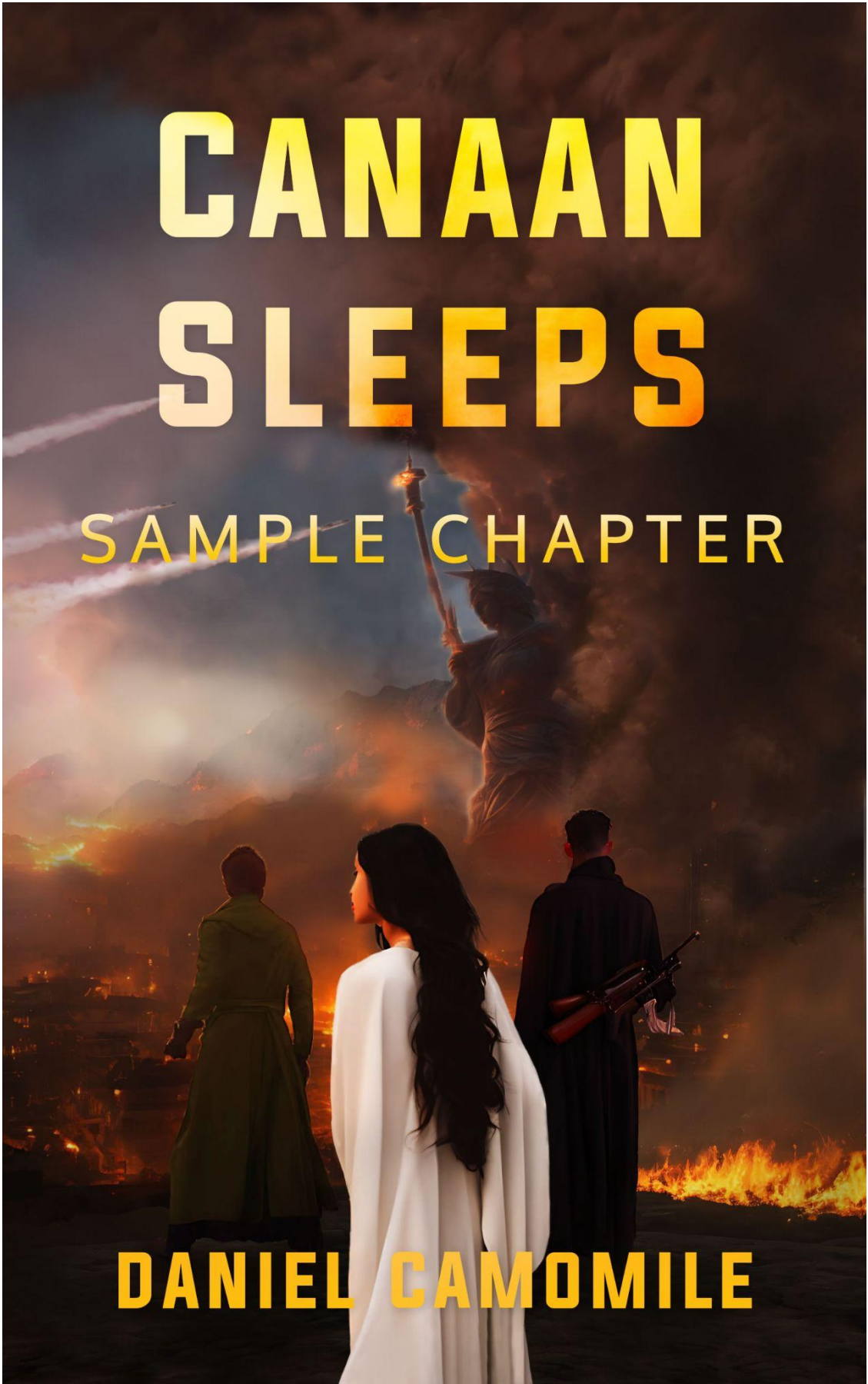


CANAAN SLEEPS

SAMPLE CHAPTER

DANIEL CAMOMILE



CHAPTER 3 OF *CANAAN SLEEPS*

A CHRISTIAN YA DYSTOPIA

Thomas stood alone on a windy rooftop high above the city. Below, he could see the rooftops of the Gold Quarter narrow down to a point at the city's center. There, in the wheel-hub of the four quarters of the city, stood the overshadowing figure of Lady Prosperity, brooding over the holy city of Shiloh. North of her lay the vast, cramped slums of the Blue Quarter and south of her lay the industrial and regimented buildings of the Red Quarter.

