Dylan Dover:
Into The Vortex

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www.theconradpress.com

info@theconradpress.com

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For Andrew, Matthew, Jessie and Dylan –
thank you for your love, support, encouragement,
inspiration and patience. This would not
have been possible without you.

DYLAN DOVER:
INTO THE VORTEX

LYNNE HOWARD

Book 1 of a series

PROLOGUE

HUMAN CALENDAR: APRIL 1521

Silence hung heavily over the four leaders, who gathered together in this secret place. They were the only ones who knew, and therefore the responsibility to decide what should be done fell to them alone. Their new world, only in its infancy and still so vulnerable, depended upon the goodwill of its citizens and peace was still not assured in the aftermath of war which had raged for so long.

The room was dark, hidden deep beneath the surface where they would not be discovered. A scroll hovered motionless before them and gave off a faint shimmer of light which was the only illumination in the otherwise blackened chamber. The four read and then read again the words which had been revealed to only them mere hours before.

Finally, the one named Alexia spoke her thoughts. 'We cannot hide this. The truth must be known. Our citizens must be informed so that we can collectively watch for signs.'

Her superior, Callista slowly nodded in assent. 'Perhaps you are right, Alexia. I was wise to have chosen you as my advisor.'

'No!' came the vehement response from another. He could not feel the warmth of the stone which pressed against his cold skin, but a familiar voice crooned to him softly inside his mind and he knew exactly what to say. 'With the greatest

of respect to you, Callista and to you Alexia, I must strongly oppose any suggestion of alerting others to this prophecy. We should be the only ones who are aware of this possible threat to our world. We are powerful enough to be able to contain the peril to our people, if and when it comes to fruition. We have many resources we can utilize, which can alert us to signs of impending danger, without having to reveal this to anyone.'

'Baltazar, I agree with your assessment,' replied the other commander. 'Callista, you and I have both chosen our closest advisors well. Baltazar and Alexia are clearly great assets to the realm, but I believe as their advice is so opposed, that it shall have to be you and I alone who make this decision. Shall we discuss this elsewhere, my friend?'

Callista smiled wryly at being referred to as a friend by Atticus, who during the civil war had been her greatest enemy. They had been the leaders of the opposing armies. She moved closer to him and stood directly in his path in order to look deeply into his eyes. The limited amount of light radiating from the scroll was enough for her to determine that Atticus was genuine in his request, and she nodded her assent.

They grasped hands, Callista's dainty and pale, Atticus' strong and dark. Their physical appearances could not have been more different but their powers were almost equally formidable. In an instant, they were gone.

Baltazar and Alexia remained rooted where they stood. They did not move. They did not speak. Each knew the other's position, and each was convinced that the other was dreadfully wrong. And they waited.

It didn't take long. Callista and Atticus reemerged with a decision. It was Callista who spoke. 'We have determined that

our society is too fragile at this time to receive this prophecy, if in fact it is as such. As leaders of the realm, we shall assume full responsibility to watch for any signs of its actualization. Baltazar, we are entrusting you to oversee the addition of any new members to our society, and to supervise the vortex of those who enter and depart. Alexia, you shall assist Baltazar in any way he requires. None of us shall speak of the prophecy to others. Any information that must be shared will be done here and here alone. It is imperative that this revelation not be leaked. That is our ruling.'

'The prophecy must be hidden away immediately. We cannot risk it being found by others,' commanded Atticus.

He approached the scroll which remained suspended in the air. The words were inscribed in flawless Latin, but Atticus easily translated the text into a language that they could all understand. And he read its contents out loud once to commit it to their memories, for it would not be seen again until or unless there were signs that it was coming true.

Hear now mighty rulers beware and take heed
The world you have created may not succeed.
Peace is so fragile, it's so easily torn
Your fate rests upon those who've not yet been born.
Together their powers are like no other
When passed through the hands of brother to brother.
Yet completeness eludes the powers of three
The last burning element, she too must be.

The power that heals, the power that destroys
Your fate to be sealed by one girl and three boys.
An unusual birth for they shall arrive
All on the same day and yet all shall survive.
Your world created shall be saved or no more
It shall be determined by siblings of four.
Look to the heavens and the stars that align
For the kings of three plus one more is the sign.

Atticus held his hands together as if in prayer, in front of the scripture. Then his hands split apart and wrapped themselves around the scroll until they came together on the other side. He closed his eyes and focused completely on the task at hand. Bits of rock and metal magically appeared and surrounded his hands. The pieces were shaking violently and rattled against each other, as if they were clamoring to move forward.

Atticus once more traced a circle round the scroll with his hands, bringing them back together where they had started. Then he took a step back. Once his hands were out of the way, the thousands of fragments forged together and created a vault around the parchment. With the prophecy safely encased in its magical tomb, Atticus once more waved his hands, and the vault disappeared.

