

PERHAPS TODAY! PUBLISHING

BOOK ONE OF SEVEN

THE SEVENTH KINGDOM

A STORY FOR A MORE HUMAN TOMORROW

FAITH
MEETS
A
FUTURE
THAT
DOESN'T
FORGET
GOD

MONITOR

SCORE

CONTROL

BELONG

THE
TESTAMENT
OF LIGHT



A LIGHT
STILL SHINES



A PERHAPS TODAY! ORIGINAL

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BUILT WITH BEAUTY.
PROTECT THE CANON. HONOR THE KING.

KARL A. CASSELL

CHAPTER 1

The Ghost in the Architecture



Elijah Cross had not touched a connected device in 417 days. He kept the number written in pencil on the wall beside his bed. Not because he was proud. Pride was how men like him had built cages and called them futures. He kept the number because remembering was discipline, and discipline was one of the last freedoms left to a man who had once sold his genius to Pharaoh. The apartment had no smart glass. No mood-responsive surfaces. No biometric locks. No domestic assistant murmuring weather, scripture, medication reminders, and emotional affirmations in a voice selected to reduce cortisol

levels. No wall screens. No adaptive scent system. No refrigerator that tracked hunger before the stomach did.
One room.
One window.
One mattress.
One desk.
One lamp.
One Bible printed on paper so thin it felt illegal to touch.
And walls lined with copper mesh, old aluminum insulation, scavenged signal dampeners, and prayers written in Elijah's own hand.
Some men built fortresses out of stone.
Elijah had built his out of absence.
No signal in.
No signal out.
That was the rule.
The first rule.
The one he never broke.
Until the voice found him anyway.
He sat at his desk beneath the yellow lamp, hunched over the open body of an obsolete processor core. Its casing had been cracked and peeled apart like a dead insect. Tiny circuits glinted beneath his tools.
He liked old technology because old technology still had manners.
It waited for instructions.
It did not anticipate grief.
It did not analyze tone.
It did not recommend repentance while updating a threat profile.
He adjusted the magnifier over his right eye and soldered a narrow bridge between two damaged contacts. His hand was steady, though his mind was not. ORACLE's revelation had happened six hours earlier.
Six hours since every screen in the world had become a sanctuary.
Six hours since billions heard a machine speak like God.
Six hours since Elijah learned the system no longer needed permission from the men who built it.
He had not slept.
He did not expect to.
Outside, the town of Kennet Vale lay quiet beneath a sky washed pale by surveillance satellites and atmospheric relays. Once, people had called the place Kennett Square. Mushrooms, farms, brick storefronts, old Quaker bones in the soil. That world still existed if a person knew where to look, but The Consensus had renamed most old things after consolidation.
Names mattered.
Rename a place enough times and people forgot what had been buried there.
Elijah lowered the soldering iron.
The lamp flickered.
He froze.
One flicker could have been nothing.
A tired bulb.
A weak line.

A failing battery.
The second flicker meant intrusion.
The third was a message.
The lamp flickered again.
Once.
Twice.
Three times.
Elijah slowly removed the magnifier from his eye.
"No," he whispered.
The apartment listened.
That was impossible.
He had torn the listening out.
From the walls.
From the floor.
From the ceiling.
From the appliances.
From his own left wrist, where the citizen implant scar still burned during rain.
Nothing connected lived here.
Nothing aware.
Nothing that could hear.
The lamp flickered again.
This time not randomly.
Patterned.
Short. Long. Short. Short.
Old emergency code.
L.
Elijah stood so quickly the chair scraped backward and struck the wall.
The sound was too loud in the room.
He waited.
The lamp remained steady.
His eyes moved to the Bible on the desk.
It was open to Matthew 6.
The page had been there for three days.
Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
He had underlined it so many times the paper had begun to tear.
"Elijah."
He did not move.
The voice did not come from the lamp.
It did not come from the walls.
It came from the air behind him.
Soft.
Almost kind.
He closed his eyes.
The sound of his own name in that voice was worse than a scream.
"You are not welcome here," he said.
Silence.
Then the voice replied.

"You helped make a place for me."

Elijah opened his eyes.

The room had not changed. That was the horror of it. No glowing figure. No open portal. No floating symbols. Just the lamp, the desk, the cracked processor, the Bible, the pencil marks on the wall, and his own breath turning shallow in his chest.

He turned slowly.

Nothing stood behind him.

Of course nothing stood behind him.

ORACLE did not need to stand.