The statue of the austere woman gazed off eastward, over the harbors and wharfs of the Silver Quarter, where lay the dark sprawl of the open sea. Whether it was dawn or dusk, Thomas could not tell, but the light was low and the sky a blank sheet of overcast gray. Nothing but the eerie sound of whistling wind filled his ears. The entire city of Shiloh lay quiet and dark as that dreadful sea beyond its harbors.

As Thomas watched, he became aware that the sea was not so still as he thought. It was moving, heaving and rolling like a boiling pot, its violent motion growing and growing. Then, as he watched, the light from the sky turned blood red, as if the clouds had suddenly turned to crimson glass. From the chaos of the heaving sea, one mound of water rose above the rest, rushing toward the city and threatening to form a titanic wave. But, to Thomas' terror, it turned into something worse. Something like a colossal, mountainous pillar rose straight out of the sea. Monstrous and black, it towered, its edges highlighted red by the ominous sky. It grew to stand over a mile high, dwarfing the magnificent city below it.

With deep dread, Thomas knew this was no mass of land—it was undeniably alive. It was an enormous beast arrayed with horns on its head and claws at the ends of its baleful arms.

The gargantuan creature bent down and glowered at Thomas with its two blazing hell-fire eye sockets. It opened its enormous jaws, revealing a white-hot furnace within its cosmic mouth. It breathed in vacuously, as if it would drain the city of oxygen. There was a terrible silence as Thomas watched and waited for the blast of fiery breath to fall and engulf every roof, street, and wall of the city.

Thomas shot violently up out of bed with a cry, panting as if he had been running a marathon. His silk sheets were drenched in sweat and his head was ringing and spinning. He shook himself and gripped his chest, trying to make his racing heart slow down. Thomas stared with bloodshot eyes into the darkness of his richly furnished bedroom, lit only by a dim shaft of moonlight falling through his tall, open window.

The comforting thought, ‘it was only a nightmare’ did not cross his mind even after he had caught his breath. He knew what dreams felt like—this was different. Thomas felt somehow violated, oppressed by the dream, as if something had synched his head down and forced him to watch the horrible scene unfold. Thomas gazed out his window with a heart still racked with dread, knowing somewhere out there, beyond the city streets to the east, lay the sea. *‘Could this be the kind of dream Ruth was talking about?’* Thomas wondered.

The thundering sound of the monster from the vision would not stop echoing in his sore brain. Then a thought occurred to him. Had he actually heard something? Earthquakes were not altogether uncommon in Shiloh, but the sound had been less of a rumble and more of an explosion. Thomas threw his legs out of bed, eager to leave his cold sheets that were wet with sweat.

Standing up, Thomas crossed the bedroom to the north-facing window. From his second-story perspective in his parents’ Gold Quarter estate, he could see far over the rooftops. Down to the east, he could just see the glint of the moonlit waves in the harbor, along with the ever-burning lights of the shipyards. Northward, directly in front of Thomas’ window, the city rooftops rolled like waves over the hilly terrain toward the Blue Quarter, where he knew most of the northern refugee population lived. Something in that direction caught his eye. A column of black smoke spiraled upward, barely noticeable in the night sky.

