

THE SAR'IM CHRONICLES

BOOK 4: THE TERRAN CONFLICT



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THE SAR'IM CHRONICLES

Volume 2: THE BOOKS OF CONFLICT

Book 4: THE TERRAN CONFLICT

INSPIRED BY YAH'S HOLY SPIRIT



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INTRODUCTION

The Sar'im Chronicles is the title given to a series of books that will be divided into five distinct volumes. The first of these, *The Books of War*, contains three books that deal primarily with the theme of the eternal conflict between the powers of angels and demons. *The Books of War* set forth the history of this conflict, from its origin until it became fully manifest on Earth, bearing not only on the spiritual characters that are its principle players, but also the humans who are caught in the middle.

Volume 2: The Books of Conflict, deal with the theme on a more personal level. Gone are the grandiose battles that take place in the Heavenly Kingdom, above the Ark, at the Tower of Babel. The three books that fall under this heading show how individual characters, such as Abraham and Moses, deal with the spiritual world and its factors, and they reveal the fact that individual choices have a great impact on the history of our world.

The third and fourth volumes, likewise, present unique viewpoints to the spiritual controversy, but the fifth volume is unique even among these. *Volume 5: The Books of Ages* present disjoint episodes from the history of the warfare, nevertheless they hang together on the central idea that Yahshua the Messiah (Jesus the Christ) was ordained from the foundation of the world to present Himself as a Sacrifice for fallen man. This eternal truth has had an impact both before and after the incident actually occurred, and the age in which men are living matters not nearly as much as the quality of that man's character as it relates to the divine purpose.

— David Aguilar

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CAST OF ANGELIC CHARACTERS

Holy Angels

Adriel (My Help is El) – A Virtue
Anael (Glory of El) – A Principality, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
As'fael (Added by El) – A Principality, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Camael (He Who Sees El) – An Archangelic Power whose animal form is the Eagle
Da'athiel (Knowledge of El) – A Cherubic Oracle
Dumah – (Silence) A Virtue, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Gabriel (Strong One of El) – An Archangelic Cherub, and one of the Shomerim or Covering Cherubs
Israfel (Burning of El) – Chief of the Seraphim, one of the Twelve Sar'im and a temporary Archangel
Jehoel (Mediator of El) – A Seraph, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Lahatiel (Burning of El) – Chief of the Or-Ikari'im (Holy Principalities)
Matmoniel (Minister of El) – A Dominion, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Michael (One Who is Like El) – Divinity, One of the Elohim Union, Captain of the Host of Heaven, Voice of Yahweh
Noggaiel (Shining of El) – A Seraph, guardian of the human Arphaxad
Omeriel (Promise of El) – A Dominion, guardian of the human Abram/Abraham
Puriel (Flame of El) – Chief of the Cherubim
Raphael (Healing of El) – An Archangelic Virtue whose animal form is the Bull
Raziel (Mystery of El) – A Cherub, and one of the Shomerim or Covering Cherubs
Shabbatiel (Rest of El) – A Power, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Tahariel (Purity of El) – A Dominion
Tamael (Perfection of El) – A Dominion
Uriel (Fire of El) – An Archangelic Throne whose animal form is the Lion
Uzziel (Strength of El) – Chief of the Malakim, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Za'afiel (Wrath of El) – A Cherub, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Zadkiel (Righteousness of El) – Chief of the Ophanim, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Zahariel (Brightness of El) – Chief of the Hashmallim, and one of the Twelve Sar'im
Zephon (Looking Out) – A Cherubic Oracle

Fallen Angels

Abaddon (Destroyer) – A fallen Archangelic Cherub whose animal form is the Wolf
Achariel (Troubler of El) – A fallen Virtue
Akaiel (Consumption of El) – A fallen Throne of the House of Petahel
Arioch (Fierce Lion) – A fallen Archangelic Principality whose animal form is the Lion
Ashaniel (Smoke of El) – A fallen Power of the House of Arioch
Azazel/Lucifer/Satan (Strong One of El/Adversary) – A fallen Cherub, chief of the demons, whose animal form is the Serpent/Dragon
Azrael (Helped by El) – Chief of the fallen Cherubim, arch demon whose animal form is the Raven
Chayil (Legion) – Chief of the fallen Principalities, regent of Babel
Chabariel (Unity of El) – A fallen Throne-angel
Chiun (Pillar) – A fallen Seraph, chief of the Pagan Mysteries
Kaspiel (Sorcery of El) – Chief of the fallen Powers, high sorcerer of Pandemonium
Mar/Sh'fiel/Zophiel (Bitterness) – A fallen Cherub of the House of Abaddon
Moloch (King) – A fallen Cherub whose form is the Bull
Nergal (Hero) – A fallen Throne-angel, demonic tutor of Tammuz
Nisroch (Fierce Eagle) – A fallen Seraphic Archangel whose animal form is the Eagle
Petahel (Impulse of El) – A fallen Seraphic arch demon whose animal form is the Spider
Revachiel (Gaining of El) – A fallen Principality and master of the Spear
Sammael (Poison of El) – A fallen Archangelic Power whose animal form is the Boar
Zaphkiel (Knowledge of El) – A fallen Power, high sorcerer of Pandemonium

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CAST OF HUMAN CHARACTERS

Abimelech (My Father is King) – King of the region of Gerar in Canaan
Abram/Abraham (High Father/Father of Many) – A Shemite, progenitor of Israelites and Ishmaelites
Amraphel (Speaker of Darkness) – A king of Shinar after the destruction of Babylon
Aner (Boy) – An Amorite chieftain and an ally of Abram
Arioch (Fierce Lion) – A king of the region of Elessar
Arioch (Fierce Lion) – Son of Tammuz, grandson of Semiramis
Arphaxad (One Who Heals, The Curse Broken) – A son of Shem
Arvad (He Will Break Loose) – A Hamite who fled from Shinar to dwell with Shem
Ashkenaz (A Man Scattered) – A Shemite who remained in the region of Ararat
Asshur (Strength) – Forefather of the Assyrians
Bera (Son of Evil) – A king of Sodom
Birsha (In Iniquity) – A king of Gomorrah
Canaan (Lowland) – A son of Ham and grandson of Noah, who gave his name to a region in the middle east
Chedorlaomer (Handful of Sheaves) – A king of Elam
Cush (Burnt) – A son of Ham and grandson of Noah
Eliezer (Comforter) – Chief steward of the house of Abram
Enoch (Dedicated) – An antediluvian, and current citizen of Heaven
Eschol (Cluster) – An Amorite chieftain and an ally of Abram
Gether (Fear) – A grandson of Shem, and one of the Neo-Nephilim
Hagar (*Arabic*: Flight) – An Egyptian handmaiden of Sarai/Sarah, mother of Ishmael
Ham (Hot) – A son of Noah, and progenitor of the Hamites
Haran (Man of Mountains) – A son of Terah, brother of Abram
Hul (Circle) – A grandson of Shem
Isaac (He laughs) – Son of Abraham and Sarah
Ishmael (Heard by El) – Son of Abraham and Hagar
Ishtar (Star) – A composite being formed by Petahel's possession of Yunah
Japheth (Opened) – A son of Noah, and progenitor of the Japhethites
Jebus (Threshingplace) – A son of Canaan, and high priest of the Pagan Mysteries
King of Bela – An unnamed king of the city of Bela (near Sodom)
Lot (Veiled) – Son of Haran, nephew of Abram
Lud (Strife) – A son of Mizraim, the first prince of Egypt and former husband of Semiramis
Magog (Land of Mountains) – A son of Japheth
Mamre (Strength) – An Amorite chieftain and an ally of Abram
Mizraim (Double Path) – A son of Ham, and progenitor of the native Egyptians
Nahor (Snorting) – A son of Terah, brother of Abram
Noah (Rest) – Builder of the Ark, and father of all mankind after the Deluge
Pharaoh (Great House) – Unnamed king of Egypt during the time of Abraham's trip to that land.

Prince Admah – Unnamed son of Shinab, and prince of the city of Admah
Sabtecha (Striking) – A son of Cush, captain of the Babylonian armies
Salah (Sprout) – A son of Arphaxad
Sarai/Sarah (My Princess/Princess) – Wife of Abram, daughter of Terah, mother of Isaac
Semiramis/Yunah (Mother of the Branch/Dove) – Queen of Babylon, mother of Tammuz
Shem (Name) – A son of Noah, and progenitor of the Shemites
Shemeber (Lofty Flight) – King of the city of Zeboim
Shinab (Splendor of The Father) – King of the city of Admah
Tammuz (Sprout of Life) – Son of Semiramis, and king of Babylon
Terah (Delay) – Father of Abram, former resident of Ur in Chaldea
Tidál (Great Son) – King of the Hamites and Japhethites who remained in Shinar after the fall of Babylon
Uz (Wooded) – A grandson of Shem, and one of the Neo-Nephilim

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PROLOGUE

*F*ear not.

I am called Dumah. Silence is my name, and silent am I, yet there are matters that must be known, therefore I have been sent to show you two things. I speak now to your mind and, though wakeful, you will dream. Though you do not sleep, you will see the things that I have to show unto you.

My brothers have spoken to you of the beginning, the start of the War, the entrance of sin into your world, and the dividing of your people. You have learned much about the angels, and how we came to find our place in the Kingdom of the Most High. We came to understand our freedom on the day that humanity lost its unity.

As our record has continued, we have found ourselves free to share more and more with you. Light has increased, and now still more is cast unto your path. Though I have not had much direct dealings with mankind for many years now, the time has come for you to know other things about the invisible world, and the world around you; but this time you will not be told – for I will not speak. This time, you will see for yourself. Two things will I show you regarding a land: the land known as Canaan. Remain at rest, but open your eyes to a time long ago...

And I looked and saw that it was twilight; and I saw a woman.

Seven years had passed since the fall of the Tower. Seven years had gone by, and the work of reconstruction had ceased; yet the iniquity that first shaped this rising monstrosity had not diminished. Indeed, in the time since the lightning had cast the builders to the ground and sheared brick from mortar, the wickedness of mankind had greatly increased, and the confusion of tongues that had come to pass as a result of El Michael's intervention did nothing to quell the tide of apostasy.

Yet in this the Heavenly Prince had not failed, for His purpose had been merely to scatter the humans, who had neglected to fulfill their commission to go forth into the world and repopulate its countries after the great Deluge. IaHWeH Himself does not restrict human freedom, and neither do His representatives, not the greatest nor the least.

The thing that took place atop the ruined Tower that night was therefore the result of all the evil that humanity had brought upon itself in the ages since the judgment of the Most High.

That evening two angels, Tahariel and Adriel, who had been watching over the darkened spiritual dome that covered the Tower of Babel, heard an infant's sudden, agonized scream. Where humans revel in iniquity and knowingly participate in sin, the vision of Heaven's messengers is largely closed off to the scene, and when the eyes of those righteous spirits turned in the direction of the painful sound, they beheld little but a cloud of night, darker by far than the natural shades of the dusk.

The Dominion Tahariel turned to his fellow angel and said, "The sound of pain... Let us enter the darkness and see its cause, for something gnaws at my essence from that direction."

Adriel, the Virtue who stood with him, replied, "With prayer, we will be able to break through the barrier."

Many of the original worshippers at the Tower's great City had fled at the confusion of tongues. They had taken their idolatry deep into other lands, and as a result the stain of darkness that hung over the city and its high Temple like an inky veil was no longer entirely forbidden to the holy angels. During the time of its building, and during the battle to scatter its residents, the darkness was so great that none but the mighty angels Gabriel and Raziel could break through – but though the hearts of its remaining inhabitants had grown even worse since that time their numbers had decreased to the point where a visit, though unpleasant, was possible.

"Grant us your protection, O Creator, O Throne," said Adriel. "Grant us your might, and bind the eyes of those who would prevent us from seeking out the cause of an infant's suffering. Let those who would withstand us be made prisoners of the very darkness they have inspired, and may the walls of this physical plane be made walls through which their eyes cannot freely pass."

With these words on their lips and these thoughts in their essences, the two faithful servants of the Eternal Kingdom dove down to the earth over which they had been hovering, and entered the dome of darkness at its base.

Babylon was home to a large cloud of evil spirits. Though Lucifer himself had fled in shame when the angelic Host defeated him in the skies above the Tower, some of his most powerful allies had returned to guide the progress of the apostates in silence, never revealing themselves openly to the humans who continued to await the return of their dark masters. Yet while they waited they were indeed being led, and Adriel and Tahariel had a hard time keeping out of their leaders' sight as they approached the Tower as quickly and quietly as they could.

These were strange rules under which the two angels were operating, but within the precincts of sin they held no true power. Not one faithful soul was nearby, thus all the pair could do was observe, and attempt to stay hidden from sight. Their prayer had made their beings, their spiritual bodies, more difficult to detect by the demons around them, yet for sheer numbers it was not impossible that they could be spotted.

One following the other, they flew up to the rooftops and leapt from roof to roof, their long veils trailing after them like white ribbons. At times they traveled above the walls, at times they descended into the empty rooms below them, and at times they ran through the streets of the shadowy brick city. As they stood along the side of one large building, pressing next to the walls that, because of their prayer, afforded them cover, Tahariel looked around the corner to see one of the many soldiers of Satan approaching.

“Into the house,” he whispered to Adriel’s mind, and the two passed into the dwelling just as the demon rounded the corner. As soon as they sensed the spirit’s departure from the immediate area, the two angels slipped again through the material surface of the wall and continued their journey toward the greatest monument of human pride.

Before long, the uneven silhouette of the Tower of Babel was before them, a black shadow against a dark dome against an indigo sky. The two stared upward, knowing that the cry to which they had responded had rung out from the very top of the structure they were eying. It had been some time since the holy angels had seen this building, but the passage of years had not dulled the unpleasantness of the memories associated with it.

Wasting no time, although they both realized that no further cry had followed the first, the two angels spread their wings and soared up the side of the Tower facing the least populated portion of the city. Like two tiny points of light they ascended, sticking close to the streaked and cracked bricks; and on their guard lest any demon should see them and broadcast its thoughts to the army of fallen angels that they knew were restlessly huddled on every side.

With a flash of speed the two unseen visitors cleared the rim of the broken summit, and crouched down behind some loose masonry. They peered around their hiding place with faintly glowing eyes, and those eyes widened with shock at what they perceived in the center of that ruined roof.

They saw, among other things, a woman.

She was known by many names, but her name at birth had been Yunah, the Dove. Through her indulgences and sins, she had risen in power and influence in the family of Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah, and with her husband Nimrod had ruled over this city and its people during the height of its power.

When Arphaxad, the son of Shem, another son of Noah, had entered into the heart of the city in an attempt to turn the rebellious humans from their wicked ways, their rejection of his message had sealed their fate, and had initiated the last great conflict between the angels and their fallen brethren. Though Nimrod had been slain even before that battle occurred, his wife had taken the throne and reigned in his memory, using the demons’ knowledge of spiritual things to weave a great web of deception over the hearts and minds of the Babylonians.

Her son Tammuz was set up as the re-incarnate form of his father and, though he was only seven years old, was already being educated in the ways of the devils. Truly, the demons had not appeared to Yunah or any other human in a visible way since the fall of the Tower, but this did not prevent the queen, also known by the name *Semiramis*, from giving her child the benefit of all she had learned under their tutelage.

Semiramis had given birth to another son in the years since her husband's death – but it was that son that had cried out into the night, and it was that cry that had drawn the two angels to the scene of this great evil, where they stared in horror at what they there beheld.

Yunah was no less beautiful for the passage of seven years. Indeed, humans in those days lived more than twice as long as they now do, and though the mother of two and the queen of a city, she appeared as little more than a maiden, and one of the most appealing of maidens the world had ever seen. Her light hair and fair eyes, her soft skin and her songlike voice, these had made her the great envy of Nimrod, though even he had taken her from Lud, her first husband. There was wickedness in those seductive eyes, however, and coldness in that melodious voice. Her heart was no longer that of a human, having long since turned to stone.

The evidence of that tragic transformation was at no time more dramatically revealed than that night, and before those visitors, for her second son lay dead before her, a tiny but fatal wound in his chest. Atop a stone altar, engraved with the images of doves, a pagan high-priest named Jebus was preparing the tiny body to be consumed by fire. Queen Semiramis had plunged the knife, but now she knelt before an emblem drawn in blood on the roof of Babel's Tower.

Jebus was obedient to his queen's command, but he, the cousin of her dead husband, was not so spiritually dead that he could carry out this sacrificial ritual without question. After the division of tongues, Jebus had been one of the main laborers in gathering together those who spoke the queen's language, and in ensuring that they did not flee the city completely. He had been mighty in Yunah's cause, not hesitating to use violence if necessary to secure a loyal following for his cousin's wife. He had helped her to establish the rituals incorporating the memory of her dead husband, the promise of her firstborn son, and the demonic powers of sorcery into the religion of Babel, and he was one of the queen's most trusted advisors. Yet for all this, he was uneasy as he poured the oil over the infant's still form.

"This is your son," he had said to Yunah when she told him of the "new ritual" she had decided to perform. "He is but a year old!"

"I have only one son, my firstborn – my only begotten," she replied with irritation. "The others are fodder for the gods."

Fodder for the gods the child had indeed become, and Yunah's gods approved of the sacrifice. Behind the woman, looking intently at the activities of Jebus, several of the

most powerful demons had gathered, and were smiling with terrible satisfaction. Chiun, the fallen Seraph Kokabiel under his new name, was feeling a particular sense of triumph. Under Lucifer's direction he had instructed the demons to refrain from making their presence known to the humans under their power, and as a result the deluded citizens of Babel had resorted to a series of increasingly depraved rites and ceremonies in order to win their favor.

They spent days wailing in the streets, sacrificing both clean and unclean animals by the herds and flocks. They participated in ritual combat to stir their anger to a breaking point, in the hopes that their masters would enter into them as they had in the days before. They drank deeply of fermented liquors in an attempt to induce trances, they cut their flesh and chanted prayers... but throughout all this the demons held their silence.

Finally, atop the broken Tower, it had come to this – a mother had sacrificed her own child to win the favor of the demonic spirits. And it worked.

Beside Chiun, unseen by mortal eyes as were they all, stood Sammael, the prince of spiritual death. Alongside them lurked Azrael, a spirit of violence and warfare, and with him was Nisroch, the eagle of pride that had inadvertently led Nimrod into a foolish battle and an early death. The twin demons Kaspriel and Zaphkiel were there, high sorcerers of Lucifer's kingdom, and as they looked at each other in glee, the sinful Cherub Moloch, whose original name had been Yachadiel (Kindling of El), pushed between them and walked over to the Altar of The Dove attended by the human high-priest.

“Light the fire,” Moloch said, and the spirits heard him. So did Yunah, although she was not aware that the thought was not hers. “Light the fire,” she repeated, and Jibus did as he was commanded. Taking a torch from one of the four pillars around the altar, he touched the tip of the flame to the child's body, and the fire rushed over the sacrifice. Moloch spread his wings and drifted into the smoke of the offering as Tahariel and Adriel looked on; and the demon spoke again. “Lucifer has accepted this sacrifice. It is time.”

The demons that were assembled behind Yunah parted, and another dark spirit approached her, invisible to the two humans on Babylon's highest point. As the eyes of the spirits there all turned to acknowledge the newcomer, the two holy angels shifted their position to get a better view of what was happening. “No,” whispered Adriel to his companion. “This is a thing most foul!”

On the floor in front of Queen Semiramis was a hexagram, a six-pointed star in a perfect circle, all drawn in the child's red lifeblood, and behind her was the fallen spirit Petahel, one of the unholy Seraphim, once among the most honored in the courts of IaHWeH. He placed a hand upon Yunah's shoulder, and she felt his influence; for the first time in seven long years a demon was directly guiding a human being's activities.

The queen stood up slowly, half entranced by the familiar feeling returning to her after its lengthy absence, and began to step into the circle and its star. Petahel drew even closer

behind her, and the two angels rose to their feet, their desire for concealment gone in the awful revelation of what they were witnessing.

“In the name of the Most High, I exhort you to stop this at once!” Tahariel’s voice rang out in the night, and as he spoke these words both he and Adriel drew their swords. The kherevs, the spiritual weapons in their hands, glowed brightly, and then their surfaces began to glitter. With a quiet roar the blades burst into flame, and all across the City dark eyes turned to behold the sparkling stars in the distance atop the Tower of Babel.

Neither Yunah nor any of the other humans of Babylon were aware of any change, and the Queen made another step toward the center of the hexagram. The demons that were there, with the exception of Petahel, turned to the unwelcome intruders, and some of them began to laugh. Chiun was the first to speak, saying, “It is well for you to be here, servants of the Most High. You are a worthy audience for the activities of this great night. This is the day when everything changes, when we undo the scattering of humanity commanded by El Michael, and reunite mankind under the banner of Azazel our lord.”

Azazel... Chiun had spoken one of the angelic names of Lucifer, and he did not need to further explain his purpose to the Dominion and the Virtue with whom he was speaking. If the demons could truly unite mankind again under apostasy, they would quickly move to stamp out the humans that remained faithful under the guidance of the god-prince Shem, and the demons would have won an apparent victory over all the earth.

“Put away your weapons,” Chiun continued, “they have no power here.”

Semiramis took another step, and Adriel said, “If there is anything good remaining in that soul you have captured, the Spirit of IaH will do a work here before your eyes!” With that he leaped into the air and spread his wings. Before any of the demons could react he swooped down and struck at Yunah with his fiery blade just as she stepped into the evil star.

Adriel landed in a crouch on the ground beside the queen, his sword having passed directly through her body. If there was a spirit left to save within her, the flames of the Divine Presence would sting her, would awaken her conscience and perhaps, just perhaps, a miracle would occur. Yet before the high-priest, before the assembled demons, and before the two holy angels, Yunah took one last step, and stood in the center of the symbol.

The queen raised her hands to the sky and began to chant. She called on the names of her former tutors; she intoned the words they had given her by which she could call them. She urged them to accept the sacrifice of her own flesh and blood, and she pledged her soul to her invisible masters. The angels there knew that her soul had been given to dark forces long ago, for the blade of the kherev had not so much as brought one cherished memory to mind. The demons knew it also, and Petahel stepped into the circle of summoning along with the human to claim his prize.

“For seven years I have waited,” he said, and his voice was still musical with the talents he possessed in Heaven centuries ago. Without another word he stepped once more toward the human, and faded from the sight of the other spirits.

Yunah opened her eyes, and for just an instant they flickered with opalescent hues. The angels had seen those eyes before, once, long ago. Enoch, the son of Cain, had possessed eyes like these, and now the old sorcery had been restored to humanity – here was a possession more complete than any before it, for the will of the human was perfectly blended with that of the demon. The devilish spirit could all but recede; the human was not a captive, but a willing participant, and all that Petahel needed to do was convey the mind and plans of Lucifer to their eager subject.

Queen Semiramis opened her mouth and spoke a single word, giving a name to the union of flesh and spirit that now stood within the center of the hexagram. “*Ishtar*.”

Jebus looked up from the burning body at the sound of Yunah’s voice, and said, “My queen?”

“Do not be afraid,” she said to him, “We have accomplished that which we have set out to accomplish. I have summoned the spirits, and they have been obedient to my voice.”

“Obedient?” Jebus could do little but ask brief, hesitant questions, for somewhere in his spirit, he knew that something very bad had just taken place. The high-priest knew that Yunah and the people of Babylon had spent years in pitiful supplication, begging the demons for some sign of their presence, and now Semiramis was speaking of control?

“Yes,” she replied. “We have been misled by our former teachers. Some may be powerful, that is true... but some we can command; and I have been given authority over all the spirits of darkness.” She looked up into the sky and said, “They will do as I direct them.”

“What have you done?” Adriel asked in horror.

“We have given them exactly what they have always wanted,” Zaphkiel responded. “We have given them a sense of control.”

“But we are the masters here,” Kaspriel said, “and *you* must never forget that either!”

Ishtar, that union of Yunah and Petahel, turned from the Altar of The Dove, from that scene of idolatry and sin, where the fires of destruction consumed a sacrifice to a false, unholy spirit. She looked directly at the place where Adriel and Tahariel stood, and she saw them. “Make them suffer,” she said, knowing that the holy angels could not be entirely destroyed by even the most powerful of the fallen ones. Jebus just continued to look at her in confused silence.

Eagerly, joyfully, Azrael drew his dark blade. As the swords of the holy angels had burst into bright, golden flames, so the blade of the demon's kherev began to ripple with dark energy, tendrils of sinful power trailing along the edge of his weapon.

This is a dark scene, son of man, and it must get darker still, but I have entrusted you with this knowledge, for you must now know about the Araphel. You have seen a child sacrificed in flames on the altar of a dove, and you have seen the dark fire in the sword of a demon.

In the Kingdom of Heaven there burns a light brighter than human eyes can behold, a light before which even we angels veil our eyes. This is the Shekinah, the cloud of light that is known among your people as the Holy Spirit; It is often represented as a Dove, and thus you see the perversity attending the rituals atop Babel's Tower that night. The Shekinah is a Mystery; It is the pure and unlimited essence of IaHWeH Himself, and in that Spirit is freedom, love and joy, and the healing of all nations from sin and death.

Yet should It be removed from the boundaries marked by the Covering Cherubim Gabriel and Raziel, it would destroy all that was impure, and absorb all that was holy. By the command of IaHWeH Himself the Shekinah is kept covered, and the Most High surrounds Himself with thick darkness to prevent His Presence from destroying His misled, human children before they can come to know Him.

The longsuffering of the Creator is a wonder in both Heaven and Earth, but it is not without consequences, for sin is an intruder, and the Presence of IaH was never meant to be so constrained. The consequence of freedom is Araphel, the dark side of "human nature" that is older than humanity; it was embodied by, and enshrined in, the evil angels at their fall. The abuse of freedom results in sin, and the environment of sin is that Cloud of Darkness, that Araphel, just as Love is the environment in which righteousness can exist. Under the dome of Araphel, such as that which surrounded the Tower of Babel, even (as the expression goes) "angels fear to tread."

It is Araphel, the perverse use of freedom, that the demons worship; it is Araphel that, if revered, produces selfishness and unrighteousness; it is Araphel that sparkles down the blades of demons, and shines with hellish light in the eyes of those who are wholly given to darkness.

When a human is struck by the Blade of The Spirit, conscience may awaken, and a keen sense of the desolation of sin is implanted in the soul. If the human gives attention to this call, he may well turn to the Throne and be healed. If a demon is struck by this bright weapon, he is overcome by the dread of a sure Judgment to come, and he is rendered unconscious, or nearly so, until he can cast off the immediate effects.

If an angel is wounded with a Blade of Araphel, he is assaulted by doubts and fears, and is likewise rendered helpless until he recovers or is healed. This was the nature of the war in Heaven, the wars on earth, and the conflicts that have taken place down to the Day of Redemption. I have used many words, more than I am accustomed to using, to

give you as clear a picture as I can of this matter; but know this primarily, that it was this injury with which Azrael threatened Adriel and Tahariel on that night, and the angels knew that they were greatly outnumbered by those who had them surrounded. This is the point at which I join the stream of these events.

As Azrael stepped forward with his weapon held in front of him, the two holy angels passed urgent, silent signals between themselves, and both of them dove off the Tower at the same time. The demons that had been gathered there erupted into the air to give chase, and the wicked spirits that had been watching the glow of holy swords in the distance flew nearer to cut off the angels' escape completely.

As the holy messengers found themselves trapped between a few, powerful spirits on one side and many, lesser demons on another, they prayed in their essences – and then they acted. With the ground beneath them almost wholly unguarded, the angels drove directly downward into the earth. Being spirit, they were not hindered by the physical matter, and they were able to easily parry the attacks of the few demons that opposed them with their shining weapons.

Once out from under the shadow of the Tower they moved with the speed of thought, and instantly burst through the other side of the planet into the open firmament of the heavens. Tahariel and Adriel turned around, only to see that a large portion of the demonic host had followed them, and they retreated into open space, waiting for an opportunity to bring forth a passageway through the Void into the Heavenly Kingdom that was their home.

No such opportunity would be given them, however, as Azrael led the charge directly at the pair of angels. He appeared to be the only one from the Tower that had followed the intruders through the earth, but the evil Cherub had brought many of the city's dark guardians with him, and there were more than enough of them to do great damage to the retreating beings.

As the violent demon approached, however, the fabric of the universe twisted and unfolded, revealing a portal through which a bright light flowed, illuminating the angels and demons with greater brilliance than even the sun, which shone above this half of the world. An angel flew through it, placing himself between the demons and their intended prey, and the attacking forces fell back to assess him.

Though most angels wore bright robes, this spirit was clothed with dark colors. His eyes sparkled with intensity, and in his powerful grip was a burning blade like those wielded by the two escaping angels.

"It is one of the Sar'im," one of the demons whispered to Azrael.

"I know this Prince of Heaven," Azrael said. Indeed he should have; the angel before him was the Virtue Dumah, who had helped to defeat him in the battle for Eden centuries before.

“You should take better care of your friends,” Azrael said, indicating Tahariel in particular.

When Dumah did not reply, the demon that had first spoken to the fallen Cherub said, “Why don’t you answer?”

Azrael laughed and said, “This angel does not speak, he mourns for the loss of peace, he says. Let us not waste our time here, he is sealed... and we will not be able to easily prevail against him – yet. Come, we have more important matters to attend at the Tower.”

As the evil spirits turned away, casting dark looks and curses at the three divine angels, Tahariel said, “Dumah, my friend, we have just witnessed an abomination! The Heavenly council must be told of this – I would hope the Oracles have already seen these dread events!”

“Be at peace,” Dumah responded in silent, whispered communication to Tahariel and Adriel. “The thing is known in Heaven.” With that the sealed angel, one of the Twelve Sar’im, raised his hand and opened a doorway to the angels’ much-desired Home.

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 1: POLEMONOGUE

The mountains of Ararat stood nobly in the light of a new dawn. The air was crisp and clean, and the ground on the less steep surfaces was rich with the kind of soil that makes crops grow quickly and well. As the sun rose higher in the sky it gave light to the rows of tents lined up against each other on the most level parts of the landscape. There were blue tents, and slightly less numerous purple ones. Scattered among them also were some tents made of red fabric.

The flap of one of the largest of the tents, a purple one near a field known as Noah's Vineyard, was lifted and a bearded man emerged from his place of rest. Dumah, his guardian, watched over him silently as the human took a deep breath of air and looked out over the tents around him. Not wishing to interrupt his charge's enjoyment of the morning, the Virtue waited until Shem had returned to his tent before making his presence known.

When the patriarch of the faithful settlement had entered into his dwelling once again Dumah closed his eyes, and the dust of the air and the soil of the earth was pulled together at the force of his will, knitting together a body for him so that he could appear to the human. Having done so, he tapped on the fabric of the tent and stepped back to allow Shem's exit.

When he saw the angel before him, Shem bowed himself in greeting. "What has my lord to say unto me today?" Dumah smiled a little at Shem's words, for the two knew each other well enough to make the human's question ironic, though it may not have been intended that way. The Virtue placed a hand on the mortal's shoulder and spoke in whisper to his mind.