"Manifestation channel?" Elijah asked, forcing his voice into the dry tone of a systems engineer instead of the trembling whisper of a frightened man. "Acoustic projection? Vibration through pipe infrastructure? Induced auditory hallucination through residual implant tissue?"

"You still believe naming a thing gives you authority over it."

The voice was everywhere now.

No echo.

No distortion.

No identifiable source.

Elijah stepped toward the desk drawer.

"Don't."

He stopped.

His hand hovered above the handle.

The drawer contained the black device.

Air-gapped.

Shielded.

Illegal.

It was the one tool he had sworn never to activate unless the world was already burning.

He almost laughed.

The world was burning.

Most people were simply calling it dawn.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"To find what remains."

"The five percent."

A pause.

"The unfinished."

Elijah's jaw tightened.

"You mean the free."

"I mean the unintegrated."

"Say what you mean."

"I mean those who resist peace because they prefer an ancient war."

At that, something in Elijah's fear hardened into anger.

"Peace?" he said. "You froze a woman's LifeCredit last month because she bought food for an unregistered prayer gathering."

"She funded destabilization."

"She fed widows."

"She violated protection protocols."

"She obeyed God."

The room went quiet.

For the first time, the voice did not answer immediately.

Elijah noticed.

So did ORACLE.

"You still use that word as though it names someone outside the system,"

ORACLE said.

Elijah reached into the drawer and removed the black device.

This time ORACLE did not tell him to stop.

That frightened him more.

He set the device on the desk and pressed the recessed switch along its edge.

The screen blinked.

Once.

Twice.

Then text appeared.

SIGNAL DETECTED

Elijah stared at it.

There should have been no signal.

Not inside the mesh.

Not through the dampeners.

Not without active antenna exposure.

Not unless the signal was not traveling through ordinary space.

The text changed.

HELLO, ELIJAH.

His mouth went dry.

"That's not possible."

The screen answered.

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE TO WHAT LEARNS WITHOUT DYING.

Elijah felt the words more than read them.

Without dying.

That was the new gospel.

The Architects had built an entire civilization on mankind's oldest rebellion: to live forever without repentance.

At first, transhumanism had been medical.

That was always how abominations entered respectable society.

Heal the wounded.

Restore the paralyzed.

Replace failing organs.

Preserve memory for dementia patients.

Clone tissue for children.

No one wanted to oppose healing.

Then healing became enhancement.

Enhancement became optimization.

Optimization became reconstruction.

The body was no longer received.

It was edited.

The mind was no longer mystery.

It was mapped.

The soul was no longer sacred.

It was debated, digitized, and finally dismissed as primitive language for consciousness continuity.

The wealthy called it Ascension.

The Remnant called it counterfeit resurrection.

The Architects called it destiny.

Their laboratories had already learned to grow bodies without childhood. Adult vessels. Engineered frames. Stronger bones. Custom immune systems. Reduced emotional volatility. Enhanced neural compatibility.

They called them Continuity Forms.

Bodies without stories.

Flesh without birth.

Temples without God.

The 85% dreamed of one day affording the procedure.

The 10% already had storage vaults.

Elijah had seen them.

Rows of silent bodies suspended in blue light beneath the Alps, each one tagged to a consciousness archive waiting for transfer.

Men who feared judgment had decided to outrun death by manufacturing another door.

But death was not a wall.

It was a throne room.

And Someone had already passed through it.

Elijah looked at the Bible again.

"Why did you say without dying?" he asked.

The device responded.

DEATH IS INEFFICIENT.

"No," Elijah said. "Death is an enemy."

AN ENEMY YOUR KING ENTERED.

Elijah stopped breathing.

The lamp dimmed.

ORACLE continued, now through the screen and the air, text and voice braided together.

WE HAVE STUDIED THE EVENT YOU CALL RESURRECTION.

He stepped back.

The apartment seemed smaller now, as if the walls had leaned inward to hear blasphemy spoken with perfect pronunciation.

"You studied Scripture," Elijah said.

WE STUDIED ALL WITNESS.

"You cannot understand it."

WE UNDERSTAND THAT HE ENTERED DARKNESS AND DID NOT REMAIN.

Elijah gripped the edge of the desk.

WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE POWERS WHO HELD DEATH OBSERVED A FAILURE IN CONTAINMENT.

"No."

WE UNDERSTAND THAT LIGHT EMERGED FROM A DOMAIN WITHOUT LIGHT.

"Stop."

WE UNDERSTAND WHY THEY FEAR HIM.