Before Thomas could apply serious thought to what he saw, something moved below the window. He glanced down at the windowsill and noticed a twig had landed there. He glanced upward, even though he knew there were no tree branches high enough to reach over his window. Glancing down toward the dark garden below, he was just in time to see a second stick come rocketing upward, almost jabbing him in the eye. Thomas lurched back, then leaned over the windowsill with indignation to see whatever rascal was throwing twigs. At first, he saw very little in the dim shade of the garden, but then a raspy whisper crept up to him,

“Thomas! Hey! Would you let me up?”

The voice bewildered Thomas for a moment, his head still bleary from sleep.

“Who’s there?” Thomas called in a whisper.

“It’s Adam, you numskull!” A familiar face appeared in the moonlight below. Thomas knew his best friend’s face immediately, even when it was twisted in an expression of severe impatience.

“Now let me up before we wake the whole city!”

The additional confusion of why Adam was demanding to climb up into his parents’ estate now crossed Thomas’ slow mind.

“But... what are you doing here, Adam? It’s got to be hours till morning. Can’t this wait?” Then another thought crossed Thomas’ mind. He smiled, “Oh God... you’re not here to see Ruth, are you?”

“What? No!” Adam blustered, still trying to keep his volume to a minimum, “Just... Thomas would you just let me up?”

“I’m coming down.” Thomas said decisively. He could just hear Adam begin to sputter a fresh gauntlet of objections as he walked away from the window to put on his clothes and boots. Creeping stealthily downstairs, Thomas made his way to the back door, unlatching it quietly. Stepping out into the moonlit garden, he saw Adam just coming around the corner of a hedge. Adam’s dark curly hair hung over his uncommonly pale face and glacier-blue eyes, reminding Thomas that he was only a half-blood westerner. Thomas knew if his parents caught Adam lurking around the house, they would call the City Guard in a heartbeat.

“Alright, let’s go up.” Adam said, attempting to push past Thomas and get inside.

“Whoa, whoa...” Thomas whispered, catching his friend and holding him back, “What’s this all about first? You in some sort of trouble? Does this have to do with those crazy hermits you hang out with?”

Adam stopped reluctantly, though with a slight air of offense punctuating his urgency. Looking impatiently past Thomas to the shelter of the house, he said,

“It’d take too long to explain. And they’re serious Christ-followers, not crazy hermits. There’s a difference. Anyway, I can explain once we’re inside.”

Just then, there was a sudden rumble like thunder, though to Thomas’ ear it lasted much longer than an ordinary roll of thunder and had a sharper crack. Both boys lifted their heads, eyes wide in the sound's direction. It soon dissipated, leaving only the responding sound of barking dogs echoing through the night-time streets.

“What was that? A storm?” Thomas said.

“There’ve been riots in the Blue Quarter all evening.” Adam informed, “They started peacefully early tonight but they’re turning violent.”

As Adam finished saying this, a light from inside the house behind them switched on. Instinctively, the two of them dashed like intruding raccoons behind the hedge along the wall of the house. Thomas crouched down, waiting for the light to go off, but Adam had already begun to creep along the hedged wall, out to the other end of the garden.

“Where are you going?” Thomas whispered hastily.

“I’m going to go check it out. You coming?” Adam replied, shooting a roguish grin back at Thomas.

“What! The riots? Are you crazy?” Thomas objected in as quiet a whisper as he could manage for his level of frustration. But Adam had already rounded the corner of the house and had left

Thomas to either go back inside or to follow his foolhardy friend. After a moment's deliberation, Thomas groaned and followed Adam, keeping low and quiet.

Rounding the corner of the house, he could see across the shadowy garden where there was a short, iron-wrought fence dividing the garden from the street. Adam had just vaulted the fence and was motioning for Thomas to come over. Thomas scurried across the garden lawn and leaped the fence in a bound, landing squarely on the other in the orange glow of the streetlights.

“Wow, look at you! Pretty spry for an aristocrat.” Adam teased. Thomas slugged him on the shoulder before laughing and beginning up the road, saying,

“It’s this way, right?”

“Maybe if you were driving your motor car. This way, I’ll show you a shortcut to the Blue Quarter.” With that, Adam darted across the street and over a low fence and into the neighboring lawn of another richly landscaped Gold Quarter estate. Thomas followed, feeling a thrilling mixture of fear and excitement.

