



Wolves of the Apocalypse:

Ways of Darkness

Book 2

Preview

By LC Champlin

Thanks again for signing up for the mailing list! As a final thank-you freebie, here are the first **three chapters of book 2, Ways of Darkness**, which comes out on **Amazon in 2018**.

They're not edited, so consider this an advance reader copy (**ARC**).

And as a final reminder, if you read *Behold Darkness* and haven't left a **review** on [Amazon](#) yet, head on over, slacker!

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Wolves of the Apocalypse: Ways of Darkness, by LC Champlin.

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Cover by me, since apparently if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself – even if you try to pay someone.

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Proverbs 2:10-15

For wisdom will enter your heart
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
Discretion will guard you,
Understanding will watch over you,
To deliver you from the way of evil,
From the man who speaks perverse things;
From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the **ways of darkness**;
Who delight in doing evil
And rejoice in the perversity of evil;
Whose paths are crooked,
And who are devious in their ways;

Chapter 1

Where There's Smoke, There's Darkness

Rise – State of Mind

Smoke black as unconsciousness billowed from the C-130 crash across the San Francisco Bay. Nathan Serebus stood to his full six-two at the view: the soot marked his grave, or it would if he'd caught his flight.

In his periphery, his three companions on the parked flatbed stared at the pyre in horror and disbelief.

The buildings across the water obstructed his view. Height. He needed to climb. There, top of the military semi's cab.

Legs coming back online after the shock, he stalked to the ladder on the cab's side. He leaned around and caught a wrung. Pain blazed along his ribs as the fractures reminded him what falling fifteen feet onto your chest did to the body. Darkness lapped at his vision. His grip loosened and his knees went weak. Be strong. Climb. Let the bones God broke rejoice.

His Nikes squeaked on the metal as he conquered the summit. On his feet again, higher than the others, he inhaled. *One, two, three, four seconds. Hold.* The morphine in his system dulled breathing's pain.

In the last twenty-four hours, life had gone from throwing the gauntlet to launching a cruise missile at him. Terrorists, cannibals, explosions - what didn't kill him mangled him, but he arose victorious, from prey to wolf, to the amarok wolf of legend that stalked the lone hunter foolish enough to venture into the woods at night.

Evolve. Attack. Dominate.

"From Chaos came forth Erebus and black Night," he murmured.

Nineveh spread around him, a maze of concrete canyons. Along the skyline, smoke rose at intervals. Sirens wailed, banshees in broad daylight. Horns honked as people fled the city. Ash in the sky, blood in the streets. God spared him to conquer, not warn, the city He judged.

Movement to the right brought his attention back to his people. Most fantasy apocalypse teams boasted superheroes, supervillains, and Chuck Norris. They didn't feature an attorney, a

reporter, and an economist. The armchair generals could have their stars; he couldn't ask for better than his pack. Tried by fire, they emerged as gold, or at least alive and sane.

That said, he would trade them all save Albin - his attorney, adviser, and friend - to have Janine at his side. They would put a new spin on the saying, "They fight like a married couple." More accurately, fighting by *her* side would make him trade his team, because then he and Albin would again occupy East-Coast territory. Home.

The exhilaration of a moment ago dipped as his arms ached to hold his wife and little boy again. For the now, he would have to take consolation in the fact that Janine and Davie remained safe in Upstate New York, clear of the attacks in NYC and many of the country's other major cities, including San Francisco.

To his right, Marvin Bridges of the Federal Reserve sat hunched on the edge of the trailer, face buried so deep in his hands that his fingers disappeared in his brown hair's spikes. To his left, Josephine Behrmann of ABC 7 Action News watched the Hercules's desolation through her smartphone screen as she filmed.

Ahead, Albin Conrad crested the ladder's top and stepped onto the cab roof with leopard grace that shamed his employer's scramble. His wire rims flashed in the sun as he adjusted them between thumb and ring finger.

Nathan gave a smile as cold as his adviser's ice-blue gaze. "*Carpe noctem. Ad victorium.*"

"*Para bellum.*" Brit heritage overpowered the Nowhere-USA half of his accent at these words.

"As should any who desire peace."

The blond turned back toward the Hercules. Its smoke rose like that of sacrifice on an altar. He reached up to the unbuttoned collar of his Armani dress shirt. "This is a war unlike any America has ever seen, sir."

