

Red Moon Rising

Part 09 of 30

Series #2 in the Teach The Sky Continuity

by Robert V Aldrich

Red Moon Rising, Part 09 of 30

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“No one holds command over me. No man. No god. No prince. What is a claim of age for those who are immortal? What is a claim of power for ones who defy death? Call your damnable hunt. We shall see whom I drag screaming into hell with me.”

Gunter Dorn, *Vampire the Masquerade*

—7 Days Ago—

The Agents of the Triumvirate arrived at the Solaritec campus with all the subtlety of a presidential convoy. Members of Solaritec security, all Hand operatives, blocked off the entire route through the campus, up to the main building network that was the heart of the facility. The gleaming towers, taller than the rest of the buildings in the industrial complex, were lit brightly in the night. All offices were illuminated and all the windows open, even with the campus itself all but emptied by the late hour. The few personnel present were mostly armed guards, stationed in strategic positions to protect the VIPs.

In his office, Phillip looked down at the roundabout at the center of the campus and watched the four cars pull up. He'd monitored every move from the screen in his office until they'd arrived. Now, he scrutinized the Triumvirate's men as they disembarked from the cars driven by Aaron's men. He watched for any sign of favoritism but saw nothing but cold professionalism. Or perhaps it was disdain.

“Phil!” yelled the phone next to his ear. Phillip was awoken from his worried daze. “What's happening?”

“The Triumvirate’s men,” he answered. “The Eyes and the Voice have arrived. Ken, if this thing goes sideways, you need to be ready to run. Don’t warn anyone, don’t bother giving the workers their final pay check. You get the hell out of there. You know the plan. If we can’t pull this off, you make for Mexico City.”

“Phillip, the Triumvirate only sends their agents when they’re planning to kill somebody,” Ken said over the phone.

Phillip watched them enter the building. “Let’s just hope we’ve got a chair when the music stops.”

“No, let’s hope the music doesn’t stop!” Ken exclaimed. “What about the book?”

“The book’s where it needs to be,” Phillip said absently, watching the procession. “Me and Jericho were turned around and sent back here. We’re going to get called in a second. I have to go.”

“I hope I’ll talk to you again,” said Ken just as Phillip hung up. He paused as he did. He looked at the security feed of the Triumvirate’s men passing through the silent halls of the office building. He felt a pang of terror. He rushed out of his office, pulling on his suit jacket. Down the elevator he went, coming to the lowest floor of the R&D section of the campus. It was a dark night, without even any stars in the sky. The lights of the campus were glowing brightly but in the absence of any noise or movement, the surreal facility felt ominous.

As Phillip approached the main building, Raphael was waiting. “Aaron and Jericho are already at the board room,” Raphael said, opening the door for Phillip.

“What’s Aaron got to worry about?” he asked rhetorically before thanking Raphael for the door.

“The Triumvirate may be the wisest people on the planet but their agents aren’t known for being discriminating,” he said as he pressed the button for the

elevator. The doors parted immediately and the two boarded together. “Quite frankly, I’ll be a little surprised if the campus is even still standing tomorrow. Did you hear about what they did in...”

“In Johannesburg?” Phillip finished as the elevator began to move. “Yeah.” He shook his head, looking through his own reflection in the glass elevator. “Seems like it goes against what the Brotherhood stands for to devastate a community like that. That neighborhood is never going to be the same.”

“I guess it’s deterrent enough to keep anybody from getting out of line,” Raphael supposed.

“You have anybody quit?” Phillip asked rhetorically. Raphael looked confused. “I had three engineers quit just in the time it took us to get back here.”

All Raphael could say was “Geez...” He shook his head. “Nobody’s supposed to know they’re here.”

“Come on, man. You know how it is. The whole Brotherhood knows, whether they’re supposed to or not.” Phillip smirked dryly. “There’s probably betting.” Raphael chortled cynically.

The elevator opened and Jericho and Aaron were standing outside a door at the far end of the hall. Phillip practically ran to join them. “Holy crap, is this really happening?” he whispered, his adrenaline racing. He glared at Aaron. “This is your doing.”

Aaron snorted, clearly not as afraid as Phillip but not untouched by fear either. “Yeah, keep telling yourself that.”