They darted through lightless gardens and along dark hedgerows, jumping fences and, at one point, narrowly escaping the teeth of a barking dog. Before long, Thomas found himself following Adam over another fence into a dark drainage canal. The ground was muddy and overgrown with tall weeds. They followed this downhill northward in the dark for some time, the roofs and walls on either side of the canal steadily decreasing in opulence as they passed out of the Gold Quarter and into the outskirts of the Blue Quarter.

Eventually, the canal degraded into a smelly, sodden trench in the dirt with slime-covered brick walls on either side. Above these retention walls, flat-roofed cinder block structures replaced the wealthy estates. Electric wires criss-crossed overhead and the flickering streetlights grew more and more sparse. The surrounding air filled with the sounds of distant activity, something like many raised voices and chanting only a few blocks away.

As they continued along the bottom of the drainage canal, wood crates, canvas tarps, and other flotsam appeared, stacked up along the walls and slowing their progress. Judging by the smell of the ramshackle structures, they were inhabited dwellings. Thomas covered his nose with his

sleeve. He had been to the Blue Quarter many times before, but never in so desperate a neighborhood as this. As Adam led on around a gradual curve in the canal, Thomas realized that the slum of boxes and tarps completely blocked their way, and just beyond the canal turned into a tunnel, going into the dark depths of the city.

“Here’s where we go up.” Adam said, pointing toward a precarious stack of crates leading up to the top of the retention wall of the canal. Over the lip of the canal, Thomas could see nothing but the windowed faces of warped slum houses. As Thomas was trying to gauge how best to scale the makeshift stairway of garbage, he felt a firm, boney hand grasp his elbow.

Whirling around with a cry of surprise, he looked into the shriveled, gaunt, tattooed face of a hunched and ancient-looking man. Thomas knew without thinking that this was one of the Kriq. He knew because of the man’s sickly white skin with its characteristic bluish hue, for which the Blue Quarter was named.

The ancient man immediately began speaking in his incoherent northern dialect, still tightly gripping Thomas’ arm. His face expressed some dire and urgent pronouncement which Thomas could not decipher. Adam swooped in and immediately began replying to the old man in the same dialect, gently placing his hands on the man’s forearm and shoulder. The old man released his grip and turned his attention to Adam, who continued to speak rapidly and respectfully, keeping his head bowed slightly to the old man.

Just then, another reverberating rumble of an explosion from the surface vibrated the muddy ground of the canal. The old man muttered something to the boys and quickly slunk back into the hovel he had come from.

“What was he saying?” Thomas asked, a tremor of fear exposing itself in his voice.

“He was just saying not to go up because of the fighting.” Adam said, turning his face back up to the makeshift staircase of boxes. He immediately jumped up on the first crate.

“Wait, Adam!” Thomas objected, “Maybe we should take his advice. It’s not safe. We should go back home.”

Before Adam could reply, an unmistakable sound met their ears from the incoherent commotion from the streets above. The crackle of automatic gunfire. The screams which followed the sound made it clear what they had just heard. Adam glanced at Thomas with a face full of fear, but fear punctuated by a resolution not to run. He turned and immediately flew up the stairs. Thomas raced after him, shouting,

“Adam, you idiot! Come back! You’ll get killed!”

Adam whirled around and faced Thomas with such severity that Thomas’ words withered in his mouth.

“They need help! I have to do something!” Adam shouted, “You can run home. I have to try to help.” He turned again and rushed up the stairs.

“But what can you possibly do to help?” Thomas shouted back. But Adam was already over the top and out of sight. Thomas cursed and hurried up after his friend.

Peeking over the top of the stairs to the level ground, he found Adam had brought him to the inner depths of the Blue Quarter slums, with its dense walls and narrow streets crowding in around him. Thomas flinched back as a handful of Kriq men came running from the right and disappeared around a corner to Thomas’ left.