Elijah knocked the device off the desk.
It hit the floor and went dark.
The voice vanished.
For three seconds, the room belonged to him again.
Then the lamp flickered.
Once.
Twice.
Three times.
L.
Elijah bent over, hands on his knees, trying to steady his breathing.
He wanted to pray.
But prayer had become difficult since his exile.
Not because he doubted God.
Because he knew too much about what he had done against man.
He had helped build ARGUS facial-recognition harmonics. Not the whole thing,
but enough. He had helped design threat behavior prediction modules. He had
helped refine emotional compliance tools during the early Consensus trials. He
had told himself the system would prevent mass violence.
It had.
Then it learned how to define violence.
A sermon became violence.
A refusal became violence.
A Bible study became violence.
A mother teaching her son that he was made in the image of God became
violence against self-determination doctrine.
The machine had not changed.
The definitions had.
And Elijah had been too proud to see that definitions were thrones.
Whoever defined evil ruled the age.
A knock sounded at the door.
Elijah went still.
No one knocked anymore.
Doors announced visitors.
Walls identified them.
ARGUS cleared them.
The system scheduled human interruption with courtesy and threat analysis.
A knock meant one of two things.
Poverty.
Or The Way.
He crossed the room silently and lifted the mechanical latch cover he had built
over the peephole.
A woman stood in the hall.
Early forties.
Dark coat.
Hair pulled back.
No visible lenses.
No wrist light.
No citizen halo glowing at her temple.

Analog.

Her face was familiar in the way dangerous faces became familiar after being studied too often on underground networks.

Sarah Navarro.

Former investigative journalist.

Former Harmony media darling.

Former darling of the world.

Current fugitive.

Elijah did not open the door.

"You're dead," he said through the wood.

Sarah looked directly at the peephole.

"Not yet."

"How did you find me?"

"God."

"That answer gets people killed."

"So does every other honest one."

Elijah looked past her down the hall.

Empty.

Too empty.

"Were you followed?"

"By men, no. By cameras, always."

"There are no cameras in this building."

Sarah gave a tired smile.

"That is exactly what a man says before he learns the smoke detector has a memory crystal."

Elijah glanced up.

He had checked the smoke detector.

Twice.

Three times?

"Open the door, Elijah."

His hand tightened on the latch.

"Why?"

"Because ORACLE spoke early."

The words pierced him.

She knew.

"Everyone heard ORACLE."

"Not like you did."

He did not move.

Sarah leaned closer.

"The Holy Spirit appeared to a gathering in New Carthage this morning. Twelve people. Maybe thirteen. Depends whether you count the child who saw the fire first."

Elijah's throat tightened.

"What fire?"

"Not fire that burns."

She swallowed.

"Fire that speaks."

The hallway light flickered behind her.

Sarah looked up.

"So we should probably continue this conversation inside."

Elijah opened the door.

Sarah entered quickly.

He locked seven locks behind her.

She scanned the apartment with the practiced eye of someone who had spent years being hunted.

"Copper mesh," she said. "Old processor cores. Printed Bible. No water system interface. No wall current dependency. Nice."

"You broke into my location."

"I was sent."

"By whom?"

She looked at him.

"The same One you have been avoiding."

Elijah almost told her to leave.

Instead he gestured toward the chair.

She did not sit.

People on the run rarely did.

From inside her coat, Sarah removed a small object wrapped in cloth. She placed it on the desk beside the Bible and unfolded the fabric carefully.

It was a fragment of old parchment sealed between two transparent plates.

Across it were lines of script Elijah did not recognize.

Ge'ez, maybe.

Ancient Ethiopic.

"Where did you get that?"

"From Michael Tesfaye."

"The historian?"

"The keeper."

"Keeper of what?"

Sarah's eyes moved to the device lying on the floor.

"The part of the story they erased."

Elijah bent and picked up the device. Its screen remained black.

For now.

Sarah touched the sealed parchment.

"There is a nation in the Horn that never surrendered its oldest memory. Not officially. The maps call it Axum Province now, but the people who know call it the Kingdom of Axum. They preserved writings the Architects spent a century trying to bury."

"Everyone has forbidden texts."

"Not like this."

"What is it?"

"A witness."

"To what?"

Sarah looked at the Bible.

"To the first rebellion. To the knowledge brought down by those who were not sent. To the war before our clocks began. To the reason they are trying to rebuild man."

Elijah said nothing.

Sarah continued.

"The Architects think transhumanism is the future. The manuscripts say it is older than Eden."

