

PROLOGUE

Eternity fractured in moments. That was one of them.

On the ash-strewn plains of Gehena, where the ground was the charred remains of ancient stars, Zadquiel's legion formed a wall of obsidian shields. Each impact of the demonic horde sounded like the cracking of a universe surrendering. The air smelled of ozone, sulfur—and something older: burnt-out faith.

Sariel, a captain under Camael's command, moved like a silver exhale through the ranks. His spear, *Penumbra*, sought not hearts of flesh, but of essence. With a spin, he pierced a lesser demon, whose body dissolved with a silent scream. There was no pleasure in his task, only the cold arithmetic of war: one threat gone, one more moment of survival.

“Hold the formation,”

Camael's voice resonated—not through the air, but into the marrow of their spiritual bones—

“Let their fury crash against our conviction!”

Sariel saw one of his squad leaders, Lurea, her crystalline form reflecting the memories of the fallen, raise her vial of *Aura*. A wave of pure hope swept the front lines, and the wavering shields steadied. For a moment, Heaven's light gained ground.

But Hell was patient. Its deadliest weapon was not force, but attrition.

From the shapeless mass of claws and horns emerged a solitary figure: Ronove, Captain of Brute Force—a four-armed colossus laughing as magma dripped from his twin maces. He didn't attack the line; he vaulted over it, landing like a meteor in the rear. The ground buckled. Several angels were thrown aside like rag dolls.

Sariel turned, his face a mask of determination. “Contain him!” he ordered—but it was too late.

Ronove swept away an entire squad with his maces. One of the angels, a young one named Elion, barely lifted his sword. The infernal mace shattered it, and the second blow split his torso.

Sariel arrived a second too late. He saw Elion's eyes wide open, losing their brightness. There was no scream of agony, only a sigh—a final breath of light escaping his lips. His body, forged of ether and devotion, began to dissolve—not into ash, but into thousands of glowing motes, like a dandelion caught on a cosmic breeze.

It was the first time Sariel witnessed a Final Death among his own. Elion had been destroyed in his divine form by a specific infernal weapon. But the second condition hadn't been met. Not yet.

The motes swirled, seeking a path, an anchor. Then, as if drawn by an invisible magnet, they shot downward—through the veil between planes, toward Earth. There, somewhere, someday, Elion's essence would find a human vessel. He would be born without memory, without wings, with a life ahead to forge virtues or succumb to impulses. His true identity would reveal itself only at the moment of his next death.

Sariel felt a chill no infernal flame could match. Elion wasn't lost forever. But he was lost to *them*. To this war.

Ronove laughed—a guttural sound that shook the air. Before he could choose his next victim, a lightning lance struck his chest, hurling him back. Zadquiel had intervened.

The battle roared on, but to Sariel, something had changed. Each fallen angel was no longer just a casualty; it was a seed of oblivion planted in a mortal world—a silenced voice in Heaven's chorus. War was not only won on the frontline; it was lost with every soul that re-embodied, taking a piece of the fight with them.

Meanwhile, eons away and at the same instant, Heaven's Supreme Commander walked alone, following the echo of a heartbeat that promised not victory, but an end.

B1C01 – The Tree Outside Time

The sands of Serephis didn't sing to the wind—they listened.

It was a desert of absolute silence, a denial of sound so deep that Miguel could hear the hiss of light brushing quartz grains. Its dunes remained motionless when no breeze should have endured, forming pathways that shifted only at the will of those who could hear its secret murmurs. Miguel walked alone, leaving footprints that glowed faintly before erasing behind him, as though the earth refused to remember his passing.

He'd lost track of time. In Serephis, days could be minutes or eons; the sun rose from any horizon, and shadows chose their own fates, sometimes stretching toward the light in an act of pure rebellion. The sky was not a blue void, but a tapestry of distorted reflections: fragments of battles on other planes, crystal cities that existed and disappeared, faces of fallen angels forming in clouds only to dissolve into rain that never touched the ground.

Yet the urgency that had drawn him here was as real as the throb in his cracked chest.