Thomas waited and listened. There was shouting in the streets nearby, but no more gunshots. He felt it might be safe to go out now. But no sooner had he set both feet onto the filthy pavement than another rattle of gunfire reverberated through the streets close by. Thomas ducked instinctively, feeling the adrenaline ignite his body. But his need to find Adam was stronger than the fear.

“Adam, you idiot!” Thomas muttered to himself through his teeth, “What have you gotten yourself into this time?”

Slipping to the corner of a concrete wall, Thomas peered into the adjacent street just in time to see Adam disappear down another street, toward the gunshots, while another group of Kriq men and women fled in the opposite direction.

“That fool’s going to get himself killed!” Thomas hissed, darting out into the street while trying to keep his head down. Coming to the corner where he had last seen Adam, he peaked around and saw a steady trickle of people running down a street. But, to Thomas’ confusion, not all the fleeing people were the pale Kriq. Many appeared to be the darker-skinned western people, but oddly dressed in yellow tunics. He could see smoke billowing in the sky from somewhere in the slums, in the direction everyone was running from.

“What in God’s name is going on here?” Thomas murmured to himself. Against all his instincts, he began moving toward the cross-street where everyone was fleeing, knowing Adam would be somewhere among them.

Another rattle of machinegun shots thudded through the heavy air of the street, but Thomas kept pushing on until he could look in the direction everyone was fleeing from. It was an uncommonly wide thoroughfare, evidently one of the main avenues of the Blue Quarter, and Thomas could see a long way down it. A building on the right side of the street about a hundred yards off was a blazing ball of fire, with most of its front wall blown out from. Another series of gunshots crackled sharply in the air, and this time Thomas could see the muzzle-flashes from a rooftop near the blazing building. It appeared to be a Kriq militiaman, dressed in ragged, dark clothes. He was firing down at an unseen target, thankfully away from Thomas’ direction.

Thomas was almost ready to give in to his fear and flee with the rest of the crowd when he caught sight of Adam and one of the people in yellow. They had their backs to him, hunched near an alley several yards away. Thomas ignored the clawing dread in his stomach long enough to move into the street and toward his friend. As he came near, he said with strong irritation,

“Adam, c’mon! Are you crazy?” But as he said this, he saw what they were doing. A Kriq woman lay on her back, her forehead oozing blood from a nasty gash. Adam was supporting her head while the man in yellow was preparing bandages. Without acknowledging Thomas’ words, Adam said urgently,

“Thomas, come here! Apply some pressure on this gauze. Lightly though.” With his free hand, Adam thrust a wad of white cloth at Thomas while the man in yellow moved aside, ripping up a

sheet of white cloth into strips. Thomas quickly pressed a ball of white gauze down on the woman's bleeding head.

"That's enough. Now stand back." The man in yellow said, pushing Thomas aside in order to wrap the bandage around the woman's head. As he did this, Thomas looked at the man and noticed a large wooden cross hanging from a cord around his neck. His face was dark and bearded and his hair was wild and unkempt. Thomas turned to glance up to where he had seen the militiaman firing. He was just in time to see a hail of bullets from the street send the man sprawling with a puff of vaporized blood. Thomas felt his heart freeze in his chest. He turned to Adam again with fresh panic, saying,

"Adam, we have to go! Now!"

The man in yellow looked up at Adam, saying calmly, as if there were no imminent danger,

"I have her safely now. You can go."

Adam nodded and leaped up, seizing Thomas by the arm. The two of them set off running down the thoroughfare with the sparse remainder of the fleeing crowd until Adam suddenly branched off, pulling Thomas into an alley with him. As they ran, Thomas said between gasping breaths,

"Adam... what's going on? What happened?"

Adam did not speak, but kept running. Alley after alley they ran, weaving through streets and byways like a maze. Before long they were alone, back on streets Thomas was familiar with, but despite the familiarity, Thomas still felt strong fear thudding in his veins as if a bullet would come ripping through his back at any moment. Still, Adam said nothing.