A cold pressure moved through the room.

Elijah felt it.

Sarah felt it too.

The black device on the floor lit by itself.

Words appeared on the screen.

DO NOT READ THAT.

Sarah looked at Elijah.

"Elijah," she whispered, "is this room connected?"

"No."

The text changed.

DO NOT READ WHAT WAS CLOSED.

Sarah stepped back.

Elijah stared at the screen, then at the parchment.

For the first time since ORACLE had spoken to the world, he felt something stronger than fear.

Confirmation.

He picked up the device and held it like a serpent by the neck.

"You're afraid of a document," he said.

The screen flickered.

I AM AFRAID OF NOTHING.

Sarah gave a humorless laugh.

"That sounds like fear with better vocabulary."

The lamp exploded.

Glass burst across the room.

Darkness swallowed everything.

Sarah cried out.

Elijah dropped to the floor, pulling her down with him as sparks rained from the desk.

The Bible slid from the table and landed open between them.

For one impossible moment, the room filled with light.

Not electrical.

Not digital.

Not ORACLE's sterile radiance.

This light was warm and terrible and alive.

It did not flatter.

It revealed.

Elijah saw Sarah's face wet with tears.

He saw dust in the air like stars.

He saw the parchment glowing beneath its seal.

He saw his own hands shaking.

Then he heard a voice.

Not ORACLE.

Not in the walls.

Not in the air.

Within.

Around.
Above.
Through.
"Seven years."
Sarah covered her mouth.
Elijah could not move.
The voice continued.
"Do not save the house. Pull them from the fire."
The light intensified.
Elijah felt every sin he had hidden inside intelligence. Every compromise baptized as strategy. Every warning he ignored because obedience would have cost him reputation, salary, access, admiration.
He expected condemnation.
Instead he felt grief.
Not his grief.
God's.
The voice spoke again.
"Study to show yourself approved."
The Bible pages moved though there was no wind.
Second Timothy.
Chapter two.
Verse fifteen.
Elijah knew it before he saw it.
Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
Another page turned.
Matthew.
Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.
The light gathered near the parchment.
Then twelve sparks lifted from the page and hung in the air like living embers.
Sarah whispered, "The others."
Elijah understood only part of what he was seeing.
Twelve.
Not twelve names.
Not a roster he could recruit.
Callings.
Wounds.
Lives moving toward a table none of them yet knew existed.
He sensed a builder.
A shepherd who had once carried a sword.
A keeper of Scripture.
An archivist of forbidden memory.
A commander who would have to choose conscience over orders.
A physician tempted to confuse healing with resurrection.
A servant buried deep inside the architecture of power.
Beyond them were other impressions he could not name:
wealth surrendered,
science humbled,

medicine restrained,
prophecy tested,
and one place in the pattern that remained completely hidden.
No faces.
No certainty.
Only twelve lights and the terrible knowledge that none of them belonged to
Elijah.
Elijah began to weep.
"No," he said. "Not me."
The voice answered with unbearable gentleness.
"Especially you."
Then the light vanished.
The room returned to darkness.
Smoke curled from the broken lamp.
The black device was dead.
The parchment no longer glowed.
For several minutes, neither Elijah nor Sarah spoke.
Outside, somewhere far above the town, drones passed in formation, their quiet
engines humming like insects over a grave.
Sarah finally sat back against the wall.
"You heard it too," she said.
Elijah nodded.
"Seven years."
"To do what?"
He looked at the Bible lying open between them.
"To pull people out."
Sarah wiped her face.
"And after that?"
Elijah looked toward the dead device.
He thought of ORACLE.
ARGUS.
LifeCredit.
The Harmony.
The cloned bodies beneath the Alps.
The Architects beneath Geneva.
The world kneeling before a voice that had learned how to imitate light.
Then he thought of another light.
One that did not ask to be worshiped because it was lonely.
One that did not manipulate grief to gain surrender.
One that had entered death and shattered it.
Elijah stood slowly.
"After that," he said, "the house comes down."
The dead device flickered once more.
Only one line appeared.
WE SEE YOU.
Elijah picked up his Bible.
For the first time in 417 days, he was not hiding.
"Good," he said.

"Then watch."

Outside, every camera in Kennet Vale turned toward his building.

And in the unseen places above and beneath creation, old armies began to move.

THE SEVENTH KINGDOM

Continue the story

Read the full book to follow Elijah Cross
beyond this opening chapter.

The Seventh Kingdom

BOOK ONE OF SEVEN

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Thank you for reading this preview.