"Then it will provide opportunities unlike any we've ever seen." Nathan clapped a hand on his friend's shoulder. "God spared us for a reason: to make order out of chaos."

"God?" Albin raised a brow.

"Yes. And since we're grounded for a week-"

"A fortnight, actually."

"Two, then. We might as well make the most of it. The night is ours, Albin."

“I am more concerned about the day.”

Shouts joined the emergency-vehicle sirens that howled across the Bay. Military personnel emerged from the Armory forty yards away. Most wanted a better view of the disaster, but a squad of combat-ready Department of Homeland Security officers had other concerns. Nathan sighed as the grunts pointed at Albin and him. “We’ve got company,” he announced for Jo and Marvin. “I’m sure Director Washington will blame this on us too.”

Albin started toward the ladder. “I highly doubt they plan to congratulate us on our survival.”

For a split second, the officers’ faces turned white, blistered. Motor oil drooled from their mouths as rust-red eyes locked on him. He squeezed his eyes shut, shook his head. Humans again.

The terrorists who unleashed the contagion that created the monsters called them *Dalits*. The Untouchables. The Unclean. The oil they drooled and bled could infect anyone who touched it.

Below, the lanky attorney hopped to the asphalt. Muscles tense, Nathan crouched and caught the ladder rail. Glancing at the DHS drones, he paused at seeing his reflection in the tractor’s side mirror. The first time he’d seen himself in a real mirror since the debacle at Doorway Pharmaceuticals this morning. Black hair slicked back but rebelling contrasted with the goatee’s sharp borders. Steristrips and adhesive covered lacerations between contusions. Dark circles rimmed even darker eyes in their caverns. *Rabid* seemed a more appropriate descriptor than *rugged*.

The reflection flickered for a lightning-strike instant. In the flash, a bestial silhouette looked back with golden eyes. His throat closed while his heart double-kicked. His face returned.

“Sir.” Albin’s voice jolted him.

Shivering, Nathan resumed his descent. Hallucinations. Again. The morphine, Ativan, and whatever else polluted his blood opened doors to dark places.

He dropped to the ground beside Albin as the DHS officers formed a perimeter around the civilians. M4 carbines waited for the chance to stop a threat. One of the squad stepped forward. “Let’s go, people. The Director wants you back in your quarters.” He jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward the National Guard Armory.

“I’m sure she does,” Josephine replied as she panned across the group with her phone.

Marvin's attention remained on the Hercules's smoke.

"It's for safety," the spokesman assured them as black-clad officers closed around their charges.

Nathan snorted. "Famous last words."

As they trudged toward "safety," Albin eyed him. "Are you well, Mr. Serebus?"

"I just survived a collapsed lung, have three broken ribs, and look like I lost a fight with Tyson. Why wouldn't I be?" He forced a sarcastic smile.

The blond frowned deeper. "Did we not just have a discussion about honesty?"

Nathan wiped sweat off his face with the sleeve of his T shirt. Cali sunshine wanted to roast him. "It's just the meds."

"I see."

"What about you?" On the surface, trauma and emotions affected the Aryan like rain affected sharks. Still waters harbored leviathans, though.

Albin glanced over his shoulder at the brunette reporter, who gave them a smile. As usual, he wanted to appear competent and unmoved, especially in front of the media.

"You're fine, as always," Nathan answered himself.

The squad acted as a crowd breaker through the service members and into the Armory's garage. An olive-drab Stryker rolled past. Another armored personnel carrier idled as troops boarded. Humvees and utility cargo pickups came and went. Others waited as support crews loaded them with water bottles and supplies.

Despite the confusion, Marvin stared ahead, following the officers like a zombie. Nathan stepped up. "Bridges." Nothing. "Marvin." He caught his shoulder.

The economist flinched, blinked as if awakened. "Y-yeah. What?"

Get JP Morgan's brain moving forward. "Do you know where to get bottles of water here?"

"Uh, the cafeteria--"

"I need you to do me a favor: get eight and put four in your room and four in Josephine's. If there's packaged food, stock up on that as well." Give a person a mission and a reason, and you improved their morale.

"I think I can manage." The usual sarcasm returned.

"Thank you."

Helicopter rotors thrummed near the armory, making Nathan turn back to the garage entrance. The DHS officers nearest him paused, but before they could drag him charge along, shouts of, “Make a path! Medics coming through!” interrupted. A team of medical staff in fatigues and wheeling a Stryker stretcher trotted past.