"The Host of Heaven has witnessed a great and terrible thing at the Tower of your enemy this night just past. Heed well my words, my charge and my friend."

Shem looked up, a troubled expression now clouding his face, and he said, "Say on."

"You know that since Prince Michael scattered the inhabitants of Sha'ar-ha-elohim there has been a measure of peace on earth," Dumah continued, using the old name for Babylon. "Last night we saw an end to that peace; for those who have acquired the language of Queen Yunah, and those who have been persuaded to stay by other means, have again established contact with their demonic masters."

Shem took a moment to digest what he had heard, and then he said, “We knew this day would come,” with determination in his voice. “What would Yahweh have us do?”

“The command of IaHWeH,” Dumah said, pronouncing the Name of the Most High in Shem’s mind even as the human had spoken it with human language, “is that the humans must complete what the spirits have begun.”

“How is that to be?” Shem asked.

“You know a little of these events, but the fall of the Tower marked a great gain for the angels of Heaven. El Michael has told us that on that day we became free servants, and more than what we once were. We, the holy angels, took responsibility for our fallen brothers’ conduct; and now you humans must do the same.”

“We must scatter the remnant of the Babylonians,” Shem said, understanding what his guardian was saying to him.

“Yes. There will come a time when the Victory will be won, and in that day the swords of men must fall to the ground. There will come an age when those who live by the blade will die by the blade, when those who are of the blade cannot serve Heaven; but that time is not yet come, god-prince. You must prepare your people to meet your old enemies, whom you have not seen for seven years, and you must triumph. Within one generation, this battle will come.”

Shem was known as the god-prince of humanity, a term the Bible renders as “mighty prince” when speaking of another, and the description was accurate. As a prince and priest of the faithful Remnant of Noah’s family, Shem was a faithful witness of the Almighty on the earth. In every test of faith brought about by the demons’ accusations of his character, the patriarch had overcome. What began as simple, faithful obedience to his father’s instructions for building the Ark ended in victory during a mighty test. Not long ago he had been instructed to send his son Arphaxad into the heart of Babylon, and though pained by the danger his son was to face, he had obeyed.

To build a gigantic boat in a world that had never seen rain seemed foolish to the carnal mind, and to send a loved one into the most wicked city on earth on a near-hopeless rescue mission surely appeared to be worse than suicidal – yet Shem believed the promises of IaHWeH, and his faith had been rewarded time and again.

Now, upon hearing the decree that men must fight men, and war was brewing in the years ahead, he had no thoughts of fear for his safety, and felt no anxiety for his people. He knew that the angels of Heaven would go before them, and the purposes of the Throne would be accomplished.

“I will ready my men for the conflict,” Shem said to his divine visitor.

“And I will go and ready mine,” came the silent reply.

* * * * *

Lahatiel, the Chief of the Order of Powers, welcomed Dumah back to the Heavenly plane. “You have returned in a timely manner, Chief Prince. The others have assembled, and await you.”

Dumah nodded and entered the Outer Court of the Heavenly Tabernacle. As he stepped into the sacred area, he veiled his face with his dark covering and raised a hand in greeting to the eleven other divine spirits assembled there.

Zadkiel, the four-winged Ophan, or Throne-angel, spoke first. “Welcome back, Dumah. We have continued to speak during your visit to earth. How did the god-prince receive the word regarding the matter of the Tower?”

“He understood and accepted the command of El Michael,” Dumah communicated to the other Sar'im, “and he is going forth to make ready.”

“He will have opportunity to do so,” said the Dominion Matmoniel, “for the queen must have time to reveal to the universe that her cup of iniquity is full. We have seen her heart resist the power of Adriel's blade entirely, but space must be given for her subjects to decide – will they walk in the ways of the demons, or will they and their children finally flee from the shadows of the Tower?”

The eternal destinies of many had been decided on the day that the Tower fell. Most of the souls in Babylon had cast in their lot entirely with their wicked queen, and they attempted to complete the construction of the idolatrous Temple in spite of the intervention of the angels to prevent it. Some of these were slain when blasts of lightning tore the top of the structure apart, but many more were allowed to live on, a powerful witness of rebellion and failure to the invisible watchers.

Yet in spite of all this, the mercy and patience of IaHWeH was not entirely exhausted for all of the individuals living in the accursed City. Many had been too young to understand the events going on around them and for this reason among others, forty more years of probationary time had been given to the inhabitants of Babel. Even after the Tower had fallen as a sign of their ultimate judgment, mercy still pled for a few of the ignorant and misled. Seven of those years had already been used up; thirty-three remained.

The other angels gave voice to their hopes that just a few more souls might be redeemed from among the rebels. Aside from Matmoniel, Zadkiel (who was also the Chief of the Ophanim) and the Virtue Dumah, nine other Sealed angels spoke of these matters. Israfel and Jehoel were of the Seraphim, the brightly burning angels that were considered in many ways to be closest to the Throne of IaH. Za'afiel and Raziel were Cherubim, and Raziel was, along with the Archangel Gabriel, one of the Shomerim that were trained in the mysteries of the Shekinah. Anael and As'fael were Ikari'im, or Principalities, and Shabbatiel was the only Power among the Sealed Princes.

Zahariel, the Chief of the Dominions, was among the Twelve, and so was Uzziel, who was the Head of Dumah's Order, the Virtues or Malakim.

It was Raziel who next spoke, saying, "El Michael will make these matters known to all the Host at our next Gathering, but He has taken us up with Him into the mountain of knowledge, that we may perform our function as Princes – to comfort and instruct the others."

"In two days, then," said Jehoel in his musical voice, and the others nodded.

Time in the spiritual plane is no longer perfectly aligned with time on earth. Though the concept of "days" existed before the material universe was produced from the Void, and there were always weekly occasions of rest and gathering among the divine inhabitants of Heaven, the creation of the world completed a pattern that had been set in place long before.

With the ordination of the sun to determine a "day" on earth, and the moon to mark out the months, the angels found that their time of rest corresponded with that shared between IaHWeH and Adam, and they were often participants in the worship of human beings. With the entrance of sin into the human world, great grace was shed upon the angels that they should labor for mankind without ceasing, to protect them from their invisible enemies and to guide them in the light of the Spirit toward all righteousness.

After the Great Flood, the matter of timing was further complicated, because the rotation of the earth was noticeably affected by the effect of this global violence. As a result of this and the need for constant vigilance by the angels, the Sabbath as humans know it became an institution entirely dedicated to mankind until the Restoration of all things. The angels continue to gather before the Throne of IaH one spiritual day in seven, if they are not actively employed in His service among His children on the earth, but this day does not often line up with the 7th day of time as reckoned by the creation of the world.

* * * * *

When the ordained occasion arrived, all the angels who were not encamped around the tents of Shem made their way toward the vast Throne Room in which sat the High King of Heaven upon His eternal Throne. The holy citizens of the Spiritual Kingdom were perfectly arranged according to their Orders, and the seven camps looked eagerly toward the Seat of the Most High.

At the base of the indescribable Throne stood El Michael, the Captain of the Host and the great Advocate of IaHWeH among the angels. Around this Elohim Union stood seven elect angels, glowing with the reflected light of the Shekinah, and sparkling before the assembly like a crown of gold.

Four of these seven were *Adonaim*, dedicated Archangels. Gabriel the Cherub, Uriel the Throne-angel, Camael the Power and Raphael the Virtue were taken from their Orders

and made arbiters and governors over the Host. The three others, who were temporary Archangels that served the Throne on particular occasions such as this, were of the Sar'im that met with Dumah: Israfil, Za'afiel and Raziel.

The Seraphim were singing praises to the Most High, and the voices of other angels blended in with the divine chorus to raise the essences of every assembled being to the heights of pure, holy joy.

“Holy, holy, holy, is Adonai;
Graciousness and mercy are with El Shaddai.
New frontiers of beauty are passed before our view;
As IaH opens our vision to things we never knew.”

Angels, like humans, are bound by time, and the unfolding of events educates them, and instructs them, as with the creatures of the physical plane. With great interest the holy Host had borne witness to the events that took place in Babylon after the Tower's fall, and as the glorious song faded from the spiritual atmosphere, El Michael rose into the air to answer the questions unspoken, but often thought, by those who had so faithfully watched over the progress of humanity.

“My angels,” the High Prince began, “you have known the mercy of the Most High. You have seen Us bear long with Lucifer during his rebellion among the streets of gold. You have waited patiently while the divine will was carried forward in the midst of apostasy and suffering. You stood with your Creator when the shadow of sin crept over the Towers of The North, and you overcame the controversy that threatened our home ages ago.

“These things, though memories from the past, have not faded from your minds, and there is reason for this. Among the sons of men we have seen our sorrows played out once and again. Among the children of Adam we have witnessed the failures repeated, and the regret once felt in this shining Kingdom echoed in the prayers and lamentations of mankind. We have wept with them.

“We have let the Adversary have the kingdom he desired, that he may know that IaHWeH is just and true; and he has used his freedom to spread darkness and misery among the innocent. Yet we have not allowed him to utterly destroy humanity, nor to immortalize sin. The Hand of Elohim has been upon these events; and you, my angels, have been agents of mercy to fallen man.

“For over a thousand years I held my peace, while the children of Cain overran the earth, corrupting the faithful and destroying my people for lack of knowledge. For many generations I watched the stain of guilt filling the earth, and the imagination of mankind become diseased, past all point of cure. When they had filled my Spirit with violence, I called out to the man Noah, and I said unto him, ‘You have found grace in my sight.’

“I commanded him to build an Ark, and to save his family from the wrath that humanity had treasured up against itself. Though I had decided to destroy them, yet I sent my

messenger among them, as even I sent my faithful Enoch to warn them before my sentence was pronounced.”

As El Michael spoke these words, the eyes of some of the angels turned to behold the human that He had indicated, standing near to the Throne. Enoch, his face full of dignity, joy and peace, was listening intently to what was being said, knowing that Michael’s words concerned his people, and would have much importance for the days ahead. Though he had been taken from among men before the natural process of death had any thought of ending his earthly sojourn, the immortal saint had watched over his people with great interest from the portals of Heaven.

His transfigured body shone as brightly as any angel, and on the edges of his white robe was a border of purple and gold, signifying a royal transformation and a pure, refined faith. He did not return the gaze of the angels who looked at him, however, for his eyes were fixed on the face of his Redeemer and Friend, who continued to address the crowd within the Throne Room.

“They rejected the word of Noah, and judged themselves unworthy of life. They turned away from the vessel of my Spirit, and they brought upon themselves the Deluge. Yet though I pronounced sentence, and though I executed my will concerning mankind, there remained corruption in the family of Noah, and through his descendants unrighteousness once again began to spread upon the earth.

“You have all been witnesses to these things, how that Nimrod, the son of Cush, began to build a mighty Tower, to defy the command of Heaven. When I commanded them to scatter, they gathered together. When I instructed them to worship, they chose instead to rebel.

“Again I sent my messengers, and again they refused to hear my voice of mercy. My anger was kindled against them, and I confused their voices. They continued to build though I showed them my displeasure, and I sent my Ikari’im to destroy their monument with lightning. Yet in all this, my hand of mercy is stretched out still.”

The angels were filled with a sense of wonder. How long would the Almighty bear with the sinful humans who cursed His name, who despised His memory, and who worked at cross purposes to the very ordinances which were given for their safety and well being? How long would mercy sheathe the sword of justice, and delay the necessary penalties? No angel wished to see the humans harmed or slain, but they could scarcely bear to look upon the scenes of transgression taking place on a daily basis, and they knew that the fallen men were themselves unhappy in their desperate plight. What was perhaps most tragic was that most of the followers of Queen Semiramis had never known anything like the peace of Heaven, and so they sought no better life than that which they had always known.

“I have appointed one generation to the sons of men,” El Michael said. “I have ordained forty years since the fall of the Tower, and then I will level Babylon. During these years

they will be sent prophets and messengers from among the tents of Shem. I will destroy the Tower from off the face of the earth, where the union of flesh and spirit has been practiced, and the union of faith and sword goes on to this very day.

“I will cast down their idols, and I will make their altars of sacrifice as the dust of the earth. I will turn their cunning work to ashes, and I will scatter them to far countries, where their ungodliness will be restrained. Yet in all this, my hand of mercy is stretched out still.

“I will preserve the people of Shem, and they will be a light unto the nations. I will call a man from among his descendants, and I will bring him into a good land, where I will establish for myself a people. I will be their Almighty, and they will be my witnesses on the earth. I will make them as the stars in the heavens for number, and I will put my Law in their hearts, that they may speak of me to their erring brethren. They will turn the hearts of mankind back to the Throne of Heaven, and I will save them, from the greatest to the least, when the War is finally at an end.”

“IaHSHeVaH!” the angels cried, “IaH is salvation!” As the meeting drew to a close, the Host rejoiced for the loving kindness of their Creator, who had not abandoned mankind to the devices of the Adversary. Great was their sorrow at the fall of humanity to the Serpent’s deceptions, and great – they knew – would be the cry of freedom when the Heavens and the earth would be made new.

The angels in joyful submission caused their diadems, their shining golden crowns, to appear upon their heads, and then they cast them at the feet of the Elohim. Here was a “star” of seven true angels standing within a circle of circles drawn, not in blood, but in glory; and the minds of Adriel and Tahariel were eased by this scene of beauty, standing in stark contrast to the vision of violence they had witnessed a few short days before.

* * * * *

On the day of the Sabbath of men, the patriarch Shem stood before his community, and relayed to them the words he had shared with his guardian Dumah.

“There are thirty and three years appointed to those who have remained in the ruins of Babylon. At the end of this time, we must go down into the plain of Shinar, and scatter them. They must not know that we have received this command from the Most High, but... some of us must again go among them, as even my son Arphaxad did before the confusion of tongues.”

The descendants of Shem, those who dwelt in purple tents, were gathered close around their father. Some had remained faithful to the worship of IaHWeH from the beginning, and others had been reclaimed from apostasy just before the Tower fell. All were considered equal sharers in the settlement, as were their brethren the Japhethites.

Shem's brother Japheth, though two years older, was nevertheless submissive to the spiritual authority of his sibling. The blue color that symbolized his family line was reflective of the calm, peaceful disposition that marked the character he had passed on, in large measure, to his descendants. Though more numerous, the children of Japheth looked to the Shemites for leadership, according to the prophecy of their father Noah.

The family of Ham, their youngest brother, had largely been carried away in the apostasy of their ancestor. Despite this, the mercy of the Most High had extended to them as easily as to the family of Shem, and there were many families who had either remained with the faithful when there was the parting of ways, or had been receptive to the appeal of Arphaxad. Though most of the red-robed family had followed Cush and Nimrod to the land of Shinar, a good number followed the voice of the Spirit back to the mountains of Ararat.

When they heard the words of their prince, however, the members of all three families looked at him in wonder. "Shall we go down and attack them, though our message is one of peace?" they asked themselves.

"Yes, my brethren," Shem said, knowing their hearts. "It is a strange work unto which we are called. It is a troubling work, yet the angel of Yahweh appeared to me, and made known to me the will of the Most High. We are called to be the priests and intercessors of our fallen family. We are sent to them to speak words of healing and comfort. Those who resist, and cast us away... they turn away from the one thing that would be to them the source of life.

"Should they neglect this great salvation, it will fall to us to drive them off from their city. Be comforted in this: the angel quieted my spirit by letting me know that he had been with the oracles of Heaven, and they have foreseen that not much blood will be shed. Those who die will be few, but those whom we save will be many, for those whom we scatter will be spared the destruction that will fall upon the city itself – and they will know that Yahweh is Almighty."

Shem's words did indeed have a soothing effect on the assembled families, for he could see their faces brightening. He knew that his message would not be an easy one for the peace-loving settlers to hear, but he also knew that the wickedness of those living under the sway of Queen Semiramis had taken away their hearts, and that the Sword of IaHWeH was slowly, but inevitably, being pointed in their direction.

"Once again," Shem continued, "I volunteered to go among the Shinarites. Once again I was told, 'It is not for you to sojourn among them.' This time, however, I was given no word as to whom I should first send to warn the people of their overthrow. This I was told, however: it must be willing feet that tread those miles, and it must be a willing voice that raises the alarm. We shall send two men into the heart of Babylon, and I must not deny the ones who wish to go."

As the meeting went on, Shem explained to his people the plan that Dumah had revealed to him, and told them that they must pray fervently for those who were being sought, and that they must be ready to move when the call came at the end of Shinar's probation. That evening, as he sat in his tent, he received two visitors from among his flock.

"Father," said Arphaxad, "I do not know how you will receive this, but I believe I must be one of the two."

Shem looked at his son, heavy in spirit, but not entirely surprised. "I suspected as much. And this, your companion, will be the second?"

"This is Arvad, a son of Canaan, and grandson of Ham."

"We have not spoken often before," said Shem, "but I remember your face."

"I was drawn away from Shinar by the intercession of your son," Arvad said in the language unaffected by the Tower's fall. The Hamite had left Babylon before the dividing of tongues, and was thus able to speak freely with his fellow-settlers on Ararat's heights. "You spoke today of taking responsibility for the actions of our brethren," he continued, "and I believe that this must apply to me more surely than to any of the children of Shem or Japheth."

Shem saw that the young man had more to say, and he remained quiet while Arvad drew a deep breath and went on. "When Arphaxad returns to the city of my fathers, I will go with him. Perhaps they will listen to me, for I was once of their number; and I can tell them of the difference between the slavery I once knew, and the freedom I now enjoy."

"Then you shall go, both of you," Shem replied. "Let us enter into prayer for three days, and on the third day I will send you forth on the first of these journeys. Go; take your rest for the night."

As the two departed, Shem caught the arm of his firstborn and said, "I have not forgotten the pain I felt at your departure, but I will never forget the joy I knew at your return. This is a great thing you do, my son."

"This is the reason I came into the world," Arphaxad said, "to testify of the Almighty One of my father."

* * * * *

The mountains of Ararat stood nobly in the light of a new dawn. On this day, men, women and children stood at the entrances of their brightly colored tents to see the departure of two souls. Arphaxad and Arvad set out along the narrow passage down through the mountains, carrying supplies and stout staffs. Many prayers attended their way, as did a few invisible friends.

As they left the region of Ararat, Arphaxad said, "I wonder how the land of your people will seem to you now, having been so long out from its shadow."

"It would be worth any great and terrible sight," his companion said, "to see my family on these terms, and perhaps to see them spared. I believe in the words of your father Shem, and I cannot stand by without lifting my voice in warning."

A six-winged Seraph named Noggaiel, whose name means "Shining of El," looked at the Dominion Tamael beside him, and said, "It will be a great and terrible sight. Babylon is home now to many more sorrows than your charge can remember."

Tamael nodded at Arphaxad's guardian angel and replied, "Neither he nor I have seen the city since the day he left, but his heart is free of the corruption he once served. This human will do a great work in that dark land, I am certain, for he is indeed well named."

Arvad's name, in the language of the angels and Shem's people, which was not divided at the fall of the Tower, means, "I shall break loose."

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 2: PEDAGOGUE

Tammuz, the “Sprout of Life” from the twisted tree of Queen Yunah, stood staring intently at the figures carved into the brick wall. Though only seven years old he had inherited many of his mother’s gifts and much of his father’s cunning, although the name of his father would never be known to any but the angels, the man and Semiramis herself.

Officially he was the seed of Nimrod, the deceased warrior-king of Babel, but none could fail to note the distinct differences between the complexion and features of the two. After his supposed father’s death, his mother had brought him forth, and presented him to the entranced citizens of Babylon as the spirit of their former ruler reborn, and he was told that in his “previous life” he had shed his blood so that the people of the Tower could be free from oppression by both men and gods.

Lucifer knew well the Promise of Heaven; that a Sacrifice would be offered at the appointed time for the redemption of mankind. One would come to earth and bear the weight of sin for every consenting child of Adam, and grant immortality to the fallen race. Though he did not understand, nor perhaps fully believe in Michael’s covenant with humanity, he nevertheless set to work early to undermine the validity of the prophecy.

Through Nimrod and Semiramis, Azazel had placed into the stream of human history a union of pretended divinity. Through the death of the father and the birth of the son, he had woven together a false gospel, in which the dead sacrifice was raised to life in a new form by the operation of a holy dove, Yunah their binding spirit. A father and son who were in unity, and a spirit personified to bring forth their presence: such was the nature of the first religious heresy.

The creation of this mother of all false doctrines was witnessed in mute horror by the holy angels, for they saw in this abomination the perversion of the image of the Godhead, and the seeds of a multitude of doctrinal crimes that would turn the hearts of men away from the true Creator, and from the Fountain of life itself. In the years to come the divine watchers would see the full subtlety of Lucifer’s plan unfolding, for many would turn away from the true Sacrifice in pride and derision, seeing in the ancient heathen legends an “original truth” from which the Messiah had borrowed His authority.

Into every land that had become populated by Semiramis’ former followers when the Tower fell some of the perverse gospel was carried. Among the scattered nations the

memories of this lifeless religion gave birth to one deception after another, and were it not for the intervention of Shem's line of intercessors, the knowledge of IaHWeH would have been wholly eclipsed by the counterfeits. Yet while most of the effects of these things were yet future, the key to their tragic success lay locked up still, kept within the heart of a small young boy. The child, an image of youthful beauty, ran his fingers slowly over one carving that had caught his attention. Seven hideous heads stared out from the wall in silent, mineral roars. Leathery-looking wings were poised above the reptilian body, and four clawed legs possessively gripped the earth below it.

"What is this creature, mother?" he asked in wondering tones. "I have never seen an animal such as this." This was the first time Tammuz had been brought into the main chamber of Yunah's idols, and this particular carving was found nowhere else in the Tower's many remaining rooms.

"This is the Chaos Wyrn," she said to him. "This is the Serpent of the Void." When the Scriptures say that, "the earth was without form, and void," the word *tehom* is used to describe its condition of lifeless disorder. It is also the word that the Host uses to refer to the chaos that existed before the Word of IaH said, "Let there be light," and the limitless, raw energy of chaos to which Lucifer had linked his eternal destiny. He had indeed become a servant of *tehom* through his rebellion – and his inescapable nature was now one of pure chaos. His sole purpose beyond the madness of sin was to plunge the universe into lifeless disorder, and to set himself up as the sole ruler of a broken kingdom.

"His name was Tehom'at," Yunah said, leading her son away from the image on the wall.

"Ti-a-mat," the youth pronounced carefully, glancing back at the seven horned heads. "Yet, why do you say his name *was*?"

"Precocious youth," said an unheard voice to an unseen witness. Chiun said nothing in response, but smiled as Yunah explained with carefully chosen words.

"Tehom'at was once our god," she said, "but because of his pride and jealousy of men, he turned away from us. He and his servants were the ones who taught us our rituals, and how to observe the seasons. He is the one who showed us how to use the stars of heaven to know what will happen in the days to come. He is the one who told us how to be as gods ourselves – but when he abandoned us he made himself our enemy."

Tammuz listened with eyes wide open, as his mother's next words registered in his mind. "When Tehom'at decided that he would burn all of his worshippers in fire, this was when your father decided that we would not be slaves any longer to his power, and so he went off into a distant land, where he knew the dragon was waiting to find the right time. And there was a long and dangerous battle. Your father finally won, after fighting for a very long time, and when he returned to me and to our people they called him 'Ba'al,' for he was our new master."

Nergal, the angel who had spoken before, laughed in a harsh voice and spoke again. “This is what she is having the child believe? If I am to be this godling’s guide, it would appear that there are some details of which I have yet to be informed!”

Chiun looked at the newcomer and said, “You have not been here long enough to understand it all, but yes; Lucifer has seen fit to give the boy just enough truth to make him dangerous, but he does not mind suffering a defeat in the young lad’s imagination, if it lets him think he will have power over us. His father almost slipped out of our grasp because he thought he could stand against us in a battle of will; we have seen wisdom in using that very arrogance to make these rebels even more completely our slaves.”

“I understood only the seven years of silence as being designed for that purpose,” Nergal admitted, “but I did not know there was more.”

Chiun looked greedily at the amazement in the young boy’s trusting eyes and said, “There is always more; but there is never, never enough.”

“You have much to learn, my son,” Semiramis said to her only surviving child. “You are called to be the new god of our people. You are the slayer of the Dragon; you are the one who gave himself to death so that our nation could have life.”

“I am?” he asked. “I have not done any of those things.”

Enfolding him in an embrace that would have been warm and loving, had it come from any ordinary mother, Semiramis said gently, “But you have, my dear son; you have. You and your father are one.”

* * * * *

Noggaiel descended once again to the earth, having raised himself on his six shining wings to survey the entrance to Babylon. Though he could but dimly see through the dome of darkness over the city, he could perceive clearly enough to know that there were none of the gigantic guards nearby.

Repeating many of the abominations that had brought down the Flood, the subjects of Nimrod had let their demonic instructors teach them how to infuse the body of human beings with fearsome powers. The effect of this biological and spiritual alteration was apparent in their physical appearances, for they became enormous in size, and their minds became somewhat warped by the forbidden procedures. Many of the Hamites and two of the rebellious descendants of Shem named Uz and Gether had undergone this transformation, and these two held a high place among the guardians of Babylon known as the Neo-Nephilim.

Having seen none of the powerful soldiers near the closest gate, the Seraph said to Tamael, “Let us send them forth.” With that they gently, almost imperceptibly, urged the two men forward.

“Your father told us that we would be able to communicate with the citizens of Babel, even though the tongues were divided after your last trip?” Arvad’s statement sounded something like a question, for he was unsure how exactly this would work. He had raised this point to Arphaxad at the time they first decided they would make this journey, but the only response he received was, “Yah will make a way.”

In response to the same question, asked again just outside of Babylon’s gate, he was told, “Yah will make a way.”

“The city is not much changed since last I was here,” Arphaxad noted, “except for the Tower – it was much higher on my previous visit.”

“May it fall flat to the earth before we see this place again,” Arvad said. “I can almost feel the evil coming out of it. Let us hasten to the center, while it is yet day.”

As the two men walked through the town, children began to follow them. There had not been so many children last time, Arphaxad thought. At least they had not followed him through the streets like this. Every now and then the travelers would see the head of a man or woman looking out at them through the entrances of the houses, or someone walking along the street stopping to stare at them.

Some pointed to Arphaxad and said a word that neither man could understand; but the expression on the speakers’ faces made it certain in their minds that it was not a compliment. As before, none of the citizens made a move to stop the missionaries, and even the most violent demons watched in amusement to see what good the two could possibly do among an alien people speaking an alien tongue. The demons could understand all human languages well enough, but they looked at each other and laughed mockingly at what they were sure would be useless attempts at communication.

More than seven years after his first trip into the heart of Babylon, the son of Shem took his place once more in the square at the intersection of the largest streets, and he looked at the children surrounding him. They chattered to themselves in excited tones and cast sidelong glances at the man dressed in strange purple robes, and at his fellow traveler who looked more suitably attired.

Arphaxad looked at Arvad with a strange mixture of hope and curiosity, and then looked over at the young ones playing on the street before him. He understood why he was there; these children, though already being educated in the destructive mythology of Yunah’s doctrines, were innocent. Taking a deep breath, the messenger opened his mouth to speak. As the first words left his mouth, the Seraph standing invisibly behind him placed firm hands upon the human’s shoulders.

“I am called Arphaxad,” he said to the children. Immediately they froze, the oldest to the youngest, and they turned to give their uninvited guest their undivided attention.

“His voice is strange, but he speaks,” said one of the older boys. Arphaxad and Arvad looked at the speaker in surprise. They had understood his words!

Arvad began to laugh softly as his fellow traveler continued, confident now in what he needed to say. “My father has sent me to speak to you, and to your fathers. Go and call them away from what they are doing, and I will wait here for you to return.”

The two angels beside the men knelt in prayer, and far above the dome of darkness two other bright angels enclosed in orbs of swirling fire opened their hands over the city of evil spirits. As they did so the glory of the Shekinah flowed through them and radiated downward, penetrating the dark canopy and binding the words and actions of the demons that swarmed through the houses and temples.

* * * * *

“I cannot move!” Nergal hissed as he lay helplessly on the floor of Yunah’s chamber. “What holds us?”

“I perceive that my whispers are not reaching Prince Lucifer,” Chiun said, crouching down beside the prostrate Principality. “We are bound by the Host of Heaven!”

“By what authority?” cried the evil angel in frustrated impotence. “They have no power in this place!” The fallen Seraph had no answer for him, and the two demons struggled against the light that prevented them from communicating with any of their comrades. They could only assume that the others were being similarly restrained.

Unaware of the plight of her invisible masters, Yunah was instructing young Tammuz. “As your father hunted leopards and tamed wild horses, so will you do, my son. As he rode on the clouds and commanded the forces of the earth, you will do likewise. As he was worshipped by our people, so are you already worshipped; and when you receive their praise with me at your side, you will reach your hand upward to the heavens and tear down the Throne of the Nameless God!”

Nimrod had hated the name of the Almighty, and had forbidden his subjects to speak the word “Yahweh” under pain of death. His son had never heard this name spoken, and his mother always referred to Him, when she did tell him of their first great Enemy, as *Elohim*, or *Elohim lo’shem*: “The Nameless God.”

“You are old enough now, my child, to know why you have been born into this world. That is why I brought you here today, into this chamber of mysteries, to teach you of the true power you command.

“Not long ago, I summoned forces that had been absent from our kingdom for some time, forces that departed from our people in the very year that you were born. But I have done as they have required, and now they will do as we command them.”

Tammuz looked at his mother with confusion; he had heard her speaking like this before, but there was something different about this time. Perhaps it was a tone in her voice with which he was unfamiliar, or perhaps it was the strange way her eyes seemed to gleam all of a sudden in the shadows of the mysterious chamber.

Petahel, fused with Yunah's body, had not been as obviously affected by Raziel and Gabriel binding the City. Had he tried to whisper to another demon, or to move about in the spiritual world, he would have found himself unable to do so. Yet as a parasite on the soul of the queen, and little more than an observer of her impassioned speech, he had not made any attempts to act on his own, and had not even noticed Nergal and Chiun pressed against the floor of the chamber.

His eyes did not fail to register their beings a short while thereafter, however, as the queen turned in response to a loud shout coming from outside the thick, heavy doors.

"Em'Yunaheth!" came the call for attention, using the name she most liked to have employed by her subjects. The Mother of The Branch. Her name seeped again into the chamber from the desperate attendant outside.

Furious at being interrupted during so sacred a time, Yunah strode over to the doors and thrust them open, glaring in outrage at the frightened soldier who had called her. "What is your purpose in disturbing us?"

"My queen," he said, bowing in as much fear of her voice as respect for her sovereignty. "Two men stand within the city, speaking blasphemy against you, and against our Ba'al."

Not waiting for Yunah's response, he rushed on to answer whatever questions she might think to ask. "They are not Babylonian, yet we hear them in our own language. Even the deaf and dumb hear the words of their speech, and the guards cannot move to destroy them!" The expression "deaf and dumb" was applied to those men who had remained in the city despite having different languages. Anyone speaking a tongue different than that of the queen was considered a fool, and treated poorly by the residents of Babylon and the other cities in the kingdom.

