

Chronicles of the HEdge

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First Trilogy Christian Publishing softcover edition March 2019

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Manufactured in the United States of America

B-ISBN# 978-1-64088-297-3 E-ISBN# 978-1-64088-298-0

Prologue

Approaching the eve of a new Century, there was great anticipation for the future of mankind. Optimism flourished as humanity teetered on the edge of the old order, ready to explode into the new.

Slowly, however, the darker side of human nature once again manifested itself. The quest for power became paramount to all else; territorial politics and class battles became the cry of the day. Dreams of the perfect world began to fade.

These struggles saw many groups fall from the political landscape. Those practicing any form of religion beyond a strict Humanism were deemed heretical and a danger to the State. Many religions that had one time populated Earth were gone or had assimilated into one of various sects of Humanism. Those professing the Christian faith became outcasts. Under heavy persecution they were forced to practice their faith in secret underground enclaves. Their persecutors were determined to finish the Christian genocide that had begun thousands of years earlier.

Humanity's Edge (HEdge) is the reigning world government. Ten consortium members representing every sector of the globe make up the HEdge Council—the supreme authority of the land. Forty sector chiefs were tendered appointments to oversee the world's finances, appointments only the HEdge Council could terminate.

Living under the shadows of this godless regime, Christians risk their lives daily as they struggle to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as the war rages, God's people don't falter but instead rise to the occasion in a mighty way.

So the struggle continues, the evils of the world seduce the souls of the many, while God's remnant battle against all odds to bring salvation to a lost and dying world.

Chapter 1

The intersection of Christopher Street and McDougal was always a heavily trafficked corner. It sat in the heart of one of Manhattan's many popular tourist spots. More subdued than the blazing hundred-story neon outlined buildings of the Times Square area, it enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere of quaint ethnic restaurants, pubs, and novelty shops. Thousands of people from every niche of society merged on this corner daily, and amazingly, even with its maelstrom of human activity, life managed to quietly coalesce from one day into the next without so much as a back-page story.

Today, however, would be different.

Seated at an end table near the window of one of the corner's busy restaurants, John Rex sipped his coffee while keeping a vigil on the sidewalk outside. A medium sized man in his late thirties, John was blessed with a sharp mind and a healthy, trim body.

The round table he was seated at was barely large enough to support his coffee and lunch plate. He stretched while glancing at the neon wall clock. Time was moving at a tediously slow pace. He took another sip. He was on his second cup, considering a third.

He was excited at the prospect of meeting his childhood friend Andrew after so many years. John reflected back to when he left New York City as a young boy with his mother, moving to California. His parents had divorced, and not wanting to remain in the same town as her husband, his mother accepted a job offer clear across the country. The relocation was harsh on the family. His older brother was forced to stay with his father, while John was swept across country with mom. With his family in ruins, John was also forced to leave his very best friend, Andrew, behind. The memories ached.

But now, for the first time since pulling away from the curb in front of his childhood home decades ago, waving goodbye to his dad, his brother, and his best friend, John was about to meet Andrew again. He could hardly wait.

He was also looking forward to meeting Keeyon, a close friend of Andrew's. Like Andrew, Keeyon was a missionary in the Eastern United States sector. John held them both in the highest regard, along with all the other missionaries that served in this treacherous region. Though HEdge military forces were a power to be reckoned with all across the globe, the Eastern U.S. sector Forces were especially ruthless. They trampled Christianity with a determination only Satan himself could appreciate.

John ran his fingers through his dense beard. Since most of the photographs circulating on social media sites and every online network showed him with a younger, clean-shaven face, the beard was a necessity. No guarantee against recognition, but it helped. His wife Melody thought the whiskers gave him a boyish cuteness and was quietly tickled that he finally let it grow out.

Melody was a loving woman who had survived many close calls and near disasters while sharing her faith alongside her husband. She never left his side or his convictions. Caring for their eleven-year-old son, Matthew, prevented her from accompanying John on many of his

missionary trips. But she would always keep him in her prayers.

The Western U.S. sector's underground Christian network provided abundant support for her and Matthew during her husband's absences. The network had millions of Christians spanning the sector from the central United States to the west coast, a network in which her husband was consummately involved.

Unfortunately, Melody and Matthew could not accompany John on this trip. He wanted to bring them along, especially to meet Andrew, but the dangers inherent in the Eastern U.S. sector made that impossible. Combing his fingers through his beard, he sat immersed in deep thought. Gone only two days and he already missed them so much. "I'll bring them next time to meet Andrew," he sighed, unaware he was making a commitment he would never be able to keep.

Almost before he finished his thought, two familiar shapes appeared across the street. The pair came from around the corner, stopped in front of the corner pub and stood talking to one another.

The bustling crowds kept passing in front, blocking John's view of them. He could see that one was a tall dark-skinned man with short hair; the other was thinner built, light-skinned with medium length brown hair. An excitement welled up inside. "Andrew and Keeyon?"

The one man stepped in front of the other, blocking John's view of him. Finally, John decided he had had enough. The anticipation was too much. He got up from the table and stepped outside.

As he left the shaded protection of the cafe, the dizzying hot rays of the early afternoon sun beat down on him. Starting across the street, he laid his hand over his brows to avert the sun. He was halfway across when the darker gentleman stepped aside, allowing John a clear view of the other man. Much to his joy, he was indeed John's old friend, Andrew.

