

*Why are the Forces of both  
Heaven and Hell fighting  
over the Soul of a Serial  
killer...on Earth?*

*Find out,  
in the new novel,*

**BURG**

*by*

**NICHOLAS BLACK**

# Burg

*A novel*  
*by*

**NICHOLAS BLACK**

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# Prologue

## *The Torn Valley . . .*

THE BLOOD DRIBBLED ITS WAY, quietly and slowly, to the black terrain below. As it did so there were bubbles and spray as the viscous liquid started to boil in tiny, erratic fits. The steam then rose, mixed with the ash remnants of blood and flesh. It lifted in rolls and swirls towards the starless sky, passing sadly by the three butchered Angels, as they too had started to smolder.

The screams were gone now. The black sands, sharp as razors, blew past the wooden spears, etching them with a chafing howl. Three tall spears sat, at different angles, pointing towards the dark void above. The black sky looming overhead was moist and thick like oil paint. And impaled, just below the splintered tips of the three spears were the bodies... the carnage.

In violent and tempestuous explosions, the three lifeless carcasses, now devoid of their Souls, turned from grayish flesh into ashes... and then to light dust. There were barely even hints of the recent slayings left on the shafts of the spears as the wind blew them to and fro; their tips vibrating and oscillating with a lonely shudder. A cold, numb shiver was felt throughout the entire universe.

Lucifer's horrible victory resonated. And kneeling before these spears was a single, lone Demon... Lucifer's finest Lieutenant.

His face had been deeply cut, crusted with the dried blood around his wounds. Thick, sticky fluid ran down his neck and onto his black cloak. The gash on his face started just above his left eye, and it continued down his face, across his left cheek, ending just above his chin. Even his lips had been severed at their edges.

As he knelled, silently before the spears, he wept as he prayed. They were tears of both pride and pain. His right eye, a deep green, wept the tears of honor and accomplishment. His left eye, forever red from the wound, wept blood. And as the tears met the black earth beneath his boots, they sizzled and evaporated.

His black heart was so filled with emotion and strife that he thought it might explode. He had both conquered and failed his master. His capture and killing of the Angels was a great victory, previously thought impossible. But this great feat was marred with failure... for he had lost the Sword.

It was the Sword that each of the Five Great Angels in Heaven had carried. It had been forged by God and given to his closest warriors. Lucifer had been the first to receive one of the five Swords, and when he was cast from Heaven... the prophecy had been ordained.

'When Lucifer's sword spills the blood of an innocent human, on earth, then the final battle between good and evil shall commence.'

It was all in Lucifer's hands, now. He would be the one to spill first-blood. He would be the one to decide when the time was right to initiate of the End of Days. Lucifer had entrusted his highest Lieutenant with the Sword...and it had been lost.

For this reason, there was more than the blackness above that loomed over this kneeling demon. The clock was ticking. Both sides were preparing.

Lieutenant Cael Lucien's history had only just begun.

## Verse

*'I form the light, and create the darkness;  
I make peace, and create evil;  
I, the Lord, do all these things.*

*(ISAIAH, 45:7)*

*I know thy works: Behold, I set before thee  
an open door, and no man can shut it:  
for thou has a little strength,  
and has kept my word, and has not  
denied my name.'*

*(REVELATION, 3:8)*

*'And I beheld that day, in secret,  
In the Valley of the Torn, whose sands were black:  
Three dead Angels atop Three pointed Spears.  
And all of Hell rejoiced at this;  
while the voice of God was...  
silent.'*

*(The Secret Gospel of THOMAS, 1:13)*

## 1

**Outskirts of Los Angeles . . .**

AS HE LEFT THE BANK, James Taylor waved at the night manager who had come in about thirty minutes earlier. James was done for the day, and could finally get out of his pin-stripe Armani suit. The night security guard let him out of the double set of locked doors. James had only his high-dollar suit and his snake skin briefcase.

"Night, Mr. Taylor," the security guard offered.