“Where are your men?” Jericho asked Aaron as Raphael joined the three.

“Getting them set up; we didn’t have time to prepare!” Aaron exclaimed in a betrayal of panic.

“It’s going to be all right,” Jericho told Aaron. He repeated the earnest sentiment to Phillip. He sighed and brushed down his own suit. “We have run the most successful office of the Brotherhood of the a Sun in the world and they will—”

Jericho’s words stopped short when Errol opened the door and peeked his head through. “The, uh, the representatives of the Triumvirate will see you now.” He opened the door fully. Jericho, Phillip, and Aaron all exchanged looks before they entered the board room.



—Now—

“Do you guys know anything about the Triumvirate?” Marilyn asked Everett and Morgan in the front of the car. “I did some searching on the Brotherhood of the Sun as all of this came out, but I found very little on the Triumvirate itself.”

“I got the impression the Triumvirate was their governing body,” said Everett. “The spirit, the soul, and the mind, or something like that. Some trinity. They’ve got some really metaphysical explanation for what they represent, but at the end of the day, it’s a council of three guys who have the final say.”

“And beneath the three guys are various little teams or whatever,” added Morgan. “And beneath them are the actual clans; the Investigators’ Clan, the Miracle Workers’ Clan, and the Hand.”

“And nobody supposedly ever sees the Triumvirate,” Marilyn said, mostly to herself.

“A boogie man story if ever there was one,” Morgan snickered. Everett gave him a guarded look. Morgan noticed and scoffed. “Come on, man. Don’t expect me to be impressed. They’re nothing but theatrics and melodrama to psychologically control their goons and intimidate their victims and enemies. They’re no different than Keyser Souze and the Wizard of freaking Oz.”

“Except those were movies,” said Marilyn.

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—7 Days Ago—

The board room on the top floor was long and narrow, with full bay windows along the far side. Overlooking the brightly lit manufacturing portion of the facility, and with the starless sky overhead, it looked like the sky and the nighttime land had been inverted. Meanwhile, the three men representing the Triumvirate sat facing the three heads of the clans. Raphael and Aaron’s men came and stood behind the three and remained standing as the clan heads took their seats.

The center of the three men representing the Triumvirate was a tall black man with deep ebony skin and eyes like mirrors. Both his hands rested on the table, the right hand over the left. The two men on either side of them had paler skin and their hands sat in their laps. All three wore completely black suits devoid of collars or

buttons, almost like the clothes had been tailored around them. All three were without hair and had piercing eyes that seemed to know all.

“We shall make this brief,” said the black man at the center of the trio, the only one thus far who had spoken since their plane had touched down. “The Triumvirate has seen enough. They have seen enough arrogance. They have seen enough mismanagement. They have seen enough.”

“Forgive me, sir,” spoke up Aaron. Behind him, several of his men held their breath. “But isn’t passing judgment premature? The Investigators’ Clan hasn’t finished its work. My men and I have only been able to present the cursory findings of a few days to the—” He was shut down and shut down hard.

“Your job is not to look where we tell you to look, not to see what we tell you to see,” said the paler of the two white-skinned men, on the left of the three. “Your job is to know what we need to know. If you require us to tell you to turn your eyes to this facility, you have already failed to meet our expectations.”

With no further outbursts, the center of the three men accepted a white page from his compatriot. He slid the page across the table, towards the three but mostly at Jericho. “Tell me what this is.”

Jericho looked at the page for only a second and sighed. “It’s an adenovirus.” Phillip and Aaron both perked up at that. Jericho clarified “It’s an adenovirus I created.”

“The Brotherhood of the Sun does not suffer the machinations of the delusional,” said the lead man.

“Please!” Jericho scoffed, unimpressed and unintimidated. Phillip and Aaron both cringed, as though afraid Jericho would be burst into flames. “The Brotherhood of the Sun has stood for the advancement of knowledge and science for five thousand years. It’s what separates us from the Illuminati.”

“Do not presume to tell us, the Agents of the Triumvirate, what the Brotherhood of the Sun stands for,” said the lead.

“Why not? You clearly need a refresher,” Jericho challenged.

“Tell us, upon how many men have you administered your steroid?” asked the man on the right.