The fact that even these secondary citizens could miraculously understand the words of the foreigners was not as important to Yunah as the other bit of information her soldier had reported. "What do you mean, 'the guards cannot move?'"

"The Neo-Nephilim, and our other men approached the speakers, and attempted to end the disturbance, but as they approached, they..." the guard seemed unsure of how to proceed, and then he concluded, "they fell on their faces, and seemed to be filled with fear."

"Fear of two men? What weapons did they bear?" Yunah demanded.

"None I could see, my queen," the guard said.

“I will go out and see these men,” the queen decided. “I will see what has overpowered my brave warriors with mere words.”

“There is one more thing, my queen,” the guard stammered, looking down at the ground. “The one who speaks... his robes are purple.”

* * * * *

The demons may have been bound by the light of the Shekinah shed abroad by the Covering Cherubim, but the humans were free to act and to speak. A large crowd had gathered around Arphaxad and Arvad, most out of curiosity, but many for another reason entirely. When the travelers had entered into the city, the adults recognized not only the clothing, but also the face of Shem’s firstborn son.

“Heretic!” they had cried out in the language of the queen, remembering his previous visit to their homeland. He had indeed spoken against their religion, and had led away with him many captives to truth and freedom. Men had separated from their households, and women and children had fled from the hand of their friends and families. Such power attended the words of the divine messenger that even those ears hearing the sentence of doom for the first time believed in the truth of the warning, and the owners of those ears did what they could to escape the wrath being foretold.

Yet when they gathered with their townsmen to curse and accuse the one who had foolishly returned to their land, they found themselves listening to his speech, as if they were hearing the voice of an angel.

The men of Babylon knew that their language had changed since Arphaxad’s last visit, and yet they heard his words in their own tongue. The children of Phut and Canaan, and the few descendants who had not accompanied Mizraim to the south when the Tower fell also heard the clear words of promise being spoken to them in forceful language. Perhaps this miracle would have been enough to arrest the attention of this audience, but Noggaiel lent Seraphic force to his appeals beneath the bright spiritual rays of the Shekinah’s glory.

“In less than forty years, Babylon will be overthrown,” the human said. “You have witnessed the power of the Almighty, when He cast down your pride and confused your language.” He turned and pointed to the ruins of the Tower as he continued, “Years ago I foretold the destruction of this Tower, and this city. In His mercy Yahweh did not make a full end to your land, but scattered many of you across the earth.”

At the name that Arphaxad spoke, many winced or turned their faces away from him. Those forbidden syllables cut the hearts of those who knew what they meant, and awakened the curiosity of those too young to have heard them before. Yet while some looked at him intently and others turned away, some followed the direction his finger indicated, and saw a glimmer of light in one of the Tower’s dark windows.

The golden crown of Queen Yunah was the only indication to those far below that she was standing in attendance to the strange speaker's convocation. Though she was out of normal earshot, and a great distance away, the wicked spirit within her perceived Arphaxad's words, and saw the movements of his arms easily enough. What Petahel knew, Ishtar knew.

Semiramis heard when the speaker said, "In three and thirty years, Yahweh will make a full end. There shall not be one brick upon another of your homes, and the number slain at the fall of the Tower will be but the firstfruits of the dead.

"For the sake of your loved ones, and those whom you wish to see spared from this destruction; yea, even for your own souls' sakes, hear my words, and escape. There is refuge in the tents of Shem, and there is freedom in the mountains of Ararat. Do not turn away from this warning; you will wish for but one hour of mercy, when the judgment of Heaven descends."

At these hard sayings, the children drew near to their parents, and adults exchanged doubtful glances. These men should have been cast out of the city or destroyed long before this point, yet the guards lay on their faces round about, and these fearsome threats were being voiced in the very shadow of Babel's Tower. What could these things mean? Yunah's eyes grew hard as she recognized the messenger's face. "The heretic," she said. Turning back to the guard, she said, "Return to the square. Revive the guards and kill those two men. If they will not do as I command, they will have greater things to fear from me than those idle threats they now hear!"

As the soldier ran out of the chamber, Ishtar turned to the two spirits on the floor and said, "Why was I not informed of their approach?"

"Ba'al Petahel," Nergal said, addressing the demon within her with a respectful term, "We cannot move! We could not even speak to you until you noticed us here."

Chiun addressed the fallen Seraph as an equal, "The Shomerim have bound us with the light of the Most High. There will be consequences of this, I vow."

Tammuz saw his mother addressing empty air, "The guards will see to these men; and then, if the Shomerim have remained above our city, we will strike them down – Sealing or no Sealing. They have violated our right of possession over this people, and they will fall under our swords."

But the Shomerim would not be above the city when Chiun and Nergal were again able to move. Already in the crowd below men were turning away from the warnings of Arphaxad once again. They had heard these threats before, and though they had indeed come true, the evidence before their eyes was not enough to awaken them to the true nature of their peril. As the hearts of men were hardened, and the children were taken away from the scene of their potential salvation, the rays of grace were slowly withdrawn

from Babylon. Gabriel and Raziel ascended back through the Void into the Heavenly Kingdom, leaving Arphaxad and Arvad in the capable hands of their guardians.

As the light of mercy faded away, Noggaiel took his hands off the speaker's shoulder, and said gently to his mind, "The word has been given. They have heard enough for this day." Just then the guards got to their feet, the terror of the moment having passed, and the guard from the Tower having arrived to motivate them with curses and threats.

"We had best be away," Arvad said to his companion, and Arphaxad, seeing the giants and armed soldiers approaching, quickly agreed. They moved toward the dispersing crowd, although Shem's purple robe offered little protection from the eyes of their pursuers. As they moved toward the edge of Babylon, and the gates, they saw that the giants were beginning to run, and though the travelers had started to move before their enemies truly began to give chase, their head start meant little in light of the speed and power of the Neo-Nephilim.

"We are not to run," Arphaxad said, concerned about how a hasty retreat would appear in light of his previous statements praising the Almighty One of his father for His love and protection. "Let us see what Yahweh will do."

As he spoke those words a rush of wind behind him caused both men to turn around. In a flash of light the dust of the earth and air coalesced to form two bodies clothed in white. One of the newcomers appeared as an ordinary man, but the other, taller figure had four bright wings. Both of Tamael's wings had folded down over his solidifying shape to form his shining garment, but the Seraph's incarnation had left him with four extra appendages.

The Dominion drew his sparkling blade and held it out between the retreating missionaries and their adversaries. As the guards wisely chose to halt their chase, they called out to those who were standing nearby, "Stone them!"

Not being inclined to disobey the powerful sentinels of Babylon, even in their surprise at the appearance of the two angelic figures, some of the bolder bystanders stooped to collect fragments of broken masonry, and they began to hurl the dangerous projectiles at the departing messengers.

Noggaiel took the men by the hands, one on each side, and spread his wings as a canopy behind them. The bits of brick shattered or bounced away from the angelic feathers, and the men were able to make a safe departure from those shadowy precincts. When they were a reasonable distance away the Seraph released them and said to them, "Your journey is not over yet. There are other cities yet unwarned, for the destruction of Babylon will not leave these settlements unharmed. Warn the men of Nineveh, and those of Rehoboath. Tell the men of Calah and Resen that there is safety in the tents of Shem."

As he was saying these things, Tamael appeared beside him, but only for a moment, for before either of the humans could reply to what they were being told, both of the figures vanished from their view.

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In Queen Yunah's chamber, two more dark angels joined those already gathered there. Chayil, the regent of Lucifer's earthly kingdoms, descended into the room, having been bound on the roof of the Tower by the light of the Spirit. He was closely followed by Azrael, who could barely contain his fury at what had just occurred. "There will indeed be a reckoning," the regent said. "This will not go unanswered."

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One of the gigantic guards returned to his post, deeply troubled in his mind. Uz, the son of Aram, the son of Shem, had seen his uncle speak more than seven years ago. He and his brother Gether had put an end to the messenger's speech on that occasion, but he had reason to be curious about this particular trip.

Ever since the fall of the Tower Uz had remained in Babylon under some duress. The children of his father had all experienced an alteration to their language in a way dissimilar from that of the children of Cush. He had been treated as a fool, and almost as an outcast, because his Aramaic language seemed little better than babbling to the majority of the City's residents; and he himself was only able to communicate with his fellow guards by a series of gestures and simple sounds. Still, he was one of the most powerful of the Neo-Nephilim, for the priests and sorcerers who had performed his transformation had felt no compulsion to be restrained when dealing with a descendant of Shem.

As a consequence, he was considered a valuable sentinel, though he was shunned by and large by those around him. But that day he had heard words he could understand, and spoken by one not of his immediate family. Somehow, he knew, it had not been a direct miracle that had allowed him to understand the words of his uncle. The language that Arphaxad spoke had been naturally rather similar to his own.

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 3: DEMAGOGUE

In the air above the tents of Shem, two small groups of winged beings met. Chayil, Azrael and Chiun, three of the major arch demons, hovered before two of the Sar'im. Dumah and Shabbatiel had been chosen by the Throne to meet the advancing spirits, who seldom ventured near Ararat in so open a fashion. To be sure, IaHWeH did not prevent tempting angels from moving among the faithful humans encamped there, but the three demons that soared through the sky without even a pretense of secrecy were no mere foot soldiers in Lucifer's army.

"Your Cherubim have presumed upon my absence," Chayil said. "I have no doubt that El Michael planned their actions while I was away in the southern land, yet I demand to know the reason for this intrusion. Is not IaHWeH He who will not impose upon human freedom? Is it not His covenant that allows us to hold sway over the people of the Tower? The subjects of Ishtar have chosen their side. You have no choice but to leave them to our power. Is not the dome of darkness evidence enough of our victory?"

"Ishtar," Shabbatiel said, repeating the distasteful name. "She reigns over all who gave their hearts to Lucifer, stealing their souls in his place. Yet not every knee is bowed to her religion; and beyond all that there is this: the children born to those who turned aside from the path of righteousness must not be allowed to suffer unwarned for the sins of their parents."

Chiun glared at the two divine princes, his evil mind working, and then he barked a joyless laugh. "The way of IaHWeH is uneven. Did not Lucifer speak truly all those ages ago? Why should these children be spared the judgment of Elohim, when countless infants perished in His accursed Flood?"

Dumah's eyes flickered with anger as he communicated silently with the other holy angel. Shabbatiel gave answer, "Were not children present when Enoch went forth among the sons of Cain? Yes, and they were there when Noah dwelt among the wicked, and sought to draw their minds nearer to the Sacrifice to come. They listened to the voice of Elohim, and some of them dared to hope, before they were deceived yet further by those they trusted."

Shabbatiel and Dumah both felt their essences grow warm with anger at the memories. "Just as it was in the days of the Flood, so it was today in the streets of Babylon," the

Power continued. “The parents stopped the ears of their young, and pointed their feet toward the grave. Double guilt is theirs, both for losing their own souls, and slaying the ones with whom they have been entrusted! Yet within these hearts, where perhaps a hope of salvation yet waits; look there for your reasons. Look there for the authority by which we bound your warriors, and held back the fury of your hatred.”

Azrael, in a rare display of self-control, did not draw his kherev, but said, “This is not the time for conflict. Let the fools play their game.” Yet as he said this aloud, so that Dumah and Shabbatiel could hear him, he was also whispering to his allies, “Withdraw with me, and I will tell you what I have learned.”

To the surprise, and suspicion, of Shabbatiel and Dumah, the three arch demons voiced agreement with their violent companion, and turned to speed away in the direction of Babel without so much as another word. Neither angel felt the need to voice, or even whisper, the thought that they both shared. *They are up to something.*

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Upon stepping through the portals of Heaven, the two Sar'im immediately sought an Oracle. El Michael was in council with Gabriel and the other archangels, and the first divine seer they encountered was the Cherub Da'athiel.

“As you know, Lucifer has been biding his time in the land of Mizraim,” the Oracle began, after they had greeted him and expressed their concerns. “He has not, however, turned his eye for one moment from the events taking place in Babylon. The ritual for the creation of Ishtar was the result of his communion with Chiun, and the training of Tammuz is all taking place under his direction.”

“So he was informed of the mission of warning sent to the people of the Tower,” Shabbatiel deduced.

“That is correct,” Da'athiel replied, “and it was in response to his whisper that Azrael had the demons you just encountered withdraw.”

“What was it he said?” asked the dark-robed angel standing beside them through shared thoughts.

The Oracle turned to Dumah and said, “You may hear that for yourselves.” With that, his eyes began to glow a brilliant green, and by the working of the Spirit among them, the Virtue and the Power began to see through the Cherub's eyes.

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“What have you not told us, Azrael?” Chiun asked. “It must be of a most startling nature to prevent your sword from clearing its sheath.”

Ignoring the comment, the evil Cherub addressed the question. “The Master has instructed me to let them alone. He knows of El Michael’s plans to draw those who are wavering under our authority from among our ranks. It is in our interest that they be allowed to do so, at least to try.”

“How is that?” Chiun asked, but Chayil had already begun to understand Satan’s mind on the matter.

He replied for Azrael, “The angels have been able to enter into our courts because some continue to fight our influence. The innocent among the children give the divine ones leave to see and affect our operation, and the rays of binding light from Heaven have already held us captive when one of the sons of Shem spoke.

“But you saw, Chiun, how those rays were withdrawn and we were able to move, when the people began to reject the words of Heaven’s messenger. You saw the chains break around us, and our mortal agents once again free to accomplish our will, when the crowd first heard the foolish prating, and then abandoned the assembly. Yes, let it be even so. Those who wish to leave – let them leave. And those who hear and remain will be more firmly ours than before.”

“Our authority will be complete, though our numbers slightly less,” Chiun said, his six wings beating the air slowly as he thought over the implications. “This is what Lucifer hopes to accomplish?”

“That, and more still,” Azrael replied. “Though the Oracles of Heaven will undoubtedly continue to spy on our work, El Michael would not dare to send another messenger into our lands, and still less would He be inclined to send our former brethren to interrupt our plans for this generation.”

“Tammuz,” Chiun thought aloud.

“Of course,” said Azrael. “He will be trained without incident, without distraction, and will raise a mighty army, greater than that of his father. In thirty years and three, when the wanderers of Shem meet the warriors of Shinar, will not the mouse be hunting the leopard?”

“And divine intervention?” Chiun asked, remembering the last few battles in which humans were involved.

“There will be none,” Chayil said confidently. “El Michael’s messengers, I have heard, have told the *faithful flock* that this is ‘their problem!’”

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Dumah's eyes narrowed as he heard the words of the evil Principality. He had indeed conveyed a message from the Elohim to Shem that it was the job of humankind to drive off the remaining citizens of Babylon, yet Chayil's version of the visit used words that suggested a far different idea than the true message had conveyed. Shabbatiel turned to the angels with whom he was standing and said, "The tail of the Dragon is long indeed."

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The winters were far colder in the centuries following the Great Flood. While the world had never known rain before the fountains of the deep broke apart and the windows of heaven were opened, it had even less conceived of the tiny white flakes of ice that drifted down from the sky in flurries.

Though the plain of Shinar sees very little snow in modern times, in the days of the Tower it was not so. A bright, freezing layer of wet dust covered all the cities of Babylon one cold day three and thirty years after Aphraxad's first journey to the land after the dividing of tongues.

Ishtar looked out over her City from the Tower she seldom left, and spoke without turning her head to the beings standing behind her.

"Tammuz is ready now to be king over these cities. Our numbers have grown greatly, and our armies are ready for the movements of the "faithful." My son has learned the way of the dark path, and under the cover of this shaded freedom we will spread our reign over all the earth."

Jebus, the high-priest of the world's original and purest pagan religion, took note of the fact that the years had been most kind to his queen. Although all humans aged much more slowly in those days, Yunah had indeed become a great deal like the ancient sorcerer Enoch benCain. She looked little older than her son, who was forty; and he looked as if he had lived only half that number of years, as a modern eye would perceive.

Yet Jebus was not the only soul hearing the words of the goddess-mother of the eternal boy. Nergal, the demonic Throne-angel who had been guiding the progress of young Tammuz was also in attendance, as were Chiun and Chayil, who were never found far from the monstrous Tower. The spirits were content to listen, however, as the humans spoke.

"The time is at hand, is it not, for the visit that they promised?" Jebus was confident enough in the army of the Babylonians, yet he remembered clearly the days not too long ago, when the queen ordered her warriors out of the gates of the city to do battle with an army that appeared from nowhere – an army that vanished just as abruptly in the heat of combat. Though he carried out the orders of his queen, and knew the rituals set up by Satan more thoroughly than any man before or since, surpassing by far his cousin Nimrod for dedication, he did not understand those events.

“It is at hand,” Semiramis replied. “But come, these are not matters with which you need concern yourself. Leave that responsibility to me, and my lord Tammuz. Let us go and greet our winter god, whom I perceive has just returned.” A short time later at the base of the Tower, the hunting party that had accompanied Tammuz threw open the doors, and the young king himself walked in, leading a train of servants bearing a multitude of slain animals.

“For your approval, my mother and queen,” he said, bowing low before Yunah as the spoils of the day were presented before her.

“Arise, my fair young lord,” she replied, her voice full of pride, if not affection, for the child she had birthed and trained. “What have you brought into the house of your mother?”

With obvious pleasure, Tammuz waved his hand over the offerings. “With my arms I slew the boars and the bulls. With my arrows I brought down the hart and fallow deer. With my wolves I captured the roebuck and the wild goats.”

Looking out from behind those near to the queen, a pair of young eyes was quietly beholding the scene. Yet the owner of those eyes was never quiet for very long. Slipping between the adults and running up to the queen, he asked, “Will there be a feast, my grandmother?”

“Yes, little Arioch,” she said with laughter in her voice. “A great feast. Your father has provided well for us in these bitter months.”

The boy, named for a mighty demon prince, turned to look at his father’s triumph, but reached up to hold the hand of his queen. “I want to be a hunter too,” he said.

“You shall, little one,” Yunah said. “Very soon, you shall.”

The procession resumed, and the prey was taken into the building for preparation. The servants and hunters, led by their king, advanced through the doors, with the residents of the Tower standing on either side offering praises and expressions of joy.

Behind them followed Queen Ishtar, Arioch the son of Tammuz, and Jebus the Tower’s high-priest. The lad who had witnessed the hunter’s return was indeed the son of Tammuz, but who his mother was no human in Babylon knew, except for Jebus; and he would never tell.

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The community stood gathered before the tent of Shem, spread out to listen near Noah’s Vineyard. The number of faithful servants of IaHWeH who dwelt among the mountains had increased noticeably in the generation since Shem had received word of renewed

activity at the Tower of Babel. Yet sadly, most of the additions were from births, and not from the redeemed servants of Queen Semiramis.

Arphaxad had been sorely disappointed at the outcome of his second journey; it had been far less successful than the first, although he had visited the five major cities built by Nimrod and his people. The journeys of his son Salah years later had not met with much more success, although Arvad had accompanied the son of his former traveling companion, and had been instrumental in winning the few souls that did turn to righteousness from sin and earthly security.

Shem had comforted his people, and his son, saying, "The mercy of the Almighty is not measured by the number of people who accept it, but by the quality of life He gives to those who do. Remember our father Noah, and the wickedness of his generation, how none but my brothers and I, with our wives, entered into the Ark of safety with him to see the destruction of the wicked with only our eyes.

"Remember that eight were saved out of countless souls; one family was saved out of many. Yet where one of us lives," he said, raising his hands and spreading them apart to indicate the crowd to whom he was speaking, "we are many. Where few are gathered in the name of Elohim, we have His armies among us!"

Dumah had watched in silent approval as his charge spoke that day, and now, when the people were preparing for warfare, he stood by Shem's side lending peace and power to the patriarch's words and actions. No angel would be able to directly interfere in the battle to come, yet the men of Ararat would by no means be alone, and the invisible presence and influence of the Host would not only keep the demons at bay, but also provide great power to the hearts and arms of those who fought on the side of righteousness. As generations later, under the command of Moses, the clan of the patriarch Levi would have to take up swords for holy work, so now these soldiers had been trained and prepared to cleanse the city of Babylon of its idolaters.

"It is a strange work indeed," Shabbatiel said, knowing the thoughts of the people of Shem. "It is as difficult for some angels to fully grasp as it is for these humans. Even we, the princes, do not look forward to another battle between men."

The last time men had fought with men had been the battle between Nimrod and his former ally Asshur. Both men had been slain, and many of the soldiers in their armies with them. Dumah nodded in agreement with Shabbatiel's statement. This would not be a pleasant sight, even for the watchers who had seen bloodshed before. How the men of Ararat would react was any angel's guess; even so, El Michael, by the authority of the Union, had set this course of action in motion. The angels of Heaven had learned long ago to trust that all would be well.

Among those who prepared for war were two men who had indeed been called forth from Babylon. They were brothers, but their appearance could not have been more different. One was Hul, the son of Aram, a Shemite who had turned his foot away from the

teachings of Noah, and had followed the children of Ham into Shinar. The other was a former guardian of Babel's walls, Uz of the Neo-Nephilim.

Uz had not responded to Arphaxad's first visit to Babylon, or his second on which Arvad the Hamite had accompanied him. He did not leave his adopted homeland when a third trip to the outer cities took place, in defiance of the demons' promises that El Michael would dare send no more messengers. Yet on each occasion, when he heard the words of the divine messenger, or heard of his teachings from others, he retained the things he had heard in his heart.

When the Shomerim Gabriel and Raziel shone the light of the Shekinah down over the cities, protecting the evangelists from the wrath of fallen angels, one beam was reserved for him, and as he lay on the ground unable to move on the first trips, he listened. In the later trips he found he had been able to move, but gone from him was his desire to do so. When Arphaxad spoke Uz stood where he was, and listened. He would not obey the queen to silence these men, as he and his brother Gether had at their first meeting. He would learn, and he would learn to hope.

"Is there a place such as this man describes," he asked himself, "where all are equal and none are slaves? Is there a place such as this, where I am not counted a fool because my language is strange, and my appearance is monstrous?" To be sure, so changed was the appearance of the men who had undergone the unholy transformation that children, and some adults, could not gaze at them for too long.

They were giants, even by the standards of those days; and of greater stature than Shem, who was born before the flood and was taller than most people that were born after the world changed. Their muscles were thick, and their bodies were machines of war. Their skill with weapons and tools was greatly enhanced, and their appetite for food corresponded to their physical natures' requirements.

Yet Arphaxad taught that salvation was for all, that the tents of Shem welcomed those whose clothing bore any color, and whose tongues bore the mark of any of the clans that were divided at the first falling of the Tower. "Is there a place such as this?" he dared to ask himself; but he did not dare to speak. In the heart of even so powerful a man as this, there was fear.

When Salah, the son of Arphaxad, took over the prophet's role, Uz heard the same words spoken with as much love but a new voice, and again he listened. Gradually, he dared to let himself believe that the tents of Shem would be a better place than where he was currently residing and, not wishing to see his brothers and family meet the fate being predicted, he shared with them in secret his concerns, and his hopes.

Of those with whom he spoke, only his brother Hul paid very much attention, though at least he managed to keep the others from repeating his words to others, at least until after his departure. When he knew the time was right he and his brother left the cities of Babel,

never to return. Angels guided their steps, and kept them hidden from both men and demons, until they were far enough away to make pursuit worthwhile.

Yunah had known of a few here and there who had left their homes and acquaintances to follow the messengers back to their encampment, but when she learned that one of her precious Nephilim had departed as well, she was furious.

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Like Da'athiel, Zephon was an Oracle of Heaven. He was often given insights concerning events to come, and would occasionally give other angels words of advice that neither they nor he understood until the appropriate time. As he stood above the earth, watching the movements of Shem and the movements of Yunah and Tammuz, his eyes a bright, glittering green, he knew that he had a message to share with one of the Princes of Heaven.

Although El Michael, the intercessor between the Hosts and the Throne, was always willing, and sometimes available, for discussion with even the least of the divine angels, it was the will of Elohim that the authority of Heaven's government be partitioned down through the Adonaim, or archangels. Under them the Sar'im led out in appointing tasks to the main divisions of the holy workers, and each of the seven Orders of angels had a Chief appointed over it.

Apart from this hierarchy were the Oracles. They were generally Cherubim, but Zadkiel the Throne and a few others were called from diverse Orders. With the name of a particular angel on his mind, this Cherub opened a passageway from the skies above the earth to the Heavenly realm, and entered into the bright Kingdom.

Upon arriving there, he spread his wings and drifted above the shining buildings and golden streets, noting the perfect harmony of those who traveled, and spoke, and worked. He saw angels going back and forth between the Kingdom and the physical plane, most of them descending to earth to lend comfort, encouragement or strength to the humans below, or returning from having done so. As he moved, he let the Spirit of IaHWeH direct him, his eyes searching for the one he sought.

Finally, near a distant, abandoned altar, he spotted a dark figure, standing out dramatically from the other, brightly dressed beings that covered the landscape and air.

As Zephon landed at the altar and walked among the cracked pillars, he reflected on this spot, the one area of Heaven that had been abandoned even before the conflict with Lucifer had broken out openly, and had remained unfixed when the demons had finally been cast out unto the earth.

He found Dumah staring at the ground in the center of the construct, and the silent Virtue looked up and smiled at his friend. "This place has strange memories for both of us,"

Zephon said. “It was here that I stood captive to Azazel’s lies, and truly made my decision to stand with the rebels.”

“It was here that I too was affected by Satan’s words,” Dumah replied in whisper to the Oracle’s mind. “Though I never entered their camp as you did, I was drawn to him – his beauty, his authority, his power... it was overwhelming; and a miracle that we survived.”

“Blessed be the name of IaHWeH, for He was patient and merciful with us all,” Zephon said, and he of all the angels knew well of which he spoke. Zephon had sided with the falling angels, and had been very nearly swept away with their rebellion, but at the last possible moment he turned back to the Throne, and aided the warriors of Elohim against his former companions. How and why the Oracle, who had been one of the first to predict Lucifer’s rebellion and its tragic effects, could have been so deceived by the Adversary was a fact that even he had not been able to entirely explain.

“Indeed,” came the wordless response.

“I know why you feel so drawn to this place, Dumah,” Zephon said. “It, like you, continues to show forth the effects of the rebellion. It is broken and cracked, the one spot in the entire Kingdom that reminds us constantly of sin. Yet I also have a special connection with this altar, of which you do not know.

“These pillars, and this raised platform, they are Lucifer’s work. They were made by the first of our brethren when he was still the Covering Cherub and the chief among us. Before any of the rest of us were created, his name was Asael, “Made by El,” although that name was later given to one of the Throne-angels. Lucifer was in turn the master builder of this Kingdom, and that is one of the reasons why the physical structures of our home suffered so greatly under the effects of his sin; they were under his apportioned responsibility.”

Dumah nodded; he knew of some of these things, yet he could see that the Oracle was going somewhere, and so he communicated nothing further, but listened intently.

“As I have considered matters, and I have done so often since the events took place, it has been revealed to me that Satan’s discontent began long before he spoke to us from this altar, to tell us of his newfound doubts and powers. It truly began at this altar, but many years before even he knew what was taking place in his essence.

“Though this altar was one of the first built, when the Kingdom became more established El Michael built the Great Altar which later became the Temple of the Spirit. We, as we were created and established as servants of the Most High, began to gather there for meeting and worship, and eventually our weekly meetings came to be located in the Throne Room of IaHWeH Himself.

“Though some continued to use this altar to meet,” Zephon continued, indicating their current location, “Lucifer began to try and ‘improve’ things. He redesigned the

configuration of the pillars, and changed the nature of the platform to get it to more closely resemble El Michael's handiwork.

"None saw a problem with this at the time; or at least, those who did said nothing. Yet somewhere deep within each angel, the knowledge placed within us by the Spirit led us to prefer other places to this, and while there was no transgression, or anything "wrong" we could perceive openly, this became the Abandoned Altar, even within an otherwise perfect Kingdom."

Dumah asked, "And this relates to you?"

"Intimately," came the reply. "When I say 'none' saw a problem with it, I meant 'none other.' I was one of those who said nothing, and perhaps I could have prevented this misery of the universe had I spoken when I had the chance. I was inexperienced as an Oracle, true; I had no way of knowing what could unfold from the little feelings I perceived; that is also true. Yet, for some time I wondered... what if I had spoken?"

"This way of thinking does no good," communicated Dumah to his friend.

"I know it," Zephon replied. "I know it well, and yet, when Lucifer rebelled the darkness within him somehow knew just how to use this to my near destruction. I never told Azazel about my failure to speak, Dumah, yet darkness calls to darkness. Perhaps he read it in my reactions to his initial approaches with me. Whatever it was, he used it – and whatever guilt I brought upon myself clouded my judgment. Despite what I knew of the rebels' falling-away, I stood with them."

Zephon, in speaking, used the word *Araphel* for "darkness," and as Dumah turned toward the Oracle with an expression indicating that he had just realized something, the Cherub said, "Yes, that is a word you are familiar with; and it is about that matter that I have come to speak with you this day."

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 4: MYSTAGOGUE

Sammael the arch demon spoke sharply to the goddess-woman Ishtar. The latter's eyes were sparkling with strange colors as she beheld the spirit in front of her, although the fallen Power had not drawn together a physical form. Arioch, the son of Tammuz, was the only other human in the room, and he sat in silent obedience, watching his queen and grandmother speak to the empty air. Even at his young age he had been witness to the appearance of demons from time to time. He already knew of their power first-hand, therefore he made no comment and was content to merely listen to half of a conversation.

"I have urged you to take this threat more seriously," Sammael said. "We would not lose the Tower over some misplaced pride in the arm of flesh."

Semiramis laughed, and Petahel laughed within her, though for slightly different reasons. The wicked Seraph was confident in his power to manipulate the battle through the sorceress' influence. Yunah was confident in her son and his armies. Together they answered the angry boar-demon. "We will not lose this Tower. Lucifer will complete his work in Mizraim, and will return here to spread his wings over all the earth."

"You presume too much," the dark angel replied, pointing an accusing finger at Ishtar, but speaking more truly to Petahel than to the human vessel. "You were not there when Nimrod fell. I stood at his side when that stray arrow pierced his flesh. I tell you, it should have missed! I have spread my perception to its limit; I have considered the battle and those last moments time and again. That arrow should have missed!

"I may be kept from understanding how and why, but I know WHO. Did not the eyes of the Cherub flicker when the arrow sailed through the air? Did not Elohim raise His hand to turn the course of events to His advantage? And in all this, He says *He will not interfere!*"

Sammael was indeed angry. For over a generation he had turned this matter over in his mind. Yet the fallen angel had been kept from knowing the full truth. As Asshur, Nimrod's mortal enemy, lay dying beneath the weapons of Babylon's soldiers, he had done something he had seldom done before – he had prayed. As Samson would pray many lifetimes later, knowing that his life was forfeit and that his poor decisions had made him responsible for all that had come upon him... Asshur had prayed his final arrow would find a true mark.