James replied with an indifferent nod of the head, his slicked-back black hair remained motionless even as the rush of wind from outside the bank met him at the door. He had on a creme, collared shirt, underneath the Italian blue stripes, a lighter blue tie, and a set of teeth that must have cost him about ten-grand. He was the type of guy that had it made. He was single and didn't mind letting everyone know.

He was quite a hit with the ladies at the bank, and had gotten to know more than a handful of them intimately. Not that he really minded where they came from, as long as there were women in his life at all times. He was a peoples' person, which made him good at his job. Then again, working at the bank was a constant experiment in social psychology. Just how far can you go with a client?

He walked out to his car, about a hundred yards away from the bank—*gotta keep those jokers from parking next to the Porsche and putting scrapes and door dings all about.* After all, he knew how jealous some people could be of his success.

As he approached the fifty-meter mark he pressed the key-chain in his pocket. Chirp, chirp. The lights blinked twice, and the interior, dome lights came on. The Porsche was waiting for him like a faithful dog. His car had its own personality, if you asked James.

So, that made three of them in the parking lot.

James was leaning as he walked nearer, squinting as he tried to see if the car was still flawless. It was.

“Hello, baby. How I have missed you so—” Crack!

Lights out.

James knew only the blackness that now surrounded him.

The strike to the base of the skull had caused almost immediate brain death.

Twenty minutes later the still-warm body was being laid flat on the ground, under a canopy of trees, on a bed of rough grass and barbed weeds. There was hardly any light from the night sky making its way through the dense foliage.

The rubber-gloved hands moved quickly and efficiently as they stripped off the corpse's expensive-looking suit. The body was tugged and repositioned flat on its stomach.

The first incision was made from just above the hip, along the spine, slowly but surely cutting upwards. It was hard to see the razor blade because it was being held deep inside the thumb and forefinger. Carefully and methodically the cut continued. Inch-by-inch, rolling over each individual vertebra, it crept.

The sounds of the woods around them covered the cracks, crunches, pops and snaps, as cartilage and tendons were cut through. There wasn't as much blood as you might expect, due mostly to the fact that James Alexander Taylor had already been dead for nearly a half-hour. Once the heart had stopped beating it no longer pumped the blood out with any force.

Sure, the length of the incision was almost two-and-a-half feet long, and that in itself gave way to a substantial loss of blood, but it could have been much more. In fact, it had been before.

As he continued to cut around the neck, he thought about how this would look when the body was discovered. Likely, some animal would drag pieces or all of the body out into sight. Maybe a curious dog out on a walk, something like that. Not that it really mattered at this point. What had been done had been done with a purpose.

Finally finished cutting, he pushed the razor blade into the wound, and with both hands started to tear apart the separate flanks of skin and flesh. In other words, he was opening this body up like a frog in some elementary school science class.

Exposed muscle and tissue steamed out vapor from the body. He continued to pull back the skin. He almost wretched at one point, but contained himself. He then produced a small spray bottle and began to evenly mist every part of the body.

Slowly, he stood up to admire his work. From a couple of feet away it almost didn't look human anymore. *Only a monster could have done this.* His work was finished...for the night.

## 2

### *The Vatican City . . .*

THE HAUNTING SOUND OF THE clock bells echoed and pounded through the halls of the Vatican City. The sunlight made its way—inch by inch—around the ornate sculptures and magnificent columns, carved stone and tapestries at ever turn. The early morning brought the reddish and orange glow of life at the finger tips of a giant hydrogen explosion.

The light crept into the courtyard and illuminated the angel—carved of stone—which stood at the center of a fountain. This fountain adorned the small garden that was placed within the walls of an attached area of the Vatican Church. The Pope, Jonathan, came here often to sit in quiet reflection. To be close to God.

Jonathan would sit there, surrounded by plants and animals—brimming with life—and ponder his days, as the sun rose to create another. He had, lately, been joined by one of the higher ranking Cardinals, to confer on matters that shouldn't be spoken within the walls of the church.

