

## Prologue

San Francisco, California, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1975

*Psi's pale blue eyes almost burst out of their sockets as Omega advanced with the needle. His hands chained to the wall, Psi faced his assailant. "You cannot Usurp me, Omega! For I am already dead."*

*The dark-haired man leered at him. "Far be it from me to kill you, Brother Psi," he said softly.*

*Psi, his wrists bruised and his cheeks aflame, made one final attempt to wrench himself free. "You are no brother of mine! And chains will not bind me - physical or metaphysical. The joke's on you, Omega. I have swallowed poison, and will be dead within minutes." His eyes gazed heavenward, as though in anticipation of the ecstasy of release.*

*His captor laughed a guttural laugh. "Come now, Psi. I could not let you harm yourself. What kind of man can see an old friend suffer? I have saved you before, and I will save you again. I am master of time and tide. You could die a hundred times, and I would still restore you; still force-feed you your medicine. And as I have saved your life, you are henceforth bound to me, no?"*

*The blond man staggered forward, retching. Yet, in his agony, he smiled an ironic smile. "Inject me if you will, but I will not see out this half hour, Omega..." Tears fell down his cheeks. "The prisoners we injected...the FBI killed every one of them...made it look like a gas explosion." As the poison ravaged his body, Psi's speech became garbled and incoherent. "Satan tempted me...I never meant this...you must know that...history must remember that...Project Redemption was my dream...I created the drug Angelus...then I realised it was the Devil pulling the strings...the Devil who latched himself to the victim's DNA, subjugating the victim to his evil will." The man was sobbing violently. "But I sought only to eradicate evil; save the world from strife. You remember I always opposed the death penalty? I believed violent prisoners could be redeemed...I thought the Angelus could expurge evil from the minds; restore primordial goodness. You stole and perverted my invention!"*

*The swarthy man swamped Psi like a vampire bat. The blond man felt the cold metal of the needle pierce his neck. Hot breath pelted down on his brow, and beads of sweat congealed on his skin. "Tell me how to make some more medicine, Psi, and I won't need to hurt you any further".*

*Psi quaked. His resistance quaked under his captor's rabid desperation. Omega's contorted features, his deathly pallor, his ravenous eyes betrayed a hideous truth: the pursuit of this single piece of information had corroded Omega's soul. And he had sacrificed it willingly. "Tell me of your own free will, before you lose it forever," he rasped finally.*

*Psi's limbs were paralysed. Had it not been for the chains, he would undoubtedly have dropped like a rag doll. But once more, he faced Omega, and through all his terror, his tone was triumphant: "Once the supply from the rock is exhausted, you cannot 'make some more', Omega! Even if the government had not dissolved us, you could not. The rock came from deep space. Its like will never be found on Earth again."*

*Omega pulled Psi back by the hair, and pushed the needle a little further. It pierced the outer layers of Psi's skin. "Lies! The laws of physics are universal. The entire universe is composed of the same few paltry elements. The substance must be synthesisable. Tell me how!"*

*Psi looked his assailant hard in the eye. "The rock was composed of neither atoms nor molecules," he said simply. "But bonds hitherto unknown to man. Your ploy must fail, Omega. You cannot create a nation of Stepford husbands and wives..."*

*Psi knew he was believed. He was dying – he had nothing to lose. Yet Omega gave only a grotesque smirk: "Far be it from me to subordinate humanity. Such cruel slander, when I seek only to continue my father's noble work. And you will help me, old friend..."*

*"Never!"*

*"You and the others..."*

*Psi felt his stomach lurch. "What others?"*

*Omega patted Psi on the back as if in fraternal solidarity. "Twenty-four brothers of the Redemption Project. Twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet. Four are dead: Gamma was shot by the FBI. Upsilon was bludgeoned by a prisoner whilst administering the Angelus. Eta died of cancer, and Zeta, our noble leader, was killed in a 'car crash'. But eighteen are already mine, and you, noble Psi, will be number nineteen..."*

*Psi felt his internal organs swell and burn within him. The agony was blinding. The end was nigh. The temptation was ever stronger to vomit up all his insides, and finally be free of this pain. But he said: "You injected all the others? Every last one of them? Impossible."*

*Omega laughed. "It was easy."*

*"But...the government wanted only to mind-wipe them. You can't have got past the entire FBI!"*

*Omega laughed again. "I have told you. I am master of time and tide. Nothing can overcome me. The State has created new lives for them, and I bide my time. But one day I will snap my fingers; and all will come running. They will serve not by coercion or command, but in love. They live only to obey my will."*

*Psi's breaths were long and laboured. "Even if you have tainted the others with your vile essence, you will never have me. Already, I feel my spirit leave me..." His tone was elated, as he stared upwards at the dark, vaulted ceiling, certain that a higher power would soon unburden him of his soul.*

*Omega moved like a prowling viper. The needle pierced Psi's jugular vein, and a spout of blood gushed out. Omega watched impassively as his colleague listed forward one final time, vomiting blood and bile. His convulsions slowed and finally stilled, as he hung limply on his chains, a paradoxical serenity imbued on his tortured features.*

*Omega laughed his baleful laugh. "No, Psi. Only a fool thinks he can evade me by dying, for none shall live that I desire dead; and none shall die that I desire to live. Besides, it would be wanton to sanction your death...talent such as yours is rare. No. You shall go back to your pretty wife and child, my dear Rudi. But one day I will summon you to meet your destiny...yearningly shall you await my call!"*

*Omega bent over, and twisted his body into the shape of a ball. An expression of unspeakable pain haunted his eyes, yet he did not flinch as he collapsed to the floor. The entire room imploded alongside him.*