Andrew saw him at the same instant. Both men's faces lit up. John speeded his pace. Andrew motioned something to Keeyon while starting toward the street. The two men merged as John stepped over the curb.

Andrew's face aglow, he held out his hand. John took it while asking in his childhood slang, "How's it going, big head?" That was it. Andrew laughed as he pulled John into a full embrace. John returned the hug with every bit as much enthusiasm.

Feeling somewhat like a third wheel, Keeyon stood with his hands stuffed in his pockets, looking beyond his friends to the rush of tourists behind them.

The Village Pub was as busy as ever. A minimum of four bartenders was necessary to properly serve the raucous crowds meandering in and out. It was a favorite watering hole for local residents and tourists alike.

Herb Duncan, one of its bartenders, was on his way to deliver two foaming mugs to a young couple seated near the window. The obese and unkempt bartender abruptly dropped the mugs on their table while demanding payment in full. His only hint of a business-like courtesy was a half grunt, half thanks, as the young man gingerly held his left hand up so Herb could scan the translucent barcode on the back of it.

On his return to the counter, Herb decided a breath of fresh air was in order. He yelled above

the crowd's roar to inform another bartender that he was going outside for a minute. *Longest minute in history*, he mused.

Entering the doorway, he elbowed an inbound customer and threw his belly into a few others as he pummeled his way through the swinging door. "Watch it, punk!" he threatened as one of the customers objected.

Once outside, he sucked in a deep breath. The stench he was forced to inhale daily inside the pub nearly drove him mad. He hated the place, and he detested the tourists, always asking for directions or complaining about something. He couldn't remember the last time they left him a tip worth talking about. Cheap lowlives! If he could, he would send every one of them back home in a box.

Feeling a need to vent, he began cursing every tourist in sight, quietly swearing at each, especially the happy ones. How dare they enjoy themselves on this miserable day in this miserable city. He hated them all.

Watching the entire corner, he was nearly finished when he noticed an especially disturbing sight, two men shaking hands then hugging each other. They seemed deliriously happy. Whatever the occasion, Herb knew they weren't pretending. They were probably long-lost relatives, maybe brothers who hadn't seen each other in years. He hated watching them.

These two were really beginning to annoy him. Didn't they have anywhere else to flaunt their stupid emotions? He watched one of them turn to a black man and embrace him too. As he stared contemptuously at the three men, something occurred to him. Something about the men looked familiar. He knew them from somewhere. The brown haired man looked especially familiar. *But why?*

Maybe he had served them a drink? No, that wasn't it. Something else. But what was it?

Then it struck him. "You've got to be kidding me!" he gasped excitedly. "Is that John Rex? No, can't be. Yeah, that's him, 'cept he's got a beard! And the black guy, that's Keeyon Webster! And the other guy's Andrew Hoyte! This is unbelievable!"

Ducking back inside, he rushed over to call the police.

Herb Duncan considered himself a fair man, someone who would do just about anything for anyone. In fact, he thought of himself as probably the nicest guy he knew. But even he had his limits, and Christianity was certainly it. He despised Christians; he loathed them, the intolerant beasts! And here was a wonderful opportunity to get rid of three of them all at once!

He couldn't believe his luck. Not even two weeks ago HEEdge Forces had been posting photos of some of the most notorious criminals in the sector on their websites, pasting them all over social media sites, and even circulating hard copy photos through the neighborhood; and today, right outside his pub, stood three of the worst!

"Maybe this isn't such a bad day after all." Herb chuckled as he dialed the six-digit Christian hotline number. "Not a bad day at all."

Unaware of the excitement their presence had aroused, the happy trio of Keeyon, Andrew, and John departed around the corner on their way to a relaxed and comfortable locale where they could engage in a good meal and some good conversation, discussing old times along with new.

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[**The Man Who Saved Christmas**](#)

Christmas—only days away; plastic snowmen and glowing reindeer adorn the lawns of neighborhoods across America. All is calm, all is bright, and yet there is something tragically wrong about this Christmas night. With swift passage through Congress, the Anti-Intolerance legislation was signed into law prohibiting the public display of religious symbols. The traditional centerpiece enjoyed by millions every Christmas, the Nativity Scene, is now gone. This is one of those perennial issues that often stir emotions to the brink. But taking a lighter approach to the argument, wouldn't it be fun if, somehow, through some bizarre chain of events, the person who most fervently opposes open displays of religion, became the mouthpiece from which a fictitious law like the Anti-Intolerance bill, was overturned? This story brings to life a witty rendition of the political struggles fought every December over something as humble and yet powerful as the display of the Nativity Scene.

[**The Rocking Chair**](#)

The Rocking Chair is an eerie tale of Ted Nathanson, an auto-body repairman who decides to drive his rickety truck a few hours north one evening to visit his brother. On his way, he makes a fateful exit from the freeway into a peaceful, quaint little town for a bite to eat and a quick nap. But before accomplishing either, he finds himself thrust into a ghastly nightmare as he accidentally discovers the town's dark secret. Before he can escape to tell the world, he is forced into the chair ... the rocking chair, where he learns the full measure of the town's diabolical nature.

The Rocking Chair won first place in a national Sci-Fi short story contest sponsored by Otherworlds Sci-Fi, and is the first story in their anthology titled The Unknown, Otherworlds Sci-Fi 2003 Anthology