The North Garden, as it is referred to in the Vatican, is both stunning and tranquil. It also has another pleasing benefit: unlike the many rooms and corridors inside the Church and its offices and halls... there are no listening devices in the Garden. If the Pope wanted to discuss matters that he felt to be too delicate or controver-

sial for the scrutiny of the Swiss Guards, he would enter into these dialogs in the North Garden.

Lately, there had been many of these 'quiet' discussions. Cardinal Paul Delatore was one of many inside the Vatican who secretly transcribed and translated the religious 'Works' as they were whispered. These works consisted of the many texts, gospels, scrolls, and teachings that had been deemed dangerous or suspect by the Church. There had been, as of late, a literary awakening. The spark of this revolution was the discovery of the Nag Hammadi cache of 'Gnostic' gospels, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Copper Scrolls. These artifacts had been uncovered in the mid to late 1940's and only now was even a tiny portion of their information made available to the public when the full collection of the Dead Sea Scrolls was released in 1991.

These were the documents and relics that the public was to learn about, however it was not even a scratch on the surface of the myriad documents, artifacts, and countless other types of historical data that the Vatican Church had hidden deep within its walls. There were a specially selected group of scholars and professors who were allowed to work—in complete secrecy and quarantine—on the 'works' translation and scientific identification. The Cardinal was the spokesman for this group of hidden researchers.

Pope Jonathan, now in his late sixties, sat on a marble bench near the fountain. The Angel sculpture looked down on him as he sat, motionless, on a stone bench listening to the sounds of life all around him. He imagined that the Garden of Eden might have looked something like this.

The Pope's pale skin had the red highlights of many hours spent in the sun, and the wrinkles of a lifetime spent in the smock. His bushy, white, eyebrows only made his grayish-blue eyes that much more pronounced. His white robe rolled back and forth as the wind worked its way around the garden. Jonathan had a handful of bird seeds and was peppering the ground in front of the fountain with food for the more than accommodating flock of pigeons. He, nor the birds, seemed to notice Cardinal Delatore's approach from behind.

The Cardinal was cloaked in a black robe with red trim, red sash, a modest chain and crucifix, and a ribbon about his collar. He made his way carefully and nervously through the garden. Paul's dark skin and brown eyes seemed to portray a man of conviction. His nose had a slight curve that tended to make it look like it was off center, but he would be the first to tell you that our differences are what make us unique. Paul had a deliberately soft gait, almost like he was trying to walk 'quietly.'

As he neared the Pope, the Cardinal wiped his forehead, a slight glaze of sweat appeared almost instantly. There was apprehension in his face. He was carrying the weight of knowledge and indecision and sadness on his shoulders. His thoughts were indeed heavy. He stood silently next to the Pope, his black smock contrasting with the Pope's soft white holy vestments. They might have been the last two pieces of a chess set awaiting the crucial last move of the game.

The Pope tossed another small pile of seeds to the smaller birds near the edge of the fountain.

"Your Holiness?" The Cardinal said gently. Paul was anxious, but knew that this was delicate.

"They eat a great deal, don't they," the Pope said as he smiled, the soft wrinkles in his face relaxing slightly. "I don't see how they eat enough to create all of this mess," he added, motioning to the overabundance of small white splotches-excrement.

Paul breathed out deeply and placed his hands together in front of his body. He scanned the garden nervously with his eyes darting from side to side.

"Sir," Paul started, "I really think that we should...ah...discuss the —" Paul was reluctant to bring this issue up with the Pope. Again.

"Relax, Paul, relax," the Pope said as he threw down the rest of the seeds in his hand and clapped his hands clean. The Pope then scooted to the edge of the bench-making room for Paul to sit next to him. The sun inched its way down and was beginning to touch the head of the Angel sculpture thereby illuminating the tips of the sculpture's wings. It cast a haunting shadow across the garden. The

Pope patted the empty space next to him on the bench for the Cardinal to sit.

