

## CHAPTER 1

*The soul gives life just as the sword takes it, yet neither possesses what they give.*

*Only the wielder does.*

“The whisper of war has been trembling on every tongue,” declared the tall, dark-haired revenant poised above a cluster of nodding comrades. “And your breaths have joined to become a gale.”

One eager voice cried out high-pitched assent; a young revenant with far more fervor than experience. The dozens of surrounding somber faces met his eager eyes, returning none of his zeal. The young revenant’s fist slowly dropped from the hushed air and he succumbed to embarrassment with a bowed head. He had no idea how to behave. He didn’t even know who he was. That was all he had come here to gain – an identity, that alone. All he had hoped for, prayed for – if that was what intense hope could be – was the simple solemnity that a name can give. Yet on his pilgrimage to this place, which was his entire brief existence, his body stirred with only uncontrollable nervous noise. His head ached with unabated notions. His heart pounded out indistinct emotions. Nothing he had, not a single one of the intangible qualities that was his sum, made any sense. That bubbling chaos within threatened to boil him alive. Only one acumen barely kept all others at bay. Intuition. He had never even seen the Pleroma, or even knew how to pronounce Pleroma before this moment, but his intuition knew who and what the Pleroma was. Knew it all deep in the catacombs of his soul through some unknown connection. It had pushed his feet through days of hunger and peril until no more would they travel. Until this very moment.

This jittery, disheveled young revenant, barely out of his grave and burial suit, with hair still plastered in the funeral home helmet style, met eyes with the Pleroma. Interminable years passed in those few real seconds they shared one another’s sight. And in that time, the young revenant instantly found his elusive peace and entrancing calm. His soul stopped screaming its wisdom and pain from many lifetimes and silenced in muted awe under the Pleroma’s gaze. The young revenant realized, almost cheaply, the many reasons and many lives it took to get to this instant and the sheer magnitude of a moment he just plainly stumbled upon. Just in the Pleroma’s eyes alone, he could almost see his every hope and sacrifice, though unsure who they actually belonged to.

The young revenant's knees buckled. He lost all language. His eyes shimmered with unshed tears from lifetimes of pain and joy. All that purpose and pain put into one soul, into him, into the Pleroma; all conveyed in one simple stare.

Tears brimmed and fell from the young revenant's eyes and his fears came with them. His soul was alleviated of the need for identity. He no longer needed a name, he had been given calm, a reprieve from turmoil. A purpose would follow this very night; he was sure of it.

The Pleroma's eyes slipped from the young revenant to spare the youth and himself any more hardship. He knew that soul wouldn't breathe long enough to be given a name.

"Every soul is here because of purpose," the Pleroma said loudly, moving past the young revenant and addressing the masses again, faithfully married to his own purpose. "I will not speak again about what we do being right – that decision is up to the ages now. What I will speak to is what is wrong. I stand before you...rather, you stand before me all too aware of the wrong occurring. Our burden tonight is to set an end to it."

Murmurs of agreement rang across the mass of revenants. The young revenant rolled his eyes as every other revenant found their zeal *now*.

The large barn on the edge of an ancient forest, where this small sea of revenants gathered, began to rumble with life. That same growing passion, aimless for so long, filled the Pleroma. That heat rose to him as he perched in the barn's loft with the hay and chickens, surrounded by an elite band of Lucien Sols, which had never left a foot of space between themselves and the Pleroma. The Pleroma stood tall and proud, his thin angular features leaping out over his ashen skin. Shiny black hair hung to his sharp jaw line and stemmed off in strands over his ball nose and thin lips. Trace amounts of brilliant blue lingered in the irises of his deep set, purely white eyes, yet worry was the most apparent. Though he stood out and above his fellow revenants, the Pleroma donned the same loose robes they all wore to show his stout belief in equality. Some of the warm faces below were familiar and loved; others, not unlike the youth he locked eyes and souls with, were fresh, but all were dressed in their earthen colored attire with light leather under armor and a sword at one side. He had made sure of it. All soldiers, all the same, all fighting to reveal the truth.

"I have been with all of you for a short time, it seems," the Pleroma resumed his address with a woeful tone. "Learning from you, teaching you what I've discovered. Much has happened in the years, months and even days we've been together – some have been here from the beginning and some have come seeking shelter from the coming storm. Ominous clouds have been choking our souls. Yet from our souls, no matter how stifled, the war of truth shall blow as long as we, right here, right now, get behind and push."

The crowd below cheered. Their unified voices drove spirits higher.

“Pleroma... sir, my Pleroma...” a deep voice whispered in his ear from the group of Sols in the loft. “Janna is back, we are ready.”

“Thank you and please quit being so formal,” the Pleroma said. “It’s strange having someone like you call me sir.”

“Sure thing, sir,” the deep voice answered.

The Pleroma’s head and hair shook side to side with the repeating of ‘sir.’

“Then shall we, Pleroma?”

“Of course, old friend.”

The Pleroma stiffened his posture and turned his colorless eyes to the sea of revenants below. His nimble hands held a metal cylinder resting on open palms. Every tongue hushed.

The Pleroma’s heart pounded in his temples but he made sure to keep his hands steady; there could be no signs of weakness, no anxiety. This tactical strike they planned for tonight had to be pulled off one way or another. The Sols, his friends and warriors, had been under constant persecution from vastly superior forces for centuries, yet had always found ways to survive. They always managed. But this time, their existence and every revenant’s existence, was on the verge of an intentional extinction. They all stood to suffer a species-wide suicide unless he stopped the Holous. They had to be stopped.

