Samson had a birthmark above his right eye. It was in the shape of a flame. It meant something important, but he was pulled to his feet. Not roughly, but there was a strength behind the action that brooked no physical argument. Samson pointed to the door. Heracles led the way.

Instead of going further down towards the torture chamber from the previous night, they arrived into the throne room. Joshua King sat there but didn't move. The twins continued walking, and shortly they came out into the sun. It was almost noon.

Moses wondered whether the twins felt the heat in their black suits, and thought probably not.

They walked to another small building, behind the house, which turned out to be a garage. Within it was not one, but three of the same black wagons he had seen on the day, yesterday it was, unless he had slept longer, when the older Mischa had come to his door.

There is too much parallel for this to be coincidence.

Heracles got into the driver's seat, while Samson joined Moses in the middle row of seats. Sitting in the enclosed space, Moses was acutely aware of just how big the twins were.

The black wagon started, and they moved off. They travelled towards the center of the city. Towards the heart of Jericho. Jericho. So much had gone on there in the Jesse King stories. Sara had been all white and power in the last book. Bringing down many of the dark. The Sarvant was the only one who could stand before her. Jesse King saved her life. The Sarvant was defeated, presumed dead. And Sara had been joyous. There was John, a rebel. They were in love.

What happened? The city of Jericho was full of joy. What has happened?

Deep inside a small voice whispered to Moses. He knew what had happened. Jesse King was dead, or gone. Whether it was a writer's bad plot twist, or something deeper, Jesse King was the key to peace and harmony within the lands. Moses had wanted it that way. The land was tied to King, and he was

tied to the people. In the last book Jesse king had embraced the beginning of his destiny.

And his city was Jericho.

Chapter Eleven



As they moved through Jericho, Moses saw life. Lots of people. Men and women walked the streets in suits. Tall buildings of glass windows stretched high. Kids ran in the suburban streets. And finally, they came to the heart of Jericho. It was geographically the middle, and built to reflect an ancient understanding. That each city, town, each *community*, has a heart. It beats, and the better it is recognised, the stronger they will be.

There were no walls around the heart. It was an area of trees, and within the trees lay the most powerful relic of magic and mutation within the land. A single standing stone, blue symbols and writing carved beneath the surface, flowing, pulsing. Power radiated from this place.

They stopped a little way from the trees. Getting out, Moses could smell the difference in the air. Fresh and alive.

A deathly smoke hovers over the King house and grounds. But here, there is life.

A few minutes later they walked through the trees, into the clearing where the big rock stood. Sara was there, the Sarvant .. And Mischa. She was dressed in white. Sara in black. The Sarvant, grey (as was his custom).

A great wooden cross lay on the ground, a hole dug before it's bottom end.

"Prophet. We welcome you to the Heart. But you know about this place. Probably better than we do." His grin said he didn't believe that. The Sarvant went on. "Sara here, this lovely creature you so kindly gave your first blood, has something happening to her. Magic and mutation, combining themselves within her. As has not been done since your great Jesse King was birthed. Fitting it should have happened on the day it did." He paused, looking at Sara. The lines had gone from her face. She was growing young again. Strong. Agile in body and mind.

"Samson. Heracles. Kill her."

The words stunned Moses. His brain tried to take in what had been said.

Why does he want Sara dead?

The twins advanced on Sara, who looked bewilderingly at the Sarvant. "Daerin. What are you doing? I gave up everything for you. My husband .. My Baby!"

The Sarvant looked at her, a hand rising to stop the advance of the twins. Then he laughed, long and harsh. "Yes, you did. But now you become a key. Not *the* key, but a key nonetheless. And your death on this *Henge* will break that which needs to be broken. And I will still have the Prophet with me. Hale and well-met. Hale at least. For the moment."

He dropped his hand, and the twins started forward again.

Sara pushed her hands out in front, fingers splayed. Fire burst from them, green and blue. It leapt at the twins, and Moses could feel the heat. Both Samson and Heracles took the fire on their chests .. Slowed .. And kept walking. Sara growled. She turned as if to run, but the Sarvant spoke ("Saehd") and a thin layer of something (like ice) covered her, stilling movement completely.

A voice cracked into the clearing. The twins turned, seeking it's origin.

"Sarvant. You bitter crazy old man .. Begone from here."

Figures in blue and green began to appear, dropping from the trees. They were all shapes and sizes, but advanced as one. The Sarvant put up his own hands, red and black fire leaping from them. Visible shields were thrown up, like out of a comic or computer game. One or two weren't quick enough, and were caught in the flames, burning instantly.