“Sit, Paul. Sit and tell me...why you look so beleaguered.” He then added, “Or do I already know?”

“Yes, your Holiness,” Paul exhaled as he made his way timidly around the bench, only slightly bothering the birds as they mopped up the remaining seeds from the gravel floor. Paul looked at the strangely intimidating sculpture that sat in the fountain and nervously fidgeted with his small chain and crucifix.

“What is it that pains you so much, my old friend?”

Paul bit his bottom lip and summoned his strength, “The others are talking, your Holiness.”

“And what are they saying, Paul?” the Pope said calmly.

“More of the same. That... now is the time to begin the—”

The Pope interrupted, “Paul, how is your faith?”

Paul turned toward the Pope, “Sir?” His eyes widening.

“Your faith, Paul...your belief. How is it these past couple of years, since we began our small participation in this immense project?”

Paul answered quickly, “My faith has never left my heart, sir. Never.”

“Has it not been shaken, ever so slightly?” the Pope said as he took Paul's hand into his hands and clasped tenderly. He gazed at the water flowing quietly out of the Angel's outstretched hands. He added, “Has this been difficult on all of you?”

Paul was silent. The Pope took in a deep breath of clean morning air and patted Paul's hand in his. “But I know that it must have been, my brother. It must continue to be difficult.”

“My faith is unwaivering, sir...but it is the nature of our project and the impact on those around us, our congregation, of our fellow Christians that might be damaged if we don't arrive at some decision. At some action.”

The Pope looked at Paul, “And what would you all recommend?”

Paul knew that he must be strong, “We think that it is time to release some of the 'works.’” Paul looked to the Pope's face for any

expression of anything. Even just a hint of a reaction. The Pope's eyes betrayed nothing, for nobody reached this level of stature in life without the ability to conceal one's thoughts and emotions.

"*We* think?" The Pope said flatly. "...You think, or we think?"

"The others...and I. We have talked about this, your Holiness. We have been meeting in seclusion for some time."

"Yes Paul, we have. Many times in fact, for many years," the Pope released Paul's hand. "Tell me, Paul, what good could come from this? What service do we do for the Lord in confusing the world? What do we do for all of those people who are living in dire times if we try to test their faith in such ways as they cannot handle?"

The Pope took a deep breath and continued. "And, Paul, would they even want to believe, after all of this time? Would it really change anything other than to hurt the Church's reputation?"

"But it is the truth, sir. It is the will of God," Paul said, almost pleadingly.

The Pope smiled and placed his hands on his lap, straightening out the white fabric of his robe. "Let me tell you a story that I was told by the former Pope—may he rest in peace." The Pope turned around and faced the vibrant garden, the sun now warming his back. Paul followed and turned.

Reflections of light were dancing off of the fountain and emanating out across the garden. The Pope took another breath and began.

"There was once a gathering of Priests and wise religious scholars. They were debating about a particularly strange and ambiguous section of Holy Law. One of these wise men was in disagreement with the others and was coming under great pressure to concede his position. This man knew, just knew for certain, that he was correct and that God would be on his side."

The Pope opened up his arms to the garden.

"This man then called upon the Lord to help him validate his argument. He begged, 'please God, if I am right about this thing then let the streams of our city flow uphill.' Immediately," the Pope,

paused for effect, "...there was commotion and the waters of their city changed direction."

The Pope continued, "His adversaries, though, were not convinced. So, then the man said, 'Please God, if I am right, may the trees bend to the ground,' and with another commotion, louder now, the trees of the city began to bend over and fold all the way to the ground. The birds and other animals were going crazy, but these wise men were still not swayed."

The Pope laughed lightly to himself and coughed. Clearing his throat he pressed on, "In desperation he called out, 'Dear God, may you now speak in support of me, so that all of these men may hear your words.' Well, then there was a rumbling sound and the clouds began to part in the sky. A great voice came from the heavens, thundering, 'My friends, I must tell you that you are wrong and that he is right. This is what I intended!'"