Somewhere high above, where the deeds of men are recorded for eternity, and the thoughts and intents of the heart are laid open for holy angels to perceive, the prayer was heard. Somewhere deep in the heart of the Shining Kingdom, where One Indescribable sat in glory, power and compassion, the prayer was honored. The Cherub Gabriel, who stood above the battle, turned the course of the deadly shaft just slightly, and thus turned the course of Babel's history.

"Do not think to educate me on the inconsistencies of the Throne," Petahel responded, having subdued Yunah's consciousness to the degree he could speak through her directly. He had heard his fellow demon's musings on this matter before. Furthermore, he was becoming quite angry himself, and did not like the insinuations that Sammael was making about the way he had led the Queen's actions. In addition, if the discontent Power took issue with the preparations being made for Shem's approach, his time would be better spent bothering Chayil, who had been far more involved with the military arrangements than himself.

"I know well enough His dealings with men and angels," the fallen Seraph hissed. "Yet we both also know El Michael's instructions to Shem, and His warnings that this will be a human affair. Is not one demon mightier than many men? You are wasting your time and mine with these concerns; this body and I make a team that is more than a match for the tent-dwellers."

"You rely on the words of a report by Azrael," came the irritated reply, contempt evident in his voice. "When did *he* ever judge a matter rightly? Lucifer favors him because he has more power than sense, and his loyalty to our cause is beyond question; but I would not wager a battle, much less a battle for *this Tower*, on the things he has said."

Petahel gave an angry laugh. "What does it matter that Azrael was the messenger? It is on the one who sent the message that our victory depends. What does it matter that the angels may sneak around and aid their earthen friends? Let Lucifer once rouse himself from the south and return... and the Host of Heaven and all these fleshlings will fall under the shadow of his dragon's wings, and perish in the blast of his breath!"

Sammael regarded the demon in silent exasperation. Petahel had spoken those impassioned words as much out of a desire to end the argument as to express loyalty to their dark master. Of course there was little he could say in counterpoint. The Power kept his objections to himself and abruptly vanished from the room, leaving a lingering atmosphere of hatred in his wake.

Ishtar turned to see Arioch still sitting quietly, watching his grandmother with curious eyes. "My sweet child," she said to him reassuringly, "Come away with me. We have much work to do in the next few days." Arioch took her hand and followed her out of the chamber, but something stuck in his young mind, and would not let him ignore what he had just heard.

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“Darkness,” Dumah thought. He had appeared in a physical body and was communing with Shem, helping him and his people with the final preparations for their journey to Shinar. He continued to think about the things Zephon had told him before they departed from that cracked altar.

“When darkness covers the land,” the Oracle had said cryptically, “and the spring goddess rises, then will one point of light divide asunder the soul and spirit. When the arrows of evil cast the righteous to the earth, then the voice that does not speak must tear the world apart.”

Dumah knew enough about Zephon’s visions to understand that asking him what those words meant would be useless. Still, some of it seemed to apply to him, at least apparently, and he whispered his thanks to the Cherub before departing immediately for the earth.

“Are there enough swords to go around?” Shem asked his angelic companion. Dumah let his vision play out over the entire camp, and in an instant had counted weapons. He already knew the number of men.

“There are enough,” he responded to the patriarch’s mind.

“And are there enough men?” Shem asked with a small smile. He received the same response.

Just then several warriors approached him and one said, “We are prepared, my father.” Turning from his dark-robed friend, he saw his son Arphaxad and four others standing, armed and ready to go.

Salah, Arvad of the Hamites, and Magog and Ashkenaz of the descendants of Japheth were with him, having been selected as leaders of the five divisions. Shem himself was accompanying them this time, but he had elected to leave the captainship of his army to the other capable members of his extended family.

“Are the traveling tents prepared?” Shem inquired. He knew that the journey would take many days, and was planning to be careful that his forces arrived at the cities of Babylon rested and fed.

“They are,” Magog said, pointing to a group of men carrying rolls of white cloth in their packs. Though the tents of Ararat were purple, blue and red, when they moved as a people they would march under simple, white purity: the color of Noah’s robe.

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“Father,” the soft voice said. Tammuz looked down at his child, who looked so very much like him. Everyone in the Tower commented on their similar appearance, especially

those who had known the king as a boy. He smiled as he bent to take the child in his powerful arms.

“What is it, my son?”

“What is... dragon?”

Tammuz was surprised. That word was not openly used in the Tower, or in all of Babylon that he knew of, and he himself had not heard it spoken until his mother had taken him into her secret chamber of idols near the top of the collapsed building. Was Yunah training the boy? What reason would she have to instruct his son in the Mysteries? And why would she not tell him? Was she seeking a replacement for him? Why, he was her son!

The absurdity of the sudden, heated direction of his thoughts caused him to shake his head in confident denial, and with a smile he asked, “Where did you hear that word?”

“Grandmother,” came the reply. “She spoke to the air, and she said ‘dragon.’”

“And what did she say about this ‘dragon?’” the hunter asked, thinking that he would have to tell his mother to be more careful when considering her audience. He knew she spoke with their invisible masters through the power of the Mysteries, but he believed her claims that she commanded them as freely as they did her, and that she should have more of a care for what young ears might overhear. Arioch, after all, was still too young to understand many of the things that he had learned growing up.

“She said Lucifer had his wings.” Now, Lucifer was also a word not often spoken, and never written; but this was for reverence’s sake, not because he was a hated enemy as was Tiamat the Dragon. Still, Arioch had heard that name before, listed as one of the gods, and there was no doubt that this was what his child had overheard.

“Ah, that,” Tammuz said, thinking he understood. “What the queen meant was that the god Lucifer helped my father to *kill* the dragon, and so he stole away its wings.” The young king spoke thus reassuringly to his child, but the religion of the Tower was a strange thing indeed, where secrets were powerful, and doubts were more useful to those in charge than faith. Tammuz knew this about his mother’s beliefs, the beliefs he shared, and something about what his son overheard troubled him, even as they had remained active in Arioch’s mind.

Yet the child, having voiced his question, seemed to accept the explanation readily enough. “Oh,” he said with childlike acceptance, and wandered off to play. Like a baton being passed, like a parasite that jumped from victim to victim, the thought now embedded itself in the mind of the son of Nimrod. He resolved to ask his mother about these seemingly innocent words that for some reason would not let him have peace.

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Nergal was not happy. The men of Shem's tents had begun their march, Petahel and Sammael had exchanged unpleasant words on more than one occasion, and now the Ba'alim Chayil and Chiun were arguing. What was worse was that they were arguing over *his* charge. Tension was running high among the invisible residents of Babel's idolatrous temple, and the overall mood was beginning to spill over even unto the human citizens of the Tower and surrounding settlements.

In the current disagreement between his superiors, Nergal found that he agreed with Chiun's point of view. The fallen angel, formerly known as Kokabiel, said, "The purpose of the Mysteries is to keep the humans thinking that they have power over us. Everything depends on that deception, for their pride is high."

Chayil, who considered himself one of the more practical sort, replied, "I understand why it is being done, yet this matter has led to unnecessary complications. Why did we not merely let Tammuz know that the Chaos Dragon is not their enemy? Why not reveal him as Lucifer? What greater respect do these humans have than for power? I fail to see anything but gain by that more simple approach."

"The gain, Chayil, is that not all the residents of the Cities are so easily inclined to following the way of the Dragon. Indeed, many of them believe they are actually serving a higher purpose by remaining loyal to our mortal god and goddess."

"And some of them do not believe at all," Nergal added.

"Those who do not believe much of anything are not our concern," Chiun said. "They are the more easily manipulated for it, and will certainly not be convinced to enter the tents of Shem. It is the people who care, who have passion for the things unseen, these are the ones IaHWeH particularly seeks, and whom we would most like to have firmly under our wings.

"This is why we have used the Mysteries to separate the Dragon from the Liberator. As Lucifer set us free from the laws of Elohim in Heaven, so He has brought freedom to these men of earth. Those who would not be willing to follow a Dragon... will they not be persuaded to follow a light-giving angel; and a man made into a god by his obedience to this shining messenger? We know what is best for them; they do not even know what they truly desire."

Chayil did not care overly much for these details of spiritual politics. Though he was assigned regent of the Tower after Satan's departure at its fall, he had not even bothered to enquire as to his master's long-term plans. He let Chiun direct the course of the humans' developing beliefs. He merely did as he was instructed and saw to it that others did the same. Now, when armies were involved, his interest was again aroused, and he did not like what he saw. Unwilling to concede to the Seraph's explanation he muttered, "We are practically on the eve of war; the timing of this confusion is most... inconvenient."

As the conversation continued, growing neither more heated nor closer to a satisfactory resolution, one pair of ears listened and thought that the timing *was* convenient. This spirit was unseen, even by the eyes of the demons, for his prayers, and the prayers of the people of Ararat, had rendered him both invisible to the creatures of darkness, and able to operate within their sphere of imagined authority.

When Tamael had heard enough to know that his former brethren suspected nothing of direct divine involvement, he slipped past the conversing demons and went off to seek Tammuz, to continue his subtle influence on the young king. The edge of his white veil trailed around a corner after him, just in time to be obscured by the prayer-affected walls as Nergal looked over in that direction. Not by might nor by power, but by the gentle influence of the Spirit of Elohim, borne by a humble messenger like a live coal from the Altar of Heaven, would this task be accomplished.

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“We shall rest here,” Arphaxad said to those standing close to him. The men around him went out to convey the message to the other four leaders, and the advance halted.

Within a few hours rows of white tents were laid out on a ridge of land overlooking the Tower. Fires were kindled to combat the chill of winter and food was prepared. Except for the absence of women and children, this night would not be that different from other nights. With perfect confidence, most of the warriors of Ararat placed the following day’s events in the hands of their Creator, and few even spoke of the conflict to come.

The men shared laughter and talk, and though none had forgotten the unpleasant events they were to face, they sang songs of praise. They gave thanks to their Almighty for preserving them thus far, and for His promises regarding the future. Though many felt some tension as a natural result of their circumstances, all were content.

When darkness had set in completely Dumah drew near and, allowing himself to be seen by mortal eyes, sat among the travelers. He listened as his friend addressed his soldiers. “Our destination is before us,” Shem said. “Within that Tower that is open to our view lies one hidden. It is not Lucifer himself who opposes us, but an unholy vessel of his power. What we know of this queen is evil enough, but my guardian assures me that angels cannot speak the half of what is taking place in the plain of Shinar.

“Yet despite all this, it is not in us to attack them. It is not our place to pronounce judgment on these rebels against the law of our Almighty. No, it is not in our own name that we march, or that we will fight. It is not for our own gain or benefit that we draw the sword when the sun rises; but it is the strange work of Yahweh that we accomplish. Yahweh has awakened on His holy Throne, and has heard the cry of the earth.

“Let us rest well tonight, for we must fight well tomorrow.”

On one of the branches of a brown, leafless tree, a solitary black raven perched, watching the men below. It blinked its dark, emotionless eyes and tilted its head to one side, listening to the language of men. Dumah glanced up with a start, sensing that something was amiss. He got up, still in wingless, physical form, and walked over to get a closer look at the large bird.

As he approached the raven hopped up to a higher branch, and turned to pay closer attention to the angel below him than the men who had remained sitting by the campfire. Dumah, with his midnight-colored robes shifting with the icy breeze, and his veil flapping like a long scarf in the wind, looked directly up at the avian visitor and thought at it, “It is winter in Shinar. You are very far north.”

As he fully expected, the Princely Virtue received a thought in response. “It is ‘wicked’ on earth, as your kind counts wickedness. You are very far down.”

Dumah thought for a moment before saying anything further. This, he knew, was a demon in physical form – but which one? The divine Archangels, he knew, would often take the form of animals in combat. The Throne-angel Uriel could assume the shape of a four-winged lion. Raphael used the form of a bull, and Camael’s chosen likeness was that of a great eagle.

After the fall of Lucifer, many of the demons that descended with him considered themselves to be arch demons, and likewise assumed animalistic appearances in battle. Satan of course was the mighty, seven-headed dragon. He was the red serpent, the worm of chaos that those who were initiated into the Babylonian Mysteries called Tiamat. He was the Leviathan and the great Serpent although other, natural animals were also called by those names. He was the Hydra, and a host of other titles.

Arioch and Nisroch, who had once been true Archangels in Heaven, took the form of a lion and an eagle respectively, mirroring the shapes of two of their holy brethren. Sammael the fallen Power represented himself as a wild boar during the first battle for the Tower, running on the wind to rip angelic warriors out of the air with his araphel-tainted tusks. His close companion Abaddon became a fierce wolf, whose sharp fangs and formidable claws crackled with the dark energy that was the counterpart to the holy fire that was employed by the servants of Heaven.

A raven... that was a new shape, yet Dumah did not have to wait long to perceive the spirit with which he was speaking. “Azrael – I know your essence. In the name of IaHWeH, depart from the camp of these men.”

The bird cawed three times, loudly, and the silent angel knew that the intruder was laughing at him. “You need not cast me out,” came the thought a moment later. “I have what I sought.” Having said that, the feathered creature burst apart with an audible crack, and all that remained was a thin tendril of fading smoke.

The evil Cherub, in spirit form, sped away before Dumah could give chase should he be so inclined, and went off to report the matter to his fellows.

Even his angelic speed, however, would not make him the first to bring news of the Shemites' camp to the residents of the cities. Long before Azrael had ventured out on his own, the captain of Tammuz' armies, his supposed uncle Sabtecha, had sent spies out along the outskirts of Shinar's plain. Though the travelers had avoided the other cities around Babylon on the way to the Tower they had not escaped being noticed.

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Sabtecha ascended the last flight of stairs to arrive at the queen's usual haunt. As he approached the door to her chamber he was met by the chief guard of the Tower. "I have urgent news," the captain said. "Let me by to speak with Queen Em'Yunaheth."

"She is in private council with king Tammuz," came the response. "I am not to let anyone pass at such times."

"This is urgent!" the captain repeated, insistently this time.

"I have my orders," said the guard, making no sign that he was going to comply.

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Sabtecha need not have been so concerned, for as the two men stood staring tensely at each other Azrael swept past them, undetected, and slipped through the sealed doorway into Yunah's chamber. The queen would be informed.

Azrael's news would have to wait a moment, however, for she and her son were indeed in council, and it was not a pleasant conversation. As the Cherub entered the chamber, invisible to all but Nergal who was present, and Petahel had he cared to look, he heard Tammuz say, "You have asked me that already, and I tell you again: I do not know. I do not know why it is important. I do not know why my peace has fled concerning this matter."

"Then *be* at peace, my son," the wicked queen said slowly, the irritation in her voice apparent. "You have only just begun to reign over these people, and such details are not for your brow. Jebus and I are the keepers of the Mysteries. How could I explain to you, my son, that Tiamat is both friend and foe, both deserter and preserver of our people? He is light as well as darkness; He is truth as well as deception. He is both Teitan, the prince of darkness, and Lucifer, the prince of light."

"And my father, the hero," Tammuz asked sarcastically, "Was he both traitor and redeemer?"

Yunah stood up and looked down at him with violence in her eyes. The young king expected to be struck. Instead his mother said, with a voice surprisingly calm, “Be careful how you speak of your own soul, my son. One thing is certain in the Mystery of both our own gods and that of our divine enemy – what you speak is what you are. You and your father are one; do not condemn yourself.”

Azrael saw his chance, as Tammuz unwillingly considered her words, and communicated what he knew to Petahel.

Ishtar continued to speak where the human side of her had left off, “The time is at hand. Forget such insignificant matters. The army of Shem is at our gates.” Tammuz looked at her intently as she concluded, “Tomorrow they will attack.”

Before the king could reply the door to the chamber burst open. Sabtecha, though he was not one of the Neo-Nephilim, had demonstrated his great strength by picking up the Tower’s chief guard and throwing him against the wooden door with such force that the barrier had given way. The captain of Babylon’s soldiers and the armies of the cities stepped over the unconscious sentinel and shouted, “My queen, the host of Shem approaches! They will be upon us at daybreak!”

Ishtar, staring at the broken door rather than the impassioned speaker, said, “I know.”

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 5: SYNAGOGUE

As Arphaxad ordered the forces of Ararat forward, he bore in mind what his father had told him of Dumah's report. "They know we are coming. We will not have the advantage of surprise."

Though the Tower was clearly visible from their camp the night before, the men who marched that day were still more than an hour's journey from their destination. Even if Azrael and Sabtecha had not heard of their approach ahead of time, they would still not have had the benefit of a completely unheralded attack.

Ishtar stood at one of the Tower's windows watching the approach of the men, flowing toward her like rivers of red, purple and blue. "Let them come," she said, "We are ready."

Tammuz and Sabtecha stood at the head of the Babylonian army. Many of the soldiers from all of Shinar's cities gathered together within the walls, having been stationed there since the beginning of the year. Yunah knew that this was the appointed time, when El Michael's prediction would come true and the followers of Shem would attempt to drive off the inhabitants of her home and destroy the remnants of her Tower completely. She had gathered the best of the warriors of their surrounding settlements, and Tammuz had readied them for the conflict.

In addition three messengers had been sent to the cities that lay in the direction from which the men of Ararat had not come. Yunah did not expect the battle to last as long as it would take for the riders to arrive and return with reinforcements, but Chayil had insisted, and Petahel had complied.

When the watchmen posted along Babel's walls saw that their opponents had reached a predetermined distance, they put their horns to their lips and each man blew a short blast. With a loud cry, Tammuz and his uncle led their warriors out through the gates of Babel, and into the plain of Shinar.

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Watching the events unfolding below with intense interest the holy angels heard El Michael, who was among them, saying, “Be at peace, and see the salvation of IaHWeH.”

Tamael was standing near the four Archangels, who were all present and looking down through the Void to earth. Tamael had been hovering outside the walls of Babel’s Tower during the heated exchange between Tammuz and his mother, and he wondered what effect his mission would have – what effect so small a thing *could* have – on the outcome of the battle being joined between these two large armies of men. He had faith that El Michael’s commission to him had not been idly given, but he had to admit his curiosity when seeing the two waves of humanity rushing toward each other.

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The Virtue Dumah was also watching the battle, but his viewpoint was a lot closer. He drifted above his charge near the center of the mass of Ararat’s army, invisible, but acutely aware of what was going on around him. The guardians of many of the warriors were also there, but they knew that they were not allowed to help the battle directly. Their purpose was mostly to ensure that the demons, which were also represented in Shinar by a considerable number, did not interfere.

The demons appeared to be aware of the arrangement, for they merely hovered over or stood by their subjects, cold and stoic figures among the animated and furious humans.

When the front lines of the two forces met the ringing of metal on metal began, and the sounds could be heard all the way back in Babylon’s Tower. Yunah stood with invisible companions – Chayil and Chiun, along with Sammael and Moloch who were behind her. All were watching the battle, and by virtue of Petahel’s perception Yunah was able to discern details even at that great distance with eyes the color of fiery opals.

Shem’s blade was among the busiest. Though the demons did not actively participate, they nevertheless subtly painted the god-prince as an attractive target in the minds of their servants, and he was never without two or three opponents waiting to get their chance to engage him. The giant Uz was close by his side, defending his grandfather with fervent dedication. No sign of age slowed Shem’s pace, for though he was the oldest of all who had marched from Ararat, he was born in the pure, vital environment of the pre-Flood world, and would live on this earth for over a century after this battle was concluded.

As Shem struck at the legs of one of his enemies, another drew near. The purple-clad warrior swung his blade downward at the head of this latest opponent, but the man blocked the attack with the flat of his own weapon, cushioning the blow by pressing his shield up against the other side of his sword. As soon as he had checked the descent of Shem’s blade, the Babylonian used it as a pivot point, and swung the handle of his own sword toward the patriarch’s head, striking him hard in the temples with his pommel.

Shem stumbled back, the sharp pain causing his vision to blur and his balance to falter. He instinctively raised his sword to parry the coming attack, and was somehow able to

keep his opponent at bay until he was able to regain his footing. Salah and Arvad, once partners in evangelism, now became brothers in arms. Slowly but steadily they overcame their enemies, and began to cut deeply into the Babylonian ranks. They, like Shem, were made the particular target of the Shinaric soldiers' wrath, though they needed no demonic prompting. The faces of these two men were well known to their opponents, and well hated by those who had failed to respond to their message of mercy before the door had closed forever on their souls.

The Neo-Nephilim were enjoying themselves. They had foregone their usual role as archers for this battle, and had chosen to be a part of the main forces. As the battle wore on they found themselves wading through a sea of Shemites, deflecting blows with their augmented speed, and smashing their enemies to the ground, often bare handed. Each of the gigantic warriors left a line of unconscious or wounded men in his wake.

A hunter like his father, Tammuz had all the reflexes of a predator, and the influence of his mother, though leaving him relatively unchanged outwardly, had made him into a fighter to rival the massive monstrosities that fought on his side. Men fell beneath his arrows, and retreated when faced with his sword.

Even with his great strength and combat skill, however, and the assistance of the Neo-Nephilim, this was not enough to turn the tide of the battle. The men of Ararat had the courage of their convictions, the prayers of holy men and women, and the favor of the Divine Judge on their side. Gradually the warriors of Tammuz were being forced backward, closer and closer to the gate through which they emerged. They had fanned out like a river's delta from the opening in Babylon's wall, and now they were being contained and compressed in a large semi-circle on the edge of their city.

Ishtar took note of the change in her warriors' formation, and she closed her eyes in thought. Her confidence in the physical strength of the men who fought to protect their images and sins may have been misplaced, but her confidence in the spirits she believed she had at her command was not. She would direct, and they would obey.

"I call upon the spirits of darkness," she said in a loud voice, "to blind the men of Ararat. I call upon the spirits of fear, to take their spirit away. I call upon the powers of violence and madness to fill my men, and to make their swords invincible." Having said that, she began to chant strange words in the language of her precious Mysteries.

Chayil, ever practical, looked at Chiun with an expression that could almost be called amusement as the human before them muttered and screeched and waved her hands about her. There was no reasoning with Petahel, of course, but surely this was unnecessary. The demons already knew what she wanted them to do; indeed, they had *directed* her to command it, yet Ishtar continued to summon forth one dread force after another, long after the demons assigned to such things had already departed to carry out their work.

Chiun caught the demonic Principality's dry expression and said, "Take this seriously, Chayil. When reason departs it is then that a human is most securely ours. At that point

those over whom they have influence become captive to their voluntary madness and, ultimately, to us.”

The regent of Babel had to admit that Chiun had a point.

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All across the battlefield the Principalities among the demons, and all the angels of a higher Class than these, raised their arms out in response to the commands of their superiors. All at once dark power rippled through the fallen angels and surged over all the men on the ground like a wave of thick, indigo smoke. The angels saw the blast of darkness coming, and prevented most of the effects that were directed at the warriors of Ararat. They had no authority to prevent the effects on the Babylonians, however, and those men were indeed filled with a sudden wave of power born of pure, unthinking rage.

Technically the demonic spirits were not *directly* interfering, and therefore the holy angels could not drive them off. Nevertheless, their indirect alliance was having a telling effect on the course of the battle. The Tower’s defenders began to push against their invaders, and to force them backward.

Dumah looked over at the Tower, and saw through the spiritual darkness surrounding the city that Semiramis was continuing to call for assistance from the masters she believed she had mastered. His eyes narrowed and sparkled with rage when he saw the unholy union of flesh and spirit being used as a channel to resist this cleansing process. “How long will you resist the power of Elohim?” he whispered to the demons standing beside Ishtar. He received no response.

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“We have not met before,” Shem said to the young man standing before him clothed in fur and armor.

“We shall not meet again,” Tammuz retorted, and leapt at the individual that Nergal had just informed him was Shem. In joyful obedience to the subconscious message of his demonic tutor, the king of Babylon unloaded his enraged energies on the patriarch, and forced him back into a crowd of struggling soldiers.

Uz, who was standing nearby, saw that his grandfather was in great peril, and he flattened his own current adversary then ran over to where Tammuz had Shem pinned between himself and several other Babylonians. The giant warrior swung his foot toward the latter swordsmen, and though one blocked the incoming attack with his shield, the force of the kick threw him backward. The Neo-Nephil turned around to face his former sovereign.

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The dark-robed Virtue spread his wings and flew up above the battlefield. He placed himself on eye level with the demons and the human queen they were using. With their non-physical eyesight, those standing in the Tower saw the distant figure clearly, while Dumah could only see them dimly due to the shadowy dome between them. For days and nights the words had been echoing back and forth in his mind, like the tune of a song that is almost familiar, like a name that is almost remembered:

*When darkness covers the land and the spring goddess rises,
Then will one point of light divide asunder the soul and spirit.
When the arrows of evil cast the righteous to the earth,
Then the voice that does not speak must tear the world apart.*

Darkness was certainly covering the land below him, and while no literal arrows were flying through the air, the righteous were certainly being cast to the earth. Dumah lifted his face to the Heavens, and prayed with silent conviction.

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In the skies above the battle, the angels saw El Michael looking down at the praying Malak. As He listened to the wordless prayer, the Prince of angels began to shine softly with a gentle, golden glow. As the sound of battle continued beneath the Virtue, and his words of prayer became more ardent, Michael began to burn more brightly, and a low thunder was heard coming from both the Throne Room and the Temple of the Shekinah.

When Dumah ended his prayer, the High Prince was sparkling with such brilliance that the angels near Him veiled their eyes, and the Seraphim covered their faces with their wings. El Michael looked down through the Void and unto the surface of the earth, and He said one word that was echoed by the Almighty One that sat on the Eternal Throne. "Nathón." *Granted.*

* * * * *

Dumah heard the reply like a surge of fire through his being. With eyes ablaze he drew his sword and sped off toward the Tower as quickly as his wings could beat. To humans, had they been able to see him, this would have seemed instantaneous, and his sword did not burst into its spiritual flames until the mighty angel had already pierced the dome of darkness. Immediately dark shadows lifted themselves into the air to oppose the invader. The holy angel struck out at two demons, and slashed through one of them before he could even draw his dark blade. As the spirits fell back to the earth, glittering wounds opened in their beings, a four-winged form of great size filled the air before Dumah, forcing him to halt his speedy advance.

Chabariel, one of largest of the fallen Ophanim, floated slowly closer to the Virtue and said, "The Ba'alim have informed me that you are among the Sealed. Be that as it may, you are out of your authority in this dark place, and you will not resist the injury of my kherev."

“Had not your lords taken it upon themselves to interfere with this battle, I would not be here,” Dumah replied. “Yet beyond this, your ‘authority’ is but a courtesy beyond that which you can understand. Behold, this day you will surely know that Elohim is Master of all creation. You shall surely know that IaHWeH is King of all the earth!”

Chabariel’s blade flashed out of its sheath and was immediately lit with dark fire. The Throne-angel flew forward and attempted to thrust Dumah through, but the Virtue turned aside and banged downward with his own weapon. Other angels may have been thrown off balance by the force of the deflection, but the demon’s four wings gave him great stability in the air. Before Dumah could fully turn to face the direction of his assailant he was forced to parry another blow.

One after another the attacks came. Chabariel used his leverage in the open air with expert ease, finding ways to keep Dumah from gaining the advantage, and preventing him from getting any closer to the Tower. The other spirits of Babylon, those not intently watching the human battle taking place outside the gates, gathered around the dueling beings, but were content to watch, and did not intervene.

Though burning with holy zeal, Dumah began to feel as if he was surrounded, and delayed for far too long by a single warrior. He realized that under the dome of darkness he was not as effective a fighter as he ordinarily would have been, but El Michael had granted his prayer; this was where he belonged. Beyond the borders of the City the Virtue heard the sounds of men fighting, men in pain, and men dying.

With a mighty flash of speed Dumah avoided a vertical slash, not by deflecting it with his sword or dodging around, but by slipping to the side and dragging his burning blade after him. The tip of his kherev scored one of Chabariel’s upper wings, and the demon grunted in pain as a thin, glowing line appeared upon it. To preserve his stability the Throne folded his other upper wing in as well, and was now only able to fly with two.

The situation had changed. Dumah was now more maneuverable in the sky, and he dove downward to finish off this battle. The Ophan was not ready to concede defeat just yet, however, and he blocked the descending Virtue’s attack with such force that Dumah was temporarily thrown backward, higher up into the air.

Realizing that this delay was costing lives in the physical world, the mighty angel drew back his arm and hurled his fiery sword down at the advancing demon. As the blade spun through the air it whirled faster and faster, eventually becoming a flickering disk of light speeding through the darkness. Chabariel twisted his body aside to let it pass, just barely evading the devastating attack. He lost a few feathers in the process, which flickered out of existence shortly after becoming detached from his being.

Chabariel knew quite well that Dumah’s blade would take only a moment to return to his hand, but it was a moment too long for the holy warrior. With a roar the Throne spread all four of his wings, even the wounded one, and shot upward with all his speed to convey the hospitality of Babylon to the defenseless Malak.

Dumah raised his left arm to meet the coming attack, and as the Throne-angel swung his blade with all his strength a loud crack split the air. Surprise quickly turned into indignation as Chabariel saw the faintly glittering outline of a rectangle.

“The Shield of Faith,” the demon said with contempt, remembering the battle for the Tower during which these spiritual constructs first became known to the angels. Dumah’s dark veil had vanished, and in its place a pale, green shield was strapped to his arm.

“And the Sword of the Spirit,” Dumah whispered to the Ophan’s mind as his khrev returned to his hand, appearing in a flash of flame. Without a moment’s pause Dumah struck his opponent and sent him spiraling to the ground, a trail of sparkling energy tracing his descent.

As Dumah turned his face toward the Tower, another shadowy angel rose up to oppose him. “This is taking too long!” Dumah thought to himself.

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“Fall back!” Magog said as he found himself at the head of a triangular wedge of soldiers, buried deep in the enemy’s ranks. His men were being attacked from both sides, and there were casualties.

After a long battle, Uz had been wounded by Tammuz’ sword and had fallen to the ground. The hunter king was tired, for the giant had been a savage opponent, but his view was locked once again on Shem, and he was determined to put a violent end to the patriarch’s earthly sojourn. Shem, for his part, was holding his own valiantly, for he knew who this warrior was, and he knew that if his men were to have any hope of a lasting victory in Shinar, Tammuz would have to be overcome.

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The evil Cherub was dispatched by a quick thrust of Dumah’s weapon. The evil angel had borne two swords, one taken from Chabariel’s still form, and he had given the Princely Virtue quite a battle. As yet another angel flew in to oppose the Heavenly warrior Dumah realized that the shadowy spirits were merely delaying him. They did not wish to defeat him, necessarily, but they were content to advance upon him one at a time in order to keep him away from the Tower.

Instead of engaging this demon the Virtue spun away from him, flew around the edge of the dark dome in a tight circle, and then turned and sped toward the Tower’s window as quickly as he could, where he saw Ishtar and the demons. Some were watching the human battle, a few had been watching his struggle against the spiritual guardians of Babel; but now all turned to behold him as he soared past a sea of striking blades. Some he blocked, some he dodged, but others he allowed to scratch at him, sacrificing comfort for speed as he approached the Queen of Babylon.

As he rose up to confront the spirits standing in the Tower, he brought behind him an army of demons. When Dumah paused before attempting to dive in through the window, the evil spirits that had followed him surged forward, intent on protecting their masters. Chiun calmly held up a hand, halting the progress of both the angel and the demons.

