

## -PROLOGUE

"This life's five windows of the soul  
Distorts the Heavens from pole to pole  
And leads you to believe a lie  
When you see with, not thro' the eye."  
-William Blake, "The Everlasting Gospel"

It was an unusually pleasant night in Seattle. If it weren't for the drizzling rain, it would be almost perfect. Unfortunately, like all good things, it had to end sometime.

Ken Matsuya was only trying to enjoy a pleasant Friday evening with a stroll along the waterfront before catching a cab the rest of the way home. Of all the beautiful sites in Seattle, Ken appreciated piers along the waterfront the most. The lights of ships reflecting off the dark water and the shadows of the peaked hills surrounding Puget Sound combine for a serene image out of some sort of fantasy novel. The fact it was late enough that he was the only soul in sight was even better...he was a man who appreciated his solitude.

Although it was obvious from the gracefulness of his stride that it wasn't needed to compensate for any handicap, he walked with elegant silver tipped cane, a fierce dragon glaring from its handle. A heavy black leather cloak hung from his broad shoulders protected his expensive charcoal gray business suit from the mist that hung ethereal-like around him.

He walked into the famed Waterfront Park, his heavy black shoes thudding dully on the worn wooden pier. The park was lined with lamps (some of them actually working), benches, and high, curving railings. There were bronze statues of both Christopher Columbus as well as Chief Seattle. Ken walked past all those to the famous "Waterfront Fountain" made of cast and welded bronze and shaped in cubical structures, Ken thought of it as a glorious cacophony of water, bronze, right angles and hard edges. He stopped momentarily to listen to the water run and splash over the fountain; he found the lights and sounds to be mesmerizing. Reaching into his suit pocket for his cigarette case and lighter, he paused to light a cigarra, the glow of the flame reflected off his subtle Asian features and displaying his close cropped black hair and pointed elven ears. The soft flame also caused the pupils of his hazel eyes to redden...briefly giving him a demonic appearance. As he snapped the antique gold lighter shut with a flick of his wrist, a gruff baritone voice rumbled from behind him.

"Hey pal, ya gotta spare one of those?"

The speed with which Ken spun around betrayed his cybernetic enhancements, but his new companions stood indifferent. The trio was less than twenty paces away from him, and they were all dressed in tattered denim pants and black leather jackets. Ken silently cursed himself for letting the sound of the fountain distract him...they should have never gotten that close. The tallest amongst them was over eight feet tall, his size and lumpy silhouette gave him away as a Troll...with the shortest only a foot or so less. Their faces were concealed in shadow...but Ken had an idea of what they might look like, it appeared the Troll had two Orks accompanying him. After glimpsing a silver skull pin on one of their lapels he also knew exactly what they were.

Disassemblers.

The Disassemblers were probably the nastiest gang in Downtown Seattle where they run a brisk business in the organ trade. The run illegal "chop shops" and move body parts obtained from hospitals or if sources are slim they find some unwilling "donors" to help them.

Kind of like what these three were doing.

"I'm afraid this is my last one, sorry." Ken kept his voice polite, but adjusted his stance to a more defensive posture. At least with the fountain behind him they needed to stay in front of him.

"That' okay." The shortest Ork replied. He got to wear the pin so Ken figured him for the leader. "That fancy watch and lighter will do just fine." He and Troll displayed the baseball bats that they had concealed behind their legs, looking more like nightsticks in their huge hands. The second Ork reached into his well-worn jacket and pulled out wicked looking foot long knife and began twirling it with an ease and practice born of a lifetime on the streets.

Ken flicked his cigarra over the railing and into the waters of Puget Sound and stood defiantly, not even a hint of fear on his handsome features. "Why do I doubt that's all you want?" he casually asked.

The gigantic Troll responded...a grin in his voice, "Ooohhh...he's gonna be a fun one." He looked to the "leader", "Hey Mole...I don't think dis 'uns gonna cooperate."

"I think your right ugly." Ken responded.

The Ork named Mole looked at his knife-wielding compatriot. "Yo, Prospect, why don't you go help the gentleman change his mind? Just remember that those pointed ears are good for some cred and keep his eyes in one piece."

The Ork stepped into the light allowing Ken to see his face for the first time. The dark stringy hair and tusks protruding from the ganger's lower lip showed Ken he was correct in guessing the race of his attackers. The "Prospect" had also painted the image of a skull in bone white over his face and a giant letter "P" was on the front of his jacket. Ken guessed him to be about 16, and he appeared to be more nervous than not. Ken noticed a small aerosol can in his offhand...probably some form of anesthesia spray. "Is ya gonna behave dandelion breath, or is I gonna hafta hurt you before we put you out?"

"Go home to your momma, son." Ken said, not unsympathetically. "You want no part of this."

All nervousness left the young Orks face and he pressed the tip of his knife against Ken's chest. "Fuck you! Like you know what I want you pointy-eared nip!"

Ken exploded into action. Almost too fast to be seen, he grabbed the Ork by the wrist and gave a sharp twist. To his credit, the ganger didn't scream when his wrist and elbow shattered with a resonating crack. He did, however, drop the knife and the gas canister. Ken followed up by driving the heavy silver dragon head of his cane into the young Ork's throat, caving in his larynx and flooding his lungs with blood and tissue. The "Prospect" was dead before he hit the ground, drowned on his own blood.