The Pope smiled and turned his head from side to side. "Well, the wise man smiled in triumph to the other men. But...the group was still unmoved." The Pope turned and locked eyes with the Cardinal as the wind blew across the garden.

"You know what they said, Paul? The group said, 'Oh, we pay no attention to heavenly miracles because the correct determination was written down long ago.'"

Paul turned his head in sad frustration, not able to keep his eyes in contact with the Pope.

"The old scriptures and stories," the Pope added, "...however inaccurate they may be, have taken on a life and spirit of their own. Religion is not about historical facts or truths, but about faith. Pure faith, Paul."

Paul shook his head in disagreement, "But this is nothing other than blind faith, is it not? And will it not falter in these days of conspiracy and misdirection?"

The Pope waved his hand dismissively, "Paul—"

The Cardinal summoned up all of his fortitude and strength, "Your Holiness, the time has past for placing dogma above the truth. And it is no way to pay homage to God."

“Dogma...” the Pope let it linger.

“You see, sir, the Muslims can survive without Mohammed, the Buddhists can continue forward without Gautama, but... Christianity—and the Church—may not survive if we continue to repress the historical proofs that the 'works' provide us. If we were only to release just a few of them—”

The Pope cut in, “I understand your frustration, Paul,” the Pope placed his hand on the Cardinal's shoulder, reassuringly. “But now is not the time. The people are not yet prepared for such an epic shock.”

Paul clenched his teeth, a nervous habit to add to all of his other nervous habits. The Pope had a way of sounding condescending, even if he didn't intend it. Paul's eyes glanced around suspiciously, “I am not alone in this thinking, your Holiness.”

The Pope stiffened, and slowly a cold smile crossed his face, “But it is *my* decision to make, Paul, and I have given this much thought and consideration.” The Pope's tone softened a bit, “The time is simply not right...it's just not right.”

“And what shall we do?”

“You will continue your work, making progress as you have. You are all noble servants of the Lord, and you all make me very proud.”

This was little consolation for Paul. Why didn't the Pope understand? This was bigger than any one man. Than any one Pope. Paul spoke flatly, “I think that this is a mistake, your Holiness.” His words were cold.

The Pope put his hands around his crucifix and spoke very quietly, “If it is...it will be mine, for it is my decision. Let us not discuss this matter again.”

The Pope placed his hands together and, almost as if to prey, closed his eyes. Paul then stood and looked down on him. He had loved this man. He still loved this man, but there was nothing that he could do. He had known that, even before coming into the garden that morning, this was to be the decision. Paul turned towards the path through the garden and began somberly walking away. The

Pope opened his eyes as the Cardinal slowly, almost sadly, walked farther. “God bless you, Paul, for all of your work,” the Pope offered.

Paul turned and looked at the Pope, the sun to his back, the Pope's white robe—the holy vestments—glowing brightly. As Paul squinted, small tears welled up in his eyes. He whispered to himself as he tried to smile, “God bless you Jonathan. I am so sorry.” The Cardinal then turned his head and made his way out of the North Garden.

The Pope turned back around and faced the fountain. He narrowed his eyes as the rhythmic pattern of light danced on the stones, swirls and somber splashes of twisted color spinning all around.

The Pope closed his eyes and slowly leaned into the warm yellow embrace of the sun, now growing quite intense. The birds around him chirped their songs and played their games oblivious to the created nature they were living in. He took in a deep, slow breath through his nose and enjoyed the medley of aromas: rose, jasmine, cedar, pine, and energy as the wind stirred and pushed the many plants and animals throughout the garden, the Pope's robe blew gently in the gust.

*Not on my watch*, he thought to himself. *Not on my watch.*

## 3

*Purgatory . . .*

PERCHED ON THE TOP OF the building, next to the Gargoyle at the roof's corner, he could clearly see the large white beltway that surrounded the darkest city in the universe. Aydan's blond hair was fluttering to the sides of his head as the breeze came across from the black desert, raising in fits and swirls, eventually making its way through Purgatory. The tiny black grains floated with the gusts and found a way to mix with the rain and make a thick black mulch that seemed to gather at every nook and crevice.