"Twins .. Go. Back to the castle. I will deal with these .."

A spear of blue light flew at the Sarvant. He deflected the first, but another struck him below the ribs. He stumbled, but didn't fall.

"Fools! Is this the best ragg-ed tagg-ed army you could come up with? I will have you dead within the moment."

More shards of blue and green and white light attacked him, but he hunkered down, then thrust up, bouncing the lights back at their senders. Figures were lying, some still, some moving, all across the clearing, within the trees. The Sarvant pushed his hands, and the ground shook, rippling outwards. Moses was knocked to the ground. The red and black fire came again, catching figures up.

They are losing. For all that it is .. They are losing.

The twins had got to his side, and were protecting him. They had their own brand of magic/mutation. Their bodies seemed to be able to take any number of the light weapons upon them. Then one struck Heracles in the head .. And another. A tall woman (her hood was thrown back) struck out at Heracles with what Moses could only imagine was some kind of mind attack. He slumped to the ground.

Samson went mad.

And Moses saw another side of the mutation that lived within the twins. His eyes grew red, all of the eye. His veins boiled, and his skin became hard. Armored like a Rhino, or Elephant. He screamed and growled, wordless agony, lifting his brother from the ground.

The huge figure of Samson (who had grown with his rage, ten feet high at least) ran from the battle, brushing off attacks like they were insects, and knocking down any who got in his way.

The Sarvant looked at the fleeing Samson, and Moses saw a flicker of fear in his eyes.

Moses looked, and saw that Mischa was right behind the Sarvant, who didn't seem to realise. She had a dagger in her hands, which lifted and swung down with hate and anger burning from her eyes.

The Sarvant then knew something was happening. He turned at the same moment the dagger struck him, so the blade struck shoulder bone instead of puncturing the neck. His arm came up, and Mischa gagged, then began to struggle against an unseen force, which was lifting her above the ground.

"You are done Mischa." The Sarvant seemed sad, which was very strange.

Mischa White, wife to Jesse King, mother of Joshua King, one-time hero of the lands, stopped her battle. She looked at Moses, and he felt her power coming forth.

"Find him."

The sounds of the external quieted, as though a cone of silence was descending around them. Moses, watching. The Sarvant, arm outstretched. Mischa White, King's Rose, forgotten by none who met her, hovering above the ground.

Mischa pulled inwards, a fetal position, and then burst forth. The Sarvant looked surprised for a moment, golden ashes falling about him. A wind sprang up, and the song returned, growing, quickly, with strength.

As the ashes touched him, the Sarvant groaned.

He is in pain. Mischa did something powerful just now.

The Sarvant didn't have the strength to even look up at Moses from where he had slumped to the ground. He mumbled a few words in the ancient language of the First Magic and flashed out of sight. A faint smell of the sea wafted across to Moses.

The Sarvant uses the First Magic now. That is not good.

The tall woman who had struck at Heracles came forward. Her auburn hair was netted with burrs and grass, her face dirty.

She is the most beautiful creature I've ever seen.

"Prophet. Your coming is bittersweet."

She seemed angry, and sad.

The figures came forward, heads uncovered. They gathered about the standing stone, and a song began. It twined with that in Moses' head. Sorrow though, not joy.

They are mourning Mischa, and the others lost.

The voices lifted high and low, words of pain and loss.

Afterwards, the woman turned to Moses. "What are you going to do?"

Moses laughed. "You're joking right? What am I going to do? Ha."

She wasn't laughing. The figures were leaving the clearing, and a man came up to them.

"Jenn, we need to gather them."

Jenn, the woman, shook her head. "It is not right Jason."

"He is wounded. Mischa wounded him."

Jenn stiffened. "I would not hear that name for the passing time. It is not done."

Jason, a dark-haired bearded (big guy) man grimaced. "The time for ritual is done. The Prophet is here. We must do what needs be done to rid the world of the Sarvant."

"You will not summon the peoples yet. But yes, it will happen soon. The time *is* come, and all is changing."

Jason didn't like it, but nodded, accepting the decision. Jenn looked to be the leader of the group .. Moses supposed they were rebels against the Sarvant's dominion (if he had a dominion, of that Moses wasn't sure yet).

After he had gone, Jenn stepped forward. The breeze rustled her hair, strands swept in front of her eyes, over her face. He reached up and brushed the hair away. She moved in and kissed him quickly on the lips, then whispered the strangest words of all.

Chapter Twelve



"I was once Jenny Hendant. My father created Hendant publishing. I arrived here countless years before you wrote the Jesse King chronicles."