“Twenty-eight so far,” said Jericho unabashedly, his candor surprising Aaron and Phillip. “We’ve had six rejections but with minimal side-effects.” He spoke like he was discussing a medical trial.

“We are aware,” said the man on the left.

The man on the right gestured to the door. “We’ve spoken to your greatest success.” The door opened and two security guards escorted in Eli. The terrified young man entered and swallowed tightly, looking apologetically at Jericho. And then a glance at Phillip, which Aaron did not miss.

“Eli Franklin is a member of your elite guard, correct?” asked the lead inquisitor. Jericho was doing a good job of hiding his shock and worry. He only nodded. “He is also the one who attempted to perform a resurrection ritual, yes?”

Now Jericho couldn’t hide his confusion. “What?!” He looked at Eli. “What did you do?” Eli clearly wanted to speak but had no words, nor the chance to use any.

“As the leader of the Hand of the Brotherhood for North America,” said the lead of the three agents, “you are responsible for the actions of your men.” Jericho looked across the table at them. “And your man attempted an egregious and profane affront to all reason.”

“What ritual?” asked Aaron. “And who was being resurrected?”

“There were to be seven sacrifices on seven sunrises, all in the name of the Brotherhood,” answered the right-most of the three.

“Sacrifices,” whispered Aaron. It hit. He looked at Eli and said, “That’s why the victims all had a connection to Solaritec.”

“Jericho Kingston,” said the leader of the three, “Head of the Hand of the Brotherhood of the Sun, you will be taken before the Triumvirate themselves. They shall see you personally pay for the transgressions you have committed.”

Aaron honestly didn’t know if he was surprised or not when Jericho said, “Very well.” He stood and said very formally, “I accept your sentence, though I refute your charges. I have done nothing but look after the Brotherhood of the Sun and its goals, and pursue those goals to the best of my ability, which has been greater than all my predecessors.” His words dripping with disdain, he leaned forward at the three, saying “And you shall accuse me baselessly of murder, accuse me of treason against those goals and ideals?” He scoffed in disgust and turned towards Raphael. “In my stead, you will have to be promoted to—”

“Hold,” said the left-most of the three. Jericho turned back around to them. “It is in the interest of the Brotherhood, and by order of the Triumvirate, that interim power be consolidated.

“Consolidated how?” asked Phillip.

“Raphael’s a proven leader,” advocated Aaron. “And he is a seasoned veteran within the Hand. Who would be better—”

“The Triumvirate have decided that the Hand and the Miracle Workers’ Clan shall be governed as one,” said the central figure.

“Sir!” Aaron exclaimed. “With all due respect, that is highly irregular. The trinity of clans has been maintained for millennia! You can’t just fuse them!”

“I agree!” said Phillip. “Running the Miracle Workers’ Clan is enough; I can’t run the Hand of the Brotherhood as well.”

The discussion was ended when the right-most man stated clearly, “You will not question the Triumvirate, or their ruling.” Both Aaron and Phillip fell immediately silent.

“This is a temporary consolidation of power,” explained the central man. He looked at Jericho. “It is to be a message to other traitors, that their office and throne may die with them.” The three men rose, Aaron and Phillip following to their feet. “Will you walk?” asked the central man to Jericho, like he was extending a special courtesy.

Jericho responded by saying, “The only way I’m going is of my own volition.” He stepped around his chair and looked at Phillip. He extended his hand, which Phillip took. “Raphael will be invaluable,” he told Phillip. He stared right into Phillip’s eyes, complex and strong emotions burning in his gaze. “I never thought his would happen,” Jericho said, almost accusingly.

Phillip said only, “We never do.”

The handshake ended, Jericho turned and began to walk out. “Come on, Eli,” he said. “We have a fate to meet.” As he approached the door, the security reached to take his arms. “Don’t touch me,” he seethed with disgust at the man he’d trained. He walked through the door, leaving the guards too afraid to do anything else.

The three agents rose from their seats before Jericho and Eli were even out the door. “We leave this domain in your hands until we appoint a suitable replacement for Jericho Kingston.”

“Hopefully, from afar,” added the man to the right. The three turned and departed, leaving Phillip and Aaron standing. Aaron glanced to Raphael who was clearly as stunned as they.

