

THE ARCHANGEL'S 1ST PROCTOR

by Joshua Darcey

Sample Chapter

10

† RITE & GORY Ψ †

ONE WEEK AGO: Father Francis had been busy and, in that very moment Count D'Carabonari took his satellite eyes off the area surrounding the St. Ignatius Friary.. ..the former St. Ignatius Friary, to scout the Proctor's route to the new Malibu estate and also monitor Michael Boridinsky and Father Aloysius's temporary relocation to the private lodge, he was able to slip undetected into the friary and take up residence. The friar was a much changed man. Walking around the empty friary was so unfamiliar to him; not only was it devoid of his fellow brethren, his family, there were no personal possessions and hardly any furniture left to speak of. To Father Francis it did not feel like the place where he had spent his teenage years, decades earlier. It seemed smaller, and oddly unrecognizable. The friar felt completely disassociated with his surroundings.

Father Francis had plans. He wanted to become powerful, all powerful, in fact. In keeping with that plan, the friar made his way through the grounds to the entrance of the catacombs. It was all locked up. But not only that, it had been bricked up and mostly concealed by earth that was piled high; to cover the steps leading down to the centuries old wrought iron gate and Jacobean wooden door leading into the friary underground. 'No worry', Francis thought. He cut through the overgrown, wild gardens, taking him to the secret entrance to the underground, hidden in the outskirts of the unkempt, spacious grounds. Many of the other brothers knew about the secret entrance, though had neglected to seal it, especially since it was highly unlikely that it would ever be discovered, on top of which, it was in the landscape zone, and so soon enough the bulldozing activity would seal it forevermore.

Father Francis squeezed into the labyrinth and made his way to the archives, to the scene of the murder of Brother Bernard, the murder he himself had committed. No, nothing. No feelings, no regret, and most alarming, no remorse. The archives were completely empty, not a piece of paper, not a paperclip, everything had been taken away. Father Francis then went to the isolated section of the catacombs, no Agaptius, no Agaptius's body, no sign. The friar then took a stroll around the labyrinth. He could see the dig holes from where the Holy Treasure had been extracted. The Bonaventure Trove was secure, he was very happy about that.... Father Francis found himself outside the Udes chamber; standing there for some time before pushing his way in. He used a gas lighter to light the torches that

were still there, doused out on the floor.

What the friar did next was reminiscent of the actions of the mentally and emotionally unsound Father James. He walked slowly around the chamber examining the chattels, visually selecting those instruments of torture that could be used to inflict the most harm and those that would restrict the most movement. Father Francis had plans! He had nasty, wicked, 'orrible plans!

There had never been deliveries made to the friary. Brother Roys had always dealt with the taking out and the bringing in of supplies, mail, parcels, etc.. Still, though, Father Francis, having walked off the friary property, down the lane to the main road, did recognize the local mail deliveryman, who he deliberately stopped to ask for directions. The mailman seemed to recognize the friar, too. As if to put the postal worker at ease Father Francis told him that he was a friar living just beyond the Point. The mailman suspected nothing when Father Francis asked him to help push his car back onto friary grounds, claiming it had broken down and although he had already called a mechanic, he did not wish to block the friary driveway.

As soon as they got onto the friary grounds, Father Francis wasted no time in bringing the mailman to his knees. He whacked him hard on the back of the head with the fist size stone he had found, handily, close by on the ground. When the mailman fell to his knees, Father Francis, concerned that a second blow to the head would cause terminal damage, kicked the postal worker in the back, then, practically jumping on him, rubbed the man's face into the ground, so much so, he began to suffocate. When the mailman passed out, Father Francis dragged him all the way to the secret entrance to the labyrinth. He struggled to get the man through the opening, but knowing that he still had another four... the friar did not think of them as victims, more as subjects, or as he persuaded himself, participants....

In order for the ritual to succeed, Father Francis could not afford any delays or hardship. The friar forced the man through the damp soil and stone opening into the former St. Ignatius Friary's underground, with the boot of his foot. He then followed the postal worker through the opening to drag him into the catacombs and along the passageways to the Udes chamber. The door was already ajar, and in the chamber three lit torches fitted against the walls, cast a dread awful flickery shadow.

Father Francis had done a great deal of rearranging in the Udes chamber. He had arranged his choice pieces in a fashion so that they would represent the five extreme points of a pentagram. It was a gruesome arrangement. Uncaringly, he dragged the postal worker over to the Stocks and fastened him in tight. On either side of the Stocks stood the Iron Maiden and the Inquisitional Chair. And on the far sides of those two heinous contraptions were stationed the Catherine Wheel and the Rack. Father Francis meant business.. ..gruesome, evil business.

Many residents on the south side of Carmel still had not received their morning post. Father Francis was out on the streets, again, scouring, looking for willing participants, and failing the willingness, looking for anyone he could cart off without being seen. The friar had totally 'lost it', though was driven by an altogether different motive than the one that had fouled Father James, who had been hideously possessed by an evil entity. Father Francis, on the other hand, in full command of his will, was possessed by naught but wanton greed.

Since being on the run, the friar had done little else but read from the Kusel Libre Codex. In its pages he had learned all about the Rite of Gohmergerrin, which, once performed, was guaranteed to bestow upon its keen observer eternal wisdom, eternal youth, eternal greatness, eternal wealth and probably as a means to retain the whole package, the seer's gift of foresight; altogether a mighty bargain.

Reading the Kusel Libre Codex in isolation as he was doing, Father Francis could not possibly know that the seer's gift was based entirely on the nature of the rite, specifically, how it had been performed. For instance, whether the participants had been willing or not. If the rite was performed for nefarious reasons, the bestowee would be plagued with the sight of all that was wicked and evil, for, as the package provides, all eternity. Father Francis was treading on exceedingly unsound ground.

The friar was on a spree. This time he waved down the attention of a housewife who had been driving back from Carmel with the weekly shopping. Father Francis had just walked out of the friary grounds and was almost to the main road when the woman, slowly driving by, stopped immediately and offered assistance. 'A jumpstart' for the friar's fictitious car would do nicely.