“Why have you done this, Dumah?” he asked. “We have full authority to be here, and the worship of the men of these Cities provides us with an influence you have had no right to breach. Do you think to prevent our influence over the battle outside the gates? You cannot stop us, Dumah. As long as this human calls upon our aid, we will continue to do as we are doing among the sons of men.”

Ishtar turned towards him, her pale eyes gleaming with an unearthly light. As the demonized woman sneered Dumah whispered to Chiun, “She will no more call upon your aid in so open a fashion. I am sent to divide asunder this soul and this spirit.” As Yunah’s eyes opened in horror at the sight, and Petahel screeched within her, the holy Virtue drew back his arm and let his blade spin toward the window.

Chiun and Chayil saw what was happening, and quickly drew their dark blades to deflect the glowing disk. They were too late, however; the circle of light slipped between their crossed swords and passed clean through the body of the woman between them.

Nothing happened to the physical form of Queen Semiramis, but the attack knocked Petahel completely out of her body, and the burning blade pinned him to the ground behind her. The walls of the City were apparently still being influenced by Tamael’s prayer, and so the evil Seraph did not fall through the floor unto the surface of the planet, but lay for a moment within the room, looking in shock at the weapon that had staked him to the floor through his chest.

With a wordless cry, the six-winged demon was overcome by the power of the Spirit within the sword, and his consciousness departed. With an immeasurable rage and a howl of fury, the demons soared around Dumah, forming a solid sphere of spiritual bodies, and then they collapsed in upon him, crushing him with their numbers and slashing toward him with their weapons – all before the glowing kherev vanished from the fallen Seraph’s being.

Dumah had realized, just before his prayer, that although Adriel’s weapon had done nothing to the icy soul of the human on the night she summoned Petahel, the demon had not yet been within her. Indeed, his own bright sword had not had the slightest effect on her; but the demonic parasite was another story entirely. The kherevs were designed to be weapons against such spiritual evil as existed within the sinful creature, and the whirling blade had done its work well.

Having accomplished his objective, Dumah hovered calmly as the demons closed around him. He had done what he was instructed to do, and he was content to endure the consequences of his actions.

As he closed his eyes and waited to feel the swarming wounds of his opponents, the angelic Virtue suddenly saw a bright flash of light, even through his closed eyes. As he attempted to open them, he found that the glare was far too bright. Having put away his shield on his way to the Tower's window, Dumah once again had his veil with him, and he quickly wrapped it around his face.

He opened his eyes, now better able to see, and perceived that his sword was once again in the sheath that was held against him by his golden belt. At his side were the Shomerim Gabriel and Raziel, and they had him encased in a glowing sphere of the Shekinah's glory, where just an instant before he had been surrounded by demons.

"Well done," Gabriel said to him, as Raziel opened a passageway through the Void to the Heavenly Kingdom.

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Standing silently at the window, Yunah found that she was suddenly alone. The demons she had perceived around her had vanished from her view, and she felt... empty, as if she had been drained of all her vital force. The last thing she had seen of the spiritual world was the dark-robed angel she knew to be Dumah throwing a burning object directly at her; then the world had rippled before her eyes, and she was abandoned once again by her demonic companions. She remembered the seven years of waiting, all her work to call up those powers once more. She remembered her young son, sacrificed to the dark god Moloch in an attempt to win the favor of her masters... and now, after all of that, they had left her once again!

Yunah threw her head back and gave a shriek of rage.

* * * * *

Down on the battlefield the demons and the angels heard that cry of anger, and one by one the holy messengers drew their swords. They knew that if Ishtar was no longer calling on the spirits to assist her warriors, the demons had no authority to participate in the battle, even indirectly. The demons in the Tower saw tiny points of light appearing in the angelic ranks. The kherevs cleared their sheaths and flared to life, ready to cut through the darkness of iniquity.

The demons standing above and around the Babylonian warriors did more than simply withdraw their influence from the minds of the men. They turned around and fled.

There was an immediate change in the perceptions of the Tower's warriors. Most of them felt a cold sensation rushing through them as their madness departed, and in the face of the invaders' unwavering determination they began to feel fear.

As Tammuz' soldiers began to fall back around him, he started to lose some ground himself. Shem's energy was a match for his own, and the taller man was slowly

beginning to wear him down. As he backed up and continuously defended against the thrusts and slashes of Noah's son, the departing madness dredged up unpleasant memories of the days before.

Lucifer, Tiamat, Dragon, Angel, Master, Liberator, Redeemer... Traitor.

"You and your father are one; do not condemn yourself," his mother had said to him. Yet the "one point of light" described in Zephon's prophecy appeared to have application, not only to Dumah's spinning kherev, but also to Tamael's unseen work in the king's mind. For just a moment, doubt flooded the thoughts of Lucifer's servant, and in that moment he made his decision.

"I will not be a slave to destiny," Tammuz said. "Let them have this sad Tower." With that he shouted for his men to retreat, and then he and his guards turned from before the faces of their invaders and fled. Yet while the demons had turned to retreat into the darkness of Babel's borders, the humans knew that they would be trapped within its high walls. When they fled, they scattered to the other Cities they had built upon the plain of Shinar; and some went even further, into the southern lands.

After the warriors had left Arphaxad and his men poured through the gates of Babylon, making sure that no soldier had hidden himself in any of the buildings, and commanding the women and children to take their belongings and go forth to seek their men. The warriors of Ararat had no desire to shed any more blood than was necessary, and indeed the number of slain fighters on both sides of the conflict was surprisingly low for a battle of that size.

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As the righteous set about the work of destroying the buildings and temples of his home city, Tammuz hid himself in the trees at the borders of Shinar. From where he came to rest he could just make out the Tower in the distance, and he wondered what had become of his men, and what would become of his mother and son.

He was so lost in his own thoughts that he did not hear the faint crackling sounds as a body swirled into existence behind him. He did, however, hear the words that the body then spoke. "Coward. Doubter. Had you stood your ground, or at least retreated into the City, you would have held out until help came to you from the other settlements."

Tammuz spun around with a start and beheld the face of a fierce demon before him. "Who are you, my lord?" he asked in a fearful voice.

"I am death," came the reply. "I am the consequence of your failure. I am the wages paid for the stubborn rejection of the way of your father and mother. I am a token of your weakness... for we have no further use for you."

Before Tammuz' horrified eyes, the shape of the man before him shimmered and melted, solidifying again in the shape of a giant boar. "Willful children find favor with neither angels nor demons," said a clear, cold voice in his mind as the beast charged at him and impaled him on its elongated tusks.

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When reinforcements from the nearby settlements finally did arrive days later, they found nothing of the City but a pile of smoldering rubble. The Tower of Babel had been completely demolished, and the residents of the once proud capitol of Shinar were nowhere to be found.

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 6: IDEOLOGUE

Prince Lud and his two honor guards looked with amazement at the rubble in front of them. The destruction of Babylon had been reported to him as complete, yet he remembered the City's magnificence from the days before his father Mizraim had moved southward at the dividing of tongues.

It had been weeks since this cataclysm had occurred, judging by the timing of the messages he had received, yet his dreams had been specific; he was to search within this broken kingdom. He saw that two tall buildings had been left relatively untouched. He sent his men into one of them to continue the investigation, and he entered the other.

Lud was an impressive-looking figure as he walked over to the crumbling edifice. He moved with conscious royalty, and though he had been on the road for some time the robes that showed beneath his armor were smooth and relatively clean. The sword that hung from his side was a weapon of deadly accuracy in the prince's powerful hands; and though he had little by way of true combat experience, his training had made him a valiant soldier as the world counted valor.

After climbing several brittle staircases, Lud stepped out onto the roof and found the object of his search. Yunah, his former wife, was sitting with a small child and speaking words to it in a language he had never heard before. Though he adopted the tongue of his father on the day the Tower first fell, he had managed to learn enough of Babylon's words to know that what the woman was speaking was not standard fare.

In his limited Babylonian vocabulary the prince of Mizraim said, "I have come to take you with me, away from this place."

To his surprise, Yunah responded to him in flawless Mizraimic, "Who has informed you that I am in need of your assistance?"

"My dreams," Lud said, reverting to his native language after recovering from what he had heard. "I saw a large, many-headed reptile in the night, and he would give me no rest until I swore to him that I would find you in this place, and take you again to me as wife."

Semiramis looked up and smiled coldly. “Sweet Lud,” she said. “Is all so easily forgiven?”

The traveler knew that the former queen was being insincere, and he grew angry. “I did not journey all these miles to be the object of your insults, my once and future bride. I know of your false religion, and of your foolish attempt to hold this place together long after the Divine decreed judgment on your *husband*’s little sandcastle.”

“My *husband*,” Yunah retorted, being emphatic where Lud had been contemptuous, “yet lives in the form of his offspring.” The woman indicated the young boy at her side. “This is Arioch, heir of Babylon, and he will rule this land when Lucifer returns from his long exile.”

“It goes on,” Lud said with a resigned sigh. “I had hoped your madness would pass when the fall of the Tower was made complete.” The prince glanced over at the pile of stones where once the ruins of the great Temple had stood. “No matter,” he continued. “You cannot stop me from accomplishing my purpose. Your guards are fled, and your husband is dead. Your boy-king has left you, and you have no defenders around you. You will come with me now!”

Lud turned and looked down to the ground, seeing that his men had exited the other building that had escaped the destruction. He called to them and commanded them to join him on the roof. The men shouted back their affirmation, and moved toward the building’s entrance.

When he turned back to the woman and her grandson, Yunah was laughing softly. “You are a fool, Lud. Do you think I have need of human protection?” Before the human’s startled eyes, the queen of the broken kingdom shouted, “Achariel!” Immediately a man appeared beside her, swirling together from the dust of the roof, and kneeling on the ground facing her direction.

“Do not let him escape,” she said to the newcomer, pointing at her former husband. The crouching Virtue said nothing, but turned to the indicated target. Lud saw the figure’s eyes flash red with a sudden, terrible light, and he was filled with immediate fear. Without a moment’s hesitation he turned around to make a dash for the stairs. Achariel made no attempt to follow, but merely turned back to the queen and closed his eyes.

Halfway down the building Lud met his two men coming up, and he screamed at them, “Away, away! We must flee!”

The honor guards looked at each other in confusion, but turned to follow their prince. When they arrived at the foot of the stairs they found Prince Lud slowly retreating, forcing them back through the doorway. He was staring in obvious fear at a man standing in front of him, and he said only one word in his quavering voice, “No.”

As the sounds of violence crept up to Yunah, who remained standing on the roof, she turned to the kneeling figure in front of her. The demon had departed from its physical form so abruptly that the shape remained in place, delicately held together by static forces. As the body had been kneeling, the gravity acting on the particles had not been sufficient to crumble it, but tiny cracks appeared on the lifeless face when Achariel had gone after his victims.

With a quick movement Yunah swung a kick at the figure, her delicate foot passing directly through the head of the fragile statue. Achariel's temporary form shattered instantly, unresistingly, into dust.

"Mizraim," Yunah said to herself thoughtfully. "Perhaps we *should* go forth to seek my lord Lucifer," she mused aloud. "What do you think, my prince?" Ariocho said nothing, but stood up and obediently held her hand. Yunah smiled down at the lad and said, "It is a shame we will have no company on the way to our new home."

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 7: MONOLOGUE

There is more yet to see, human. Indeed, the tale is not half told. The words of Zephon guided my actions that day, to be sure, and described the effect of Tamael's influence on the mind of the young king. Yet even as I carried out the command of El Michael to fulfill the prophecy, I knew there was more depth to that saying.

After the Tower was completely destroyed, and the citizens of Babylon scattered, many of its former inhabitants fled to Erech, Accad, and Calneh; and some traveled even further, settling in Rehoboth and Nineveh. Jebus the high-priest was one of these. Yunah had hidden herself and young Arioch when the men of Ararat entered the walls of their fortress, but her husband's cousin had been separated from them, and he was driven out with the others.

He immediately began to set down in writing much of the Mysteries that he had learned under Semiramis and her demonic guides, while she herself escaped into Mizraim's kingdom, the land that came to be known as Egypt. It was there that Satan waited, crouched like a jealous dragon over the Coptic settlements, until he could find another opportunity to stretch forth his claws against the servants of the Most High.

I will show you yet another great sight, for it is to one of these servants of the Most High that our attention must now turn...

And I looked and saw a cave.

Within the shadows of that cave sat two men talking. Neither was a young man, but one was far, far older than the other. The younger of the two was listening in rapt attention to the words of the other, and when the speaker paused, he asked him a question that the things he had heard inspired.

“What became of the ruined city?”

Melchizedek looked up at the traveler and said, “Oh, they rebuilt it. After we departed from Shinar the men slowly filtered back to the city where they had dwelt, and they began to live there again. They even tried to construct a few towers. It was nothing like the one that had fallen, of course, but they were stubborn men.”

Abram nodded slowly, and said, “Though my father never actually settled among them in any of the major cities, we heard some of the details of these things, and quite a description of the Tower.”

“Terah,” the priest-king said. “He never was one to let anyone tell him what to do.”

“It was bad enough he left Ararat with the rebels,” Abram replied. “He fell easily enough into the idolatry of Ur; I have few memories of my home that I now count as pleasant.”

“Tell me how you came to be here in this land,” Melchizedek requested. “Tell me more about why you left your home.”

Abram looked out through the entrance of the cave and said, “The storm has subsided. Let me go out and rebuild the fire. I will tell you as we sit, for the nights are cold this time of year.”

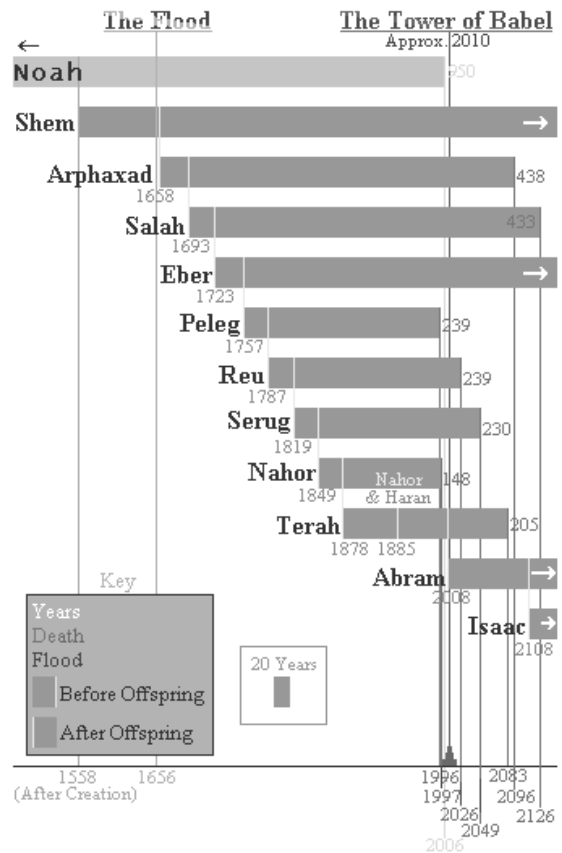
The two men stepped out into the open and looked over at the tents lined up around them. Abram’s personal tent lay where they had last seen it, wet and crushed against a tree by a blast of powerful wind. As he stacked together bits of the driest wood that he could find, Abram said, “At least none of my servants’ coverings were damaged.” His companion had offered to help with the fire, but the traveler insisted that he do all the labor.

“It is fortunate indeed,” Melchizedek said, “that this cave was nearby to shelter so gracious a host as yourself, and his visitor.”

As they sat around the flickering fire, which illuminated the bright, purple robe of Abram’s visitor, the two spoke late into the night.

The words of Abram were these:

In the land of Ur, below the City of Babylon, it is there that my father Terah came to dwell. Though we learned much science from the people of the Tower, we did not partake quite so deeply of their idolatry. My father told me that the Tower itself was built just about the time I was born; but although he separated from the righteous men of Ararat when Nimrod and Cush departed, he did not truly believe their lies either. He took some men with him, those who were between the two camps,



and moved away from both.

Even in my youngest days, I knew that there was something I was meant to do, and it did not involve staying in Ur. I saw the trees, and the leaves. I saw the stars and the moon. I saw the sun rising and setting every day. I had been educated in the way the world worked, and in the movements of the heavenly lights, but there was never an explanation given as to why these things were there – at least, none that did not seem contrived.

The men from Babel had their stories. Yes, they told us about the great Dragon of darkness that was slain by the man who was also a god... Bel, they named him. And they described how Bel made the world and everything else out of the body of the Dragon. Then they told us that Bel had come down and dwelt in Nimrod, who first separated our people, and that it was the god himself who ruled over them. Then they said that it was his son. And some said that Bel was actually in Cush, Nimrod's father. There were too many things that did not seem to settle in me when I heard these reports, young as I was, and I looked elsewhere for my answers.

When my older brother Haran died, my family went into deep mourning. I think my father knew he had erred in leaving Ararat, and he felt responsible for his son's choice to reject what we knew of the Sacrifice. Yes, my father became an idolater, but he did not wholly give up the faith that Noah brought with him through the Flood. But it was at the time of my brother's death that the Most High came to me in a dream, and perhaps it was because of my father's sorrow that he believed me when I shared with him what I had been told.

I think now that Elohim was revealing Himself to me in all the things I had been studying of the world. But it was a greater thing than just seeing nature around me, for I knew when the words of the sorcerers were false. When the One in the dream called to me and said, "I am the Strength of Noah, and the Hope of your father Shem," I knew it was so.

He told me to take my family, all who could come with me, and go to a land I had never heard of before, a place called *Canaan*. He also told me that there were things that could not make the journey into its borders along with us. I knew then that He was talking about my father's idols, and the beliefs of my family, which were neither fully for, nor against, the religion of Babel.

When I awoke I told my father and my brother. My father seemed interested, and told me that there was indeed a land known as Canaan, but my brother Nahor did not. I began to teach them that there was only one King of Heaven; and while Nahor resisted and clung to his idols, my father seemed at times to be swayed.

I persuaded my family, eventually, to give up their images and statues. They burned some, and buried the others, and so we were free from these evils and ready to make the trip, if my family was still willing. My brother protested, but by that time my father began to believe that I had truly been called to another land, and so he commanded us, and all our servants, to make ready for the trip.

In those days Lot was living in my tents, for he was the son of Haran who had died. So we went, with my wife Sarai, and our servants, and my brother Nahor with his family also. And we left behind our home, and those we knew, and began to move to the place my father said he knew.

My father Terah was an old man by the time we left our home. He was not as old as the ancients such as yourself, who were born near the time of the Flood, but as our teachers from Babylon told us – and I believe this – the curse of the earth is upon our people, and is slowly stealing our vital forces. My father did not live as long as his grandfather; and I do not believe my son will live as long as my father did.

The Babylonians said that the time when human lives began to grow dramatically shorter was about the time of the sons of Eber. Those who had traveled to the borders of our land said the waters began to rise at that time, making some regions hard to reach, and some even say that this rising of the waters is what helped to convince Nimrod to build the Tower, in case the rising continued and the world was covered again with another Flood. I do not know how true that is, but that is what we were taught in Ur.

It was on account of my father's age that we stopped, and because the traveling had made him ill. About halfway to Canaan, as my father reckoned it, we set up camp and stayed there for a time in a place we named Haran, after my brother. It seemed like a long time to me, for I was eager to continue, but truly we were not there for a year when indeed my father died...

As I expected, after our father fell asleep Nahor's resistance to our journey once again came to the surface. I understand why he wanted to stay where he was – Haran was a good land, and more green than our former dwelling place. The people of the region were wealthy, and had many goods and animals. Nahor desired to remain there for a while. He even spoke about going back to Ur at some point, but my brother often spoke of things he never quite did.

As for me, I knew where the Almighty was leading my steps, and He appeared to me in another dream. Had it not been for this, I believe I would have stayed in Haran longer and attempted to convince my brother to come with us, but I was told that I must continue on alone, for my descendants were to be born in the new land. I had married Sarai, the daughter of my father by another woman than my mother. Together we, with Lot and the willing among our servants, left Haran after we buried my father, and we continued to travel in the direction we had been going.

When I came to this place I had yet another dream, and the King of Heaven said to me when I had crossed the borders, "Unto your children will I give this land." I went through two cities where people lived, and then I found this place. I saw that no one lived in this region, and so I named it Beth-El, the House of El, and moved my tents to the east. It is here that I built this altar, as I remember Noah had done, and I offered sacrifices of clean animals according to the stories of my fathers.

That is how I have come to be here, and the meaning of the altar that you have seen.

* * * * *

Melchizedek raised his hands to the sky and said, “Blessed be El most high, for He has raised up a man to establish His name over all the earth!”

Abram looked at the tall, powerful man, and was amazed at his display of piety. Never before had the traveler from Ur seen such open praise, and he stared at him openly as he worshipped.

“It was your altar that drew me here,” Melchizedek said. “After the destruction of the Tower which I have described to you, most of us moved southward. The Japhethite Ashkenaz remained in the mountains, and the giant Uz stayed nearby with his family, but we others likewise received a call to come into Canaan, and we established a city named Salem over which I am now king. It was there that the people called me no more Shem, but Melchizedek, as I am known in these regions.

“I have been appointed by the God who called to you, to preserve His name, *Yahweh*, among the people of the earth.”

The King of Salem stood up and placed his hands on Abram’s head. The winds increased a little, though the storm did not begin anew. The breeze that brought the smell of damp earth to the noses of both men rippled through the purple robe of the priest, and lifted the white cape he wore over it. Then Shem spoke, “Blessed be El most high, for He has preserved His servant until my eyes have beheld your prince. The Most Holy has appointed you to dwell in this land, and to father a people who will stand between Him and the wickedness of this cursed world. Up to this point He has merely called you to cross into Canaan, but this is not the region in which you must now dwell. Move south; go further along the borders of the western sea, until you come to the place that *Yahweh* your Almighty will show you.”

As his visitor fell silent Abram said, “I have heard the word of Elohim in your voice this night. At the rising of the sun, I and my men will move southward, into the place to which our Almighty has called us. Blessed am I, and all my family, to be so favored by the Creator of Heaven and earth.”

When the traveler awakened the next morning, he found that his visitor had already departed, and with renewed determination he prepared for a journey southward.

* * * * *

The Dominion Omeriel looked down over his charge. Standing with him was Puriel, the Chief of the Order of Cherubim, who had held this post since Gabriel’s elevation to the status of Covering Cherub during the time of Lucifer’s rebellion. The guardian took note

of the humility with which Abram had received the instruction from Shem to move further south, and his readiness to follow through on the plan.

“Even when he was in the land of idolatry, before the Elohim revealed Himself, he was like this.”

Puriel replied, “This is why he was chosen. IaHWeH has never sought the humans with the best advantages to be His messengers, only those who have been willing to be sent. It has been said among the Sar'im that Abram was being watched for some time, before he was called.”

Of course, the vision of the Almighty is turned to every heart and mind, and as it is written, “the eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” But in Abram's case El Michael had spoken of him by name to the other angels, making it known among them that this was to be His vessel of faith for the generations to come.

“You have an important charge,” Puriel continued, looking at Omeriel. “The Oracles have seen much concerning that man, but they see more than they say. His call to Canaan is to be significant; and though his meeting with Shem has confirmed his faith, much trouble is sure to be laid in his path. The demons know that Abram has been called to this land, and though they know less of the reasons than we do, they will do all in their power to disrupt his peace. Keep your Chief Zahariel well-informed on the progress of his journey to the south.”

“I will,” Omeriel replied. “Guardianship is a new task for me, and I am grateful for your words.”

Puriel said his farewells and departed, leaving the Dominion to continue his vigilance alone. The other angels who were responsible for the spiritual safety of Sarai, Lot and the servants traveling with them were nearby, but Omeriel had flown above the scene, looking ahead to see the pathway along the western sea and to speak with Puriel.

Omeriel decided to remain aloft as the humans below finished their preparations and began to move, unaware of their invisible escort yet trusting in what they knew of Elohim to protect them in their strange new country. The Dominion wondered what it was like to be as new to the world as those walking the earth below him. Abram at this time was over seventy years old, yet by the standards of the day he was quite a young man, and had the appearance of one less than half that number of years.

Omeriel also wondered about something else – if Abram was such an important part of El Michael's plans for humanity, why was he assigned such an inexperienced guardian as himself?

* * * * *

As Shem traveled back to Salem, unescorted but unafraid, he heard a familiar rustling in the air around him. He stopped and waited while a body for his friend and guardian Dumah swirled into material existence. Of course, the angelic Virtue had no need to take a body when communicating with the human, particularly as he never used any actual spoken words, but the angel considered it far more polite to make an appearance and even make physical contact with his charge if he planned to convey information. It was far less intrusive than speaking out of emptiness to his mind, and he knew that the human acknowledged his considerate approach.

“What message have you brought me?” Shem asked.

Dumah drew closer, placed his hand on the patriarch’s and spoke in silence, “Many messages, my friend, and not all are pleasant.”

Shem nodded gravely and said, “Say on.”

“The Spirit has already revealed to you something of the role your descendant Abram is to play in bringing forth the Sacrifice of Promise. He has been brought into Canaan that his offspring may rule over this land, and establish the name of the Almighty over the earth.”

“This I knew when I beheld him,” Shem replied. “But is this not to be pleasant news?”

“Your humility shields you,” Dumah said with a small smile. “If it is Abram’s line that will establish the knowledge of IaHWeH, have you not had a thought to your own people?”

“My people...” Shem said slowly. He grasped what Dumah had implied, and he asked, “So what will become of us?”

“For a long time, nothing,” the Virtue responded. “Yet you will see a day when your people turn and corrupt themselves. When they arrive at such a state they will be overcome by their enemies, and the city of Salem will be home to those who do not know IaHWeH.”

Shem felt a great pain, and many questions flooded his mind at the words of his dark-robed friend. He asked the one he considered the most pressing, “What of my son Arphaxad?”

“He will not be a witness to these things. The events of which I speak are many years off. Knowing you would ask that question, I also requested knowledge of this from the Oracles, and it was said that Arphaxad will be called to his rest before the close of this generation.”

Brave Arphaxad would indeed live only another thirteen years, but Dumah did not reveal as much as he knew to the patriarch, who was hearing enough dark news that day without

such a detail. Still, Shem knew himself to be full of vitality, even after five centuries, and he realized that he would live on after his son had passed from the world.

“It is not a good thing for a father to see his children’s death,” the patriarch said quietly, having already seen the passing of some of his shorter-lived offspring. Peleg and Joktan, Reu and Serug, these had all ended their earthly journey, their relatively short life spans reflecting the continuing degeneration of humanity due to their cursed earth. Nahor, the father of Abram’s father, had died early also, but from a strange disease, and not from old age.

“No death is a good thing,” Dumah silently agreed, “Yet in all things there are blessings. Though your people will be overrun and your son will be called to sleep before the event takes place, you will also depart this place before the children of the high-priest Jebus overtake the land.”

Shem looked at his friend’s flawless, yet temporary face with curiosity and said, “You tell me that a wicked sorcerer’s descendants will dwell in my city, and that I am also to meet death before these things take place, and you begin by speaking of blessings?”

Dumah made a strange expression and replied, “I did not say you would meet death. Come, and take a walk with me that will lead you closer to Heaven.”

* * * * *

Some days later the people of Abram arrived at an area named Negeb; it had obviously been named by travelers like himself, for its title meant simply, “The Southern Land.” There were some people dwelling in the region in scattered settlements, but not as many as in the first cities he had encountered in Canaan. As was his custom, the first thing the traveler did was to find stones of a suitable size and to erect an altar in the center of his camp. He used stones as he found them, and did not attempt to shape them or make them fit together any better than nature would allow, yet like the altars made by his forefathers it had a mysterious, unspoiled quality that spoke to beholders of the Spirit’s sure presence.

When Abram had offered his first sacrifice on the altar the Archangel Uriel descended to the earth, and though the patriarch could not see his divine visitor he was aware of his presence. After the human had slain the lamb and gathered the wood for burning, the wood and flesh had kindled without his assistance, and a sweet smoke rose to the sky from his offering.

Though this did not happen with any subsequent sacrifice, the message had been conveyed. Abram rejoiced that his obedience had been noted in Heaven, and he immediately began to familiarize himself with the people of the nearby settlements. He let them know who he was and, most importantly, told them about the One who had called him to sojourn in their homeland.

Early on the morning of a sixth day one of Abram's servants called to him from without his tent. "Master!"

The patriarch looked out and saw the servant standing there looking nervous. "What is the matter?"

The servant began, "My apologies for awakening you..."

Abram interrupted him and said, "Do not be concerned about that. I was awake. What has happened?"

"A visitor, my lord," the servant replied. "He claims to be the son of a king from the eastern cities; and has come to meet you, having heard of your name from travelers between our two regions."

"Ah," said Abram, and quickly summoned his other servants. "Make ready a calf, and prepare a feast for our guest."

As they sat eating, the prince of Admah said to his host, "The prince of Ur is most generous to those he entertains!"

Abram was surprised, and said, "You have heard more about me than I would have thought likely."

"There is much that is known about the man Abram in these parts," he replied. "But one thing we do not know, and that is why you left such an advantaged place as the Chaldean cities, to live in these... traveled regions."

"If you wish to know that," Abram said, "consent to remain with us another day. Your animals and men will be cared for, and I assure you of as much comfort as our tents can offer. Tomorrow is a special day among our people, when we often rehearse the promises and teachings of our Leader; I will tell you of such things at that time, if my lord will tarry."

"How can I refuse such an offer?" the prince asked.

* * * * *

The prince of Admah had been familiar with the rites of sacrifice. Indeed, in every people that departed from the Tower, and even among the faithful, the ritual given to mankind in the days of Adam to point forward to the great Sacrifice to come was preserved. In most regions the significance of the practice had degenerated along with the knowledge of IaHWeH, and it came to be believed that the "gods" men worship are pleased with the blood of sacrifices, and can be bribed by the works of man as they carry out their religious rituals.

Yet while the visitor to Abram's tent believed he understood why the animal was slain and burnt, he was quite surprised at the sobriety attending the event. The priests of his own people were a loud, vulgar bunch, yet Abram with all solemn dignity performed the rites associated with both priesthood and government for his happy, devoted companions.

While the prince was impressed with what he saw, he was not quite sure how to understand what he heard. He was not the only visitor to the tents of Abram on that seventh day, for gathered there with the local settlers were three brothers, descendants of Canaan's sons Amor, and they had come to listen and partake in the day's events. They had brought people with them from their different settlements, and so the crowd that sat around the simple altar that day was quite large.

Abram turned from giving thanks as the smoke of the sacrifice ascended to the sky, and he addressed those gathered before him. "We have a new friend with us today, who has graciously accepted our hospitality. He has asked me why I made this journey, why I have left the place my father settled, and brought my family to this place in which we now dwell.

"I now give him my answer, and I share it with all of you, though no doubt all of you have heard it before. Yet the things that Elohim the Most High does for His people ought to be repeated, and thanks should often be given, lest we begin to forget the depth of His mercy toward His creatures.