This blew Moses away, completely. He stood, stunned, her breathing close to him, flustered. He closed his eyes, trying to comprehend what had been said.

How could this be? What is going on? If this world existed before I wrote it .. Then did I create it?

Moses (whose brain noticed that he seemed to be losing a little of the flab, *tighter* his body was) needed to step back, distance himself, so that he could think, could work out what was happening. But there was an intoxication about this woman before him that dragged at him. She was more than beautiful. His eyes opened again.

She is everything.

You probably know what Moses was thinking. The feeling that cannot immediately be put into words, but encompasses every thought. A connection, a vibe, a crossing of paths. Electricity. Tension.

Moses had been married once. It had been about ritual and probably a little naivety. Married definitely for his money, his ex-wife (he didn't think about her name, ex-wife was enough) had run off with her *true* love, the minister that had married them. The hypocrisy of it all had hardened Moses' heart against all things love.

What Moses experienced with Jenn in those scant moments broke this down, swept it away. It was mind-blowing. Out of this world. There was only the connection, only her eyes (green, gold-flecked), only her breath on his face, sweet as summer rain.

How long they stood there Moses did not know. His memory (later) of this time was that time had nothing to do with it. Lost to them was time.

Moses brought his hand up again, to stroke the face of beauty before him, brush away the strand of hair that had escaped her ears again. Jenn moved. Not away, but she pushed her head into his hand slightly.

She feels, she knows as I do.

Another age passed. The madness that is love (true, deep, beyond emotion, into absolutes) had taken hold of them both. Jenn (once from the real world) and Moses (the Prophet).

The song was sweet within Moses. Relishing the moment, it encompassed the both of them, and Jenn heard it too, echoing from Moses. Swelling, Moses heard the standing stone, the *Henge*, join in with it's own song. He took Jenn's hand (electricity) and turned towards the most magic of elements within the world of Jesse King.

They stood together, hand in hand, listening to the song within Moses joined with that of the *Henge*. It's melody *moved*.

That day (and night, for they stood longer than could be possible in normal circumstances) two lives were changed. Everything was changing, but moreso right now, these two were changed. Something was created within them. Purpose, destiny, fate, truth .. It was more than sappy love from tv soaps and romance novels, more than the world's understanding of love that is good for a

season and then not. Why? Because the strength of what bound them was not found in themselves.

As the sun rose, crossing over the city, the Henge spoke to Moses.

"Go down Moses. Find him. Tell Pharaoh. Let MY people go."

Chapter Thirteen



Jenn led him wordlessly. Things were different. Alive perhaps (like a crisp summer morning). The song had receded, not quiet, but not loud either.

People watched as they walked through the streets. Cars drove by. Jenn stood out, not just because of the clothing, but she was more *real* than those they passed, who seemed grey and shadowed. He hadn't seen it before.

These people are under thrall.

This thought was followed closely.

Pharoah. He lords them. They are his slaves, and he is god in their world.

They were walking along the pavement, a small flock of sparrows gathered crumbs up from the street, when the air around them *thinned*. Swirled and rippled like water in a breeze. The world faded as they walked through, into another place. The people and the sparrows were gone.

Moses looked around. They were in a desert, sand molded underneath his shoes. Heat shimmered the land around them. A walled city sat close by. Blue

and green clothed men and women walked around the battlements of the city. Spears in hand, they marched. Marched with spears in hand.

I wonder if they have ram's horns?

Jenn pulled him gently towards her. She spoke close to his ear.

"This is our place of refuge. We war against the Sarvant and others from here. You must guard yourself in this place, although it is almost home to me, there are others that would soon as kill you as listen. And more .. There is always darkness in the brightest of places. We have traitors here. The Sarvant is strong, and there are others, as and maybe more powerful."

Moses nodded. He was still enveloped with a strange peace, Jenn's face still distracted his thoughts. And something else.

"Go down Moses. Tell Pharoah to let My people go."

Who are these others? There was always and only the Sarvant. What if he is not the Pharoah? What if there is someone else? Some thing else?

He was about to ask Jenn about the other beings, but was distracted at the sight of the city gates opening. A horn sounded. *Long, long, short. Long, long, short.*

As they approached, a group of long-cloaked (think Neo from the Matrix) men and women came towards them. Black sunglasses. The men, short-cropped hair. The women, tight-clasped single braid.

A man moved to the head. The others stopped as a single beat. The man came up to them. He tucked a knee and bent towards Jenn. She, in turn, took his hand and kissed it.

Strange ceremony.

"Jenn the Crimson. You bring hope. Jason has reported. Sadness is ours, but joy too." He turned to Moses.