The woman drove onto the consecrated grounds and when asking where his car was, the friar responded by clocking her out cold through the open driver's side window; he violently knocked her out for the count. Same routine, he dragged her around the outhouses, through the overgrown garden next to the graveyard, and down the embankment. This one was easier. She was lighter and smaller. Francis got her into the underground tunnels and carried her over his shoulder with a fireman's lift. In the Udes chamber, with so much apparatus to choose from, Father Francis, thinking about how nice she had been to stop and offer help, sat the woman down in the Inquisitional Chair. He strapped her up tightly and left the chamber. This time, for sound proofing reasons, he closed the door behind him.

Father Francis was not a good driver, never having obtained a driving license or taken a driving lesson, but he could steer an automatic car, just about. He needed to expedite his gathering of subjects. The thing about Carmel is that it is an incredibly friendly place. Father Francis had become akin to a pariah. The old lady who had been looking out over the ocean from a bench in the tiny park on the edge of town, welcomed a ride from the friendly friar. She was puzzled, however, as to why he was driving in the opposite direction to that in which she lived. She was even more confused on seeing dozens of stamped, unopened letters, blowing around the friary grounds. Father Francis told the old woman he wanted to show her the gardens at the back of the friary. She loved gardens, especially wild ones with fruit bushes, she followed him.

Not knowing how to go about incapacitating her, the friar simply, wickedly, overpowered the elderly lady; lifting her and tossing her through the opening into the labyrinth. He then dragged the frail woman screaming, through the catacombs, into the passages toward the Udes chamber, all the time trying to pacify her by repeating that he was a friar and as such was a man of the cloth. Because of her elderliness, Father Francis thought it best to put the woman on the Rack, that way, should she need to, she would be able to rest. Father Francis did his best to collect the letters that had blown out of the postman's bag. He picked up as many as he could, put them in the housewife's purse, and stuffed the purse in the trunk of her car.

Father Francis thought he ought to step on it, one, because it was getting well into the afternoon, and two, because he wondered about the housewife's car, whether the woman's husband, or, if she had any, children, would have reported it, and her, missing. 'One more in the car', he told himself, 'and then abandon the car and go back to being on foot'.

The homeless man was easy! Being a once compassionate man, it was not too difficult for the friar to recognize those in need. The homeless man did not travel with a bag of possessions, he stood alone in extremely used clothes and looked very hungry. Father Francis stopped and asked him if he would like to come to the friary, saying that they had a soup kitchen there, and that the man would be more than welcome to have a meal, if he would agree to doing some extra work, nothing too strenuous, just odd jobs about the place. 'Absolutely! Absolutely', he would prefer to work, the homeless man told the friar. 'Good, then, right this way'.

The first thing the homeless man noticed when Father Francis drove onto the friary grounds was how quiet the place was. 'They are all in prayer', he lied. Lies which had him easily convincing the homeless guy to climb through the secret entrance into the labyrinth. The friar led him through the catacombs to the Udes chamber. When they arrived Father Francis told the unsuspecting homeless man that the work needing to be done was inside the chamber, but that the door was very difficult to open. 'Not a problem', the man had said, as he commenced to put his shoulder into it and edge into the Udes chamber. He straightaway heard moans and groans and was about to turn to the friar to ask what the heck was going on, when Father Francis cracked him on the back of the head and neck with part of the carjack he had found in the trunk of the housewife's car. The man fell to the ground. Fearing he would

come around fairly quickish, Father Francis acted, dragging the homeless handyman into the Udes chamber and locking him in the dreaded Iron Maiden. The homeless man was thin, which helped to distance him, by millimeters, from the sharp, rusted iron prongs welded to the inside front door of the sick, effective, antiquated torture device. The friar leaned the man up against the back of the Maiden and began to close the door. Remembering Brother Leo's injuries after only a few minutes in the Maiden, Father Francis, instead of closing the iron door, pushed the heavy footpress and a few other torture instruments, up against the slightly open door, which he would close at the start of the rite.

As much as he wanted to begin the Rite of Gohmergerrin, in order to get it over and done with, and, of course, release all the subjects, those who survived, Father Francis could not begin without a fifth and final participant. Being a patient man and a man of discipline, Father Francis did as he intended, driving his housewife participant's car into the local town and dumping it. He then walked on foot, all the time looking for a ride back to the friary. He did get a ride, within only a fast few minutes of walking, off a greasy, fat, lazy, alcoholic trucker, just then driving by in a long wheel-base, eighteen wheel, semi-vehicle. 'Scandal Randal', he said was his name.

In the short time Father Francis was in the cabin, being driven back to the friary, Scandal Randal had scratched his crotch, scratched his stomach, scratched his armpits and explained to the friar all that was wrong with the State he was driving through. Scandal bragged about all the times he had gotten away with hauling an illegally heavy load. He spouted off that if he ever ran into trouble, he would resort to using the colt 45 revolver he had wrapped up in the back of the sleeping cabin. Father Francis saw his chance with the disgruntled redneck, telling Scandal Randal that he and the brothers at the friary had been cleaning out the old underground catacombs and come across a cache of weapons, perhaps from the second world war, perhaps more recent. Father Francis told Scandal Randal that the brothers just wanted to get rid of the weapons in the quietest possible way. Scandal Randal became very interested; offering to do the honors, saying that he knew everything there was to know about guns, and if anybody could dispose of them quietly, properly, it would be him. He insisted on going to the friary to have a look and see what he could do to help the brothers. Father Francis accepted the trucker's ulterior motivated offer of help.

It was a particularly tight squeeze, getting the semi-vehicle over to the right side and around the back of the friary, out of sight, but as Scandal Randal bragged, he had gotten into much tighter spaces than that. Scandal was not interested that the friary seemed totally deserted. He was not interested that the friary seemed altogether closed up and unoccupied. He was only interested in getting to the cache of weapons and seeing what he could select and keep for himself. He already had in mind how easily he had been able to persuade the friar that he should be allowed to take all the weapons. Scandal Randal was extremely enthused.

Fat and completely inactive, it was a struggle for the trucker to climb in through the secret entrance, five feet up off the ground, and non-too deep and wide. In the end Father Francis had to kneel on all fours and let the obese Scandal Randal stand on his back for a peg up. He then struggled and wedged his way through the hole entrance, blubbering down to fall the last few feet to the ground. Scandal was through, and without waiting for the friar, was hurrying into the catacombs. It took Father Francis a few moments to straighten up and stretch out; Scandal Randal had crushed him. He was aching all over but excited that he had his 'five' and could soon enough begin the Rite of Gohmergerrin; to leave his present life behind him for one of power and greatness.. ..the friar was extremely excited.