'As leaders of this new immortal world, we are placing our complete and utter trust in you both, our deputies. We need your help to ensure that our vision of a peaceful society is fulfilled. One where all immortals, of any faction can exist in the open, without having to hide away any longer from

humans. But like all new societies, ours is still very vulnerable. The scars of our civil war have not yet healed. This prophecy, if known, would cause our old disputes to arise once again, and we cannot risk that. We are confident in your loyalty. We shall not return here again, unless there is need to discuss the prophecy and we shall not mention it ever again, unless it becomes necessary to do so. Understood?' Callista demanded.

'Yes,' Baltazar and Alexia replied in perfect unison. 'Yes,' whispered the voice inside Baltazar's head. Then the four leaders of the immortal world returned to their society to govern the newly formed realm.

CHAPTER ONE

HUMAN CALENDAR: SEPTEMBER 2006

'Reus', the voice hissed menacingly into his ear. 'You must not fail. If you disappoint me, you know what the consequences shall be...' the words trailed off and then his superior abruptly turned on his heels and left Reus alone in the hallway.

Reus stood still for a moment to control the trembling that threatened to overtake him and give away his sense of fear to those who he would soon encounter. Any slip up could ruin Baltazar's plan and would result in Reus' immediate and very painful death. Reus had been under Baltazar's control for centuries and knew with complete certainty that he was expendable and easily replaced. His continued existence depended upon successful implementation of this plan, which had been in the works for many months. Reus steadied himself for another moment before he entered the birthing chamber.

On the table lay Maggie Warston, her distended stomach protruding higher than it seemed possible. Her nervous husband, Ben sat by her side squeezing her hand. The Master Deliverer had not yet arrived, which gave Reus a short time for introductions. He approached the couple and noted Maggie's anxious yet elated expression. She was eagerly anticipating the birth of multiples. In the world of the supernatural, doctors like those that exist in the human world are unnecessary;

however, those with exceptional powers were still needed to help heal immortals from traumatic injuries that could occur. Delivering one child or even twins would not likely cause any major injuries to the mother, but triplets or the even more unusual situation of four or more infants at the same time was a rare occurrence. Immortal children, even those yet to be born, had magical abilities which sometimes cloaked the presence of additional babies. For these unusual deliveries, the need for someone with strong powers to save the mother or any of the children should a problem arise was a precaution that the parents usually insisted upon, and for which Baltazar rejoiced. This made his plan to monitor unusual births that much simpler than if the parents had desired a home birth without intervention.

'So, the day has finally arrived. Congratulations to you both,' smiled Reus at the soon to be parents. 'I am Officer Eldonik, representative from the Ministry of Population and Census. I am here to record the births and report them on your behalf.'

'Yes, we were informed that a government official would be here,' replied Ben in a clipped tone. He was clearly irritated at a stranger being present for such a personal and intimate event.

'There is nothing to be concerned about. I am simply here to observe. You won't even notice that I'm in the room. But of course, you understand that for all exceptional births the Ministry sends a representative. It's just standard procedure.'

'Thank you, officer. My husband and I completely understand,' said Maggie and she gave her husband a smile to take the edge off her remark. Ben's shoulders slumped slightly as he relaxed under his wife's loving gaze.

Just then, the Master Deliverer known to his patients simply

as Chai, glided into the room. He first made eye contact with Reus and gave him a knowing look. Reus felt confident that Chai would follow Baltazar's commands, exactly as he had been told. *I wonder what Chai has been promised by Baltazar. Or perhaps threatened…* thought Reus.

Chai approached Maggie with a friendly smile and placed his hand on her stomach. His grin promptly changed to a look of concern, which Maggie and Ben both noticed immediately.

'What's wrong? I can tell that something is wrong,' cried Maggie.

'We need to deliver these infants immediately,' stated Chai authoritatively. He quickly muttered the necessary spell as he waved his hands over Maggie's body from her head to her toes. A barrier appeared between Maggie's chest and the rest of her body, concealing her belly from both her and Ben. They could hear everything that was happening but could not see beyond the barrier.

Chai stood on Maggie's left side and Reus on the right. Reus gave Chai a nod to indicate that he should proceed. Chai hesitated a moment, and Reus could see regret flit briefly across Chai's face. *Clearly Baltazar is threatening him,* thought Reus. *No doubt about it. Chai is not a willing participant here,* but Reus was still certain that Chai would comply and would keep the secret.

Chai took a deep breath and then placed both of his hands on Maggie's stomach. He closed his eyes in concentration and began to chant quietly. The words for a safe delivery had a strong rhythm that were hypnotic and meant to ease the infants out of the womb with as little injury as possible to the mother. Reus watched as Maggie's belly split open to reveal

the children nestled inside her. Chai knew what he had to do next. His chanting changed but his words were so quiet that only Reus could hear them. Chai reached into Maggie's belly and delivered the first child.