At this height, above the surrounding buildings and skyscrapers, there were few lights to silhouette his form against the skyline. Occasionally, sparks of streaking lightening would traverse the otherwise pitch black sky above. But Aydan wasn't worried.

He was waiting to see just how far the two Demons were willing to take this. So far, they had crossed the black sands of the Torn Valley, violating the oldest, unwritten law. They had made their way across from Hades, and were already creeping towards the large white beltway—a six lane, unused highway, that formed the perimeter of Purgatory.

Aydan wasn't sure why these two Demons—clad in red and black leather, with pale white faces and cold gray eyes—had come this far. It would be Aydan's job to make sure that they left without

incident...well, one way or another. He was a Protector-of-Souls, and in the city of Purg, he and a handful of others were the law.

The Demons didn't normally enter Purg, for the consequences were grave. Hades, where these two had obviously come from, sat just across the barren wasteland—also known as the Torn Valley. There were a million reasons that the Demons, or Dark Angels, were not allowed to pass the beltway. The biggest reason, however, was that God had forbidden it. Aydan would not allow these, nor any other evil creatures to enter the city and jeopardize any of the Souls who lived there.

As Aydan focused down, from just over thirty stories high, he noticed with a bit of apprehension the gleam of metal on their backs. *Swords*. This was no peace keeping mission; two of the Devil's soldiers had come to make trouble.

Aydan watched them as he bent into a crouch. He pulled a black cord from behind him and started to fasten it to his right ankle, just above his thick leather boot bindings. He quickly attached a metal clasp, fixed to the end of the cord, to a dark metal 'd-ring' that was firmly attached to his upper boot.

He gave the connection a couple of quick tugs to make sure that the cord was properly attached. Satisfied, he rolled back down his black pant leg and scanned the edge of the building.

He then stood, carefully still, next to the gargoyle and checked—with both of his hands—the sides of his waist belt. They were still there, under his black trench coat. Sharp weapons of a variety of shapes and sizes. On his back was fixed a broad sword, its grip extending at an angle across his right shoulder. Aydan's hands went about doing a mental inventory of all the assorted cutting devices—securing them with snaps and buttons. The entire time he was doing this he was focusing down across the rain...at the two Demons.

He stood slowly, his right hand balancing him with the support of the statue's ghastly chilling head. The Gargoyle's wings were fixed at its sides, giving the impression that it was waiting to leap down with its large, phantasmal eyes, and elongated, hellish teeth.

The wind gusts had picked up so Aydan would have to carefully time his decent. His deep blue eyes tracked the Demons as they crept, half bent-over, near the edge of the white concrete road. They were coming across; that was now a certainty. They knew the rules, and so did Aydan. The leader of the Protectors was about to do a little house cleaning on a couple of PNG's—*persona non grata*.

Aydan wiggled his left arm, ever so slightly, and a small dagger attached to a tiny black line fell into his hand. He steadied himself on the edge of the building's ledge. He then took three quick breaths through his nose, and then three slower breaths. He shifted forward, taking a relaxed step off of the stone outcropping. Whoosh! He and gravity had struck a deal.

Going down!

As he plummeted downward he slowly rolled his body so that his legs were trailing above him. He was in a free-fall nose-dive with his hands at his sides. The black cord was humming as it unraveled on the roof and followed his trajectory down. Quickly, the slack began to lessen as he neared the middle of his fall—somewhere around the 16<sup>th</sup> floor. Suddenly, there was no more slack in the cord, and it was taut, from his ankle to the roof, where it had been secured.

At the very moment when there was no slack left, it sprang and tensed as it elongated, its elasticity slowing Aydan's speed. The cord continued to stretch and expand as he slowed even more, almost to a stop at some five meters from the wet sidewalk below.