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—Now—

“Of course, we didn’t know any of this at the time,” said Everett, more thinking aloud than anything else. “We’d only learn about it later. At that point, we still knew next to nothing about the Brotherhood of the Sun, the three clans that make it up, the Triumvirate, all of that. We were still mostly dealing with Armand’s determination to go to war against Solaritec.”

Marilyn defended Armand. “He wasn’t determined to go to war; he wanted answers.” She sat forward between the seats. “And why were you guys so opposed to supporting him? He wasn’t wrong.”

“Right and not wrong are not the same,” Everett said. He turned to say more and was surprised at how close she was sitting. He turned away nervously.

“It wasn’t his intentions and motivations they were opposed to; it was his going off half-cocked that was the problem,” said Morgan.

“Solaritec – or the Brotherhood of the Sun – turned out to be the big bad guy Armand was certain they were,” Marilyn reminded the two in the front seats. “He was right.”

“When you look at the events as they happened,” said Morgan, “all evidence was that the sniper situation had been resolved. It looked like life was going to return to normal.”

“Looked like,” Everett lamented.



—7 Days Ago—

“You will need very little,” Armand explained, as he stood before the World Alliance. Dressed in his uniform of black clothes and jacket, with only a red shirt to distinguish himself, his brand hung obviously at his side. “As far as clothes, you guys need to wear dark, cool tones. But don’t wear all black. That will just stand out and be suspicious.”

“I thought we were breaking in?” Alan asked uncertainly, as he looked to Marilyn and Victor. “Isn’t our presence alone going to be suspicious?”

“Not as much as you might realize,” Armand said, he looked over the three, along with Malcolm and Ruwani as well. “It’s a corporate building. People stay late all the time. Some of these corporate types even have showers in their offices so they can spend the night in their office. I’m not kidding.”

“Must be nice to have that kind of money,” Victor joked, smiling at Marilyn. She didn’t smile back. She simply focused on Armand’s words, barely even aware of Victor’s presence by her side.

“The Solaritec campus is based around three central buildings, with satellite buildings around it in concentric circles,” Armand went on. In the corner of the university library, he spoke in hushed tones. “Thanks to Marilyn’s informant,” he

said, nodding to her across the maps they stood over, “we know that the central building, floor 8, is where we can find and confront the director of their developmental technologies, Phillip Reynolds.”

Ruwani and Kate were on Armand’s right, the three men on his left. Marilyn stood across from him. Everyone but Marilyn looked worried. She didn’t look eager but she seemed to be the only one committed and determined.

“The front gates of the facility are designed to be anti-vehicle but not anti-people,” explained Armand. “We should be able to get through the gates and onto the facility proper without any trouble.”

“Isn’t that breaking and entering?” asked Kim.

“Not until we enter the buildings,” Armand said, way too casually. “It’s just trespassing, and they are required by law to give us two direct and obvious requests to leave before they can call the police. They also cannot detain us in any way.”

“Good to know,” said Malcolm a little sarcastically.

“Once we’re inside the building, time is against us,” explained Armand. “We will need to make our way to the eighth floor, to Phillip Reynolds’ office, and confront him.” He pointed at Victor, who had with him a video camera. “You will need to film all of this. Not just film it, but stream it. We will likely be arrested but not before we get information out of him.”

“Is absolutely any of this legal?” asked Ruwani.

“This isn’t about the law; it’s about the truth,” said Armand, chillingly. “When the truth comes out,” he said, looking to Marilyn, “the people will handle the rest.” She nodded, pretending to be confident.

“I still don’t know,” Alan spoke up. He looked to Marilyn. “This is a far cry from breaking into an office in a dance club.”

Marilyn agreed but said, “We exposed the enemy with our raid of the Australia Club,” she said. She looked at the map of the Solaritec campus. “We’ll be bringing him down with this.”

“And when we get arrested?” asked Victor. He didn’t look so much at Marilyn and Armand but at the others. “What then?”

“The charges will be minimal,” Armand said. “And, likely, we’ll be exonerated.”

“Likely,” questioned Ruwani.

“This is dangerous, guys,” Armand told them. “But changing the world always is.” The others all waffled, no one saying anything. Resolved, Armand stood and said, “All right then. Let’s do this.”

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