With each step, he felt the fissure in his sternum—a mark from future campaigns, an echo of a loss not yet come—pulsing beneath his light armor. It was no physical pain, but a void, an emptiness that absorbed his own light. His breath condensed into golden motes the wind dared not scatter. Above him, two tattered fragments of white wings, frayed by ancient war's lightning, hung like extinguished banners—testimony to leadership forged in sacrifice.

The pulse guiding him was not sound, but resonance, pulling at the crack in his chest like an invisible chord—a summons promising not healing, but a purpose for the wound.

A whisper of golden air, tuned like a lyre, made him look up. Gabriel descended with the delicacy of a freshly spoken spell; his blue-silver robes billowed around a staff humming like a cosmic tuning fork. The air around him crystallized into geometric patterns in time with his voice.

“You follow a whisper, brother,”
he said, modulating his tone so the sand parted in respectful ripples—
“The Council believes it's a trap. Foras has been sowing false visions in
the in-between planes.”

Miguel didn't stop. His eyes fixed on the horizon, where a faint emerald glow pierced the ochre monotony.

“It's not a whisper. It's a heartbeat. And it belongs not to me alone. This pulse is older than Foras, older than his lies.”

“Do we at least know whose—or what's?” asked Gabriel, landing beside him. His feet hovered an inch above the sand, leaving no trace.

“Uriel reports front lines buckling near the Abyss of Varkhannar. They need your presence, your standard. Every hour you delay is a hundred souls hanging by a thread.”

“Do you think I'd ignore the war?” Miguel finally turned, and Gabriel saw in those ash-blue eyes the weight of armies, the weariness of millennia of conflict.

“I've seen our brothers fall, counted shattered banners. But something here calls us from before this war. If a path to end it—to break no more banners—exists, it might begin right under this sand.”

He pointed to the horizon. The emerald glow was no longer a speck, but the impossible silhouette of a forest in the desert.

Gabriel sighed, and the sound rippled into a tremor among nearby dunes, which re-shaped into a perfect spiral.

“The price is high, Miguel. Hope is a rare resource.”

“That’s why we can’t waste it on battles that simply buy time. We need one that stops time.”

Gabriel nodded slowly. No oath was necessary; their trust was older than any vow, forged in the first light of Creation.

“Then go,” he yielded. “But if the storm rages before your return, I’ll know this journey was worth the price. I will fight with the echo of your name in my voice.”

He raised his staff, and his form dissolved into a whirlwind of reverberating notes—a farewell symphony rising to the fiery heavens of other battles, leaving only silence pregnant in Serephis.

Miguel resumed his march. As he walked, the sand beneath his feet turned crystalline. A few steps later, the desert gave way to a bed of knotted white roots, each pulsing like veins of solidified light. The air thickened, heavy with the scent of wet earth and time suspended.

1. The Heart of the Grove

The forest filled a circular clearing—an impossible oasis of life. Twelve colossal trees of ivory-polished wood formed a perfect ring. Their canopies touched overhead, yet cast no shadow. The sap flowing through their trunks glowed as though dawn were trapped beneath bark, and each leaf was a thin jade plate vibrating with an inaudible melody.

At the center stood a single ash tree with translucent foliage—a silent beacon. Its silver bark was etched with symbols belonging to no known tongue, celestial or infernal. Here, gravity seemed to falter: golden pollen motes floated upward before drifting down slowly, as if thoughts seeking a mind to anchor in.

Miguel held his breath—not because he needed air, but because he sensed a sudden sound would shatter something sacred—an equilibrium forged beyond time. He took a step... and then saw it.

Embedded in the wood, where the trunk first forked, rested a sword. It didn’t look forged, but distilled. The blade held liquid currents of living light—miniature galaxies swirling in an impossible edge, as if a small sun had been stretched thin and sharpened. It had no proper hilt, only a golden crystal extension ending in a throbbing amber—a star’s heart pulsing in sync with the call that led him there.

Solmire. The name bloomed in his mind, not as a memory, but as a newfound truth.

