



# Splinters

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By Tony Sheppard

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## Prologue

**Solihull England – 1950**

It had been the kind of impossibly hot summer's day when insects seem too tired to fly. Later, when the sun began to sink below the horizon, they rose like golden clouds of pollen. Prompted by a supernatural air that chilled the ensuing night, birds left the parched land and flew in chevron flocks towards an orange and cinnamon-hued sunset.

For those who had the ability to see it, the ghost-like apparition of a man soared across the heavens. Hovering above the Earth in the perfect emblem of the letter Y, his long fair hair shivered with energy. Telepathically, he spoke to those who had the ears to hear him: “Memories of the dead, I command you to listen to my words.”

The response was immediate: collective memories, or souls, which had left the bodies of people who had died and yet remained in the afterlife, responded.

“Pythagoras, Master of the Harmony of the Spheres, I hear you,” said the soul of a man.

“Most revered of Druids and seers, we hear you,” said another, this time the soul of a woman.

“Man is abandoning his fear of God and descending into a secular way of life!” boomed Pythagoras, ominously.

“Why should we concern ourselves, O mighty one?” asked a different soul.

The apparition of the Druid quivered. He continued, “I am but a servant of *The Almighty*, creator of the universe and all therein. This emblem, Y, hereafter signifies the straight and narrow path of virtue, which is one, but, if once deviated from, the path will breach and ever widen. If the situation is not reversed, nation will fight nation and mankind will destroy itself.”

“But what can we do?” said another, indifferently. “They're still rebuilding after yet *another* world war. There isn't time.”

Somewhere in the cold never-ending cycle of the birth and death of galaxies, a star collapsed in on itself, lighting up the distant heavens. When Pythagoras spoke again, his energy could be seen rippling across the void in sweeping waves. “Time! What is time? You are what you are and know the way.”

“What d'you mean?”

“Do you not possess between you all the knowledge and understanding man has acquired since time began? Transmigration into the minds of men and women is the only way to prevent mankind from annihilating himself and every species on Earth. Our spirits must return to Earth. Once there, your dispersal will be indiscriminate, but *I* must wait for a special person whose body I will inhabit. Prepare to be returned to a temporary home.”

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Behind St Mary's Church, Solihull, England, is an incline leading to a flat wooded area of about three acres. On this plateau, last inhabited by the d' Oddingswell family, manorial lords of Solihull in 1320, a Celtic homestead once bustled with life. No buildings remain to give an idea of what the settlement looked like, but a dried-out moat marks its boundary. In this place, some 20 metres from the moat and on the unprotected side of the complex, stood the great oak tree.

The great oak tree on the Celtic homestead braced itself against a chill wind, now sharp and scouring. Thin branches at its crown waved like a drowning man's arms searching for something to cling to. Leaves, unable to resist being pulled first one way then the other, released their fragile grips. It was as if the tree, in a desperate effort to salvage something from the situation, had jettisoned them to search for a safe place. The leaves and

their cargoes of acorns shimmered in the greying light as they fell. After the storm, the tree stood like a crucified martyr against a dark brooding sky. Then, Nature abandoned its ill-tempered little fling and launched into a passionate affair.

Thunder and lightning raged in the upper atmosphere! Positive and negative atoms smashed into each other with increasing ferocity, violating the air around. Countless souls allowed themselves to be drawn in to a boiling mass of clouds, which spread across the sky as opposing forces of nature battled against each other. From the prehistoric man who discovered how to make fire, through the age of Greek philosophers and scholars, to the mathematical genius of the Chinese, the heroic conquerors such as Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great, through the Roman Empire, the Renaissance and the greatest empire the world had ever known, the British Empire, souls prepared themselves to be transported back to Earth.

With an ear-splitting crackle, a bolt of golden lightning in the shape of the letter Y reached out from the heavens before accelerating to strike the uppermost branches of the great oak tree. Telepathic energy surged through every branch and fibre of the tree before bursting through its roots and into the ground. Finally, the great oak tree lay felled and defeated.

What remained cooled. The swollen, sap-filled veins contracted, but whereas the electricity had dissipated, the energy of the souls, including that of the Druid, remained

in the coagulating mess. In the years to come, any person who came into contact with remnants of the great oak tree, although a splinter more often than not, would become a host to the soul of a dead person. That person would not even realise the splinter was there until the soul had infused their blood and reached their brain. Some were the souls of people whose religious faith had kept them going in times of persecution, and they would use their energy to support people who felt marginalised or threatened. However, other souls had also been drawn into the transmigration; malevolent souls whose evil machinations would create havoc in the minds of the people they infected...

Many years would pass before the shroud-covered supreme tempter of mankind would appear in pursuit of the ultimate prize - the souls of the human race. Then, with Armageddon looking inevitable, a final battle would take place between the forces of good and evil.

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