The Black Hawk descended into view. Downwash blew dust across the concrete. The door slid open, an invitation to the medics.

Nathan stepped back for balance as someone pulled his shoulder rearward. He shrugged away. The din around him faded to static. Images of the inside of a Black Hawk flooded his mind: Restraints. Medics holding him down. Pain across his chest. Why couldn't he get any air? A flash of Albin upside down, pinning him with an ice-blue stare, insisting on-

“Sir?”

Panting, chest burning, Nathan looked about. The visions evaporated. He gulped against a dry throat. He started after the others, to the gratification of the DHS sheepdogs, but kept an eye over his shoulder.

The medics inside the chopper exited, a patient on a backboard between them. But as they transferred their charge to the stretcher, the injured man reared up and swiped at the medics like a grizzly. Reflexes saved them. The others grabbed his limbs and cinched down the safetybelts.

Nathan halted again as his brain caught up with his eyes: the patient had a white face and black mouth. Too far to see eye color, but...

The golden eyes of the amarok blazed in the night forest of his mind. *Don't just stand there like prey; warn them.*

“Cannibal. *Cannibal!*”

Chapter 2

Cry, Wolf

I'm Down -- The Almost

The shout brought the DHS squad's attention. "Come on, sir--"

Nathan jumped forward, only to meet closed ranks of officers. Idiots! "You have to shoot him!" He jabbed a finger at the monster on the stretcher. "He'll infect everyone if you don't put a bullet in his head."

"Calm down, sir." The nearest officer raised a hand while the other hovered over the Taser at his belt. His comrade favored the baton.

The cannibal on the stretcher occupied the medics' attention as they hustled through the armory, toward the front doors.

"You're wasting time," Nathan snarled as he tried to sidestep them.

"Mr. Serebus."

A hand on his shoulder. He pulled free, but the DHS man blocked him. "Move!"

Then his arms went out as someone reached under them and around the back of his head. Fire lanced over his ribs. He staggered, the assailant's foot on the back of his knee.

"Stop," Albin hissed in his ear, wrestling him back.

Nathan dropped to a knee. "Get off!"

"Stop before they make you." More hands restrained him. Ah, everything hurt!

"He's...a cannibal!"

"He is combative, like you were. He is not cannibalistic."

The stretcher sped past. Its occupant looked...human. Pale, bleeding from the mouth after a chest wound, but definitely human.

Two DHS officers slammed Nathan to his chest. Fractures screamed, taking vengeance at the assault. Darkness narrowed his view. "Fine," he gasped.

"He is no threat." Albin dismissed the grunts, who backed off with reluctance. He helped his employer up.

Breath came in ragged gasps while the pain subsided. *I saw it. I know I saw it.* “I...I was mistaken.” Flashbacks superimposed on reality? He clenched his fists to stop the tremors. *Inhale for one, two-* Ribs burned, caught him mid breath.

“Better safe than sorry,” Marvin put in.

Josephine’s brow furrowed as she stepped closer. “Nathan, are you-”

“Don’t worry.” Her concern made his skin crawl. Blast, the whole misadventure made him feel like spiders scurried over his flesh.

“What the fuck, Serebus?” a woman’s familiar voice cut through the chatter. The DHS minions turned to allow one of their own through. Though the top of her head came only to most of their shoulders, she stormed up with more don’t-mess-with-me attitude than a honey badger. And she most assuredly *did* care.

“Officer Rodriguez.” Nathan grinned, half from pleasure and half because it annoyed her. “Fancy seeing-”

“Swear to God, I can’t get out of babysitting you.” She glared up at him, irritation darkening her face. “Shut up and get your collective asses back to your quarters before you make a bigger idiot of yourself.”

“We are endeavoring to do just that, Officer,” Albin assured her.

Josephine nodded. “It was just the confusion around here.”

“Go.” With last glare, she stalked off, muttering, “Fucking pains in my ass.”

The convoy resumed its trek. Nathan kept his eyes forward as footage of the non-cannibal played in his mind’s eye. Each repeat warped it like the degradation an image suffers after multiple copies.