The vibration hit him before he could lift his hand. It was an ancient hum, like distant drums recalling a forgotten march—a hymn of creation and defiance. A wordless voice rang in his mind, clear and resonant: *Come*.

Miguel closed his eyes. The vision struck instantly and overwhelmingly. He saw a flame born, grow, and curve into a sword. He saw a mischievous artisan laughing as he hammered light—not with anger, but chaotic joy—as though mocking creation itself was part of the design. The craftsman’s face blurred before sharpening into an enigma wrapped in laughter that made stars tremble. Then it vanished.

When Miguel opened his eyes, his hand was already outstretched, trembling not with fear but resonance. He touched the crystal extension. The sword’s pulse fit into the fissure in his chest as though it had always been a lock waiting for its key. The void inside him filled not with peace, but with a terrible, righteous power.

The surrounding wood cracked in silence. The ash tree exhaled, a sigh of millennia... and let him draw the blade.

At the moment he drew it, all sound vanished. The grove, the wind, even time’s heartbeat stilled to listen. Miguel felt his spine arch under the force flowing from the blade. It was not weight—but purpose—a current of destiny seeking passage through his arm, through his will. The sword was more than an object; it was a verdict waiting to be pronounced.

“Who forged you?” he whispered, barely audible in absolute silence.

The sword’s light didn’t reply in words, but with a single note—a vibration Miguel understood instantly, deep in his soul: *You are forge as well*.

2. The Promise of Living Steel

The ground trembled. The ash’s roots contracted as though mourning the loss of the radiant spike anchoring them outside time. With ancestral creaks, the twelve ring trees bowed inward, forming a closed circle—not in hostility, but as witnesses to a silent vow.

Miguel raised the sword in guard instinctively. The blade flashed, and with that flash, another memory ignited: a battlefield roiled with storms of corrupt energy, laughter fading among sparks of impossible colors, and the sense of a power so ancient it made the current war seem a childish skirmish.

The vision staggered him. He dropped to one knee, planting Solmire's tip into the root-carpeted ground for support. The impact released a pure, metallic echo—a note that raced through the roots, pierced the crystal sand, tore through Serephis's atmosphere, and soared across the planes, ripping the veil of reality.

At that same instant, far away:

- **In the trenches at Gehena's front lines**, Uriel, Archangel of Celestial Fire, saw the infernal flames of his enemies flicker—touched by a pure gold not their own. He looked up, bewildered, feeling an irrational yet powerful surge of hope.
- **On the highest pinnacle of the Abyss of Varkhannar**, Lucifer, the Infernal Prince, paused mid-gesture over an obsidian soul-map. The wine cup in his hand cracked. He met the sky with deep red eyes and a slow, dangerous smile. He recognized the vibration—an age-old weapon he believed extinct, a power beyond the rules of the current conflict. “Interesting,” he murmured.
- **In a small hut on a forgotten hillside on Earth**, an old herbalist with knotted hands and serene eyes dropped his mortar as he crushed herbs. The stone split in two with a dry crack. The old man—his name lost to time—turned to the window. The sky appeared unchanged, yet he sensed a note in the cosmos's balance, a melody unheard for countless ages. Something buried beneath his peace and resignation stirred awake.

Back in the grove, Miguel inhaled deeply and rose. He felt the fissure in his chest seal slowly—not with flesh or ether, but as if the sword had poured into him a fiery resin of pure light. Yet he knew it was no healing, but a pact. The sword had not cured him; it had completed him. Now his wound was his strength.

“Then lead me,” he said, lifting the blade to shoulder height—not as a threat, but as an offering—
“and show me where your judgment must begin.”

The ring of trees opened. The path back across the desert was no longer a whispering suggestion of sand, but a bright, clear trail carved at the speed of thought.

And Miguel set out on his return, feeling Solmire's terrible, comforting weight in his hand. He did not notice a drop of crystallized sap—an amber tear from the ash—forgotten on the freshly sealed fissure of his armor, creeping toward his skin, whispering timeless names he, for now, could not comprehend.