'The first child is a boy,' Chai said with fake enthusiasm. Chai ran his hands over the infant and within a minute, the baby let out his first cry. Chai held the child and passed his hands through the barrier to give him to his awaiting parents. While Maggie and Ben excitedly examined his fingers and toes, and cooed over his head of hair, Chai quickly delivered the remaining children. But he did not recite his incantations over these new immortals, and so they did not cry. Nor did Chai hand the babies over to his parents, but rather, he placed them in the arms of Reus.

Acting upon Baltazar's instructions, Reus immediately scanned the bodies of the infants looking for any unusual markings to report back to his master. He noticed on the second born child something strange on the inside of his right wrist – three small circle shaped markings that ran in a diagonal line. He then checked the same place on the third born child and found an identical line of dots. He did not notice any such markings on the others, but he also did not have adequate time to do a thorough inspection and of course, he certainly could not check the infant who was already in his mother's arms. Reus, with all but the one child securely nestled in his arms, snapped his fingers quietly and silently disappeared from the birthing chamber.

As soon as Reus was gone, Chai began his intonations again. He knew what he had to do. His ability to conceal the truth and persuade the parents of his lies was imperative. His voice

sounded anxious and Maggie and Ben instantly noticed.

Chai's words became faster, his voice more frantic. Maggie and Ben simultaneously cried out to see their other children, but Chai ignored their pleas and persevered in reciting the magical spell that was known only to him as the Master Deliverer. Maggie cradled her first born son and kept her eyes locked on Ben's, as the two parents waited with fear in their eyes, to hear the cries of their other babies. After several minutes, the room went silent. Chai stopped his chanting.

'Please Chai, where are our other children?' pleaded Ben. The barrier dissolved in a whirl of colorful splinters that splattered rainbows around the room.

'I'm so very sorry,' whispered Chai. 'The other children are gone. I couldn't save them from their fate.' Chai held out to the parents what appeared to be the bodies of two perfectly formed, but completely still baby boys. Their eyes were closed. Their bodies were motionless. No breath stirred in their tiny chests.

'No!' gasped Maggie as grief overwhelmed her and she dissolved into tears. Ben too had tears streaming down his face as he stared at the two lifeless beings that Chai held before them.

'I know that this is devastating for you both,' stated Chai, 'But you must focus on your son who lives. Your other children will always be in your hearts, but you must move on without them. Cherish the son you have been blessed with, for I know that he is destined to do great things.'

Before Maggie or Ben could ask to hold their second and third born sons, their little bodies disappeared in a quiet whoosh which transported them to a world unknown even to immortals.

Chai quickly attended to Maggie's wounds from the delivery and healed her stomach so that within minutes, her body was as perfect as it had ever been with no signs of the traumatic delivery and no signs of being pregnant with three healthy sons and one healthy daughter. *They will mourn the two boys,* thought Chai. *Perhaps it is better that they never knew a daughter existed,* he decided.

Maggie and Ben left the Birthing Chamber with bittersweet tears for the son they were taking home and the sons that had disappeared. Chai remained in the room by himself for some time. Most of what he had said to the parents was true, if you didn't consider his lies of omission. The parents had just interpreted his words differently than he meant them. But Baltazar would be pleased. Chai and his family were safe… at least for now. He hoped that his debt to Baltazar was served and that by keeping this secret, he would no longer be under Baltazar's control. And yet Chai knew only too well that when Baltazar wanted something, he would do anything to achieve his goals. Chai did not know what Baltazar had in store for the warlock infants that were snatched from their parents this day or why the parents were only to know of three infants and not the fourth. Nor did he know why Baltazar wanted these children so badly, but he hoped that they too would be safe.

Chai cleaned the room quickly, wanting to leave this place as soon as he could. His usually capable hands trembled as he waved them over the stained surfaces, and he moved around the birthing chamber in great haste, his hurried efforts making him clumsy and distracted. Chai felt regret and terror weighing in equal measure upon his heart.

He put his hand into his pocket to reach for his handkerchief

to wipe his forehead and as he did, his fingers brushed against a small, smooth stone. As his skin grazed the object, he felt a warm, pulsating sensation radiate through his hand, then travel up his arm before spreading through his torso. Chai's mind immediately felt at peace, all the trepidation falling away, leaving his thoughts clear and calm. A soft whisper in his ear reassured him that all was well and that he would not think of this incident again.

Chai resumed his duties and finished his tasks efficiently. Then he left the birthing chamber to return home to his family, the events of the day not causing him any further distress. His role had been fulfilled, at least for now. The stone glimmered softly close to Chai's body, where it would remain unless an intervening force pulled it away.