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Veil of Eternity

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Introduction

History is often described as a tapestry, each thread woven across the vast stretches of time to create the story of who we are. For Caden Rowe, history was more than just a field of study—it was a calling, a craving for closer communion with the legends and lives that once shaped the world. He spent his days entrenched in archives, lost among brittle tomes and faded letters, searching for clarity in the chaos of centuries gone by. The past whispered to him, urging him to uncover its truths, but nothing had prepared him for the discovery that would unravel the fabric of everything he knew.

It began on a rain-soaked evening at Kynaston University, under the dim glow of ancient library lamps. Caden stumbled upon a manuscript unlike any other, its pages shivering with a strange energy, its script written in a language that seemed to shift and squirm beneath his gaze. A sense of unease washed over him, mingled with curiosity so sharp it felt almost dangerous. Drawn inexorably forward, he broke every rule of caution, determined to decipher the manuscript's secrets—a decision that would forever alter the trajectory of his life.

Within those cursed pages, worlds collided. Reality thinned to a trembling edge, and Caden fell, as if the ground had given way beneath him. When he awoke, he was not in any place memory or history had ever recorded, but instead found himself in a realm where magic pulsed beneath the earth and shadows stretched with sentient intent. Everything he believed about the boundaries of possibility and time dissolved, replaced by the staggering truth that he was not merely an observer of history, but now a part of its most perilous and hidden chapter.

As the days unfolded, Caden discovered that his arrival was no accident. Prophecy, ancient even to the ageless denizens of this new world, cast a long shadow over his presence. The cursed manuscript was the fulcrum upon which two realms balanced, and Caden's fate was entwined with their survival. Every friend he found, every enemy lurking in the depths, every choice he made, would ripple across both his world and this land beyond the veil.

This is not a simple tale of adventure or magic; it is the story of a young historian thrust into destiny, forced to confront the secrets of his own ancestry and the nature of the world itself. Behind every scroll and incantation, a deeper mystery beckons, one that challenges not only his courage, but also his heart. Through ancient prophecies, shifting allegiances, and the looming threat of annihilation, Caden's journey is one of self-discovery and sacrifice.

The 'Veil of Eternity' is at once a border and a bridge—a test of hope, of unity, and of

the timeless call to protect what we love, even when the future is veiled and uncertain. Welcome to the journey. The tapestry awaits its next fateful thread.

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CHAPTER ONE: Shadows in the Archives

The air in the Kynaston University archives always tasted of dust and forgotten knowledge, a potent brew Caden inhaled with an almost reverent pleasure. Tonight, however, the usual comforting scent was overlaid with the metallic tang of an approaching storm, rattling the ancient single-pane windows in their frames. Outside, the sky was a bruised purple, and the first fat drops of rain were beginning to splatter against the glass, each impact sounding like a tiny drumbeat against the overwhelming silence of the cavernous room.

Caden, a slender young man with perpetually ink-stained fingers and an unruly mop of brown hair that always seemed to defy gravity, pushed his spectacles higher up his nose. He was hunched over a stack of late 17th-century parish records, a task assigned by Professor Eldrin, his notoriously meticulous (and occasionally cantankerous) mentor. Most students found such work mind-numbingly tedious, but Caden saw stories in the fading cursive, lives intertwined across generations.

He was looking for an obscure mention of a localized harvest blight, a seemingly minor detail that Eldrin believed held the key to understanding a broader economic shift in the region. Caden, however, felt a restless energy tonight, a prickle at the back of his neck that had nothing to do with agricultural yields. It was the feeling he always got right before he stumbled onto something significant, a whisper from the past demanding to be heard.

His gaze drifted from the ledger, across the towering shelves that scraped the arched ceiling, to a section of the archives rarely visited. It was tucked away in a dimly lit corner, behind a precarious stack of broken lecterns and discarded microfiche readers—a place where the university's oddest and least cataloged acquisitions were often left to molder. He'd always meant to explore it, but Eldrin's strict adherence to the cataloging system usually kept him on a tighter leash.

Tonight, however, Eldrin was at a conference in Edinburgh, leaving Caden with the rare privilege of unsupervised access. The thought of it sent a thrill through him, a giddy sense of academic rebellion. He packed away the parish records with uncharacteristic haste, the blight momentarily forgotten. The storm outside intensified, a symphony of wind and rain that seemed to beckon him towards the unexplored depths of the archive.

Retrieving a small, battery-powered lantern from his backpack, Caden navigated the labyrinthine corridors of shelves, his footsteps muffled by the thick, dust-laden carpet. The beam of his lantern cut through the gloom, illuminating forgotten spines and the

occasional cobweb that clung like ancient lace. He passed rows of theological tracts, centuries of scientific blunders, and historical accounts so biased they bordered on fiction. Each section held its own allure, but the pull towards the uncatalogued corner was stronger.