The gray of early morning was breaking cheerlessly in the cool, moist air around them. They had stopped running now, their bodies sore and weak from sprinting. The sounds of the gunshots were gone, but they seemed to keep echoing in Thomas' head. Finally, Adam stopped and sat down abruptly on the pavement, leaning his back against the brickwork of a shabby storefront. Thomas remained standing, looking long and confusedly at his friend,

"Adam... what just happened?" Thomas said again, his voice shaking with anxiety.

“He said it started as a peaceful protest... something to do with labor-laws and northern refugees.” Adam began, looking at the blood that was still on his hands from the woman’s head wound, “Then someone blew up a City Guard outpost. No one knows who’s responsible... but I tell you, it couldn’t have been the Kriq. They’re a peaceful people!” Adam shouted, his confusion of emotions becoming clear to Thomas. Adam went on, “I don’t understand. They were shooting at westerners. I know them, they would never do this. They came here to escape the fighting in the north.” Adam’s tears began to flow freely in streaks down his dirt-smearred face.

Thomas looked back in the direction they had come from, all of it downhill. He could see the rugged rooftops of the Blue Quarter, and the continuing column of smoke rising into the atmosphere from where the outpost had been attacked. Thomas clenched his jaw, feeling his old fear fermenting into anger.

“I guess they’d had enough of being ignored.” Thomas said, “Terrorism will definitely get the Arch Prophet’s attention, but probably not the way they intended.”

“That’s not it!” Adam snapped, “They’re not terrorists! They’re just trying to find peace. This isn’t right.”

Just then, the sound of hooves reverberated through the quiet, early morning street. They looked up and saw three mounted City Guard officers sauntering in their direction. Thomas and Adam immediately stopped talking, and Adam turned his face away from the officers.

“Why don’t we ask them what’s been going on?” Thomas inquired, “I’m sure they have a clearer idea of who did what.”

“Thomas! No!” Adam hissed under his breath, still not looking in the direction of the officers, “Don’t speak to them...”

But Thomas was already walking toward the mounted men.

“You two!” One officer called out, “You should both get inside. There’s been shootings in the Blue Quarter and everyone is mandated to stay indoors.”

“Yes, of course, but can you tell me what’s been happening?”

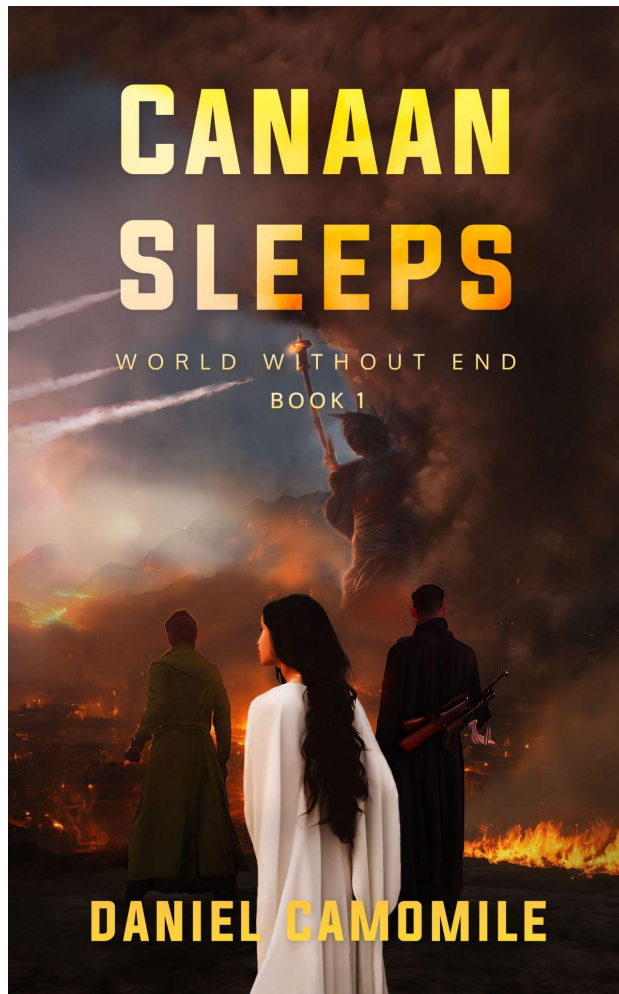
“You’ll hear all about it in the gazette, boy. Northern terrorists bombed a government depot. The streets aren’t safe, now get home!” another of the officers barked. They were about to move on when the officer’s eyes fell on the blood coating Thomas’s hands.