Aydan quickly curled into a crouch and used the dagger that he gripped firmly in his left hand. He cut away the bungee-type elastic cord, just above his ankle, and was released as the cord snapped violently upwards.

Aydan flipped forward twice and then landed, catlike, on all fours. He lifted his head, like a sprinter in the starting blocks, and sprang into a full sprint. All around him were the ooo's and aaah's of surprised Souls, making their space so he could move forward.

In seconds he was across the street and bolting towards the last block of buildings, next to the beltway, where the two Demons were trying their hand at a surreptitious entry into Purg.

The two Demons sat, in a crouch, at the edge of the beltway. They were waiting and watching to see if anybody had noticed them. They whispered in a strange demonic language back and forth between each other.

“Da vos takoi?” Can you hear them?

“Ta, ta. Kolkin.” Yes, yes. Souls.

“Pad anglikt, si vost ect nost.” Speak English, in case somebody hears us.

The two of them sprinted across the empty highway and again lowered themselves into a low crouch at the corner of the first building that they came to. It was a large, gray-walled building, with no windows on the sides. There was black dust gathered between the sidewalk and the building's side wall.

The Demon at the corner, Ada, was peering across the adjacent street—his gray eyes conflicting with his sickly-pale, acromic skin. He had no hair, no eyebrows, no mustache, just this anemic, cadaverous skin. His beady eyes searched farther and farther around the corner. There was nobody around.

“What you see?” Salas, the second Demon, said.

Both of them were wearing tight bodysuits, with large cloaks hanging over them. The cloak was cut down the front so that they had access to their weaponry. As they were not wearing the hoods, the water droplets in the air gathered on their slick, toneless heads.

“Nothing. It appears clear,” Ada answered as they prepared to move forward.

“Now, you see, that's the problem these days,” Aydan said, having sneaked around behind the two Demons.

He stood no more than 5 meters away from them, near the beltway. Aydan noticed that they had been startled, and continued speaking. “It's strange that there are two Fayette Guards playing around in my city. Don't you guys have something better to be doing, like baking, or pottery classes over in Hades?”

He waited for a reply. There was none. “Gay porn, perhaps...or is that too old fashioned for you two?” Their eyes narrowed as he spoke.

Aydan's accent was distinctly British, with a strange poshness to it. He almost smiled at them, but though better of it. His hands were inside his trench coat, its sleeves dangling empty at his sides.

The two Demons had expected, and planned, to work their way much deeper into Purg before being spotted by a Protector. As they came to the realization that it was Aydan—the leader of the Protectors—their plans seemed to crumble. Their easy foray into Purg just got exponentially more treacherous.

The Demons both stood and slowly separated away from each other. They carefully freed up their swords, that had been fastened onto their backs, and eyed each other knowingly as if to say, 'Lets do this nice and easy, by the numbers.'

Ada, who was closest to the building, said, "We come to look for one man. No trouble for you. He coming to Hades, anyway." He glanced over at Salas as he spoke.

Aydan remained calm, motionless in fact. He allowed himself a grim smile. "Oh, it's no trouble for me. It's just that...well, we all know the rules: you guys don't come over here, and we don't go over there. I can't help but to think that this is all very clear to everyone. I feel like I have to repeat myself to you guys quite often."

Salas looked over at Ada, their gray eyes meeting and this time...not agreeing. Salas said, "I don't like rules anymore."

Ada looked over at Salas with disbelief. He spoke in their language to his comrade. "Salas, po ib timitay. Nost rir, hala. Ist fi Ayeedan!" Salas, this is finished. We must leave, now. It's fuck-ing Aydan!

"Rir, Ada. Oni pat fedas o Ayeedan." Go, Ada. I'm not afraid of Aydan.

Ada scowled at Salas, and he realized two things: One, Salas was going to stay and fight; and two, Ada was going to have to stay and back his play. Lucien would not forgive any soldier that gave up an opportunity to bring Aydan's head into Hades.