He finally reached the makeshift barrier of forgotten furniture. With a grunt, Caden shifted a heavy, splintered podium, clearing a path. The air here was even colder, thick with a scent he couldn't quite place - not just dust, but something else, something metallic and faintly sweet, like ozone after a lightning strike. The hair on his arms stood on end.

What he found there was a haphazard collection of objects: a taxidermied owl with one glass eye missing, a collection of intricately carved wooden boxes whose locks had long since rusted, and a large, velvet-draped stand. On the stand, partially obscured by the faded fabric, rested an object that immediately commanded his attention.

It was a book, or at least, it looked like one. Larger than any Caden had ever seen, bound in what appeared to be dark, unblemished leather, despite its obvious age. There were no visible seams, no title etched into its spine, nothing to suggest its origins or purpose. The leather itself seemed to absorb the light from his lantern, leaving the book perpetually shrouded in its own faint shadow.

A strange symbol was embossed on its cover, an intricate spiral design that seemed to writhe and contort, drawing his eye deeper into its labyrinthine curves. It wasn't a symbol he recognized from any historical period, any known culture. It felt... alien. As he reached out a hesitant hand, a faint tremor ran through the air, and a coldness seeped into his fingertips, not unpleasant, but undeniably unnatural.

He pulled back, a shiver running down his spine. This was it, he realized, the source of that restless energy, the whisper from the past that had been nagging him all evening. Professor Eldrin's warnings about "unstable artifacts" echoed in his mind, but they were quickly drowned out by the historian's insatiable curiosity. This wasn't merely old; it felt ancient, imbued with a power that hummed just beneath his perception.

With renewed resolve, Caden gingerly lifted the book from its stand. It was heavier than it looked, solid and dense, as if its pages were made of lead. The leather, upon closer inspection, wasn't merely dark; it seemed to be a living, breathing black, shifting subtly in the faint light. He carried it to a nearby table, carefully brushing away a thick layer of dust before placing it down.

The storm outside raged, a perfect backdrop to the quiet intensity that now filled the archive. Caden fumbled in his bag for his magnifying glass and a pair of white archival gloves, standard protocol for handling delicate artifacts. But as his fingers brushed the cover once more, the cold sensation returned, a pervasive chill that seemed to sink

into his bones, bypassing the gloves entirely.

He hesitated for a moment, a fleeting thought of simply returning the book to its forgotten corner. Yet, the symbol on the cover seemed to pulse, a silent invitation, a challenge to his scholarly discipline. He had to know. He *needed* to know. It was the fundamental drive of any historian—to uncover, to understand, to bring light to the shadows.

Taking a deep breath, Caden unclasped the two ornate silver clasps that secured the book. They were strangely un-tarnished, gleaming with an unnatural sheen. As the second clasp clicked open, a faint, almost imperceptible hum filled the air, a vibration that resonated deep within his chest. The book didn't simply open; it unfolded, its pages parting with a soft sigh, as if releasing a breath held for centuries.

The interior was not what he expected. Instead of brittle, yellowed parchment, the pages were a rich, dark indigo, almost black, and felt impossibly smooth beneath his gloved fingertips. The script was unlike anything he had ever encountered – a swirling, elegant calligraphy that seemed to twist and reform even as he looked at it. It was beautiful, terrifying, and utterly indecipherable.

He leaned closer, trying to discern even a single character, a recognizable symbol. But the script danced, refusing to settle, like ink swirling in water. A faint, almost melodic whisper seemed to emanate from the pages, a sound that bypassed his ears and resonated directly in his mind, though he couldn't make out any words. It was a cacophony of sound and silence, a paradox that made his head ache.

Suddenly, a jolt, sharp and electric, shot through his hand as he touched a page. The archival gloves were useless; the energy passed right through them, searing his skin. He cried out, pulling his hand back, but it was too late. The spiral symbol on the cover flared with an ethereal, violet light, and the swirling script on the open pages intensified, glowing with the same unnerving brilliance.

The hum in the archive grew into a resonant thrum, vibrating through the very floorboards. The air crackled, thick with an almost visible energy. Caden felt a growing pressure, as if the very space around him was contracting, twisting. The shelves, the books, the familiar comfort of the archives – they all began to waver, their edges blurring, dissolving like smoke. Panic, cold and sharp, finally pierced through his academic awe.

He tried to stand, to back away from the glowing manuscript, but his legs felt like lead. The light from the book intensified, becoming a blinding supernova of violet and indigo. The whispers grew into a roaring chorus, a thousand voices speaking in a language he almost understood, a language of ancient power and forgotten realms. The entire archive seemed to tear apart at the seams, unraveling into a vortex of color

and sound.

A single, desperate thought flashed through Caden's mind: *What have I done?* Then, the light consumed him, a force that ripped through his very being, pulling him apart and reassembling him all at once. The world spun, not just around him, but *within* him, a sickening, exhilarating centrifuge. He felt himself falling, not downwards, but through a fabric of reality, a sensation akin to being stretched thin across an infinite chasm. The last thing he heard before consciousness fled was the distinct sound of tearing, as if the tapestry of time itself had ripped in two.

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