

Order of The Ancient

Christianity has been wiped out...
the world is finally united...
until one boy discovers the *Truth*.



by Karl Bastian

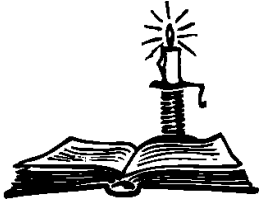


It is over 100 years in the future. There is One government. There is One church. And finally, after centuries of turmoil, the world is finally free of the one religion that caused all the problems... the Christians are no more. Truth has been traded in for prosperity. But there is a Remnant. They walk among us. They wield a great power. And slowly the tide of history is being drawn toward its ultimate conclusion. Indeed, Truth has not been eliminated, only purified and focused. These are the Chronicles of the Remnant, the Order of the Ancient.



"I myself will gather the Remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:3-4



The Prologue

Out of breath, he ducked into a corner, but not quite out of sight. Anyone who walked by would see him, and that just could not happen. Directly across from him was the doorway he had worked so hard to get to. Before he could open it, he had to cross the hallway where several guards were stationed not more than fifty feet from his present position. The door was only feet away, but it might as well have been a mile with those guards standing so close. He looked at the sign on the door, "RESTRICTED" and realized that once he entered that door the stakes would suddenly get higher. He was already in great danger. It was a miracle that he had gotten this far without capture, but the mission was of the utmost importance. The future of the Remnant depended upon it. It was warm in the hall, and he had relaxed his guard for a moment to catch his breath. He felt a chill go up his back as a draft from a vent below his feet sent a burst of cold air up inside the cloak that covered his youthful looking face.

He heard footsteps, and then voices. They were coming his way. There was no way he could go back the way he had come, not after... His thoughts were interrupted as the voices suddenly got louder. They must have rounded a corner and joined the guards down the hall. Now they were coming toward him!

Just months ago he would have panicked, but not now. He was a Disciple of the Redeemer, a Member of the Order of the Ancient. He knew who was ultimately in charge here. Besides, he'd had so many close calls in just the past forty minutes he knew that if the Master had allowed him to get this far, He would certainly deliver him again. The question was not 'if' but only 'how'.

His Mentor was always saying to 'look up'. While this was usually meant figuratively, he looked up and offered another intercession. Then he saw it. Recessed into the ceiling, across the hallway between him and the guards was a blast door. If it could be lowered it would block off the guards and hide him as he crossed over into the room that waited beyond the restricted door.

He bowed his head, closed his eyes, and extended his arm up toward the blast door. With his palm outstretched and his fingers slightly curled, he concentrated. He had to summon enough Faith. He interceded for the power in the way of his Mentor. He had never moved anything this large before, but if a mustard seed could move a mountain, he only needed a few molecules of faith. He took a deep breath, and interceded for the strength he needed. He could feel his spirit buoyed by the many that were interceding for him at that very moment. But nothing happened.

The voices got louder. A drop of sweat formed on his forehead. Was that doubt creeping up? Or fear? He could not allow his spirit to be distracted. He focused harder, but the blast door would not move. Then, in his mind he saw a number, 2911. What was that? He tried to ignore it and focus on the blast door. But it would not go away. Was it a reference to the Book of Books? He had only seconds before he would be discovered. But the number burned on the inside of his eyelids. He opened his eyes and saw the unmoving blast door. He knew that sometimes the Counselor chose to say 'no'. After all, the Power belongs to the Sovereign, not His followers. He could only connect to it, not command it. He was wondering what use he would be to the Sovereign if he was captured, when he noticed a keypad on the wall right next to him. Time seemed to stop as he lowered his hand to the keyboard. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see the guards appearing before him. They were looking at each other as his fingers typed 2911 into the keypad instinctively. The guards' heads started to turn toward him as the blast door suddenly came surging down and sealed into the floor with a loud sucking sound and deep thud. Josiah rushed across the hall and using the key card he had been given by Jeremiah, he entered the Restricted Archive room. It was dark. He reached over to the wall and passed his hand over where the infrared light sensor should be and instantly the room was flooded with light. He was startled by the light, but as his eyes adjusted, his heart suddenly sank. In the middle of the room stood a cylinder pedestal with an enclosed glass case. Inside the glass, levitating and rotating slowly was the object of his mission! But throughout the room, in every conceivable place stood an armed guard pointing his weapon at him. A tall gaunt man with a wickedly evil smile stood in the back of the room with an obvious satisfaction. It was a trap and he had taken the bait.



Chapter 1

*It is the year 19 AP
Nineteen years after The Year of Purification.*

"Bye Brent!" called out Mrs. Camden. "Are you taking the hoverbus to school today?"

"Nah, I just wanna walk..." answered Brent as he pressed the seal button on the side of each of his shoes and watched and felt the laces tighten automatically around his feet. "It's a beautiful day," he finished as he stood up.

"Yes, it is. Thank the Divinity!" said Mom with a smile.

"Yeah, whatever," muttered Brent as he waived good-bye to his mom and headed down the street.

'Thank the Divinity?' thought Brent. "How do you know which divinity to thank when we worship a different 'divinity' each day?" Every Sunday Brent went to the United Church of the Divinity with his mom. It made him uneasy. It seemed to him like a vending machine of gods and he felt like he should pick a favorite, but after being sternly rebuked by the clergy for asking which of them was the greatest, he learned to keep his questions to himself. His dad didn't go to church. He had chosen Science as his

Answer, but he made Brent go with his mom every Sunday. “Even if you don’t believe any of that nonsense, Brent, it’s good to learn what others believe,” he would often say.