Salas looked at Aydan, trying to size him up, not from stories and legends passed down, but face-to-face. A smile started to form on Salas's face. He tossed his sword from hand to hand and then bent

into a fighting stance. Ada reluctantly lowered himself into a fighting position, his weight evenly distributed over his powerful legs.

Still Aydan remained calm.

Salas and Ada were both more than a bit unnerved that Aydan hadn't taken up any kind of fighting stance. They again looked to each other as they tried to slowly circle around, positioning themselves on opposite sides of him. They continued to circle, and Aydan continued to do nothing about it.

Salas jeered, "You make this too easy for us. Maybe you're getting old?"

Aydan spoke calmly, "At the risk of sounding cliché...this is your last chance."

Ada lowered his stance, preparing to lunge. Salas lifted his eyebrows, his gray eyes rolling side to side. And they both slowly approached him. 5 meters. 4. 3.

Both Salas and Ada sprang forward and attacked with their swords, slicing at waist level. Aydan dropped into a deep squat as the swords cut through the air above his head, passed, and sparked against one another. The sharp sound of metal crashing against metal resonated!

Cha-ching!

Aydan then jumped up into the air and did a back flip. While he was in the air his arms exploded out from underneath his coat releasing the two s-shaped, curved, blades which shot out of his hands. By the time he landed back on his feet, the two Demons were stumbling clumsily backwards. It all happened in the space of a couple of seconds...two breaths.

Salas, still holding his sword, had been hit in the throat with the razor sharp blade. Black viscous liquid was spraying out of both sides of his neck, the blade lodged somewhere near the back of his throat. The dripping edges of the blade were protruding from both sides of his neck. He dropped backwards, gasping the whole way down to the ground. His body began to sizzle and smolder, finally turning to gray ash and rose, like mist, up off of the ground and into the moist night air.

Ada was struck through the left eye socket, and most of his face was gruesomely caved-in. He spun a couple of times, like a drunken ballerina, as he too began to spark and sizzle. At the time that his sword struck the ground below, he had already dissolved into a small tornado of ash and dust, their remnants of him swirling upward into the sky. All that remained of them were their discarded weapons strewn about the ground.

Aydan, had quickly produced two more daggers, in preparation for the next attack. But, on this night, there would be no more attacks. Ada and Salas now ceased to exist.

*So*, he thought, somebody important is coming to Purg. He turned away from the lonely city of Purg, and towards the abandoned beltway. He gazed off into the haunting blackness of the Torn Valley. It was quiet.

Somebody, or something...was staring back.

**LOS ANGELES TIMES, December 3rd,  
AM. Edition  
NUMBER '9': SURGEON KILLER  
REMAINS ACTIVE**

By Heath Guthrie

LOS ANGELES—Police still have no clues as to the identity of, or motives of the so called “Surgeon Killer.” The killings, which now number 9, continue to elude even the most experienced Criminal Psychologists.

Some sources tell the L.A. TIMES that the accumulated forensic evidence is being studied at both local and Federal crime labs. The FBI's own Mobile Forensic Crime Unit has given this situation its top priority. Sources inside the FBI have stated firmly that the local police are cooperating completely and they expect to be able to bring this situation to a close. This cannot come any sooner, as the public outcry is violent in its message. Local pawn shops and gun stores have reported a 78% increase in sales of firearms and ammunition.

The former Police Chief Gates is strongly urging residents not to take the law into their own hands saying, “I urge the City to pull together, and to let the authorities handle this matter. Vigilantism will only result in the loss of innocent lives. We don't know at this time who the Killer or Killers are, so it is important to be calm. We should come together as a community and try and report any suspicious activity or leads to our local authorities.”

Former Chief Gates also commented briefly on the tactics of the, “Highly capable” crime lab. “We are getting close to this suspect, or suspects, there are just some things that we have to link together and then we can put this whole investigation in the right direction.” Local residents, however, call this window dressing, saying that they feel that this killer could be the next... **Continued on page 6A, column 3.**