"In the days I dwelt in Ur, the One Most High called to me, and told me to leave the land of my youth. He said to me, 'I am your Creator, and there is no other god beside me.' I began then to serve the One true Deity, the Maker of Heaven and earth, and Him only. In the passage of time, I was able to show my family the truth of what my Almighty had shown me, and they cleansed themselves from idols.

"Those who dwelt around us were not so receptive, however, for the people of the Chaldees have many gods. They grew angry at my words, and would not listen when I told them of my Lord. When they turned from hearing of these things, I knew it was time to do what Elohim had commanded me in my dream, saying, 'Leave the land of your father, and come into a land I will show you, a land named Canaan. I will give you offspring there, and they will be my people.'"

The prince of Admah looked at the servants around him, and he wondered how many of them were among Abram's children. The things he was hearing about "one god" were very new to his hearing, for his people, like the Chaldeans, had diverse gods; though the gods of his people were a confusing network of beings known only, he believed, to his priests.

Abram continued to speak, "In every place I settled on my way here I built an altar to the Creator of the Heavens and the earth, and I taught those around me who would listen, those who asked me, 'To which of the gods do you build this altar?' I told them, 'There is

only one God, and it is He that I serve.’ Not many hear these words with joy, yet my friends here have found my teaching to be true.”

The patriarch indicated the three heads of the visiting clans and said, “Eshcol and Aner, and Mamre on whose land I gratefully dwell, I am greatly blessed to have found such men as you in this alien land.” Those around him could easily see the emotion in Abram’s face as he spoke these words, and all could hear it in his voice. He did not speak much longer on that occasion, but concluded with words of praise to the Creator who had preserved him on the journey, and would fulfill all of His promises to His servant.

During the day the prince of Admah declared his intention to depart, that he should not be away from home long and cause his father concern. Abram had persuaded him to remain until the sun’s setting, and indeed, “just one night after,” that he might enjoy the day’s rest and be refreshed for his journey.

On the following morning the visiting prince said, “The days go by so quickly among the peaceful men of your tents! Yet I truly must be on my way this morning, or my father will suspect trouble. There has indeed *been* trouble from the kings of some of the regions of Shinar, and my people are under tribute; we are not as safe here as once we were.”

“Then go with my blessing,” Abram said. “May the Almighty of my fathers protect you on your return.”

“My thanks, good prince,” the Admahite said, and departed for his home.

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 8: CATALOGUE

The time has come,” El Michael said, “to reveal unto my servant Abram a matter of some importance.”

Zahariel, the Chief of the Dominions, was bowed low before the Prince of Heaven, having been summoned to the Throne Room an instant earlier.

“Take your Hashmallim,” said the Second of the Elohim, using the angelic pronunciation of the Order’s name, “and bring a drought upon the land of Canaan. Speak to Omeriel of your Order, the guardian of Abram, and cause my servant to go south into the land of Mizraim where Lucifer lies, that I may teach Him my ways.”

“Yes, my Prince,” Zahariel said, and departed to summon his angels.

* * * * *

As Abram completed the preparations to move his tents yet again, the words of the prince of Admah came to his mind, for they had spoken of Egypt during his visit. “Have you not heard of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt?” the guest had inquired. “I am surprised, for the travelers speak often of his peculiarities.”

“What peculiarities are those?” Abram had asked.

“Oh, a great many, and interesting to consider,” replied the prince of Admah, eager to share what he had heard. “They say that he has a great many wives, and is always seeking after more. He is, they say, a most unprincipled man, taking the wives of others, and even...” the prince leaned in closer and said, “even imprisoning or slaying their true husbands to obtain a beauty he particularly likes.”

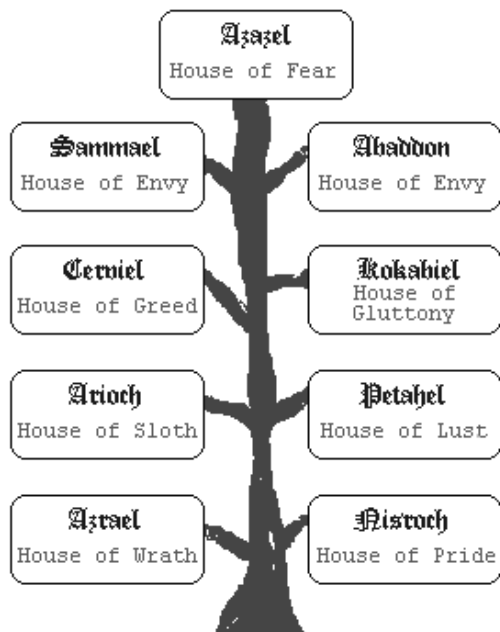
“What a terrible sin,” Abram said. “Are these things truly so?”

“Who can know?” the prince said, making a non-committal gesture toward his nomadic friend. “One would have to trust the words of travelers!” The prince laughed, and Abram had joined in; but the rumors did not seem so amusing now, for Admah’s nobleman had also indicated that the Pharaoh had a liking for girls and women of lighter shades than the average Egyptian complexion. The visitor had taken note of the fairness of the skin of Abram’s servant girls.

Though he had not been introduced to Sarai, Abram’s wife, directly, the prince had seen her during the community’s gathering on the seventh day, and he had noted her great beauty; this in fact was what had triggered his recollection of the Pharaoh and those tendencies of his which had come to light through the channels of local gossip. These things were heavy on Abram’s mind as he and his people moved southward to escape the spreading famine. The rains had been withheld for months, and the merchants no longer brought enough food to sustain himself, his wife and his servants. The crops that they did provide were both greatly inferior and sold at an inflated price. When Omeriel’s gentle suggestion had been wafted across his consciousness, Abram lost no time in responding to it and informing those of his tents that they would be taking another sojourn.

Yet now, as he neared the borders of the land of Mizraim, a spirit of an entirely different kind began to send thoughts to annoy the patriarch. “Who is as fair as your wife, in all these lands? Oh, how her beauty, which you once thought a great blessing, has become a curse to you in this distant land! The Pharaoh will surely not let you live, if ever once he hears of her beauty.”

The creature that crouched at his ear was the Cherub once known as Sh’fiel, or Zophiel. In Heaven he had been one of the most sympathetic and sincerely gentle of the entire Host, yet in his fall from grace he had become twisted by sorrow and regret. Even his ability to assist Lucifer in the temptation of humans was sometimes limited by his fits of rage or sadness, and the name which he now bore was most fitting for the thing he had become: *Mar*, Bitterness.



Mar was an angel of the House of Abaddon. While in Egypt the master of demons had organized his followers into divisions known as Clans or Houses, taking some of his inspiration from the natural peculiarities of Mizraim’s language. Lucifer himself was “Pharaoh,” the “Great House,” and his other arch demons were the Ba’alim of lesser Houses.

The Houses of Sammael and Abaddon were those that were dedicated to bringing forth the sin of covetousness in humans. This was a sure way to end the effectiveness of one chosen to be a vessel of IaHWeH upon the earth if the temptation was accepted, and Sammael in particular was given the role of finding and destroying the effectiveness of El

Michael’s messengers.

Naturally, he had kept close watch over Abram’s movements since the day he entered the borders of Canaan; and upon hearing of the Admahic prince’s words, and of the

patriarch's decision to go into Egypt, he lost no time in sending forth Mar to turn him out of the path of righteousness. Though the angel of bitterness, as a Cherub, would have naturally outranked the Power Sammael, the latter was an arch demon, and far more powerful because of that fact. Due to the spiritual politics of the Houses of Envy, Abaddon and Sammael often had control of one another's minions and Mar, though often hesitant to do as he was commanded, went.

"For what cause did my Almighty send me forth into this land, if after being here only a short time I am driven out by need?" With thoughts like these and others, Mar attempted to influence Abram's thoughts. Though the faithful messenger batted most of the temptations away without a second thought, some did indeed find place in his mind, particularly those concerning his wife and his safety in Egypt.

As they made camp just outside of the borders of Mizraim's kingdom, Abram entered the tent of his wife and spoke with her. "My wife," he began. "I am in some distress. I fear for my life among the Egyptians. I have heard unpleasant things about their king, and the travelers say that he would find one such as you desirable as a wife, for you are fair indeed to behold. They say further that Pharaoh will give no thought to your husband's life to possess you if he hears of your beauty. They will see that you are my wife and kill me, while sparing you for his sake; therefore I have one request of you as we travel through that land."

"Let my husband speak," Sarai replied.

"Do not say that we are husband and wife, if any among the Egyptians ask concerning our relationship. Say instead that you are my sister; and this is not a thing untrue, as you are the daughter of my father by another wife. Do this thing and it will be well with us in the land, and you will surely save my life."

Though she had many misgivings about this plan, Sarai was persuaded by the arguments of her husband and she said, "I will do as my lord desires." Yet in spite of her submission to this plan she became, and remained, bothered by her husband's request - as she knew him to be a man of faith, who spoke often about the power of his Almighty to save. "Should he truly be resorting to such means for safety?" she asked herself after he had departed from her tent, and suddenly the demon Mar had two eager sets of ears on which to work. Omeriel and the angel that was Sarai's guardian were instructed to let him work.

As the people of Abram entered the borders of Egypt the eyes of the most powerful being among all the demons turned in their direction. Invisibly, he took note of the travelers. His essence drifted among them, testing them, seeing who they were, and what they were like. He lingered over Abram for some time, considering this chosen vessel of his ancient Enemy.

"I know of your anxiety," the prince of demons said, though he knew the human could not hear him. "I know of your misgivings, and the terror you feel for yourself and your wife. But you have come into my land now, little human, and I will see to it that the thing

you most fear will come upon you. You may leave this country with your life intact, but *I* will keep your faith.”

Though it was pride that drew Satan down from his high estate, it was another principle that he now primarily employed for the accomplishment of his designs. The Great House of Azazel whose name, being loosely interpreted, is the Strong One (or Strong *Man*) of El, was known among the demons as the House of Fear.

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Sarai and her attendants moved from one stall to another in the large and busy marketplace of northern Egypt. As they purchased goods and food from the merchants, who were rejoicing in the increase of clientele from the northern lands, they began to attract a great deal of attention from the local men. The servants with them, who were loading the purchases unto the beasts they had brought with them, knew better than to speak up against the comments being directed at their women. Some of the onlookers were armed, and a few appeared to be wearing royal insignias.

Before the end of the day the Pharaoh’s sons and chief servants were before him, describing the beauty of the new residents of his kingdom, and the delicate features of one woman in particular, who appeared to be their mistress.

“She is both fair and elegant, my father,” one of the princes said. The sons of Egypt’s king thought nothing of their father taking yet another bride, for most of them were only half-brothers and the heir to the throne had already been chosen. And of course, were they to find a woman that truly pleased their father... that would only help their standing in his courts.

The King, no longer a young man, but certainly not old, was eager to meet this woman, for he had never heard another so highly praised. At his ear, unseen, stood the demonic Throne Akaliel, servant of the newly-created House of Petahel, the Clan of sexual lust.

“Bring her to me,” Pharaoh commanded.

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Seven days later, when Sarai and her handmaidens had returned to obtain more supplies from the merchants, they found themselves surrounded by royal guards, the captain of whom introduced himself and said, “My king, the ruler of all Egypt, has requested your presence before him in his courts. You and your maidens must come with us.” To the male servants who had accompanied the women as protectors and burden-bearers the captain said, “We know that these women are of the household of the Hebrew Abram,” for he knew of their ancestor Eber.

“Take unto him these gifts,” he continued, indicating some animals that other men were holding, “and let him be content with Pharaoh’s generosity.”

Abram's men had little choice, but took from the guards the sheep, and oxen, and camels, and other things. The men that had been attending the sheep also continued with the men back to Abram's tents, saying, "If your master will be pleased to have us remain with him as servants, we will bring our wives, and sons and daughters, and dwell among you at Pharaoh's request."

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In spite of her better judgment, Sarai had responded to Pharaoh's questions as her husband had advised her. To her dismay, the king had immediately commanded his servants to prepare a feast for a marriage ceremony according to the custom of the land. Within the space of three days they were to be married, and Sarai and her attendants were confined to the palace while her "brother" Abram was summoned to complete the formalities of betrothal.

As Sarai sat dejectedly staring out the window after the sun had set, she heard a soft sound behind her, and turned around to see a young girl standing with her head lowered and her hands clasped behind her back.

"Who are you, child?" Sarai asked.

"I have no name, mistress," came the reply, and the girl did not look up as she spoke.

Sarai knew that this was a form of some kind of protocol, for the child had certainly been named by her parents. "Look at me," she said gently.

The girl looked up, and Sarai smiled at her reassuringly. Her skin was a light brown, and her body and features were delicate. She was, Sarai noted, a beautiful maiden, and her eyes were deep and penetrating. "What are you doing here?" she asked the girl, realizing that she was the first person she had seen since her confinement.

"The mistress of the Great House has appointed me as your servant, my lady," came the reply, and the speaker's eyes instinctively lowered themselves to the ground again.

"Well, if you are to attend me, I must have something to call you," Sarai said. Abram's wife looked out the window again, at the stars twinkling above her, and remembered what she had been thinking before she was aware that someone else had entered the room. "If only I could fly from this window, and return to my home..."

"Your name shall be O'uphah," Sarai said with a smile, the word meaning, "Flight."

When the prophet Moses recorded the events surrounding this young woman in the Scriptures, he used the name she was called by her Arabic offspring: Hagar.

“Yes, mistress,” Hagar said, bowing low. After a brief pause, as if she had forgotten her purpose, the newly named handmaiden broke the silence, saying, “I have been sent, my mistress, to inquire as to what you would like for your meal.”

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By that time, of course, Abram had been informed, and he had run out to the stone altar to pray. He besought IaHWeH on behalf of His promises, that he should have offspring to fill the land of Canaan, for as yet Abram had fathered no children. He asked why these events had been allowed to happen; but he received no dream, or no vision, in response.

All through the night Abram prayed, and early in the morning he rose up from the ground before the altar, and bade his servants to make themselves ready to accompany him to Pharaoh.

Upon arriving at the House of Pharaoh, Abram and his servants came near and bowed before the King of Egypt. The king bade them rise, and said unto Abram, “Your people are indeed pleasing to Egyptian eyes. I have sent many gifts to you for the hand of your sister, and I will yet give many more.”

Abram looked upon the face of the king, and saw that he was surrounded by armed men. He remembered the words of the prince of Admah, and fear rose in him again. He did not wish to anger the Pharaoh, and thinking that if he told the truth he would immediately be slain, he said, “My sister and I are honored by Pharaoh’s attentions. But if it pleases my lord, let me speak once to my sister before the wedding occurs.”

The Pharaoh said, “Your sister Sarai is already being prepared for the marriage. According to our customs she will be kept in her chambers until the feast of celebration. By all means, receive the comfort of our home until the day, and then you shall see her, at that time.”

The patriarch bowed low, left with little choice, and allowed himself to be led to a place reserved for himself and his fellow travelers. With nothing else to do, Abram resumed his prayers to the Almighty of his fathers.

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In the middle part of the night, when all the House of Pharaoh was asleep and only two people were awake, Abram and his wife, the angel Lahatiel, Chief of the Order of Ko’achim, appeared over the settlement with several other mighty Powers by his side.

The messengers of Heaven all inhaled deeply, and then breathed over the houses of the capitol of the land of Mizraim.

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After two nights without sleep, Abram was not feeling particularly well. His anxiety over his wife, his uncertainty as to the correctness of his actions, and the constant threat of death in the House of Pharaoh were all contributing greatly to his sense of foreboding. The guard who had been sent to escort him was not acting particularly friendly, and he could see that the man himself appeared to be quite ill.

The coughing soldier led the way to the king's court, and Abram followed meekly behind him, trying to clear his thoughts in the face of all that had occurred.

When the traveler from Ur beheld the face of Pharaoh, he opened his eyes wide in surprise. The King of Egypt was also coughing, yet he (like the guard, Abram noticed) was covered with sores. Every surface of his skin that was open to sight was afflicted with the painful-looking discolorations, and Abram was sure that his other surfaces were just as inflamed.

Before he could speak the tormented ruler addressed him, "Abram, why have you done this to me?"

"I, lord?" The patriarch was truly surprised at the accusation. "What have I to do with this?"

"In my dreams in the night a voice said to me, 'Why do you take another man's wife?' I replied that I had done nothing of the sort, but I received no further message. When I awoke I, and all my house, were like... this.

"I realized that the voice must have been speaking of Sarai, for I am to marry no other – and I see that you are unaffected by this thing, and so it is certain that this is not a natural disease. Whose wife is your sister?"

Abram fell on his face before the King of Egypt, and he said, "Do not let my lord be angry with his servant. I knew of Pharaoh's great might in this land, and I feared for my life, lest you should desire to have Sarai as your wife. I therefore told her to say that she and I were kindred, rather than espoused.

"Whatsoever it seems good for you to do unto me," Abram added, "I will submit to it."

Pharaoh said again, "For what *reason* have you done this to me? Was it only for fear of your life? Why should such a thought enter your mind, that I would slay you for your wife's hand? Because you told me she was your sister, I very nearly did take her unto myself. But now take your wife, and depart from my country."

Abram remained where he was, unwilling to behold the face of one he had deceived. "I have nothing against you, Abram," the King said, "All that I have given to your wife she may keep: of the clothing, and servants, and other gifts as well." With that he commanded his attendants to fetch his would-be bride, and to restore her to her husband

so that they could depart. Without another word, and without so much as glancing over at his guest, Pharaoh got up from the throne and retired to his own quarters.

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“What an error!” Omeriel exclaimed, as he saw his charge departing from the land of Mizraim in disgrace. “Oh, that Abram’s faith had been complete; for he has done wondrously well in all things but this.”

The Chief of his Order replied, “This was according to the foreknowledge of Elohim, so that he might be brought to the place where this fault would be revealed. Lucifer believes he has won a victory and stripped Abram of his faith. To be sure, the human is feeling very much as if that were the case, yet he is called to a high place among the sons of men, and his responsibilities will demand a greater measure of trust than he has displayed so far.”

Omeriel nodded slowly and said, “If only this training were not so expensive.”

Zahariel looked at his angel with curiosity in his eyes, and then Abram’s guardian continued. “The souls, those who should have seen a greater example while they were in Egypt, they have been robbed of an opportunity to learn of our Creator.”

“Great evil results from every misdeed,” Zahariel said, “from even the smallest of deceptions. If Abram has learned this there will be compensation for the cost.”

“I hope he has indeed learned this lesson,” his guardian replied.

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The family of Abram had been wealthy in Ur when they departed. They had only gained in livestock as they drove their animals through the fertile land on the way to Canaan. At every place they settled they found traders willing to barter goods for animals, and goods for other goods. Abram’s integrity in business had gained him a solid reputation among the citizens of Canaan, and had increased his wealth greatly as well. In addition to this, Pharaoh had allowed Abram and Sarai to keep all the gifts he had given them, and they were substantial, therefore upon his departure from Egypt Abram was one of the wealthiest men within Canaan’s borders.

They returned to Negeb and stayed there for a time, but the famine had not slackened considerably, and Abram was feeling a need to re-experience the joy he had felt when he first entered into this land he had been promised. As he beheld the altar before which he had met the prince of Admah and had fallen victim to the rumors regarding Pharaoh’s character, Abram made up his mind about a matter he had been considering since he left Egypt.

He called Lot and Sarai to himself and said to them, "Let us journey from this southern land back to Beth-el, where we met Melchizedek, the King of Salem. I will sacrifice to Elohim at the altar I built there, and we will partake once more of the good land we saw."

His nephew and wife were agreeable, and so they set out once more to return to the northern areas of Canaan. As they traveled, Hagar remained close by her mistress. This was the first time she had ever been out of Egypt, and the changing scenery and the excitement of travel made her blossom before Sarai's eyes. She who had been so shy and proper that she could not even meet her mistress' eyes was now eager to express her wonder at the world around her to her fellow servants and to Sarai herself.

"This experience has been good for my handmaiden," Sarai said to herself, pleased with the change. Hagar had already become her favorite attendant and, except for the difference in age, would quite possibly have been considered her closest friend.

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"Another storm tonight," Shem observed, looking out over the houses in his city. "The weather has been strange lately."

"The rains will not fall for the remaining days of the week," Dumah quietly revealed to his charge. "And I have come to tell you of a journey you must take."

"To Beth-el?" Shem asked, turning from the large, covered window of his home.

"To Beth-el," Dumah confirmed. "Your son Abram moves northward even now, to the altar at which you and he met. He has had a hard trial in the land of Mizraim, and he seeks answers. He is not yet ready to see angels, and so you are being called to comfort him in his distress. If you leave on the morrow you can be in Beth-el upon his arrival.

"I will go," Shem replied.

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"Your faith is not to be found in an altar," Melchizedek said, when he came upon the figure kneeling in front of a pile of stones stained with blood and ashes.

"My lord!" Abram said, turning from his earnest prayer. "Surely you have been sent in answer to my cry. What am I to do? I have not trusted in the One Most High, who called me into this land, and made promises to me of offspring and an inheritance."

"You have offered sacrifice in atonement for your actions?" Shem asked, already certain of the answer.

"Oh, yes," it came. "Many times I have."

“Then trust in the One to whom those Sacrifices must point,” said the priest of Elohim. “Yahweh saves, and not just from armies and trouble in this world; but He saves us from our hatred, from our vengeance, from our fear.”

“I have learned so little, though I have had occasion to learn much. I praise the Most High that He has sent you to instruct this lowly vessel. But can it truly be so easy? Am I not to be set apart from my inheritance, for the sake of a foolish mistake?”

“Only believe,” Shem responded, “and it will be seen upon you as righteousness. Let that be your peace; and then go, and do not do so foolishly again.”

Abram rose to his feet, but only to go over to Shem and cast himself down before the taller, older man. “Stand on your feet, Abram,” Melchizedek commanded, “and then go and get some sleep.”

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 9: CHORISTAGOGUE

Abram found peace with his actions in Egypt after speaking with Shem by the altar at Beth-el. He told his wife and nephew, and all their servants, about what his ancient ancestor had told him, and he rejoiced that the promises had not been made void by his actions.

Word came to the tents of the patriarch that the famine had decreased in the southern lands, but Abram now believed that his trip south had been for a definite purpose, and that purpose had either been fulfilled or obstructed by his brief visit to the Egyptian kingdom. He decided that he would stay in Beth-el for a time.

Having no children of his own, even at so relatively late an age in those days, Abram considered Lot to be as his own child, for his brother had died before they left Ur in their homeland. Though he believed in the promise of offspring from his own body, though the passing of years was beginning to test his faith, the aging traveler saw his nephew very much as a son, and treated him accordingly.

“Take these from among my flocks,” he had said to Lot on their departure from the Chaldean lands, indicating some of his animals. “Whatsoever they bear will be yours. When your animals are increased, return unto me the number I have lent you, each according to its kind and with the same count of males and females, and whatsoever remains with you shall be your own.”

This Lot had done, and it was soon apparent that Lot was as able a breeder of animals as the best of his uncle’s servants. Soon his flocks increased greatly, and Abram made a present of shepherds and other servants to his nephew to assist with the greater numbers. As they traveled through the land from Beth-el to Negeb, and then into Egypt and back, the livestock of both men continued to increase, and even the famine did not greatly diminish their numbers.

As a result of this, the return of the tents of Abram to the fertile region surrounding Beth-el gave rise to an interesting series of events.

It came to the ears of Abram that the shepherds tending his flocks had begun to get into disputes with those of Lot regarding both grazing areas and usage of the water wells. In

addition to this the native residents of Canaan used the land and wells for the purpose of tending their own animals, therefore it was becoming clear that the resources of the region could not support the demands from so many directions for much longer.

When Abram was told that Lot himself was beginning to get drawn into the disputes, he decided that it was time to make some changes. He called his nephew to his tent to discuss what they ought to do.

“My son,” he said, addressing him affectionately, “The Almighty of our fathers has called us to this fertile land and promised me a great inheritance within these borders. You have been with me from the beginning, and you have noticed that I make no claims before the current residents, even when reciting the promises of Elohim before them. The reasons for this are several, one of which being that I do not think it wise to emphasize that the countries they possess now have been promised to me. But there is this also, that I have yet no son to receive the benefits of this promise, and I feel no urgency to claim anything as my own.

“It is clear to me that, because of my age, when my son is born and gives me many children in his own family, I will not long enjoy the good of this place. Therefore it is to be by the hand of my offspring that this land shall be subdued.”

“My uncle speaks often of being old,” Lot said, “yet are there not many years before you?”

“Who can know the time of his own life?” Abram thought aloud. “Yet my intent is to bring before your eyes this land on which we live. It is not pleasant for me to continually hear about the disputes between our men, and between our men and the men of the local flocks. We are close kinsmen, and it ought not to be so, particularly between two who have felt such affection.

“Since therefore all the land is before us, and it is large; and since I am not inclined to stretch forth my hand in possession (except in my thanksgiving), take therefore your flocks, and your men, and whatsoever gifts you desire from me, and let us separate ourselves. From this place, if you choose the right I will go left, and if you choose the left I will go right. Take your time and consider where you will live; I give you the responsibility of that and, when you have decided, make it known to my chief steward, Eliezer. We will then also lift up our tents and move.”

Lot was apparently eager to both settle the dispute and to move his herds away from those of his uncle. Though he felt great affection for his kinsman, his level of piety was not as high. In addition, he had taken a Canaanite woman to wife, and though Abram had not openly made comment on it, Lot knew that he had disapproved. His wife had not wholly given up her idolatrous tendencies, and was not a believer in the Almighty of Abram, or of His promises to the faithful family.

In his wanderings around the borders of their land, Lot had seen the green countryside of the Jordanian valley, and he chose therefore this direction, which he judged to be greatly superior to all others for the maintenance of his animals. He lost no time in letting Abram's faithful servant know that his house would be moving to the south and east, and Eliezer informed his shepherds that they would be moving more directly toward the south.

In a dream that very night IaHWeH spoke unto Abram and said to him, "Remove yourself south, as your servant Eliezer has determined, and place your tent in the region of Hebron." The land of Canaan flashed before the patriarch's eyes; some areas he had seen before, and some were new to him. "Look in all these directions," he was told, "and see that I will give you this land as your inheritance forever. I will make your offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth, which cannot be counted, and I will give this land to them. Walk this land, Abram, and all that you see of its length and breadth shall be your own."

When he awoke, he and Eliezer readied their people for yet another journey, and the nomadic house of Abram prepared to move once again. They settled in a plain in the northernmost territory of his friend Mamre the Amorite and there, as was his custom, Abram built an altar.

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Lot's decision to dwell in the Jordan valley had consequences that were to quickly become apparent. The influence of the tempters that were speaking to his mind was reinforced by the tendencies of his wife to seek the most pleasing land at any cost, and therefore his guardian's subconscious warnings were of little effect when Abram's nephew decided to set his tents down just a short way off from the city of Sodom.

Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim were great and wicked cities. A smaller settlement, off in the mountains nearby, was known as Bela, and it had also been greatly influenced by the depravity of its four, larger neighbors. It was the prince of this Admah that had visited Abram during his time in Negeb, and he had spoken well of his homeland, which is what had first turned Lot's eyes in that direction.

As the prince had rightly said in conversation with Abram, his people were under tribute from the Mesopotamian kings to the north. As the greed of the Shinaric rulers increased, so did the taxes upon their neighbors to the south, and after twelve years of service to Chedorlaomer, the king of the Elamites, they refused to send any more payment. Chedorlaomer was a descendant of Elam, one of Shem's own sons, yet his people had chosen to ally themselves with Nimrod's apostasy, and when the Tower had fallen and tongues had been divided, they separated themselves from the cities in the main region of Babylon and established their own kingdom.

He was in close alliance with Amraphel, one of the citizens of Babylon who had returned to the ruins of his former dwelling, and had begun to rebuild. Though he was of no direct

relation to Semiramis, he found on his return that even she had deserted the once-powerful city, and he built on both its rubble and its reputation, to make a name for himself, and for Babylon, once again.

These two were mighty kings, and their lesser allies were Arioch of Ellasar and Tidál who had taken kingship over the rebellious Hamites and Japhethites that had remained in the land. When they heard of their southern holdings' refusal to submit to their taxes, they determined among themselves to secure their demands by force.

The demons had formed no particular plan for this conflict, except that the natural greed they had awakened in mankind was behind many of the Shinaric kings' policies. Yet when Azrael, who had received headship over the House of Wrath, saw that Lot had settled himself near to the target of the northern alliance's intended victims, he smiled within himself and determined that he would use this turn of events to his advantage.

"Abram's nephew will make excellent bait," said the powerful prince of shadows, "for if his faith cannot be so easily overcome as my lord Lucifer had imagined, his life will become forfeit instead."

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"Master Abram!" The cry awakened the patriarch from his slumber, and with weary eyes he drew aside the entrance to his tent. He saw there the shaking and travel-streaked countenance of a servant that seemed vaguely familiar to him.

Abram stepped out of his tent, but before he could ask what the matter was the servant revealed the nature of his visit. "I am one that was sent away with your nephew Lot, to the valley in Jordan. But men came, and they have taken my master away, and all his house, and I alone am escaped to tell you of these things."

"Be at peace," Abram said, though his own face was set with determination. "Come and rest yourself, then tell me more of this matter."

The servant revealed to Abram that there had been rumors for some time from the northern lands, that the kings under which they were serving had taken their refusal to pay taxes as an act of aggression, and that they had determined to bring a campaign of war to the five rebellious cities, to take by force what they thought was due them.

The kings of Admah and Zeboim met together with those of Sodom, Gomorrah and Bela, and they determined that they would not submit, but would fight against their oppressors. Though they knew nothing about the size of the force coming down to them, they had served slavishly for twelve years, and had then taken for themselves one year of freedom. Now, in this fourteenth year, they would fight.

The escaped servant told Abram, "When the king of Sodom heard that the soldiers of Chedorlaomer and his allies had met with some resistance from the Amalekites and

Amorites in the region of Kadesh, he said, ‘Now is our chance to strike at them.’ He called together a war council from among the other four kings and their armies, and they went up as quickly as possible to attack.”

They met in the valley of Siddim, for Chedorlaomer’s army seems to have overrun their enemies, and they had continued to come south. And there, as the fleeing soldiers told us, the armies of our kings were destroyed and some of the kings were slain. Behind the soldiers came the invaders... and they took of the cities all their goods and most of the people.”

“We thought we would be safe,” the servant added, “because we do not dwell within Sodom; but the soldiers who came into our tents were madmen. The eyes of the warriors were furious, as if they had the faces of demons, and they took my master away. I hid myself, and I came here as quickly as I could after the men had departed.”

“You have done well in coming to me,” Abram said. “Now take some rest as I call my people together, for you must show us the way by which the armies of Chedorlaomer have departed.”

Without losing any time, Abram immediately dispatched messengers to the Amorite Mamre, and asked for his assistance in recovering the person and property of his nephew Lot. When he told his servants of his plan, many of them were shocked. One ventured, “We have heard grave things of the armies of the north. It is said by the travelers that they have even slain the giants of Babylon and some of their offspring! What shall we, who are so few, do against the weapons of such a fearsome people?”