Father Francis, once through the secret entrance, ran after Scandal Randal, shouting to him, telling him not to go far, telling him that it was easy to go astray in the dark, to become lost in the labyrinth. Telling him that the weapons were not 'that way', but 'this way'. Scandal fell in behind Father Francis, who led the way in the dark, through the catacombs and along the passages, to arrive at the Udes chamber.

Heavy footed and wheezing, the trucker was out of breath and tired, and had already begun to

complain about the lack of light, about the distance they were walking, about the fact that the weapons had better be worth his while, about the fact that he would not be the one to carry the weapons back to his truck. His complaining was incessant, however, Father Francis was completely oblivious to it all. Reaching the door to the Udes chamber, Father Francis began to push it open when he suddenly remembered that Scandal Randal was still fully conscious, and still complaining. If the friar were to open the chamber door sounds from his other participants would doubtless flood the corridor, more than likely alert the trucker to the fact that something was very amiss.

Father Francis stopped at the closed door and in the darkness walked back a few yards, feeling for the unlit torch that had been left, propped against the stone wall. Picking it up, the friar then walked toward Scandal, who, hardly being able to see anything in the dark, caught the faintest glint of light reflected off a tiny shiny nodule on the rusted old iron, metal torch. Before the friar had a chance to crack Scandal Randal on the nut, the trucker slammed into him, smashing him against the wall. Shouting and throwing punches, Scandal was swinging his arms and kicking his legs in all directions, however it was much too dark for him to get a beat on where Father Francis was. It was dark for the friar, also, but years of using the St. Ignatius underground passageways had made him accustomed to finding his way in the dark.

The friar found the moment and swung hard with the iron torch in hand, swiping the trucker a nasty blow across his jaw. Scandal Randal stopped shouting, fell back against the wall, buckled and slid to the ground, hitting his head on the flagstone floor. He was out cold!

The friar pushed his way into the Udes chamber and was drowned by the sounds from the other subjects already in position for the rite. For the briefest moment Father Francis wondered if he should not release the homeless man and enlist his assistance to drag the fat trucker into the chamber. He thought better of it, but decided he had been a little harsh placing the homeless man in the Iron Maiden. Scandal Randal was the only one of the participants who had given the friar any trouble. 'Quite right', Father Francis thought, 'Scandal Randal should be the one to be positioned in the Iron Maiden'.

The housewife was as lively as anything; screaming and crying and demanding to be let loose and allowed to go home. She threatened the friar with all kinds of legal action and then pleaded to his better nature to release her. She neglected to ask for the release of any of the other subjects, possibly hoping to gain her own safety and then bring the authorities to help release the others... unless she simply did not give a damn about anybody else. The homeless man was still out of it. The old lady was dazed and moaning. The postman, angry, postal, he was going nuts, shouting, threatening, trying his best to loosen the straps on the Stocks, to no avail, of course, but the noise he was making, Father Francis found it disturbing. ..most disturbing.

The friar told the postal worker and the housewife that if they remained quiet and calm, the chances were that they would soon be released and allowed to walk away. However, Father Francis warned, if they were to make one more sound, just one more, he would see to it that they were never released from their temporary incarceration. The friar's calmness and quiet tones convinced the participants that he was deadly serious, and not altogether sane. Quietness fell over the chamber, apart from the low tone moans and groans from the old lady on the Rack.

The friar heaved and pulled and dragged the fat trucker into the Udes chamber and shut the door behind them. Once inside he remembered how forcefully the trucker had slammed him into the wall, he also remembered how the tirelessly complaining stinker had squashed him on the way into the underground when trying to climb in through the secret entrance. And then, as if that was not enough, on top of it all, Father Francis suddenly realized how eager the trucker had been to get his mitts on the fictitious weapons; the guns. Father Francis did not agree with the possession of guns, any weapons at all, for that matter. He really did not like the greasy trucker, Scandal Randal.

Leaving the fat man where he lay, Father Francis skipped and leaped across the Udes chamber to the Iron Maiden. He removed the heavy metal footpress, opened the door wider, and peeled the

homeless man, still very much dazed, out of the rusted tomb, to drag him backwards over to the Catherine Wheel. The fevered Francis strapped his victim...subject, firmly onto the wheel by his wrists, waist and ankles. And then enthusiastically returned to pulling the fat trucker across the cold shiny floor, to the Iron Maiden. Father Francis had a devil of a time fitting Scandal Randal into the rusted iron, upright coffin, though he did seem to derive an amount of vulgar satisfaction when he squeezed the door closed and saw the first trickles of blood drip from the foot of the maiden onto the tip of the pentagram he had scraped into the floor with a piece of old, brittle slate.

Father Francis really did have no intention to kill any of his participants, even the fat, misogynistic, gun-totting trucker. He simply needed to follow, precisely, the requirements for the observant performance of the Rite of Gohmergerrin. Keeping that in mind, the friar was careful when he nicked the wrist of the homeless man, the leg of the housewife and the wrist of the postal worker. The rusted iron pikes had taken care of Scandal Randal, so it was left to the missing member of the St. Ignatius Brotherhood to pierce the back of the leg of the old lady who was still laying semi-unconscious on the Rack. The postal worker and the housewife, both fully conscious, had been inclined to shout out objections, and screams of fear when Father Francis had cut into them, but heeding the 'holy man's' earlier words, they did their utmost to remain silent.

Father Francis, kneeling in the center of the pentagram, arms extended, began to recite from the codex open on the floor in front of him. The text was Latin, though pages of it were also in Greek and Hebrew. The friar, being a member of the St. Ignatius Brotherhood, had good command of all three languages.

The homeless man had started to come around. The postal worker and the housewife, who had been looking upon the whole rigmarole in the Udes chamber as a sordid, bizarre carryon by a mad monk, became terrified when they visualized the blood from all corners of the pentagram beginning to trickle, quickly, drop by drop, toward the center of the diagram. Each drop of blood defying gravity as it left the ground, to spiral inwards and upwards, in a helical form, revolving nonstop around the friar and performer of the Rite of Gohmergerrin.