“The Cycle *will* persist,” the Pleroma shouted. “*We* will see to it. And we will continue on with our holy mission of protection and perseverance. We have our own future in our hands...will we fight for it?”

The crowd cheered with minimal tenacity.

“Will we fight?!”

The group screamed a unified “Yes!”

The Pleroma’s right hand clenched tight around the cylinder. A fledgling stalk of blue light appeared from the lifeless hunk of metal in his hand. The azure beam weaved smoothly upwards as growing liquid light, tumbling over bright strands of itself until it formed into a thick curved shape of a blade. The familiar combination of a rushing river and a crackling fire sang as it roused, humming the soothing tune of the aura blade. The blue hue gently illuminated his face and his eyes burned the same color. Swirling navy blue lines, darker than the whole, snaked within the burning blade, curling in complex circular patterns, adorning the weapon with constant manifestations that reflected the same complex emotions cursing through the Pleroma’s soul.

“And we will win!” the Pleroma roared as the lines twisting through his aura blade spiked with his passion. “Take your positions and take your futures!”

The throng chanted and cheered. Those with helmet banged them. Those with free hands clapped and all stomped up enough clamor for the enemy to hear. For the heavens to hear. The Pleroma couldn't help but think of the old Roman legions as he looked over his troops. The revenant army stood before the simple and tall wooden barn doors, valiantly facing a truly pivotal point that lay across a lush field of late Spring grass. The doors creaked open and the legion trampled out into the night, lead by a pair of revenants with glowing aura blades.

The beautiful blue glow surrounding the Pleroma winked out as he turned back to his trusted group with a mere metal cylinder in his hand. All types of souls stood before him in brown ribbed leather that resembled muscle tissue, covered with loose tan robes. He looked down their bodies to their knee high boots, then back to their thick belts with ribbed metal cylinders attached. Every ashen face was painted with a thick red circle that covered the eyes with an inner red dot. In all four directions from this circle grew arms of a simple cross that covered most of the face. Every face was decorated and ready for battle, the Pleroma no exception.

“Pleroma, one last time,” the deep voice sounded again at his ear, “can we convince you to stay here out of harm's way?”

“No matter what occurs, good friends,” he responded, “everything is in place – whether I live or not. I am needed on the field. Now, scatter to your companions and positions.”

The group dispersed solemnly in different directions until only two revenants were left standing before him. A woman with curly, tangled dirty strawberry blonde hair with red paint splattered in it, and the man with the deep voice, whose red painted cross had spread to cover most of his pale brown bald head, stood at the ready.

“My favored, we ride,” the Pleroma smiled.

## Chapter 2

A group of two dozen elite Lucien Sols dispersed into the dark forest as hundreds of infantry marched out of the barn and into the crisp night. By the light of their last moon the Pleroma and his two favored revenants rode across the same grassy clearing on horseback, reaching the forest beforehand. They dismounted quickly at the tangled tree line and looked into the dark thick brush. The Pleroma stood between the two other revenants and held their hands. He looked over the bald, coffee-colored man with a stern gaze, but broke into a smile quickly and shook his head.

“We have been through enough to know it doesn’t end here, my friends,” the Pleroma sighed. “Between our Ghosts, fate, and what we have put into motion, we have done all we can.”

Smiles filled the space between them as they wrapped into a hug. The air held a sense of dense finality as humid air holds rain. They were slow to push apart, sluggish with the want to remain together and each couldn’t pull their hands from each other’s shoulders. A tangible sadness filled the dusty air between them. Each moist pearly eye struggled to break contact with one another, but with a nod and no need for delay, the Pleroma broke the reverence and turned to the strawberry blonde woman with misty eyes. Her lips attempted a smile, her dimples showing faintly in her cheeks, but he only managed a worried smirk. She leapt into his arms and they held together, first in a kiss and then in a lucid moment of realization. No matter the pain, no matter the loss, all souls were on the line and any failing could end everything. Least of all their love.

“You know where to meet me. I’ll wait there as long as I have to,” she said. “I love you.”

The Pleroma looked into her big round eyes and smiled. “As will I. I love you.”

He gave a quick nod, let her down and stiffened up. All three simultaneously looked up into the wan moonlight and watched the debris dance across the glow. It twinkled like the stars millions of miles beyond. A brief thought of *Quis Amnis* flashed through the Pleroma’s mind with the twinkle of those stars. Sparse warmth tickled their faces as a crisp breeze whisked by and cleared their minds. They were calm for the moment but they knew the ancient forest before them, old with time and pitfalls, would rip that away from them momentarily.

A scent followed the breeze and filled the Pleroma’s nostrils. Roses. Its trail led him to a small bush that painstakingly climbed a rotted wooden post that looked to be the last remnant of

a dilapidated fence. The aroma stung and burned into the Pleroma's brain. It was the smell of fate.

Each revenant closed their eyes and took a deep breath of the sharp clean air. So good it soothed the lungs even if it would be their last easy breath. The Pleroma tried to ignore the roses. He focused on the link between the trio's Ghosts, but the roses would not be ignored.

With one breath, all three heads lowered, moonlight and mote draping them. A moment passed and their heads rose and eyes opened in unison. Each blazing white eye, a window to a savage soul, speckled with pure azure. They greeted the old dark forest with a spiteful smile and sprinted into its tangled rooted verge with the scent of roses lingering.