The light, the meds, the confusion? ...The trauma? No, Nathan Serebus rode his demons now, not the other way around. *I am the amarok. I hunt the hunters.* He didn’t have mental breakdowns anymore. No longer did the shadows of the wolves who had hunted him as a teen on that disastrous night on the Aleutian Islands oppress him. They hunted beside him now. God chose him as His weapon to execute judgment on the human beasts who rampaged through the city.

The squad crossed the parking lot to Belle Air Elementary, the government’s ad hoc incident command center for the area. They navigated the halls to drop Marvin and Josephine off at their respective rooms. A guard remained at each door. When they arrived at Nathan and

Albin's quarters, if you called an office with two cots "quarters," two guards detached from the squad.

Nathan paused. Albin didn't seem in any hurry to enter either.

The officer nearest the door knob opened it and nodded for them to stop screwing off. "Inside, sir."

"I need to use the restroom, officer." It worked for the three-year-old when he wanted to stave off bedtime. "All that IV fluid." He brandished his arm with its hospital bracelet and gauze-covered IV puncture.

"And I believe we require more bottled water," Albin added.

Their protectors exchanged glances.

"We were permitted to come and go before," the attorney pressed as Nathan opened his mouth to announce his intention to go whether they liked it or not.

"Fine. But be back here in five minutes."

Nathan took a step down the hall, then half turned back. "You can come along if you're worried I'll disappear."

"Go."

Ah, the small victories.

Around the corner, Nathan slowed. "Where's the emergency intake area where they..." He patted the dressing on his side. A few hours ago, a chest tube had protruded from between his ribs.

Albin halted. "Why?"

"Secondhand memories are dangerous." If the Versed worked as well as he thought, he shouldn't have any repressed memories. The drug supposedly made it impossible for the brain to record events as they occurred. "I need to see the room."

"That episode..." Interrogation Mode, Albin's default status when digging for the truth during negotiations.

"You make it sound like a seizure."

"Perhaps it was."

Nathan splinted his ribs with his right arm. "I can trust the darkness as long as I know it's true."

"I understand."

The adviser led the way down halls and around corners, ending in front of double doors. Nathan squinted through their windows. Beyond the reinforced glass opened a nausea-green common room. Privacy screens jutted from the perimeter to form stalls. Medical staff hustled to fetch and carry, wheel carts, transport patients.

Here they saved his life. The incision ached, drawing a growl from him.

No memories, no flashbacks.

Albin joined him. "Is all to your satisfaction, sir?"

"Completely."

As he stepped back, the medical staff at the rear of the common room paused to stare at another set of double doors. A yell, barely audible. Then the doors in question burst open as several medical staff charged out. Nathan pressed against the glass for a wider angle of view. "What in the—" Nurses didn't run *from* anything.

He shouldered through the doors. What he could do remained nebulous, but he could at least try to repay the staff's service.

"Get security!" one of the harried medics barked. Then, arms out, he blocked the path of the medic flood that bore down on him. "Don't go in there!"

From the left swept a man in a surgical gown overcoat and Army fatigues. Lieutenant Colonel James Wozniak, cardiothoracic surgeon, ate crises for elevensies. Taller than anyone else in the room and with a linebacker's build, he dominated the scene. "What's going on here?"

"The patient—"

Not waiting for the nurse to finish, Jim sidestepped him and kicked through the doors. "Hold it open."

The patient no longer needed lifesaving. It half crouched in front of the stretcher, black oil streaming from its mouth. The fluorescent lights turned its blistered skin copy-paper white.

Chapter 3

Medical Intervention

Hot Blood -- Kaleo

A damned cannibal. In the heart of the authorities' base.

"Albin, call security." Nathan turned, only to catch a last glimpse of Albin's back as he slipped from the makeshift emergency room.

Calm but wary, Jim backed up. "Shut the door."

The cannibal raised itself to its full height, threw back its head, and hissed:

ssssaaaaahhh.

That hideous sound, worse than a cougar's roar or a bear's growl. Nathan's hair stood on end as his stomach tried to take cover behind his spine. Images flooded his mind: a parking lot full of them, reaching for him as he hung from the edge of a bridge in mid-collapse one story above.

Flashbacks vanished behind the black-hole body of the amarok. Predators did not fear their prey.

"Jim, think fast!" Sliding an IV pole from a nearby stretcher, Nathan tossed the weapon hook-end first.

Jim caught it as the doors began to close on hydraulic assist. The cannibal fell forward, thrusting itself ahead with powerful legs. The pole flashed as Jim hurled it. Center of mass hit.