Loud thunder from beneath the chamber began to rage and wind from some unknown place, having become trapped within the Udes's stone walls, began to gust fearsomely around and around the outer perimeter of the pentagram, confining the trickles of blood, trapping them into a never ending upwards spattering, corkscrew motion, entirely focused on the pentagram in the Udes chamber; demarked by the five stations of pain and suffering, the Rack, the Wheel, the Chair, the Stocks and the Iron Maiden. The blood and wind were whipping up into a tornadic twister. Father Francis felt like the center of gravity... he was ecstatic. The wind, concocting the tornado, firing around the Gohmergerrin activity, was brushing, forcing, a steady trickle of 'participants' blood, further into the center of the pentagram. Father Francis was becoming moist with the fluids of his unwilling victims.

In the center of the pentacle, being blown one way and t'other, back and forth, opening and closing, becoming splattered with blood, were the pages of the Kusel Libre Codex. All care and concern for the codex had abandoned the frantic friar, whose only thought, once the Rite of Gohmergerrin had started, was to receive the powers he believed were rightly due to him.

The friar, still down on his knees, hands raised up to Heaven, eyes squeezed shut, was urging that the rite bestow upon him the greatness of all and everything. Francis was oblivious to what was happening on the floor right in front of him. Each time a drop of one of his unwilling victims' blood splattered onto the codex, a spear of power energetically charged and spurted out of the bloodstained pages of Holy Treasure literature, surging directly into the unwilling 'provider' of the essential fluid.

Due to the unholy bloody mess leeches from all five victims and pooling on the pentagram, a fireworks show had catalyzed, center stage. It was bloody spectacular, with the spears of power firing every which way; each charge of energy sinking deep into one or other of the five unwilling victims. Father Francis, however, still ecstatic and still caught up in the tornadic storm that was going on all around him, was still waiting for his first infusion of power unleashed by the item of Holy Treasure.

The friar, keenly concentrating on receiving his gifts of eternal wisdom, greatness, wealth, youth and foresight, reluctantly succumbed to the distraction that was gnawing away at his subconscious. Noises, completely incongruous to the violent, blood spattered chaotic situation before him; guttural affirmations, exclamations of pleasantness... oous and aahhhs, and yes, yes, yeses, as well as incessant repartees; 'I understand', 'I will', 'I do', 'I am'.... Could it be that the Kusel Libre Codex was communicating with him as performer of the rite and rightful receiver of its power? It was due solely to the extreme lack of influxes of power that Father Francis opened his eyes and lowered his arms... to see what the hell was going on.

For a moment he was entirely perplexed by the sight before him.. ..surely it was not part of the Rite of Gohmergerrin, surely not? Why were all the radiant spears of energy, power, his power, emanating from the Kusel Libre Codex and flowing directly into his five 'helpful' participants, why? Why? Father Francis was appalled and panicked. The wind was starting to get on his nerves, it was not helping in the slightest; he could not hear himself think. What the devil was going on? And why were his five vict... erh, subjects, so damn happy when only moments ago they had been pleading to be let loose, what the hell was going on? The friar was becoming excessively distraught; he did not know what to do. He was in the middle of the rite. Had he performed it correctly? Had he read it right? It certainly did not seem to be so. 'No!'. This was not what he had planned. Where was his gift of limitless power?

It was plain to see what was happening. But the wind, where had the wind come from, was it part of the Rite of Gohmergerrin or was it blowing in from the catacombs or even the labyrinth deeper below? Father Francis could see the raging, out of control tornadic tempest blowing blood; droplets of blood, their blood, onto the pages of his codex. He had laid the holy book exactly where he was required to, had he not? Right there in the center of the pentacle, yes, he had put it right there. He had drawn the pentagram correctly; copied it straight from the holy book. Everything was as it should be, it was all right, so what was wrong, what was going on?

The subjects' *vichyssoise* was supposed to trickle directly to him, central position in the pentacle. Clearly, now that he was scrutinizing the performance, the friar could see that the blood essence had been falling ever so slightly short of target. Father Francis began to feel a stirring in the pit of his stomach. The rite, it was starting to work... 'it must be working'. He could feel it stronger, the power! The Glory! He could see things. He could see.. ..what? Father Francis could see suffering! He could hear it, too. And taste and smell it. Suffering! Damnation! The tormented! The terrified! He could see them all! Feel it all! It was evil! The lifetime sufferings of the multitudes! What was happening? What was going on? The friar could see more; the young, the old, the weak, the strong, falling, screaming, in pain, running, fleeing, crying, all vague shadows filling his mind's eye. He could see himself.. ..Father Francis could see himself from above, down below, kneeling on the stone cold flagstone floor in the Udes chamber, next to the codex, watching 'his' Holy Treasure book of holy rites, as its pages issued indiscriminately, as far as the friar was concerned, its power; its energy shooting forth into his unwilling participants. Francis quickly realized that his power, all that due to him by way of the Rite of Gohmergerrin, was being sucked in by these.. ..these interfering swine, these gatecrashers, these five thieves, they were stealing his power! Everything that was rightly his was being bestowed upon them, his damn deceitful participants!

Father Francis was silently screaming. He was frantically attempting to descend, to climb down to the ground! He could see himself, the back of his head, his arms reaching for the Kusel Libre Codex, as he himself, his out of body self, reached in vain to get back down to the ground. Father Francis did not feel safe, he felt confused and weak and dizzy. He could see himself, but he was not in himself! The Gory! Especially scared, he did not know what was happening. He was no longer in command. Feeling pain, he was screaming so much, much louder than the housewife had done, louder than Scandal Randal had done only moments earlier. He was screaming for himself to look up and take a hold of himself, steady himself, he wanted to go home, he wanted to be inside himself, he wanted his unlimited power. The frantic friar was screaming and crying and nobody could hear him but his screaming out of

body self.

The wind was still in its cyclonic mode. The postman, looking much younger than he had previously done, with renewed energy and strength pushed his way out of the Stocks, it was easy for he had the wisdom, strength and the will to raise himself up and go forth. The housewife did the same. The dark ages wooden cuffs that had held her to the Inquisitional Chair, no longer able to contain her greatness, fell away, and, a picture of youth, she stood up and staggered over to the Rack. The postman went with her and both of them helped the elderly lady up. The elderly lady was fine, she was smiling, feeling wonderful and strong, youthful, and amazingly, no longer elderly. All three of them began to make their way to the closed door of the Udes chamber. The homeless man was next, he fell off the Wheel! He had been strapped in there pretty damn tightly, but down he fell, onto all fours, only to spring up like an athletic teen. The homeless man strode over to the Iron Maiden and, although it was stiff and awkward, opened the door. Scandal Randal, no longer screaming, no longer fat and sagging, or bleeding, or complaining, walked out of the maiden and thanked the homeless man for his kindness; suggesting that they all leave the Udes chamber and be lively about it.