"Welcome Prophet." He didn't bow or even nod. Instead of these things, he closed his eyes and began to sing softly.

Within him, although the man's words were barely discernible, the song rose in greeting. Its music jumped for joy on hearing whatever it was the man sang. Again he recognised it after a few moments. His grandmother's voice joined the song.

Joshua fit de battle of Jericho.

I can't remember the words. Walls and ram's horns.

He realised the people in suits had fanned out around them in a circle. The place they had arrived at was (of course) a gateway, grey rock marked with blue symbols and pictures. Marked, flowing, pulsing through it. This was all new to Moses. He hadn't written of a place like this, or even thought about it.

The man stopped his song, and the song within Moses dropped low.

"Prophet. You come to us in our dire need. Although there is some contention." Jenn glanced towards the city. The man went on. "I believe you to be our single hope in this world. There is in you that which will defeat the darkness."

He stood (at some point in the song, the man had dropped to his knees) and touched his eyes with his thumbs. He opened them shortly.

"I am Heran. There will be festivities tonight, but for now .. The Assembly awaits. I am to bring you before them. Steel yourself Prophet, if need be. And come follow me."

Jenn grasped his hand, squeezing tight. There was no time for any kind of goodbye as they walked through the walls, under the stones. The front gate was massive, but behind that was more wall, then another inner, smaller gate.

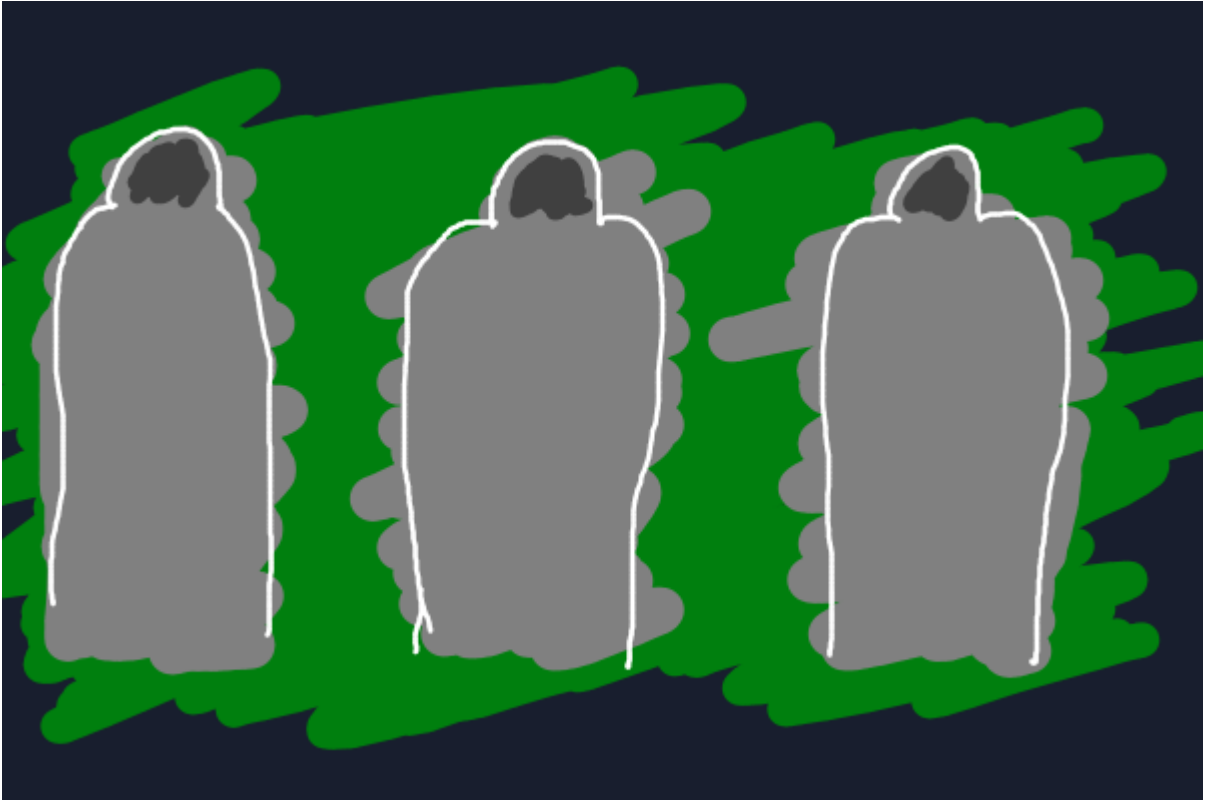
This opened into a city bustling with activity. People walked and ran and sat and stood. Vehicles drove down one street and up another. The group boarded what seemed like a cross between a train and a bus, and stood around him and Heran. Moses turned to speak with Jenn (who had let go of his hand earlier, but whispered words into his ear), but she was gone.