His thoughts were interrupted by a familiar beep. Brent looked down at his DataPortal on his wrist, usually known as a DP. It was displaying a reminder that today was his Unified History and World Constitution Test. If he passed today he would finally be confirmed as a Netizen of the WNC, the World Network of Communities. He had failed his past three attempts at this all-important test, much to his parents' frustration, which is why he had to meet weekly with a tutor, Mr. Kimble. Brent sighed to himself. He would be happy when he was finally done meeting with Mr. Kimble. His tutor had no patience for Brent's endless questions. Mr. Kimble said questions are for teachers. Students are only to listen and learn. Brent was always being reminded that if he would just be quiet and listen, his questions would eventually be answered. His biggest question was what happened in The Year of Purification, the year that marked the beginning of the new calendar? No one seemed to know much, or else was not willing to talk about it.

Brent touched the 'OK' button on his DP's touchscreen with his finger and the reminder disappeared as the screen changed back to its default setting. A cool picture of his favorite sport, Hoverball appeared (that he had clipped from the GlobalNet) as well as the date, time, a few one-touch icons to his favorite functions. Brent looked down at his DP, and marveled at all it could do. A DataPortal was a personal computing device attached to the arm from wrist to elbow, usually on the left arm, worn like a long bracelet. It contained a screen, fold out keyboard, microphone, and an assortment of other helpful devices. Everybody had one. DPs had long since replaced their bulkier predecessors, the desktop or laptop computer. A few old timers still used PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) since they preferred the smaller size and privacy, but there was now legislation pending from the WNC to either require them to link into the GlobalNet, or ban them altogether. In 3 A.P. (After Year of Purification) all computers were merged into one massive network known as the GlobalNet. This had solved many problems and eliminated the viruses and hackers who had plagued the GlobalNet's predecessor, the Internet. Now there were no PCs (personal computers that could access the Internet) but only DPs, or DataPortals, that enabled all DPs to communicate and openly share data. Everyone's files were stored on the GlobalNet and money had long since been replaced with online Credits managed by the World Bank as it controlled 95% of the world currency. Access to the GlobalNet was confirmed via voice recognition, so online crime had been greatly reduced. Nearly everything, it seemed, was available online and nearly all of it was public, even your personal files and finances. Few secrets, it was believed, would lead to fewer

crimes. . It was all part of the "Open Community" that everyone was raving about. Brent wondered why if it was so 'open' he couldn't get his questions answered, but there he was, wondering and asking questions again. He just couldn't help it.

As he walked along his thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a greeting from his friend Scott, his new Netizen bar gleamed on his Academy uniform as he slowed his hoverboard down and stopped next to Brent, floating about a foot above the ground. Scott was the same age, but already a foot taller than Brent, so the hoverboard merely exaggerated the height difference so that Brent had to really look up to talk.

“Are you ready for the Test?” asked Scott, his hoverboard slipping side to side and bouncing slightly up and down, as though it had to struggle to stay stationary.

“I think so,” answered Brent, a little annoyed that even his friends were starting to join his parents in nagging him about the test. He was surprised he had gotten out of the house today without a lecture about it.

“Just remember, ‘if in doubt, they're both true’,” said Scott, trying to put on his wisest expression.

“But that's impossible,” retorted Brent, amazed that he seemed to be the only one who thought so.

“Oh boy, you're never gonna get outta that class. You know, they only let you take it so many times and then...” hinted Scott, his voice trailing off as his eyebrows raised.

“and then *what?*” demanded Brent, struggling to hide his irritation.

“I don't know, but I wouldn't want to find out. All I know is, you don't see any non-Netizens walking around over twelve years old, and your birthday is next month!” replied Scott, with a smile.

“I'll *pass*,” Brent repeated, worrying that his irritation must be apparent. Scott didn't seem to mind. They'd been good friends for years.

“That's good, besides you'll never qualify for a hoverboard license until you are a Netizen,” jabbed Scott as he spun around on his hoverboard and then nearly fell off as he tried to bring it back to a stationary position.

“Yeah, I know. I said I'll pass,” Brent repeated again, matter-of-factly.

“Of course you will, it's easy! I gotta get to the Academy. I'll see you there soon, I hope, on a hoverboard too! Bye!” and he was off before Brent could say ‘bye’, zigzagging down the street showing off his new hoverboard, a gift from his parents upon passing the Test. Brent couldn't wait until they could ride their hoverboards together. In a quick motion, Brent looked at his DP and touched Scott's name on his buddy list and then looked up as he watched his friend almost crash into a pole trying to answer his DP while flying down the street. Brent yelled into his DP, “Watch that pole there, buddy. Better slow it down or the UFP will be pulling you over.” He laughed as he watched Scott look back over his shoulder while holding his DP up to his mouth, “Yeah, yeah. They won't be bothering you, that's for sure – I don't think they pull over people *walking!*”

Brent was about to offer another retort when his DP beeped. He looked down at the screen. It was an advertisement for the new *Ascent Hoverboard XL4*. It was amazing how your DP could pick up on a word in your conversation and instantly deliver an advertisement. But his desire for a hoverboard was no secret to anyone who knew him. Oh, how he wanted to have his own hoverboard! Soon. But first, the Test. Brent hit ‘Ignore’ to the advertisement and continued on his way, but he couldn't help thinking about the ominous words Scott had just said. His friend had been only teasing, but his words kept echoing in his mind, “you don't see any non-Netizens walking around over twelve years old.” The subtle but sobering fact was that it was true. Brent began to wonder what happened to those who fail, and of course, his imagination ran away from him as he pictured horrible fates that could be his. Then he shook his head and laughed out loud to try and shake off the fear. But inside, where no one could hear, he made up his mind to pass the Test and also to discover the answer to that disturbing question, “What *if?*” He picked up his pace. Today he'd keep asking questions until he got answers.