Father Francis was out of his mind, and still out of his body! Screaming to be heard, he suddenly started pleading with his subjects, begging for them to help him, to be kind to him. The friar's words were drowned by the windy Rite of Gohmergerrin. The friar's victims, led by the postman, were out the chamber, out of the corridors, out of the labyrinth, through the catacombs, and almost out of the secret entrance to the underground. The rite was almost over and Father Francis, with his stations of the pentagram retreating, was in for a massive infusion; the power of the gift of foresight was about to befall him greatly!

In a blaze of glory.. ..in actual fact, gory, the Kusel Libre Codex, with all its power and good intention, ejaculated, decimating the friar with a most unholy arrival. Astral flight over and back in his body, Father Francis, in trying to break into Heaven, had steered himself to a harbor of Hell.

The friar could see! He could see clearly. He could see that his victims, his 'participants', having abandoned their stations, were taking with them what was rightfully his, in his opinion. Due to their unwillingness to participate, a commixtion of the eternal powers released by the performance of the rite had been rightly transferred to each one of them, all but the gift of foresight, that is. They had taken the friar's eternal wisdom, his greatness, youth and wealth, leaving him with naught but a harbinger's view of terrible, wicked things to come.

Father Francis, from his Udes vantage in the center of the pentagram, saw the eight members of the Vekel Augustine Council, assigned by Vlad Romulus, quickly converging on the former St. Ignatius Friary grounds. He saw the sheer terror on the postman's face as he helped the young and sprightly, formerly elderly woman, climb out of the underground's secret entrance opening. Father Francis perceived, from the wisdom that surged through the postal worker, that the postman knew they were all, more than not, about to meet with a most violent and untimely end.

Having fallen back down to Earth, surrounded by the empty stations of the Rite of Gohmergerrin, wallowing and squirming in the sloppy patch of victims' blood, with the pentagram still encircled by a fierce gushing wind, which was seemingly holding him prisoner, Father Francis could see.. ..foresee, the reason for the postal worker's extreme fear of an imminent ending. The giant, burned and curled flapping wings of the demon Gapp, all frayed and decayed, were swooping down from high above. The Fallen five, Astroroth, Gapp, Balam, Shax and Vapula, having failed in all their efforts to get a beat on Father Aloysius and Phoenix Sens, had honed in on the huge amounts of mystical energy generated during the observance of the Rite of Gohmergerrin.

Astroroth had demanded that all five Fallen fly in force to investigate the unholy anomaly caused by the performance of one of the rites contained within the pages of an item of Holy Treasure, treasure most powerful indeed. Gapp, as usual, leading the brood, struck devilishly lucky. Wickedly, the demon saw his opportunity to come to a crashing halt and soft landing. Huge betaloned feet, claws first, the demon lunged at the postal worker, who had been in the process of helping the once old, but Rite

of Gohmergerrin transformed, eternally youthful, old lady. Gapp gripped the postal worker whilst at the same time evilly de-fanned his wingspan, piercing the postman on either thigh with his nasty, razor sharp wing tip tusks. The demon then forcefully drove his wings, retracting them back to the rear, pulling the postal worker hither and thither; all asunder. It was bloody gruesome! Gapp flapped and the postman snapped, vertically, torn apart. So, so gruesome!

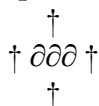
The eternally youthful, formerly elderly lady, only a few feet away from the sliced up postal worker and the monstrous demon Gapp, frozen in shock, bellowed a shrill unending shriek. Scandal Randal came hurtling toward the secret entrance opening. First at the scene, he was ready at the rescue. His newly acquired participant's portions of the Gohmergerrin's eternal finer qualities had him wisely proceeding with caution. However, his greatness urged him on, directly into the path of the landing, vicious Vapula. Vapula, much slower than Gapp, was just as evil.

Scandal Randal, with his overabundance of wisdom, having arrived at the entrance opening in time to see the unfortunate postal worker being ripped apart, certain that he could do nothing to help the youthful old lady, and positive there was no place beyond the secret entrance in which to seek refuge from the landing winged monsters, turning tail, and as he ran, strongly advised the housewife and the homeless man to take flight into the tunnels, into the darkness, where they might successfully hide.

Scandal Randal, feeling quite capable, having been fully conscious during his initial trip to the Udes chamber, assisted the other two victims by leading the way at top speed back into the labyrinth. He was thankful that it was pitch dark, they had more places to hide... 'unless, of course', he thought, the demons could see in the dark. The demons, albeit Fallen, were Angels, of course they could see in the dark; they could see even without using their eyes. Scandal Randal continued to fumble for a hiding place. The housewife and the homeless man, not a party to the demonic Angels falling out of the sky, racing and whispering, wanted to know what it was that had attacked the postal worker and had the youthful elderly lady in an unending siren outburst.

Scandal, employing his eternal wisdom, a great improvement of his former self, did not get the chance to impress upon his fellow victims the urgency with which they needed to hide. Vapula, shadowed by Balam, spurred on by the bloody carnage at Gapp's clawed feet, was in too much of a hurry to revert to his human form. He crashed into the labyrinth's secret entrance; burrowing into the hole he extended his wings to crush down the soil and stone wall. Balam, too, smashed into the opening. Clawing at it, yanking out the sodden brick and earth. Making a way large enough for all five demons to tear into the tunnels and pursue the one chance they had of picking up the tracks of Father Aloysius and Phoenix Sens. A chance which would prove, for them, to be no chance at all.

Father Francis was hysterical with fright. He could see it all unfolding before it had even happened. He was in anticipation of the deaths, for an absolute certainty, of all his Rite of Gohmergerrin participants. And if his newly acquired mind's eye did not deceive him, his own demise was fast approaching. It was all becoming too much to bear for the friar; all but one of 'his powers' had been denied to him...! Father Francis knew he would be entirely unable to fend off the descending demon foe. He was beside himself with remorse and guilt. He begged his brother, Bernard, to forgive him for his murder, imploring him to help in any way he could; urging him to do all to prevent the heinous course of events that were about to besiege him.