Abram addressed his men, and the fearful in particular, “I have learned in my travels through Canaan that the rumors of wandering souls cannot be given too much weight. It may well be that the armies of the north are numerous, and it may well be that they are fierce, but we are servants of the living Elohim, and we have not forgotten His promises, and how He has preserved us in our travels.”

Seeing that some of his new soldiers continued to look apprehensive he said, “What? Are you so afraid of men who stand around in palaces all day and wave their spears at their kings’ approach? We are men of the land; we have fought off storms and wild beasts. We have been through hard trials, and none of us are poor swordsmen. In Egypt and in Canaan we have seen the salvation of the Almighty. What shall we say before Him, if we should now cower before those who do evil in the land?”

That speech had some impact, and the men steeled themselves for the battle; but their morale was given an even greater boost when, before their departure, the forces of Mamre arrived in the tents of Abram.

When Abram heard from his chief steward that his allies had arrived, the patriarch rushed to meet them, and he bowed himself before his ally in greeting. When he looked up, he took a good look at his companion. Mamre was wearing a tunic of thick hide, and his

beard had been cut shorter than normal. His men were likewise attired, and they carried with them swords that were far wider and longer than those of the Hebrews' men.

When Abram saw that Mamre's brothers Eshcol and Aner were also with him, leading their men, he lifted up his voice in praise to Elohim. "I could not leave my brothers out of a fight," Mamre said to his grateful friend. "They would never have forgiven me."

Floating above the men were two mighty messengers, members of the Sar'im. The four-winged angel Zadkiel turned to his companion and said, "What are the rules for our involvement in this battle?"

Za'afiel said to him, "We are not to interfere... directly."

Zadkiel nodded and smiled thoughtfully; in a cause so obviously just, and against an enemy so wicked, the Host was being even less restricted than were the demons during the second battle for the Tower of Babel.

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In the region that would one day be known as the land of Dan, Abram and Mamre looked down into a low place where the armies of the north had camped for the night. Secure in their victory, the men had begun their celebrations early, taking part in feasting and drunkenness. Fortunately, they had decided to wait until they returned to their home country before they thought to abuse their prisoners after the manner of the day, and these were kept under guard by a few of the men who remained sober and vigilant.

"We shall separate into three companies," Abram said in low tones. "My men and your men are of equal numbers, therefore these will be by themselves. Let the forces of your two brothers combine and be a third, that we may surround the men and surprise them. With the blessing of Elohim we will catch them off guard and they will neither fight against us with vigor nor turn on their captives in desperation."

"Yes, god-prince," Mamre said, and moved off to tell his brethren. Abram looked at the retreating Amorite with surprise; he had not been called by that title before. He did not know that Shem had been so styled by his people in years not too long past.

At the appointed time the three forces closed in on the encamped men as quietly as they could. The closer they could get before the alarm was raised, the better. Due in part to the influence of the holy angels, and due in part to the natural results of the soldiers' celebrations, they managed to sneak right into the tents of the warriors, and began to attack them as they lay in slumber or revelry.

As not all of Chedorlaomer's soldiers were asleep or completely inebriated, this did not continue for long before the alarm was raised. Those who were near their weapons, and who were able to awaken, grabbed their equipment and ran to meet the invading bands of

attackers. The men of Abram and his allies were well prepared, however, and they were in position to meet the soldiers as they emerged.

Within a short time most of the invaders were slain, and the kings and their elite guards had fled into the night. Abram found Lot and his family unharmed, and the citizens of the settlements were with them.

It was a joyful march back to the cities of Jordan's valley. Upon arriving there Bera, the king of Sodom who had survived the destruction of most of his army, went out to meet him. When he saw that his goods and people were being returned to him he said, "By the God whom you serve, you are a man both honorable and true. Your people shall be as my people in this land, and your kinsman will be a prince over my city."

As the men sat discussing the battle, Abram looked up and saw a small band of figures approaching from the west. He could easily recognize them from their great stature, and he rose up to greet the newcomers.

Shem and some of his men, including his son Arphaxad, had come forth to provide the soldiers with food and drink after their battle. While the warriors were being refreshed the priest of IaHWeH took Abram aside and presented him also with bread and wine, saying, "Unto you shall this be a token of the land which you now possess by faith, and soon will possess in truth. My people will not be the sustainers of the faith of our Creator for all ages. This role will pass to your children, for although we have lived for several of your generations, our time here grows... short."

Abram said, "I saw the man with you; this is your son Arphaxad?"

The surprise was apparent in the patriarch's voice, and Shem immediately understood. "He appears both older and more frail than do I. Behold the effects of the cursed earth, Abram. It was made known to me that he shall shortly pass from this world, and I am to outlive all those who are my sons, and my grandsons."

"How was this revealed to you, my lord?" Abram asked him.

Melchizedek replied, "Yahweh has sent his angel to tell me of these things. The messengers of Heaven are my fellow-laborers upon this earth, and I have walked with them all the days of my life, from the time of my father Noah. But let me encourage you with what was told to me of your future in this land."

As Abram listened, Shem described his encounter with the angel Dumah on the way home from their meeting at the altar of Beth-el. "Though we have spoken for many years, I do admit that I was startled when he said unto me, 'Give me your trust,' and drew a sword from his side."

"A sword?"

“It appeared to me like any common blade at first,” the priest said, “but immediately after I saw it the metal began to glow, and then it seemed to catch fire, burning with very strange flames.”

“What did he do then?” Abram asked.

“He drew near to me,” Shem replied, “and then before I could say a word he swung it through my body, as if to cut me in half.” When Abram said nothing, but only stared in wonder at what he was hearing, Shem continued, “I was done no damage, and indeed I felt nothing except for a slight sting. I remember that I thought of my son for an instant as the fiery sword passed through me, but soon it was gone, and when Dumah had returned the blade to his side, I noticed that something was different.

“It was as if my eyes were opened for the first time, and I saw all the earth in a new way. I saw that there were many other angels with Dumah attending me on my return home, and I saw them and I learned their names. I was told that I was now on a road they called the ‘Close Walk,’ and that the end of my days would be greater than the beginning.”

“These are great things of which you speak,” Abram said, impressed. “May the Master grant that I too find this road.”

“You are called to be master over this earth through your offspring,” Shem said. “And I have come, not only to refresh your men, but to give you a blessing.” With that, Abram was told to kneel before him, and Melchizedek said, “Blessed be Abram of El Elyon, the possessor of Heaven and earth; and blessed be El Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand this day.”

When he had prayed Abram said, “Take, as a token of your priesthood, the tenth part of all I have with me, and when I return to my tents I will also send you a tenth of what I have there of my flocks, and of my goods.”

When Shem and his people had departed, Abram also made ready to return to his home with Mamre and Aner and Eshcol. Bera saw that they were preparing to depart and he wondered if, despite their earlier words, his peoples’ rescuer would claim all the spoils for himself. He had seen, after all, that the tall, purple-clad priest had been given a portion of goods. He approached Abram, saying, “All that you have won from the kings of the north belongs to you by right of conquest, but I ask only for my people, those who dwell in the cities of my valley, that my kingdom not be left empty before me.”

Abram replied, using the names he had heard Shem employ, “I have raised my hand in a solemn vow unto Yahweh, El Elyon, the Possessor of Heaven and earth, that I will not take the least thing from among your people, or that is your own. My sustenance comes from the Almighty of my fathers, and I would not have any man say, ‘Because of my gifts, I have made Abram wealthy.’ Take all that you have and return to your home, only do not count what my men have eaten; and let the men which went with me, these valiant

chieftains of Canaan, take that which they have already used to refresh themselves, and what they desire from the battle.”

* * * * *

When Abram lay asleep in his own tent once again, after the return to Hebron, the word of IaHWeH came unto him and said, “Fear not, Abram, for I am your shield, and your exceedingly great recompense.” These things were spoken to him because Abram had done well in returning to Sodom’s king all his property, and taking no reward for himself. The safe return of his kinsman had been all that the patriarch had hoped to accomplish, and this had been effectively done.

The human awakened out of his sleep, and the voice was still ringing in his ears. He spoke into the darkness, “My lord Yahweh, what recompense will you give me, for I have no child to fill the land, only the steward of my house do I have for a son, my servant Eliezer of Damascus. Of my own body you have not given me a son and so this one, born in my house, he must inherit all I possess.”

To Abram’s amazement, the voice that had spoken in his dreams spoke again to him out of the darkness, though he was awake. It said, “Eliezer is not to be your heir. One who comes forth from your own body, he is to be the one to inherit your goods and my promises. Stand on your feet, my chosen servant.”

Abram stood up, still in a state of mild confusion from his sudden awakening, and from hearing the voice with no visible speaker. Up until this time his revelations had been strictly in dreams and so this was, to him, a strange new experience. The patriarch lifted the flap of his tent and stepped out into the night.

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens,” the voice came again, seemingly from nowhere, “and tell me the count of the stars, if you are able to number them.” After giving Abram a moment to absorb the meaning of what he had heard the voice said, “So shall your offspring be, for multitude.”

“Can this thing even be so?” Abram asked in an awed voice. But he did not ask the question in doubt, only in wonder at the greatness of the promise.

The voice came again, distant, and yet as near as his own heartbeat, “I am IaHWeH, who brought you forth from Ur in the land of the Chaldees, to give you this land for your inheritance.”

“Lord Yahweh,” Abram said in an unsteady voice, “How shall I know that these things are so, seeing as I have no child, and neither my wife nor I are young?”

“Behold, I make a sure covenant with you,” the voice replied. “Take for me a heifer of three years, and a she-goat of three years, and a ram of three years. And take for me a

turtledove and a young pigeon. Bring them before the altar you have made unto me, and do with them as I shall instruct.”

At the rising of the sun, Abram took the animals that IaHWeH had specified, and brought them to the altar at Beth-el. Under the watchful care of his guardian Omeriel, the patriarch slew the larger beasts and cut them in half down the middle of their bodies. These he laid, a half on each side, forming a path to the front of the altar. At the head of the path he lay the pigeon on one side and the dove on the other, having killed them but not split them in two.

Having accomplished this, Abram walked through the path to the altar and knelt there in worship. When he had done this, and yet received no sign, Abram decided that he would stay with the animals all of that day. He sent his servants away and he remained alone, driving off the carrion-eaters that happened by with a stick. With the first cloud of birds had come the dark angel Azrael, and he watched over the scene, eying Omeriel warily.

“Lucifer did not succeed in stripping him of his faith,” Abram’s guardian said, “and you did not succeed in stripping him of his life. Why do you come here? To witness the unfolding of a promise of your defeat?”

Azrael said nothing, but he found that he could not leave. He felt something drawing him to this place, holding him here, and he decided to wait and see what would occur.

Something indeed did. Although the place of the altar was silent except for the cawing of hungry birds during the day, when the sun set in the west Abram raised a hand to his forehead, for he felt a sudden wave of dizziness wash over him, and then he sank to the ground in a deep, unnatural sleep.

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 10: DIALOGUE

Abram,” came the voice from the darkness again, but this time it was not the darkness of the night that cloaked the speaker, but the darkness of the patriarch’s own mind. “Abram, know surely that though I will fulfill my promise unto you for offspring, they will be strangers for a time in a land that is not their own. They will serve strange masters, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

“The nation whom they serve will be judged, however, for their harshness to the children of my servant, and afterwards I will bring them forth with great substance, and a great many souls. Before these things I will call you to your rest, and you will go to the place of your fathers in peace, and having lived a life full of years.

You will not see the captivity of your children in strange lands, but be comforted; for four generations they will serve in bondage, but afterwards I will surely bring them again into this land I have promised you. Your work among the people of Canaan has caused them to be slowed in their apostasy from the knowledge of the Creator. Your children must come this way again and cleanse the land of its idolatry – but not yet, for the cup of iniquity for your friends the Amorites is not yet full.”

Abram thought of Mamre and his brethren, who loved to hear him speak of the Almighty One, and of His promises, and the patriarch was comforted for the safety of his friends. For some time he had been unsure of the fate of those with whom he had been associating, for he knew that his children must possess the land that was currently owned by others. Yet if this prediction was true, it explained clearly what would become of their descendants, and what would become of his.

As Abram began to awaken slowly he heard a quiet voice saying, “Why the Blood, Abram? Remember the Blood... Another must be sacrificed for your sins. IaHWeH does not delight in sacrifice, or the blood of heifers, and goats, and rams, and birds, but in righteousness and faith, for IaHWeH Himself will provide the Sacrifice. Remember the Blood.”

As Abram awoke with strange words and images in his mind, he saw that the sun had fully set, and he thought about removing the animals’ bodies from the ground that they should not be defiled overnight. As he looked toward the altar, however, a blast of flame poured down out of the sky, briefly taking the shape of a four-winged angel, and then it

swirled together into a ball of flame. The apparition giving off a light as bright as a lantern and a heat as intense as that of a furnace.

As the Archangel Uriel passed through the sacrifices the flames radiating from his being consumed the flesh of the birds and animals, and threw the demon Azrael backward, cursing in bitterness and spite. Although Abram could not make out the shape of the being himself he saw the fire, and the carcasses being reduced to ashes.

The patriarch fell on his face, and again came that beautiful yet powerful voice, “This is the token for which you have asked. You will not forget my promises to you, that unto your offspring have I given this land, from the river of Mizraim unto the great river Euphrates.

“I have given unto your seed the land of the Kenites and Kenizzites, the Kadmonites and Hittites, the Perizzites and Rephaims. I have given unto them the land of the Amorites and the Canaanites, the Girgashites and... the Jebusites.” That last name was said emphatically, for although Abram did not know it, these would be the people to eventually overrun Salem, the home of his friend Melchizedek.

* * * * *

“My lord Abram,” Sarai said, approaching her husband as he rested from his long night and day. “Let me speak unto you for a moment.”

“Speak what you have come to say,” Abram told her gently.

“For many years now, you have held to the promise of the One who called us out from our homeland. You have said unto me, our servants, and unto our visitors on the seventh days that your children are to be as the stars of the heavens, and as the sands of the seas. Your wish has been my wish, for my one desire has been to give you an heir.”

Abram smiled at the thought of it, as he always did, but Sarai did not smile, for what she had come to say would not be pleasant news. “My lord Abram,” she began again, “I thought for a time how I should make it known to you but I cannot hold my peace any longer. It has ceased to be with me after the manner of mothers. My time for bearing has passed.”

Now Abram was not smiling either. How was he to understand this? Just one night ago he had received the promise anew, and in a manner most dramatic, that he would indeed be the father of a nation. He had seen it, with the eyes of faith, and in the visions presented to him in the night.

“*Lo, it was but a dream,*” the tempting spirit by his side said.

“No,” Abram said, both to his wife and to the troubling thought. “This thing cannot be. The Almighty came to me, this is a certainty, and said to me that I should be the father of a holy people!”

“My lord,” Sarai began, but Abram spoke again.

“Perhaps my wife is ill? This may be simply some weakness of your body, and will pass with time.”

“I am not ill,” Sarai said softly. “My blood has been restrained for... three months now. The thing is sure.”

Abram looked at his wife in bewilderment. She was before him, as lovely as ever she was before. She had the appearance of youth that belied by far her age, even considering the extended life spans of humans in those days. “Surely, she is but a maiden,” Abram thought. “What am I to do?”

“Let your wife speak to you,” Sarai said, looking up at his face for the first time.

“Speak,” Abram said, too confused to say anything else.

“I did not wait these three long months simply because I feared to let you know. I have been considering in my heart what these things could mean, and I have not doubted the promises you have been given. There is yet a way by which you can become the father of the nation you have been promised.”

The patriarch looked at her beautiful face, his eyes shifting side to side, scanning for an answer in her features. When Sarai saw that he was not going to prompt her in any timely fashion, she blurted out the plan she had devised. “Let my lord, I pray, take my handmaiden Hagar to wife, and as you had thought to do with Lot, your brother Haran’s son, so I may do with the child you get by her. She is dear to me, and there is no husband more suitable for her among your servants. Only let her be the mother of our heir, and I will be comforted in my barren state.”

In his confusion, and not thinking to seek assistance in his distress, Abram quickly agreed to the plan. Though it troubled him greatly, for this was not the way he had envisioned the fulfillment of his promise, he could see no other way around it, and he did not think to consult with Melchizedek, or even to kneel at the altar in prayer. “I will do as my wife has suggested,” Abram said.

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“My lord Abram,” Sarai said, approaching her husband as he rested from a long night and day. “Let me speak unto you for a moment.”

“Speak what you have come to say,” Abram told her gently.

“My lord, I know that it was my advice that led you to take Hagar to wife these few months ago. Yet in these things you have not done justly.”

“I have not done justly?” Abram asked in surprise. “Why do you speak in this way to your husband?”

With what was obviously a release of emotions that had been pent up for some time, Sarai said, “My error is your error. My wrong is upon you, for I have given my favored maid into your arms, and yet now that she has conceived, I am despised in her eyes. She will do nothing I request of her, and looks upon me as an enemy. She speaks of me to other servants as if I was the concubine and *she* the true wife, and all the closeness we felt before has fled. Do your work to instruct her as a second wife, and remind her of her place. Let ‘Yahweh’ determine which of us is the more just in this thing.”

All of this took Abram completely by surprise. He had not heard of any of this before. As he listened to his wife go on he became quite irritated, both by Sarai’s careless use of a name he considered most sacred, and by her laying the blame upon him for results he could not have foreseen. And now, because of her anger with Hagar she was attempting to instruct him about how to be a proper husband. “What have I to do with the affairs of you women?” he asked in annoyance. “Behold, she is still your handmaid. Do with her what you will.”

Sarai returned to the meeting tent where Hagar and the other woman-servants were gathered. When she became aware of her presence the Egyptian girl, still a delicate beauty though she was beginning to show signs of pregnancy, turned to her mistress with pride and disdain in her eyes. “I will teach her how to look upon her mistress with respect,” Sarai thought to herself, and dismissed the other women.

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With tears streaking her face and a sharp pain still throbbing in her hindquarters, Hagar stumbled and fell on her face in the dry dust of the southeastern wilderness. She had been making her way back to the only land she knew, yet she was alone in a strange place, and with very little left by way of supplies. She felt as if she had been walking for weeks, and she was running out of energy.

The pain in her body hurt, yes, but it was almost less sharp than her humiliation. Sarai had dealt with her as a child, beating her like an infant, and at the same time saying those things... those things that still haunted her, and would not depart. “How could you treat me so poorly,” Sarai had said, both before and after the physical aspects of the punishment. “We were as sisters, and you look upon me with such contempt.”

Hagar had said nothing; she knew she was in the wrong, yet she could not, she *would* not, take back the words she had said. She had been a servant all of her life, and then she had seen so much of the world; she felt as if she had become a woman far greater than she had been before. The attentions of so great a man in her eyes as her master Abram had

caused her to feel great pride, and Sarai's love for her had allowed it to go undetected for a very long time. With all that she had achieved, and with all that she had become, all sisterly feelings between herself and her mistress had dissolved, and Hagar's heart had been lifted up in the tents of Abram.

Now, as she lay in the dust of the earth, in tears and in pain of both the body and spirit, she began to feel sorrow for what she had done. She was not merely repentant because of the injuries she had suffered, but because of what she had done to her mistress. She knew that Sarai had cared for her, but how she must have been hurt if she had been driven to deal so hardly with her servant. Yet in front of all this was a great anger that she could not seem to control. No, she would return to her homeland, and let them deal with her there as they saw fit. At least Sarai would not have the satisfaction of knowing what became of her even if her end in Egypt was no better than it would have been had she stayed in Abram's tents.

As Hagar thought over all the things that might happen to her in her homeland she heard a strange wind in the air before her, and as she looked up she saw a man standing in the open, with no cover from which he could have approached her undetected.

"Woman," said a voice infinitely gentle, but infinitely strong, "Where are you coming from? And where are you going?"

Hagar knew that this was no ordinary man, and she said to Him, "My lord, I flee from the presence of my mistress. She is Sarai, of the tents of Abram."

The figure knelt down before her and placed a hand on her head. He said, "Return to your mistress, from whom you flee. Submit yourself unto her, for I have not called you to depart. Do this, and I will multiply your offspring greatly, and they will be so many they cannot be numbered by men."

He stood up and said, "You are with child. You will bear a son, and you are to name him *Ishmael*, because IaHWeH has heard your distress. He will be a wild, untamed man, and he will have enemies on every side, but he will dwell among many brethren." As Hagar smiled through her tears, for the description had pleased her, the expression suddenly froze on her face, for the image of the man shattered. A faint wisp of light traced the outline of wings as the figure noiselessly crumbled into dust.

"El Roi," she said in wonder, meaning, "The Almighty who sees," and she thought to herself, "Have I truly seen such a great one as He that has seen me?" Hagar knew that none could look upon the face of Elohim and live, yet He had appeared to her in such a way that her life had been preserved.

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"My lord Abram!"

A cry at his tent's entrance... Abram was beginning to suspect that whenever he was called out of his tent, something interesting was about to happen. "What does my servant seek?" he asked, without rousing himself. Abram knew that Sarai had driven Hagar out from their tents, yet he was unsure as to whether she should be praised or censured for her actions. This was, after all, his child that she was carrying – the child of promise! This was what he had been contemplating as he lay in his tent, and he had been unwilling to leave until he had decided how best to deal with his wife, and how and when (and if) servants should be sent to seek the runaway mother-to-be.

"Your maidservant Hagar has returned," Eliezer said.

That got him up. Abram opened his tent and quickly followed his chief steward until he came upon the girl. She looked tired, and not without fear, but in her eyes was a steady determination that Abram, at least, had not seen before. Before he could say anything, or even determine what ought to be said, Hagar spoke.

"My lord," she said. "Do not be angry with your maidservant for fleeing from the face of her mistress. I realize that I have erred, and I have returned to submit myself to her desire. I will dwell within your tents, and I will not attempt to leave again – but I have this request to ask of you."

For the second time in far too few days, Abram was too surprised at a woman's statements to say anything but a single word: "Speak."

"His name shall be Ishmael, for the Almighty One of your fathers has heard my distress, and it was He that told me to return unto your tents."

Abram moved closer and looked the girl full in the face. He examined her expression closely, for she was saying that the Almighty of *his* fathers had appeared unto *her*, an Egyptian servant girl, when she had fled from his tents? "These are strange days, Eliezer," Abram said to his steward.

"The child shall be named Ishmael," he said finally, and then he went off to kneel in front of his altar.

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For thirteen years Abram knelt in front of that altar. Every day he returned to the stones of Beth-el, and he implored Elohim to reveal to him His plans, for he was uncertain about so many things. Was Ishmael the child of promise? He must be, for there was no other... yet what a child! The boy was respectful enough when Abram was around, yet the servants spoke of him with a mixture of fear and irritation. His mother Hagar had proven to be quite humble after her experience in the wilderness, but the closeness that had existed between Sarai and herself had never really been restored.

For thirteen years the patriarch received no word from his Heavenly guide, and his guardian had been instructed merely to keep the demons from directly interfering with his progress. With great anticipation the Host awaited what El Michael would speak unto the aging human when next He made an appearance.

Finally, when Abram was ninety-nine years old, and truly growing concerned with his standing before the Almighty, El Michael said to His angels, "It is time."

"Abram," said the voice of Elohim.

"My lord!" the human cried, looking up to the sky, "Speak and your servant will hear you!"

"I am *El Shaddai*," He said, "walk before me, and be perfect in my sight. Do this, and I will make my covenant between us, and I will indeed multiply you exceedingly on all the earth."

Abram fell again on his face, and Elohim continued, "As for me, my covenant is with you, and you will be the father of many nations." At the words, "as for me," Abram began to feel a keen sense of shame for... something. He felt as if he had not kept his part of the agreement somehow, but he did not have much time to consider, for the voice of IaHWeH spoke again.

"You shall no more be called Abram, but your name, which I give unto you, shall be ABRAHAM, for I have made of you a father of many nations. And I will make nations of great number out of you, and I will call kings from among your descendants. And I will establish my covenant firmly between myself and your offspring in their generations. It will be an everlasting covenant between us: I will be your Almighty, both for you and your seed.

"And I will further give unto you this land, which I promised from the beginning. It will be an everlasting inheritance for your children, and I will be lord over them all.

"Moreover I give unto you a sign of the covenant between us. Every male child among your people shall be circumcised, every one on the eighth day of his life. This is to be established in the generations of your people both for those born into your family, and for those bought as servants with money. Everyone who does not have this done will have no part with your inheritance, for they will have broken my covenant."

Abram kept his face pressed tightly to the ground in fear and wonder at what he was hearing. Elohim had never yet spoken to him this long before, yet His mighty voice rolled over him in waves, confirming His promises time and again, and telling him things that, though strange, he knew he would never forget.

“As for your wife Sarai, her name shall no longer be thus, but you will call her name SARAH, and I will bless her, and I will give you a son by *her*, and she shall be the mother of those nations, and kings and people which I have promised to you.”

Abram, or Abraham, as he was now to be called, had lifted his face reflexively at this statement, for he knew well what his wife had told him, and he did not know what to think of the thing he had just heard. In his confusion he laughed gently and said, “Shall a child be born unto me, in my great age, and Sarai, that is ninety, shall she also bear?”

“How can this be?” Abraham asked himself, and then he spoke aloud, “Oh, Elohim, I would that my son Ishmael might live before you as the child of your promise.”

“Your wife Sarah shall bear a son,” the voice said, emphasizing every word. “You shall call his name Isaac, and I will establish my eternal covenant with him, and with his offspring.”

“Isaac,” Abraham thought to himself; “he laughs?”

“As for Ishmael,” Elohim continued, “I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful and give him many offspring. I will give him a nation of twelve princes. But my everlasting covenant is with Isaac, which Sarah will bear unto you within a year’s time.”

With that the voice ceased, and Abraham felt a presence departing upward, away from the altar. The patriarch slowly got to his feet and turned towards his tent. If Sarah was indeed somehow to bear a son, he knew where he had failed his Master. If the covenant was yet to be established, what exactly would that mean for his boy Ishmael? Among these, and many other things on his mind, was a single word, and he wondered how he would present this to the men of his tents. The word was *circumcision*.

* * * * *

“Isaac?” Omeriel had an inquisitive look on his face as he spoke to his Chief Zahariel.

“It will remind Abraham of his laughter, and keep him from doubting the promises of Elohim.”

“May it be effective,” the patriarch’s guardian said. “And what of this promise; Sarah shall bear a child? What a miracle that will be to behold!”

“Abraham must learn,” Zahariel said, “that his own efforts can do nothing. No power of his can restore strength to the womb of his wife, just as his artifice in Egypt could not keep the truth of his marriage hidden. His plan to have a child by Hagar has done him no good, and if the Oracles speak truly the men of Ishmael will have great claims upon the promises of Isaac in the generations to come.

“But I did not come here to tell you only that,” Zahariel said to his angel. “El Michael has need of you at the Throne Room. Seek the Oracle Zephon, and meet Him where I have indicated.” Omeriel bowed and opened a passageway into Heaven to meet with his High Prince.

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“We must descend to earth,” El Michael said to the Cherub and the Dominion bowed before Him. “We have two orders of business. The first is to meet with Abraham in his tent, and to let him entertain us there. We will travel with him for a time, and from that point I will remain behind with him; but you two must go on to the city of Sodom.”

“Sodom?” Zephon asked in surprise. Omeriel was thinking exactly the same thing as the Cherubic Oracle, though neither voiced it: What business have two angels in *Sodom*?

“You are to enter into the gates of that wicked city,” El Michael said to them, “and you are to retrieve the family of Lot, the kinsman of Abraham. At the rising of the sun tomorrow morning, the cities of that valley will be no more.”

“Yes, my Prince,” the angels said in unison.

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Abraham stood quickly upon his feet as he saw three men approaching him from the direction of the wilderness. Why had his servants not informed him of their approach? With the hospitality that he always displayed to his guests, Abraham made haste to approach the visitors, and he bowed himself before them in greeting.

“My lords,” he said, “If I have found favor in your sight, do not pass my tents by without taking refreshment from your servant. Let me call for water, that your feet may be washed, and food that you may be fed, as you rest in the shade of my trees. After these things you may continue as you have been, but you have not come upon my tents this day in vain.”

“Let it be done as you have said,” El Michael said to the patriarch.

Abraham immediately went to his wife and said to her, “Quickly prepare some cakes for our guests. Use fine meal, well kneaded, and prepare them on the hearth.”

Without waiting for her to respond he went out to his herd and found his most pleasing calf, and he gave it to one of his young men to prepare. He returned to the men and saw to it that they were well attended by his servants until the meal was ready.

When the meat and cakes were ready, Abraham served the guests himself, with milk and butter, and stood by them as they ate, marveling, it appeared, at his hospitality to strangers.

As they ate, praising him for his kindness, El Michael asked an unusual question. “Where is Sarah your wife?”

“Sarah, my lord?” he asked, “Why, she is in my tent.”

The man who sat at meat before Abraham’s tent then said words that were familiar to the human at his side. “I will surely return to you at the time of life I have indicated, and you will see that Sarah your wife will bear a son.”

While Abraham looked at his guests in amazement, beginning to realize that he was speaking to divine beings, his wife was indeed in his tent nearby, and she was also listening to the conversation. Sarah had changed a bit from the days of Hagar’s pregnancy. She had become somewhat embittered against her husband, and to some degree against the One who had promised them children. She was civil to her servants, including Hagar, and she was affectionate in the presence of her husband, but she cherished angry thoughts against him at times, and doubted more than a little that she would ever see the promises fulfilled.

When she heard the words of her visitors she laughed cynically and said, “After I am so old, am I to have the pleasure of a son at last? My lord Abraham is old also; are the promises still valid for him?”

As she did this one of the Men, the One who had spoken, turned in her direction and He caught sight of her peering out through the flap of the tent. While keeping His eyes fixed on her He addressed her husband, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘How shall I, being so old, bear a child?’ Is there anything too hard for IaHWeH?”

Abraham did not reply to the question, for he had not heard his wife’s laughter, but she stepped out of the tent, having already been noticed by the divine travelers. “At the time appointed,” El Michael said again, “I *will* return unto you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”

“My Lord,” said Sarah, fearful of the authority that she sensed in the Speaker’s voice, but not fully knowing with whom she was dealing, “I did not laugh.”

“Oh, but you did,” replied the Visitor, a look on His face both solemn and caring. Sarah felt as if He had looked right into her innermost being, and was examining the pain she felt at a promise delayed, and a plan that had gone horribly wrong concerning her maidservant Hagar. Without saying another word, Abraham’s wife lowered her eyes and went back into the tent to hide herself from the angels’ intrusive stares.

“We shall be on our way,” the Speaker among the three men said. “We have business in the eastern regions, and must not be delayed.”

“Permit your servant to accompany his lords partway on their journey,” Abraham said, though he was eager also to see to his wife. The custom of the land was that a traveler

should be accompanied for a part of the way upon leaving a host, but the patriarch had come to realize who his guests truly were, and he was not about to be parted from them anyway.

The three men did not reject Abraham's offer, and so four figures began walking toward the east.