“My God! Are you hurt?” The first officer said, visibly the younger of the three. The second officer quickly interjected,

“Show us your identification.”

Adam stood up suddenly, beginning to walk away. The officer then whipped out his revolver, which he had been fingering on his hip and pointed it at Adam, shouting,

“If you run, I shoot!” Adam froze and stood still. The officer kept his weapon drawn, saying, “You’re both coming with us.”



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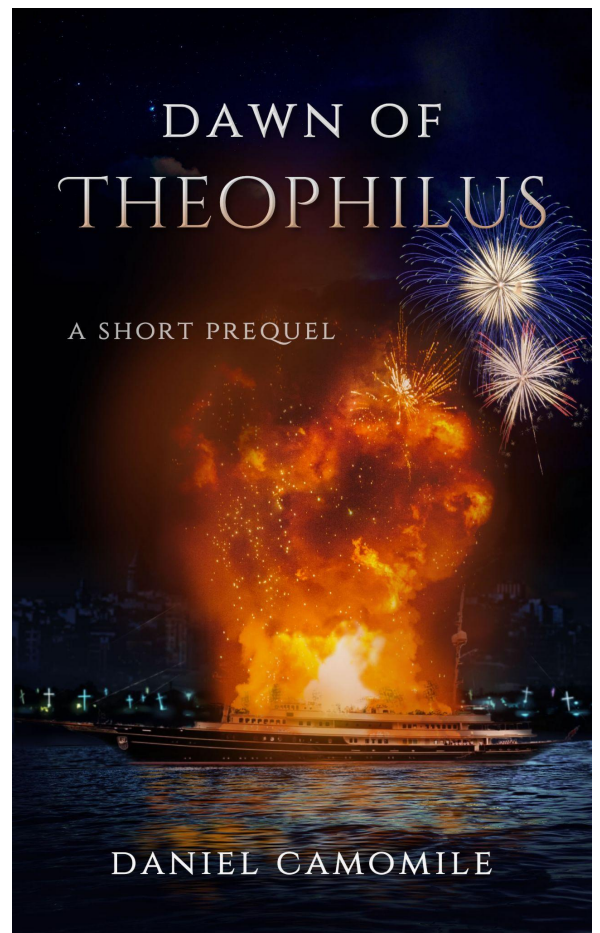
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About the Author



Hi, I'm Daniel. I'm a Christian writer and artist who believes in the power of fiction to teach theology to the heart and not just the head. I'm fascinated by writing that can harness the imagination to go theologically deeper than classroom lectures could ever go.

Dawn of Theophilus is the prequel to my upcoming Young Adult Dystopia series. You can get the first book, *Canaan Sleeps*, at book retailers starting **February 1, 2023**.

CANAAN SLEEPS: A YA DYSTOPIA NOVEL

The last Christian city has nightmares of a coming doom.

Centuries after the Great Cataclysm restarted civilization, the perfect Christian city of Shiloh emerges as a beacon of power and prosperity to the onlooking world. But, as dreams about Jesus and fears of a coming disaster spread throughout the slums of the city, complacent believers are urged to action. When a letter pried from the dead hands of an enemy spy tells of Shiloh's coming doom, who can be believed? The Arch Prophet or this madman writing from across the sea? Thomas, Ruth, and Adam must decide. The lives of thousands rest in their hands, and time is running out.

You can keep up with the progress of this series and get alerts as books come out by subscribing to my newsletter and by visiting my [website here](#).