ONE WEEK AGO: Pluto and Augustine received word of the mystical disturbance in the area around the Los Lobos friary from Pluto's Angelic guards, minutes before Vittoria, Count D'Carabonari and Ebba received notification of the disturbance, so alerted by the Nepalese Sensors at the new Malibu estate. Vlad was informed, who in turn had the eight Council members, just returned to that area to search for Father Francis, race to the grounds of the former St. Ignatius Friary. Rampel, Kutiel and Manakel reached the friary grounds shortly after the five Fallen had entered the underground

labyrinth.

The friar, Francis, witnessed it all but could do nothing. He vigorously tried to leave the Udes chamber but each time he attempted to step away from the pentagram, the wall of wind battled against him, effectively keeping him tethered to the pentacle. Father Francis had become a prisoner, a victim of his own cruel and despicable actions, he was not going anywhere, despite knowing for a fact that the five vacant stations of the pentagram would soon be revisited, this time by five willing participants; the Fallen Astroroth, Balam, Shax, Gapp and Vapula. Father Francis was frantic, and terrified, and greatly in fear for his life.

Scandal Randal screamed the loudest. The housewife, the homeless man and Scandal were making so much noise a hiding place was out of the question, in addition to which, they could not manage to see where they were going to find one in the first place. All three of them, newly filled with a greater sense of worth, infused with wisdom, knew what was upon them; the wings of death in the form of demons. The only thing they could do was run and hope to be overlooked, or not discovered.

The Holy Angels, Rampel, Manakel and Kutiel, made straight for the Udes chamber. They had naturally sensed the intense mystical energy released in abundance by the near correct use of an item of Holy Treasure. The Fallen Angels, totally attracted to the mystical energy, were most evil and as such were also attracted to the prospect of causing pain, suffering and devastation. They therefore spread out to different parts of the labyrinth in pursuit of the three fleeing, unwilling victims. The demons' great mistake....

Father Francis, cowering while clinging to the bloody spot in the center of the pentagram in the wind swept Udes chamber, new to his gift of foresight, mistook the advancing Holy Angels as more of the same as those that had dispatched the postal worker and his elderly victim. In fear of them rendering him as viciously as they had done the postal worker, Father Francis hit on the sick and twisted gory idea; if he first took away his own sight, perhaps his inability to see what was about to take place would serve to determine that the event would no longer take place.

The friar, rigid from fear, barely able to move, gripped the spelter blade he had smote Brother Bernard with and struck himself, boldly, in his eyes, first left then right. He was howling in agony, howling, which reduced into a quiet, soulful wail when he realized that his eyes, though supposedly the windows to his diseased soul, were not, and never would be, the windows to his Rite of Gohmergerrin given power of eternal foresight, the view through his mind's eye. He could not simply poke the images of foresight out of his mind, he could not pick them out and stop the happening. Father Francis's mind was flooded with pain and portrayals of evilness, the evilness of the wicked things soon to pass.

In very bad shape, the friar had extreme critical trauma to both of his eyes. His sockets were full of blood and what was left of his eyeballs... wicked, gory! He was experiencing an unbelievable amount of physical pain, on top of which, he was suffering from total confusion, as the images of what was happening, and what was about to happen, soaked him in terror and a demoralizing comprehension of impending demise. The friar, harangued and detained by the circling cyclone, threw himself to the ground and began to wallop his head against the flagstone floor.

Father Francis, with the blood streaming from his eyes, in his confused state, was ranting and raving, accusing all and sundry of conspiring against him. Even going so far as to accuse the belated Brother Bernard of working on the higher plains to scupper the friar's chances of becoming all and powerful, as deemed by the Rite of Gohmergerrin. Father Francis had come to believe, convinced by his new powers, that the demons, demons sent from Hell, in the labyrinth busily dispatching his participants, would soon descend on himself and attempt to strip him of all the eternal powers he had not received by inflicting all manner of harm and death upon his person. He was frantic! He was terrified! He was distraught. And because of his belief that the Holy Angels, actually on their way to protect him, were devil Angels in disguise, the best he could do, the friar believed, was to do away with himself before he met with a similar fate to that which his unwilling, dead participants had been dealt. He was determined to smash the life out of himself, he was succeeding.

Manakel was the one to bestill the wind. The Holy Angels, first to reach the Udes chamber, were appalled by the eyeless, bruised and bloody state of one of the members of the St. Ignatius Brotherhood. To them it was obvious that the friar was beyond all healing, more so, they believed, due to his unhinged mental state.

Kutiel snatched up the Kusel Libre Codex and the bloodied spelter blade, then, without a word, Zotiel, who had arrived separately to Manakel, Rampel and Kutiel, picked up the fragile, frail, frantic friar, and promptly disappeared. Retreating, directly, undetectably, to the newly acquired Malibu estate.

Manakel looked at Rampel and Kutiel, the three were silently questioning each other as to whether or not they should engage the Fallen five; there seemed to be little point, they decided. It was a certainty; whoever the Fallen were chasing in the tunnels would be soon found and rendered incapable, completely incapable by the Devil's demons. At any rate, the Holy Angels determined, anyone to be found in the St. Ignatius underground, not a member of Lucifer's squadron of thirty-eight, surely, judging by the layout in the Udes chamber, of the five instruments of torture only recently vacated, will have taken part, willing or unwilling, in the rite the friar, Francis, had been performing, and as such, they would have been intentionally exposed to an active item of Holy Treasure. As unfortunate as the situation was, Manakel, Kutiel and Rampel already knew that such participants would most definitely be designated for soul extraction. The fact that the Fallen would claim the vessels first meant that the Council would not have the benefit of collecting three more souls for ransom payment. By all accounts, an interaction with the Fallen in the labyrinth would be a most unsavory encounter. Kutiel, Rampel and Manakel withdrew, disappearing out of the chamber, following Zotiel to the Malibu estate. As soon as Manakel reported to Pluto, Pluto inquired as to the status of his eight Council members who were in the process of converging on the friary in order to round up the fleeing friar, Father Francis.