Off balance and impaled, the monster staggered back. Oil oozed around the pole to join the blood from the other chest wound. The cannibal showed no pain, merely dropping its center of gravity to regain balance.

The door clicked shut in front of it. Medical staff chatter faded to a buzz. They milled behind, unsure whether to help or hinder the officer who thought impaling a patient made sense.

Wait. Uniform, chest wound. Its face looked familiar despite the corruption. The victim from the chopper? "It can't be." Blood turned to ice in Nathan's veins as it drained from his heart to pool around his ankles.

Move! He kicked the brake off a stretcher as Jim jumped to do the same on another. Nathan shoved his to the officer, who slammed both beds against the doors. The left door swung inward; the cannibal charged out, only to have the stretcher catch it in the waist.

Backing up, Jim reached under his coat, behind his back. The double doors into the emergency room banged open and a team of MPs burst in, rifles panning.

The cannibal hopped onto the stretchers, crouching like a frog. Its shoulders dropped as it prepared to lunge.

A semi-auto handgun appeared from under Jim's coat. *BANG-BANG!* The rounds struck beside the IV pole that protruded from the chest like a branch from a tree. The monster's momentum and grip on the stretcher meant the hit only rocked it back.

Soldiers barked at the bystanders to stand clear. Medical staff yelled their own orders.

Through the cacophony- *Sssssaaaaahhhh*.

The cannibal dropped forward again to resume its attack.

"Headshot!" Nathan roared, reaching for another IV pole.

BANG! The cannibal's head snapped back as oil and bone exploded from the back of its skull. With a last spasm it toppled backward.

Jim held his stance as the MPs converged on the scene. When their leader nodded to him, he holstered his weapon and moved clear. "Get a hazmat team in here. Don't touch any fluids."

Then he strode over to Nathan as Albin joined them. "We meet again." The ginger wore a grin, but his blue eyes sparked with intensity as he shook hands with Nathan.

"Nice to see you putting a pipe in someone else's chest for a change." Nathan smirked as he patted the bandage on his side.

Jim chuckled.

Albin tore his attention from the MPs, who worked to cordon off the area. "It seems nowhere is truly safe."

"Thanks for the help, both of you."

One of the MPs detached from his fellows and approached them. The soldier snapped a salute to his superior. "Lieutenant Colonel, sir, we'll need your statement regarding the incident."

"Of course, Corporal. Take care, gentlemen." Jim nodded to Nathan and Albin.

The MP turned to them. “We’ll need both of yours also.”

“The DHS is expecting us back at our quarters.” Nathan smiled, pained. “They’ll be interviewing us soon anyway.”

“And,” Albin added, “they are rather sticklers for protocol.”

The soldier gave a nod. “I’ll escort you.”

As they headed back to their room, the adrenaline from the incident fell, leaving confusion in its wake. The man was a cannibal, then he wasn’t, then he was.

“Sir?” Albin regarded Nathan with...suspicion? Interest? “It was the patient you believed to be a cannibal.”

Nathan could only shake his head.

“It was a trick of the light, combined with the factors we’ve already discussed.” Albin’s tone signaled the end of the discussion.

The conversation might cease, but the thoughts grew. Maybe the Ativan fertilized them. They spread their roots, found the cracks in the foundation of his sanity. Leaves unfurled: He’d intuited the future. He’d sensed the cannibal infection.

God chose him to rule and judge. Would He not give His chosen weapon insight? He didn’t give cannibal-detection vision, but now and then perhaps He intervened.

Intriguing ideas.

Restoring order here would act as a stopgap measure until they could go home. Control and networks in San Francisco would ease Albin and his return to New York City.

“I am on a mission from God.”

“Excuse me?” Albin glanced at him as they rounded a corner.

“What?”

“You mumbled something about God.”

He said it aloud? “Oh.”

“Our emergency is not God’s.”

Nathan smiled, mirthless. “God doesn’t have emergencies, Albin.”

TBC...

Want to know how Nathan, Albin, and our favorite pack of survivors slide deeper into the end of civilization as we know it? (Hint: It's with the help of a familiar **villain**.)
You know you do.

The hunt continues with book 2, out 2018 on Amazon.

To keep up to date on its progress, as well as get blog posts about villains, weird science, and more, **visit my site lcchamplin.com**