Ken looked up at the other two Disassemblers as the stared for a full three seconds...mouths agape. The one called Mole snapped out of it first "I don't fuckin' believe it!" He screamed in rage, "You'll bleed for that! Sweeney...waste the slant eyed prick!"

The big Troll charged, setting up a swing with his bat that would knock Ken's head across the Sound if it connected. Ken effortlessly ducked under the clumsy attack, and shoved the tip of his cane into Sweeney's right armpit, simultaneously depressing the stud on the handle that discharged the over 100,000 volt charge stored in the silver tip. The would be butcher roared more in frustration than pain as the entire right half of his body became paralyzed.

With a fist the size of a Christmas ham, Sweeny swung at Ken's head. Calmly, Ken drew the sword that was concealed inside the walking stick and spun under the vicious swing. The Troll ganger fell screaming to his knees unable to stand after finding both his Achilles tendons had been sliced. Ken then slid the three foot long blade into the base of the bellowing trolls skull...silencing him instantly. He let the body of the Troll fall into the fountains water with the sword still embedded in his skull.

Suddenly, Ken felt a white hot pain in his shoulder and an invisible force spinning him around and driving him to the wet boards of the pier, effectively knocking him senseless. It took a few moments for him to realize he had been shot, and despite the armor woven into his cloak, he felt the warmth of his own blood running down his arm.

The remaining Disassembler walked into Ken's field of vision, a smoking revolver looking not unlike a toy in the giant's callused hand. Almost absent mindedly Ken noticed that Mole's entire head was painted white and apparently he had lost his nose at some point...a gaping hole in the middle of his face where his nose should be gave the Ork a particularly sinister look. Ken grunted as he felt all the air rush from his lungs as his assailant stepped on his chest and took aim. But something was wrong. The troll's face and head seemed to shift, as if Ken was looking at it from underwater. The distortion became more and more radical and then settled on a shape that caused Ken to make an audible gasp.

The appearance was that of Ken's own face.

Mole/Ken began laughing sinisterly and centered the big gun right between Ken's eyes. In a deeper version of Ken's own voice, the twisted amalgamation sneered, "What do you see at night when the demons come?"

And he pulled the trigger.

-oOo-

"As I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,  
And if I die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

-Christian bedtime prayer

Ken Milner sat bolt upright, his skin and bed sheets were soaked with sweat. His muscled chest was heaving as if he had just completed a marathon, the dragon tattoo across the top of his shoulder and down his back seeming to writhe with a life of its own. He looked around, wondering what happened to the Disassemblers and the waterfront. But it all came back to him; he hadn't been to Seattle in almost fifteen years.

This was home...in Denver.

He was safe.

He laid back down, his breath finally beginning to return to a normal rate. Ken looked to his left, studying the woman next to him. Even with her lack of makeup and unkempt red hair, she was still every bit as stunning as the first time he met her. He studied her every feature. From the closed, long lashed, eyelids that hid the emerald treasures underneath, to the surgical steel data port just visible noticeable behind her left ear, to the perfectly shaped snow white breasts as they rose and fell evenly with her breathing.

His abrupt waking hadn't even caused her to stir.

As he gazed lovingly at his wife he was reminded of a poem he had once read. Although the exact words escaped him, he remembered the title..."This Angel Next To Me." It truly was fitting that her name was Angela.

Feeling the cotton forming in his mouth, Ken rose, put his white terrycloth bathrobe on and padded barefoot towards the kitchen.

His head somewhat clearer and armed with a glass of juice, he headed back to bed. As he passed the twins' bedroom he peeked inside. Although Tessa and Marcus were both born on the same day a little over ten years ago, they were definitely two separate people with very distinct personalities.

Tessa shared her mother's looks. Her Strawberry blond hair was peeking above the mountain of blankets as she gently snored. But she had inherited Ken's almond shaped eyes...giving her a very exotic appearance. Because of her mixed heritage, Tessa had been the target of many cruel jokes from the other children at school. So, despite Angela's very loud objections, Ken took her to the back yard and began teaching her the how to protect herself using the martial arts that were part of her Asian heritage. Soon, not surprisingly, the hazing stopped. Ken smiled in the dark as he remembered how the two of them had done exceedingly well at a local tournament a week ago, the evidence of which was displayed with the ribbons hanging on the wall above her bed and the chrome first place trophy that rested on the pillow beside her.

Tessa's twin brother Marcus was almost a study in contrast from her. Marcus more resembled Ken with his straight black hair and deep toned skin, but he inherited his mother's piercing green eyes. Marcus was also very frail, the result of constantly being ill as an infant. Tessa took great pride in her self-appointed duty as her brothers' protector. But what Marcus lack in physical prowess, he more than made up for in intellect. He possessed an "Above genius IQ" according to his last exam. He was rarely found without his nose buried in one of his treasured books (a gift from Angela's mother before she passed away 3 years ago) or glued to the computer. Another possibility that sent Ken and Angela's heart alight was the fact that Marcus' teacher at school had told them Marcus might be magically adept. They had plans to see the doctor in a week's time for testing to find out for sure.

Ken smiled, catching himself puffing his chest in fatherly pride. He closed the door and returned to his own bed. As he closed his eyes to sleep, he thought, hopefully, that the demons got what they wanted out of him and would wait until a later night to return.