Manakel, Kutiel, Zotiel and Rampel immediately returned to the friary grounds moments after Astroroth, Balam and Gapp flew away from Los Lobos. Manakel and Kutiel, smelling the stench of their Fallen brethren, entered the friary and searched up and down. Rampel did a once around the grounds, the outhouses and the hermitage, searching the smaller out buildings, too. Coming upon no Fallen, Zotiel was the one who found the trail of body parts, fresh, warm.... rack of ribs, leg of man, hand, arm, another leg, body, broken, smashed, torso, cut, ripped, torn apart with lots missing. A head, another head, a trail of entrails. Zotiel could see it all clearly, even in the dark.

The others, Kutiel, Rampel and Manakel picked up on Zotiel's needs. The Holy Angel needed his brethren to be with him, to assist him with his find. The Angels did not suffer the needs or desires of mortal man, however, they were, each one, saddened by the ghastly, disrespectful, beastly sight of the savaged remains of a number of Vekel Augustine Council members. Zotiel had counted at least three heads. Kutiel was quick to point out that one of the heads, large and fat, ripped and squashed, did not belong to a Vekel Augustine Council member. The other two upper body parts, however, sadly, did do.

The Angels agreed that most of the body parts and entrails did not smell like Council members, a difference easily distinguishable by the Holy Angels. The fevered five Fallen had also caught up to the homeless man, and from the state of the remains, savaged him to bits. All four members of Pluto's Angelic guard picked up on the lingering, subtle scent of Abbledrave, a potion three of their number -Ecanus, Keel and Baglis, two of whom are still in Lucifer's hellward custody-, had helped to concoct more than a thousand years ago. A potion described in literature in amongst the wealth of Holy Treasure. The Abbledrave potion was known to disrupt the hearing and smelling senses of Angels, in particular, Fallen Angels.

As mentioned, upon discovering Portus L'Fane was being manipulated by members of Lucifer's unholy squadron, Pluto and Augustine had placed the Council on high alert regarding the presence of Fallen Angels, and so the eight Council members who had returned to the Los Lobos friary were all armed with specific implements productive in fending off and defeating the Fallen.

Using the Abbledrave advantage the surviving Council members retreated, rapidly, into the labyrinth and the dugout which led to the storage room where the Holy Treasure chest had been stored.

The three scurried along a narrow tunnel, through a hole and into the tiny subterranean storage room no bigger than nine by five feet in length and width. The room was, with its scraped out ceiling, about six feet high.

The three Council members leaned well back against the walls surrounding the hole entrance. They switched off their flashlights and kept as quiet, though not quiet enough for the devious, devilish Vapula who had breathed in the least amount of Abbledrave. Vapula, eager for bloodshed, had chased the three through the labyrinth, all the way up to the dugout tunnel. In no way wanting to be bested by mere Council immortals, too large to follow his quarry, Vapula snapped back his grey and shabby, rotten wings and reverted into his human form. The demon then scurried, wheezing and grunting, along the tunnel, in a determined pursuit. Diving through the dry mud opening, Vapula landed upright, center floor in the tiny storage room.

The demon was not quick enough! The Council members, working in unison, each wearing a Glagvythid Glove, aiming from different angles, pelted Vapula with St. Thelgelasius Bane, an amalgam of pure mercury, pure silver, aluminum and sulphur, with minuscule amounts of other ingredients, infused with mercy and love; the mixtures pooled in tiny dogtooth wells on the palm-side skin of the glove. The glove itself comprised a smooth, soft, pliable metal outer lining, with its palm-side being fissured with hundreds of minute dogtooth style cavities.

When they were placed on high alert, Vlad Romulus had contacted one of the Vekel Augustine Council departments and asked that the eight Council members currently working with some of Pluto's team, be kitted out with the appropriate attire. That attire, in full; the Abbledrave potion, the Glagvythid Glove, with its genuine quicksilver property, and the Father Thadius Brockim wooden and bone lances. The attire comprised of all items of Holy Treasure worth, which, when used in combination, were capable of staying the demonic advances of an attacking Fallen Angel.

The Glagvythid Gloves, with no special launching capability, when used properly and accurately, were enough to hand-launch sharp, piercing, shiny pellets, droplets of the St. Thelgelasius Bane, poured out in preparation, pooled on the gloves, fired off into the close proximity human form of the evil, Fallen Vapula. Bullseye!! Vapula buckled and fell to the floor. He began squirming and howling and rolling around in severe pain, as the Bane worked its way into his unblemished and barely used organs and sinew. The unholy Angel's howling and shrieks were demonic and very frightening. And each Council member, trapped in the subterranean tiny room, was terrified and scared to death that the Bane would not be enough to prevent Vapula from shedding off his human form to once again take on his natural appearance of a mighty, powerful, Fallen Angel.

Vapula, in the shape of a man, had been much weakened by the Bane. Whimpering and floundering, he was failing to take on his demonic form. Having extended their telescope style lances, each Council member ran at Vapula while the demon was down, and pierced him deeply with their Brockim lances. Together the three immortals then pushed the demon back into the corner of the tiny dugout storeroom and leaning heavily against their lances, kept Vapula pinned down, with little license to move.

The demon was screeching and bellowing; there was nothing the Council members could do about that. None of them wanted to get any closer than a lance's length to the Fallen for fear of.. ..well, for fear of anything really. They could only hope that with the Abbledrave still lingering in the underground, and the fact that they had gone way back, deep down into the labyrinth, through thick, thick concrete and earth tunnels, the noise from the beast would not be enough to bring upon them the wrath of his Fallen cohorts.

Astroroth and Gapp, having already slain the postal worker, the formerly elderly lady, the homeless man and Scandal Randal, left Shax and Balam to the sport of hunting down anyone else who might be present in the underground while they themselves headed to the center of the practically dissipated mystical energy, the Udes chamber. Foiled again! With the sign of violence and struggle in the center of the chamber, and the familiar mark of a bloody pentagram, the demons knew they had

arrived too late and that whatever had been happening, had happened and would no longer continue to happen; it was over! The demons were certain that the victims in the tunnels held no clues as to the rite that had taken place or the whereabouts of those they pursued.

Astroroth was enraged; she could smell the sweet, lingering fragrance of an Angel from the Dominions, the Choir of Angels to which she herself was a Fallen member. That being so, of course they would find no evidence of anything noteworthy and useful. Astroroth stormed out of the underground with Gapp in tow. She demanded that the others follow suit and withdraw in order to make their way to the rendezvous with Arioc, Neberus and Crone. The grand Duke demon was furious! Gapp, with blood, guts and death still dripping off his wings and talons, satisfied, took the lead, flying away from the friary in a north-easterly direction. Astroroth and Balam flapped closely behind.