I didn't even feel her leave. What kind of connection is that?

The bus/train moved along the streets. The city was massive, far bigger on the inside than it seemed on the out. In the distance Moses saw farmlands. Turning, into another distance, he saw industrial buildings. A river ran through the entire city (as far as Moses could see), winding through each part.

This is new.

Chapter Fourteen



They came to a cathedral. It dwarfed any church that Moses had ever seen. Towers rose from it's many rooves, stain-glass murals decorated the walls. Huge story boards laid out. Moses was having trouble taking in the rest of the city, but this place ..

You could sit here for hours looking, and still not find everything.

Heran turned to him.

"Before you is the greatest of stories. It tells of the struggle between light and darkness. It was Jesse King's vision. And .. You are in it."

Moses felt the surprise, but so much had happened that it didn't register on his face.

The walls were enormous, but he scanned them anyway. Looking for some recognition. The pictures drew him in, they were alive. Some kind of magic lived within them.

And then he saw himself. But it wasn't him exactly. Too tall, too good-looking. And the figure in the center of the many mural'd walls had a presence, even in a picture, that he could only wish for.

They moved towards the cathedral. It's great doors were open, a thick blue and red carpet rolled down the marble steps. You could see all the way into the center room, where the figures were standing.

The Assembly.

There were guards alongside the carpet, swords at their sides, halberds at an angle. Orbs floated above, turning endlessly.

Seealls. Security cameras, magic ones. Some things are the same.

There was much that Moses recognised as they walked forward into the massive room ahead. Even though he had not written of this place, this *temple*, Jesse King had talked about building it in the books. It had been in Moses' mind, but not fleshed out.

This is more than I could have imagined.

The Assembly stood silent as they arrived. A great gong was struck, unseen.

The three lead figures, dressed in silver rather than grey, lifted their hands. A low hum began. A chant.

Haannuummaannuumm.

It continued.

Hanumanum.

The song answered within Moses. He felt the words within him, responding. It was the language of the Gaels, a sect of monks.

Ganumael.

The Assembly bowed their heads as one, and the chant ended.

"Telos naribida galush. Icth forulas me'h tael. Hanumanum."

One of the three silver-robed Assembly spoke with a loud clear voice. Sonorous would be the word.

The Assembly responded.

"Ganumael."

They then took their seats, all except the three silvers.

"They say you are the Prophet."

Another of the silver-robed Assembly had a different tone to his voice. Not nasal, not whiny, but it struck discord in Moses. It seemed he had spoken out of turn, mutterings came from the seated men and women.

The third silver-robed figure drew her hood back.

"Michal. It is he."

Moses blinked. Before him was an older, but no less stunning, picture of Jenn.

Her mother.

Michal didn't seem to like her answer. He stepped towards Moses.

"Truth is a weapon. As is trust. We trust too much in a d .."

"Truth."

The silver-robed figure who spoke first in Gael also drew back his hood. Michal stopped talking.

"Michal is correct. Here today, we have truth before us. A weapon. Salvation lies with the Prophet. This is truth."

Michal drew breath. "But he will be our destruction. We cannot trust this .. This man. You see what I see. Chaos shimmers around him."

As Michal spoke, Moses began to hear sounds coming from outside the walls. Noises.

".. So for whatever reason he is here, let us not place the mantle of salvation upon him. Not yet, if indeed at all."

Others were beginning to hear the noise too. They turned in their seats.

The silver-robed man that wasn't Michal lowered his head, closing his eyes.

"He has come."

He brought his eyes open as he lifted his head, and looked straight at Moses.

"You must go. Back to your place." He *pushed* at Moses, with his hand .. And with magic.

Moses began to fade. The room began to fade, at the corners of his vision. Jenn appeared and ran towards him. The tall silver-robed man was speaking.

"Leah, remember the path. You must take her and walk it now. Michal. He has come. We must bring battle to hi .."

The back wall of the Cathedral, where the mural of the Moses-likeness was, burst inwards. Rubble and dust flew thick and deadly. Some of the robed Assembly were down. Invisible walls and hands shielded most. The dust was cleared, swept away.

As Moses' vision faded completely, he saw Daerin Sarvant standing tall in the center of a massive hole in the wall.

"PROPHET."

The voice crashed into his brain.

"CATCH YOU NEXT TIME."