Manakel joined Rampel, and in their human forms rushed down deep into the labyrinth, to the Holy Treasure dugouts, to the places where Council members might seek refuge from demonic devils. Kutiel and Zotiel joined forces as the two disappeared, then reappeared in the Udes chamber, but on finding it empty, quickly made their way to the catacombs. Just as they entered the isolated section they heard cries and shouts and blurted out orders. One of the Council members, sounding in a much weakened state, was ordering another to stay his ground.

The two Holy Angels charged to the Council members' aid to find a most horrific sight in what used to be Brother Agaptius's confine quarters. Three Council members had attempted to lock themselves inside Agaptius's old room. The demon, Shax, had followed them and tried to burst through the doorway. One of the Council members had bravely stabbed Shax, repeatedly, in his open wings. The Fallen Angel, in a great deal of pain from the wounds caused by the Brockim Lance, had to retract his wings with their festering wounds in order to reduce the pain he was suffering. Shax, entirely demonic, though unable to use his wings, with greatly reduced strength, continued to squeeze through the doorway into the stone confines. The demon scratched out and snatched hold of the Council member who had lacerated him and with one huge devil claw, stretched the man's head from his neck until it snapped and his head ripped clean off. The Council member continued to shake and shudder, but like the other two Council members, he, also, had been not so cleanly decapitated.

The remaining Council members in Agaptius's old suite, believing they were about to be demonically sliced up, attacked Shax as best they could. One of the men swung an open handed punch into the demon's shoulder and chest. Shax spasmed then roared in pain as the Thelgelasius Bane surged into his system. Buckling, the demon swiped at the Council member who had wielded the Glagvythid Glove, striking him hard, sending him crashing back against the far wall. The Council member, bounding off the wall, crumpled to the floor; he could barely move. The last standing Council member charged Shax as the demon doubled over in agony. Seeing his chance, he pierced the demon, pinning his side, forcing the lance further in, slitting Shax' rib cage as he shoved and rammed the lance deeper still. Shax erupted into a chorus of demonic wailing and moaning. Shuddering out of his demonic status and in human form, he semi-slumped to the ground.

The Council member who had wielded a decisive blow into Shax with his Glagvythid Glove, was shouting as loud as he could to be heard over and above the demon's evil disharmony. Greatly injured and unable to stand, he was ordering his colleague to strike again, at the demon's heart, which although would not kill, would completely incapacitate. The Council member did strike again with his Brockim Lance, but missed the demon's heart; instead puncturing the lung. Shax again bellowed and squealed in agony, winding down to a wailing whimper and an insistence that he would have his revenge.

The human form of Shax was putty in Zotiel's and Kutiel's hands. The two Council members who knew the Holy Angels by name were greatly relieved by their appearance. Kutiel, seeing the headless corpse close by to where Shax was kneeling in pain, scooped up the injured Vekel Augustine Council member and promptly disappeared. Within less than seconds, Kutiel had delivered his passenger to the Vekel Augustine Council's headquarters, leaving him in good care, to reappear in the

exact same isolated catacomb chamber to assist Zotiel and the Council member who was pinning the demon down, with the capture of the speared Fallen Angel, Shax.

Shax, belonging to the same Angelic Choir as Zotiel, Cherubim, spoke to his brother as if he had never Fallen from grace. Zotiel was sympathetic, though at the same time the Holy Angel made it clear to the demon that he would be dealt with in the proper manner; detained at the leisure of the Vekel Augustine Council, and more than likely, the Fallen Shax' only chance of release would be in barter for the ascension from Hell of a number of the Proctor's captured Angelic guard.

Infected with St. Thelgelasius Bane and punctured numerous times by one of the Father Thadius Brockim Lances, severely weakened, Shax was incapable of mounting a defense or resisting in any way the Holy Angel's attempt to bind and restrict him. Leaving Zotiel to arrest Shax, Kutiel, followed by the lance carrying Council member, raced through the labyrinth toward the dugout storage site of the Holy Treasure chest. The more they approached the more they could hear the injured Vapula in his human form, cursing and promising, and threatening the three Vekel Augustine Council members and Rampel, and Manakel.

Manakel and Rampel had taken over from the Council members, fully arresting the demon, Vapula, who they bound with a twine of hair; hair from a Holy Angel of the Choir of Powers. Angels' hair can bind and restrict anything, anything at all. The Fallen, though, no longer have such a luxury as their nails and teeth and hair, and everything about them, has turned to rot and badness.

The three Council members in the storage room dugout helped Rampel carry Vapula in his injured, bound, human form. Manakel stayed behind to search the subterranean room, making certain nothing of the demon had been left behind.

It was a dark day, an exceedingly dark day indeed for the Vekel Augustine Council. It had irretrievably lost three of its members. The one redeeming factor in it all was that Shax had been the murderer of all three Council members, with his characteristic removal of the head style slaying, and so Zotiel had already been able to retrieve the souls of the Council members from the arrested, defeated Shax. Zotiel saw to it, quickly, that the souls were handed to Kutiel, who in turn Angelically flew away, by disappearing and almost immediately reappearing at the Vekel Augustine Council's headquarters, where the souls were surrendered to the appropriate department. And that department, knowing that the souls had already been disturbed, would see to it that each one was laid to rest in the Council's vaults until that day when they might receive judgment.

Shax and Vapula were placed in an altogether different vault. A vault very cold, dug deep and far from sight. It is a sunken place in the wilds of North America. A vault specifically placed were the Mohawk tribe continue to watch the Eastern Gate. This particular vault is hollowed under mountains of rock. It is not made of metal and rod, but there be Angelic twine, Native American spirits and all manner of mystical cloak.

The Fallen Shax and Vapula would not be locked away alone. There are a great many of their beastly kind in the vault, not only those from Lucifer's squadron of thirty-eight. All have been imprisoned by Augustine, Ful and Sorli in the hope that one day they may have enough of the Devil's lot to bargain for the release from Hell of some member, if not all, of the 1st Proctor, Duke Bolli Vekel Rendar's family. Pluto, though aware of the existence of the Eastern Gate prison vault, takes no part in it, much preferring that they dispatched the demons back to Hell whenever the creatures cross the Council's path.