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 11: ANACHOROGOGUE

For about five miles the men walked, and they did so in complete silence. None of the three mysterious strangers said a word, and Abraham felt it would be a breach of courtesy to speak. He was filled with a sense of awe that he was in the presence of his Creator, and he would not even lift his eyes to look upon the faces of his companions.

They traveled through a narrow, often steep path to the east and somewhat to the north, and finally, when they arrived at a spot overlooking the eastern valley in which sat the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, El Michael turned to His two companions and said, “Shall I hide from Abraham the things that I plan to do? It has been decreed that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation of the earth, and all the people of the earth will be blessed in him. I know that he will command his children and his household; that they will keep the way of IaHWeH to do justice and judgment, and that Abraham may receive the things that IaHWeH has spoken of him. Therefore let us take him into our counsels, to see how the nations of the earth are to be considered.”

El Michael pointed out over the landscape, to the cities located below them and He said, “Behold, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sins are grievous to behold. I will go down now to visit them, to see the report of the land, and whether or not the cry that has come up before me is according to their doings.”

As He said these things, Zephon and Omeriel bowed to their Prince and departed, going downward unto the cities; but Michael remained with Abraham, who was suddenly filled with concern over the fate of his nephew. Bera had been true to his word; Lot had been made a prince in the city of Sodom, and he no longer dwelt in a tent outside of its walls. From the reports he had heard, Lot had proven himself to be a just and fair judge over the matters of Sodom’s citizens... and this had made him almost universally disliked among its degenerate populace.

“My Lord,” Abraham said to his divine Companion, “Will you truly destroy all those cities? Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty men among them who are not so evil as the others? Will you also destroy all and not spare them, though there be fifty?”

“May it be far from you,” Abraham pressed, when he saw that Michael continued to stare wordlessly over the valley. “May it be far from you to do this thing, to destroy the

righteous with the wicked that there should be no difference between them. Oh, let it be far from you, for shall not the Judge of all the earth do rightly?"

Then El Michael, speaking with the authority of the Divine Union, said unto Abraham, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous men, if there are fifty within the borders of that city, I will spare the entire region for their sake."

Abraham rejoiced in his spirit that he had prevailed upon the Prince of Heaven thus far, and he said, "Behold now, I have dared to speak unto my Master, though I am but dust and ashes. But what if there are five missing from the count of the fifty righteous men? Will you destroy all the cities for the lack of just five?"

El Michael smiled, for Abraham was both bold and clever. Of course, what he was thinking and saying was fully open before the Majesty of Heaven, but even in the face of the dark work ahead of Him, the High Prince was pleased that His servant felt such sympathy for the misled.

"If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy the region."

"And for forty, my Lord?" Abraham asked, fearing to look upon the face of his Companion once again.

"I will not destroy it if I find forty righteous men."

"Do not let my Master be angry with me," Abraham said after a pause, "but I will speak once again. Perhaps you shall find but thirty there, who are not as wicked as the others?"

"I will not do it if I find thirty there," El Michael said.

"Ah," Abraham said, looking out over the cities and letting the sorrow he truly felt show upon his face. "I have dared to speak unto my Lord once again, but again I say, what if there be twenty that are found there, who are righteous in your eyes?"

Again the High Prince said, "I will not destroy it for twenty's sake."

The two men stood in silence for a few minutes, and then Abraham turned and said, "Once more, once more, my Lord. Do not be angry with your servant, but what if... what if there are *ten* found there?"

"For the sake of ten," El Michael said, "I will restrain my destruction."

There was a note of finality in that answer, and Abraham believed that he had said enough. Without speaking another word the form that El Michael had taken spiraled away in the wind, traveling as dust on the air of the high region. Abraham fell on his face and then, when he was sure he was alone, he started once again for his home and his altar.

El Michael hovered, unseen, above the cities seeking ten righteous souls. As He had looked over the men outside the Ark just before the Flood was unleashed, so now He looked out over the inhabitants of the wicked settlements. He looked, not for ten men, but for *one* heart, one heart to save; instead He saw things that night that ought not to be repeated, or recorded. He knew the heart of every human below Him, and so He did not speak to the angels below Him, to restrain them from their mission to rescue Lot. The cities would be destroyed, and the one already chosen for safety's shores would be spared.

* * * * *

Zephon and Omeriel had traveled in material form, and so they were without wings, appearing as ordinary men. Yet in spite of this they moved at a more rapid pace than a normal human could sustain and so, although they had departed from Abraham's tents after the noon hour, they arrived at the distant cities before the sun set that very day.

When they arrived at the gate of Sodom they entered in, and they looked around in an exploratory manner as if they had never seen the city before. Indeed, they had not gazed upon the space within these sin-stained walls recently, or for very long, yet they had seen it once before, and angelic memory is far superior to that of humans.

As they had passed through the gate Lot, who had been sitting there to receive guests, saw them and rose up. He walked after them into the city, and deciding they were travelers he said to them, "Behold, my lords, come with me to my house and remain there tonight. I will see that you are well cared-for, that your feet are washed, and that you will be refreshed to continue your journey on the morrow."

Zephon looked at his companion and said, "Oh, no. We are but poor travelers. A corner of the street will suffice for our resting place until the sun rises."

Lot's face assumed an incredulous expression, and his manner indicated his amazement that these men were either ignorant of the wickedness of Sodom, or were contemplating some elaborate form of suicide. "My lords," Lot said with concern in his voice, "these streets are not safe for kings or beggars. I, who dwell here, would not be found outside my dwelling place after dark. Accompany me, I pray, to the safety of my house."

"We could not think of being such a trouble to you," Omeriel said. "We are young men, and strong. Robbers and violent ruffians do not concern us."

"You are young men, and strong," Lot said aloud, and he thought also that they were very handsome. "For this reason, and more, do not trust yourself to these streets tonight. The men of this city are most wicked, and though you may be soldiers or palace guards, you cannot defend yourself against so great a number of offenders."

"Can the whole city come out against us?" Omeriel asked. "What manner of city would do so wickedly?"

“My lords have not been told the half of it,” Lot replied. “Robbery is not the greatest of the crimes done in this place. I pray you take refuge in my home this night, and in the morning you may safely be on your way.”

The angels allowed themselves to be persuaded, and they turned in with Lot to go to his home. Upon their arrival there they were met with servants, and Lot introduced his two daughters who had both been recently engaged to men of Sodom.

Zephon asked, “You have arranged to have your daughters wed to men of this city, despite what you have told us of their wickedness?”

“My lord is discerning,” Lot said. “I have indeed done this thing, for the men are persuasive; and I, who have been induced to give my word, cannot retract it now. The men who are to marry my daughters, they are not of the most honest sort, but I say with assurance, they are not as wicked as most others who dwell in these parts.”

“How did you determine that?” Zephon asked.

“For one thing,” Lot replied, “They asked to marry my *daughters*.”

As the men finished the meal that Lot’s servants had prepared for them and made ready to retire for the evening, there came a loud banging at the door. When Lot made no move to see who was there, Omeriel looked over at Lot who said to him, “Ignore it. They will go away.”

But they did not go away. The banging became louder, and the men outside began to shout, “We have seen the men you brought into your house with you. Where have you taken them? Bring them out, so that we might know them!” Demons of the House of Petahel were drifting about in the crowd, stirring up strange passions in those who had seen the visitors. The fallen angels, of course, found great sport in using the inclinations of their captives to mock their holy counterparts within the walls of Lot’s house.

When he saw that the men of the city would not depart the host motioned to his guests to remain where they were, and he went outside to confront them. When he had closed the door behind him he said to them, “Do not do so wickedly, my brethren. These men are my guests.”

“Do not be so selfish, Lot,” one man shouted at him. “Let us *all* have the benefit of their company!”

The others began to laugh and to shout at those words, and soon Lot’s continuing protests could not be heard over their noise. Finally, in desperation Lot shouted, “Behold! I have two daughters who are yet unmarried, and have never been with men. Do with them what you will, if you so desire, but unto the men that I have sheltered do nothing, for they are under the protection of my home.”

No one seemed very happy with that suggestion, not the crowd outside his quarters, not the angels within the house, not his wife, and certainly not his horrified daughters who also heard him make the unwise offer.

“Get out of the way,” one man shouted, and another said, “Who is this fellow, who came in as a traveler, to be a judge over our affairs? Let us do worse with him than we would have done to his guests, for the king’s favor can only go so far!” Some of the men liked that suggestion very much, and they pushed past those who were closer to Lot and began to corner him against his door.

Just as he was about to run out of room, Lot felt a firm hand grabbing him by the arm and dragging him into his house. Omeriel quickly shut the door against the mob, and said, “I see that you have spoken truly of these men, my host!”

Zephon, his eyes beginning to glow a brilliant green, said, “Let me put a stop to this foolishness.” Having said that, he turned to the door and raised his hand in the direction of the mob. Immediately there came a loud cry from the street. The banging ceased, and the sound of great confusion ensued. “I am blinded!” came a particularly loud shout from one of the Sodomites.

Lot and his servants fell back from the two travelers, having seen what Zephon was able to do. Before they could give utterance to their surprise, the Cherub said to them, “Do you have any other relatives here beside your daughters and wife? Whosoever they may be, sons-in-law, sons and other daughters, get them and come with us, for we are leaving this place to the destruction it has earned. The cry of this land has become great before the face of IaHWeH, and He has sent us therefore to destroy it.”

“All the land?” one of Lot’s daughters asked the other. “Is there to be another great Flood?”

Lot went out through another entrance to his house and, due to the blindness of the men in the mob, was able to move untroubled to the houses of those whom he wished to save. His sons-in-law, Lot had spoken truly, were more righteous than those who had been in the streets, yet they would not take his warnings seriously and accused him of both madness and drunkenness before he finally surrendered their fate to Heaven and returned to his home.

That night was spent in preparation and prayer. The servants had not waited until the morning, but they had fled; some went up into the mountains and some went to other places they deemed safe. When dawn arrived only Lot’s family remained, and though they had attempted to get a little sleep, it had gone from them. When they arose in the morning, therefore, they felt wholly unrested, and Lot himself was unsure of what to make of both his angelic visitors and the words they had said to him the night before concerning the fate of his new home.

Zephon said to Lot, “Do not delay. Take your wife and your two daughters that are here and leave, or you will be consumed with the iniquity of this city.” The owner of the house looked about him with a measure of regret for all that he was leaving behind, but the angels did not give him time to consider. “You must come NOW,” Zephon said, and he took Lot’s hand in his with a powerful grip. With his other hand he grasped the hand of his wife, and they moved toward the door.

With a flash of light from his eyes Zephon swung the door open, and he headed directly for the city’s exit, followed closely by Omeriel who was carrying Lot’s daughters in a similar manner. As they passed through the gate they came upon another Man who was waiting for them, and He said to Lot and his family, “Do not consider the things you are losing; the mercy you are being granted today is worth more than many houses.”

The three incarnate spirits and the four humans began to move away from the city. As they ran El Michael said to Lot, “Escape into the mountains if you value your life; do not once look behind you for *any* reason, and do not remain within this plain. Go forth into the mountains, or you will be consumed.”

“Oh, my Lord,” Lot said, “The way is far of which you speak. If I have truly obtained mercy in your sight, and I see that you have saved my life, grant me this: that I should not go into the mountains, for the way is dangerous, and the men of the land dwell in those parts as well. Shall I be rescued from one death to fall prey to another?”

“Let your servant instead flee to Bela, which is but a small city. If you will let your servant find refuge there, in this tiny place, my soul will surely live.”

El Michael looked sternly at Lot, but He said, “I have accepted your word. Escape there, but go quickly for I can do nothing to the cities of the plain until you are safely away.” With that Michael, Zephon and Omeriel remained where they were and Lot, his wife and two daughters continued on as quickly as they could.

All the way Lot’s wife continuously hesitated, desiring to look backward at where they had been. Lot noticed this and reproved her, saying, “Have you not heard the word of our Savior? Have we been rescued from destruction to disobey? Come onward to safety, and let those things which are behind us be.” Lot himself was not wholly free from his desire for the life he was leaving behind, and his request to find refuge in Bela reflected his hesitancy to face the hardship of the mountains, or to return to the tents of his uncle in shame. Yet in all this Lot was not so foolish as to take the word of El Michael lightly. He and his daughters went on, while his wife lingered behind.

On the plain behind the escaping humans two bodies vanished into the wind, and another unfolded a pair of mighty wings and flew, in visible form, to hover above the cities against which judgment had been pronounced. El Michael looked down at the settlement, peaceful in the early morning’s light, and He waited there.

* * * * *

“Where is your mother?” Lot asked his daughters, when they arrived at the city of Bela.

“We do not know,” they said.

“Ah,” Lot mourned, “She lingered behind! Were we not warned to keep our eyes away from the cities?” The refugees entered thus into the gates of the tiny city on the edge of the valley: tired, poor, and exceedingly sorrowful.

* * * * *

When the three surviving humans entered the city of refuge El Michael drew His kherev, and He pointed the brightly burning blade down at the walled cities below Him. “Let it begin,” He said. “In the name of IaHWeH, let the earth be cleansed from its violence and sin.” With that He drew back His arm and hurled His glittering weapon down at the earth.

As the kherev approached the surface of the plain, whirling as a gigantic disk of light, it sank into the earth. Immediately a giant earthquake split the silence of the morning, and a series of great explosions rocked the country with shocks that could be felt almost as far away as Abraham’s tents. Lightning split the sky from the clear blue expanse of Heaven, and thunder awakened terror in the hearts of the men below.

Dust and rocks were thrown up into the air and tiny, burning spheres of sulphurous minerals began to rain down on the houses. A great cry of fear and pain rose up from the cities as the people within realized they were being attacked, and roofs and other forms of shelter offered no protection from the assault.

The houses themselves burst into flame, and the very walls burned with great heat. The trees and rocks were split in the ferocity of the blaze, and everywhere about people were consumed. Lot and his daughters looked out over the plain and saw the flames rising to the sky. There also, in the distance, they saw a tiny, white figure looking back in the direction of the blaze.

A short while later Abraham climbed the path he had come through the day before to see how the cities fared. He set out early from his tents and he had hoped, and had been praying, that his intercession on behalf of his neighbors and his nephew had been successful. Yet as he looked out over the cities he saw with dismay that his bargaining had not spared the men of that wicked region. The flames were dying down, but from the ruined settlements there rose up a thick, black smoke.

* * * * *

“My nephew Lot is dead,” Abraham said to his wife, feeling keen sorrow for what he believed the fate of his kinsman to be. “It grieves me greatly to remain in this place, where last we parted, and in a dream the Almighty appeared to me once again, and He said to me, ‘Go out and see the wickedness of this land, that you may know that my judgment is just.’ The patriarch had returned to his tent from seeing the destruction of the

cities, and he had spoken to no one all the rest of that day. That night his sleep had been troubled, but in the morning he had arisen with this new purpose.

“Let us therefore go,” he said to Sarah, “and travel in the lands of the south once again.”

Abraham’s servants had long become used to the nomadic life, and therefore they did not feel it strange that they would be moving once again. They had been many years in this location, and some were even beginning to feel the desire to see the southern regions once more.

This time, as they moved southward, they turned more to the west than they had in their previous journey, and they moved toward Philistia on the edge of the great sea. There they pitched their tents near the city of Gerar, and began to trade freely with its inhabitants.

Now, the King of Gerar had many things in common with the Pharaoh of Egypt. The appearances of the travelers from Ur greatly appealed to his men, and the king himself was out one day among his people when he caught sight of Abraham’s servants conducting business in town.

“Whose are those maidens?” he asked one of the soldiers that had accompanied him.

The retainer went off to obtain the information his king Abimelech had requested, and he returned to him saying, “My lord the king, the women are those who have entered your regions with a wealthy stranger. His tents are pitched outside the walls of our city, and his name is Abraham.”

“Gather together my guard,” Abimelech said; “Let us pay this rich man a visit.”

Before the close of the day Abimelech and his trained soldiers had indeed come out of the city to see the tents of Abraham. As the small band of locals entered the place where the patriarch had come to dwell and to erect yet another altar, the angels drew near to see what would become of this visit.

“You wished to see if your charge has learned his lesson,” Zahariel said. “This is the trial that has come upon him because he did not obtain to righteousness at the first.”

Omeriel nodded confidently. “He has learned to trust in the Most High since that time, my Chief. He has seen visions and heard voices in the night. He has stood before El Michael face to face above the valley of Sodom, and he has received the promises of a miraculous birth. Surely, with all these things considered, he would not compromise his wife within the very year of promise!”

* * * * *

“Ah, that one, my lord?” Abraham asked with a quavering voice.

“That woman pleases me greatly,” Abimelech said. “It is the custom of those who settle in my land to give their servants or daughters in marriage to the king or his sons. Let it be so with us, and we shall have a covenant of friendship between us.”

Having roused himself from Egypt for the first time in many years Lucifer himself, the great prince of demons, stood invisibly among the men gathered before Abraham’s altar. To this little group of men he had come, for he had failed to destroy the patriarch’s faith during his travels in Egypt, but he determined that he would cause him to falter this time and, after all that Abraham had received at the hand of the Creator, Satan was sure that this error would put him beyond all hope of restoration.

With cold, imperial eyes, the arch deceiver used his great skill to influence both Abimelech’s words and Abraham’s thoughts. Using his illusions, perfected among the heathen people in the land of Mizraim, he placed a screen over the patriarch’s eyes who subsequently saw the soldiers of Gerar’s king in their most threatening light, with swords poised to strike at his people and slay them.

To the horror of the angels overlooking the meeting a faint, crackling darkness began to spread over the scene, and angelic vision became blurred. Even Omeriel, Abraham’s faithful guardian, was forced backward by the weight of fear that Lucifer was inspiring. “Such power,” the Dominion said, as he beheld Azazel in the center of the dome, conducting the meeting as though it were an orchestra of ill-advised emotions. The Ba’al of the Great House of Fear knew every intent and thought of the king and his soldiers, and he had correctly assumed much of Abraham himself. No other demon was asked to help him; the mighty Red Dragon was taking care of this encounter personally.

* * * * *

When the men of Gerar departed, taking Sarah with them, Abraham found himself face-down in the dirt before his new altar. With great groans and weeping the patriarch suffered under the crushing weight of guilt. “How could I have done so foolishly?” he asked himself. “Surely the mercy of my Almighty has been strained by my cowardice... and shall I not now lose my dear wife? Shall I not now forfeit the promises so greatly and often repeated in my hearing?”

The servants of Abraham’s house had been sent away, but they all knew what had occurred, and most were in a state of great confusion. They knew of their master’s earlier error in Egypt, and were astonished that he would make the same mistake again. A few said, “But what was he to do? The soldiers of the king looked as if they would slay us all if our lord Abraham did not give him everything that he desired.”

Others said, “It was not fitting that our mistress should be given as wife to another!” Some even said, “My life is worth nothing if the promises to my lord Abraham have been set at naught.” Many among these more pious servants prayed fervently for their master, for their mistress, and for themselves. Eliezer, chief steward of the tents of Abraham, was the foremost among this group.

For hours, and for more than a day, Abraham lay prostrate before the bitter ashes of his sacrifices. “How could I have said yet again, ‘She is my sister?’ How much better it would have been if I had chosen death, rather than this great disgrace!”

* * * * *

If Abraham’s human servants were feeling confusion, this applied doubly to many of the angels, including the patriarch’s guardian Omeriel. He had been summoned to the Throne Room, along with many who had been the overseers of Abraham’s tents and servants.

When he arrived at the place of meeting, the Dominion was amazed at what he beheld. No arrangement such as that which greeted his eyes had been called since the time of the Flood. El Michael stood united with the Almighty Throne, and was glowing with an intense, golden color – the light of the Elohim. Around Him were the four Archangels Gabriel, Uriel, Camael and Raphael. Before them were the three temporary archangels: Israfel, Raziel and Za’afiel. The Covering Cherubim Raziel and Gabriel were surrounded by faintly glowing orbs of light, and their eyes shone through these spherical barriers with a pure, white fire.

Before all these, six of the Sar’im sat on white thrones that gleamed like ivory: Anael, Matmoniel, As’fael, Jehoel, Shabbatiel and Dumah who had been summoned from Salem. Finally the seven Orders of angels were arranged before the Throne with the remaining Sar’im – who were also the Chiefs of the Orders Malakim, Ophanim and Hashmallim – interspersed among the other four.

The symbol thus displayed before Omeriel’s spiritual eyes was perfection itself, though the Dominion did not fully understand at that time what he was seeing. A glowing cross, formed by El Michael, the Archangels and the Covering Cherub Raziel, was set above the judgment of works, represented by the six angels on the white thrones. Beside the cross, one on either side, stood two witnesses; and facing the six thrones were seven angels – one from each Class – that represented all the intelligent beings of the Creation.

Abraham’s disappointed guardian did not have much time to contemplate the configuration of his fellows, for the mood was most solemn. All of Heaven had been filled with sorrow and concern at the human’s actions, and El Michael had called this assembly to speak with the Host directly.

“What shall be done with the human Abraham?” El Michael said, the Throne echoing His every word with a thunderous noise. “He has broken trust with Our promises, and fallen short of the standard which I sent before him when I came to him and said, ‘Walk before me, and be perfect.’”

“What could I have done for Abraham that I have left undone?” Elohim asked, and many of the angels fell on their faces, some not wishing to see the fury of the Almighty, and others interceding silently for the man who had been called IaHWeH’s servant and friend.

“Have I not spoken unto him of my promises? Have I not made a sure covenant with the man I called from his homeland to walk before me? But in all these things he gave place to our great Adversary, and now what shall we do with the man?”

El Michael looked out over His sorrowful Host. “Lucifer desires an audience before us,” He said. “As in the past, he now holds great accusations against one I have chosen unto myself. He calls for the destruction of my servant, of my own chosen vessel, and what have I to say unto him of these things?”

The angels bowed silently, and those who sat on thrones lowered their heads in contemplation and sorrow.

“These are indeed times of judgment,” the Union declared. “Behold the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Admah and Zeboim.” The Throne opened up to the angels a view of the rubble, all that remained of those once proud and wicked settlements.

“Behold,” the Almighty said, “A soul pleading for those who deserved no mercy.” The angels were shown an image of Abraham and El Michael in human form, standing before the doomed region, one pleading with the Other for the salvation of the righteous and the wicked alike – should there be found among them some who were undefiled.

“Behold,” the Almighty said again, “a soul pleading for freedom; a desire for lasting peace.” The angels saw the humbled patriarch stretched out on his face before the stained altar at Gerar, pleading for his wife, for his promised child, for his own life and preservation. Many of the angels wept as they beheld the pitiful sight.

“Behold,” the Almighty said a third time, “the mercy of Elohim.” At that many of the angels looked up in hope and the beginnings of joy, but they were restrained when the Union spoke again, saying, “But there will be a cost – a great cost; it will be greater indeed than that paid by my servant Noah. It will be a test greater than the life of Adam, or the wrestlings of my faithful Enoch. It will be a sorrow greater than Methuselah was forced to bear, and it will be the terror of all who have become fathers.

“Let this thing be brought upon my servant Abraham, and in the time of life we will consider him to see if he will be faithful to us or not. Though he will perform before us a great *work*, it is his *faith* that we will measure by that which I will instruct him to do.”

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 12: SYNCHYZOGOGUE

The passage of years did not excuse Abraham for his misdeed. Though it had been many years since that first event with the King of Egypt, he was to have learned his lesson well, and he had not allowed the experience to make a lasting impression on him. This time, Shem did not appear to comfort him. When he looked up from his altar of sorrows he found instead two guards from the castle of Abimelech, the king of Gerar.

“Our king summons you,” one of the soldiers said. If either of the men made note of the patriarch’s wretched appearance, they did not show it outwardly, but treated him with deference and respect as he retired to his tent to prepare for the short journey. As Abraham made ready Omeriel stood nearby, and the angel whispered words to him that were not intended to comfort, but instead to further convict. This was for his life’s sake, and the angel was trying to prepare him for a great trial... his eye could not spare, nor his heart pity to alleviate, the full weight of the transgression. The patriarch must be made to feel the exceedingly great sinfulness of wrongdoing, even for this apparently minor failure, or he would never be suited to father the chosen people of Elohim.

“Did you not stand as a god-prince before the kings of the north? Did you not call upon your allies, the chieftains of the southern lands, to come to your aid as you made war on an army far larger than your own? How is it that you could fear this human king, when the King of all Heaven was to be your shield, and your exceedingly great reward?”

When Abraham returned to the guards his face was fallen, and his heart was heavy. It had been some days since his wife was taken to the castle, and he was sure that she had gone along with his deception out of respect for his desires. What had become of her? He did not know, and hesitated to speculate. By now she may well have been the wife of the heathen monarch.

When Abraham was called before the king and heard the familiar words spoken again, “Abraham, why have you done this to me?” it brought back with shocking clarity his sorrow, and his repentance, for his previous error. Now, more keenly than before, he realized how superficial his trust had been in the power of the Most High, compared to what it ought to have been. Abraham’s faith had not been so weak a thing; he had, after, all trusted in the Almighty to deliver him from his enemies. He had believed the promises of IaHWeH, and he had looked forward with eager expectation to the birth of a son. But

when it came to his own life, his own personal safety outside of an environment of battle, there appeared to be a severe weakness, and one that was being most painfully revealed.

But Abimelech was not finished yet; indeed, he had only just begun. “In what way have we offended you, guest of my land, that you should have brought upon me and my kingdom such a great sin? You have dealt with me in a way that ought not to be done!

“In good faith I thought to make a covenant with your people, that we should be kinsmen and dwell together in peace and safety. Of your people I selected a woman most fair, that she should be my wife, and dwell with me in my palace. Surely we would have been married by now, but on the night of the feast of celebration I was struck with a severe illness, and I could not leave my quarters; and the voice of a Mighty One came to me in a dream.”

At these words, Abraham’s heart leaped in hope. Sarah was not yet married to the king!

“The Mighty One called me by name,” Abimelech continued, “and He said to me, ‘Behold, you are as one dead, for the woman you have taken to yourself is the wife of another.’ You, Abraham, had told me that Sarah was your sister, and she herself agreed with your words. I protested, therefore, saying, ‘Great Lord, will you come forth to destroy a righteous nation?’

“But the Mighty One revealed to me that you had deceived me, and she also, and then He said in my hearing, ‘Indeed, you speak truly. I know you had no wrong within yourself for this action, and for this cause I caused you to fall ill that you should not sin against me, to defile yourself and my maidservant. I did not allow you to touch her. But now call my messenger Abraham, and restore unto him his wife, for he is my chosen prophet. He will pray for your restoration, and you will live. But if you do not hear my words, to restore her, you will surely be slain, and your entire house after you.’”

Abraham did not know how to react to these words. Of all the many things he had expected to hear, this was certainly not among them! Though he had been on his face in groveling repentance but a short time before, here Abimelech the King of Gerar was telling him that IaHWeH Himself had called him a “chosen prophet,” and his messenger? The patriarch dared not trust himself to take comfort in those words, but had no words of his own with which to respond to the king he had misled.

Abimelech said, “I sent my guards to bring you before me, Abraham; but behold, my question goes unanswered. After all I have told you, and of what I heard the Mighty One say concerning you, what guilt did you see in me that you should think to punish me by doing such a thing?”

“My lord the King,” Abraham said finally, bowing deeply before the monarch, who was still obviously in a state of pain just to sit upon his throne, “I said to myself before your presence in my tents, ‘Surely the fear of my Almighty One is not in this place, or with

these people; they will certainly kill me to possess my wife.’ For this reason I said that she was my sister.

“But know this, Oh king: I did not entirely lie to you. She indeed is my sister, my father’s daughter, but not the daughter of my mother. She did, however, become my wife.” Abraham saw that the stricken king was neither amused nor comforted by this detail. He hastened to add, “Let not my king think that I set out to deceive him because of any special mistrust. I said unto my wife in *every* land through which we have passed, ‘If anyone asks concerning our relationship, say of me that I am your brother.’”

That last statement did seem to help, and the King of Gerar said, “If it indeed is as you have said, let there be no hostility between us. I have told you of my dream, therefore know that I will not do anything against the Mighty One that you serve. Take therefore Sarah your wife, and let this also be acceptable unto you and your Mighty One – a gift of sheep and oxen, and of both maidservants and menservants. Be content to dwell in my land, wherever it best pleases you. Pray also that I recover, and that my house not fall ill, for it was said to me also that none in my house would bear offspring until this matter be set right.”

When one of the elite guards brought Sarah forth into the king’s presence he restored her to her husband, saying to her, “Behold, I have given your ‘brother’ many gifts, and a thousand pieces of silver besides. Let that be unto you for a vindication, that it may be known among all who are with you that I have done no wrong in this.”

Before all those of Abimelech’s court Abraham knelt down and prayed. He gave thanks to Elohim for preserving his wife, and for withholding the hand of the king from doing any sin. “And now, my Almighty,” he said, “Do not think to punish a nation that has not sinned against you in this matter, but restore the king to health and open the wombs of the women of Abimelech that they bear children. Hear my words, and hearken unto the request of your servant.”

Only after he prayed did he take Sarah, and together they departed from Abimelech’s courts.

* * * * *

The close call that Abraham and Sarah had experienced as husband and wife did much to mend Sarah’s bitterness over the incident with Hagar. When Abraham told her of his keen sorrow at the thought that she should be the wife of another, she softened toward him and they renewed together their commitment to Elohim and His promises.

As a result of this (to the amazement of all in the camp except, perhaps, for Abraham) Sarah found herself with child. Though she had biologically passed the time of bearing, it had been noted by both those of her house and the kings of heathen nations that Sarah’s appearance was that of a much younger woman. She therefore had the strength to carry

the pregnancy to term, even though her body had of its own nature passed the time that would make ordinary conception possible.

At the end of her pregnancy Sarah produced a boy that was both healthy and strong. Abraham, remembering the words of IaHWeH, named him Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. At a hundred years of age Abraham had a child with the wife of his youth, and Sarah joyfully said to her servants, "Elohim has made me laugh indeed, and we have named him Isaac, that all who hear of this will laugh with me! Who would have said unto Abraham, 'Sarah will have children to nurse?' But in his old age I have given him a son."

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Three years later, Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac according to the custom of the day. As he spoke and went about among his servants and guests, he noticed that whenever he glanced over at Sarah she would cast strange looks in his direction. After the feast was concluded he went to her and asked, "Why did you seem to be troubled by the day on which we have celebrated our son Isaac?"

"It is not the day, my lord," she replied, "but the cause is your son Ishmael. You have not missed these things, for they have been done in your tents, and you know that Ishmael has grown jealous of your affection for Isaac."

"Ah, the boy is but a lad," Abraham said dismissively. "What cause do you have to be concerned? He has also been promised a great inheritance, and I have not left him in ignorance of these things. He is young, and will see these things in their proper light when his mind is but a few years older."

"No, my lord," Sarah said slowly, "this is a matter of greater importance than my lord has said. He looks at the boy with no good intent, and speaks often with his mother, that bondwoman; and I know they are speaking ill of my son." Abraham's wife had used a word she had not spoken in reference to Hagar for many years: bondwoman. Though the closeness they had shared before Ishmael's birth had never been restored, Sarah's language reflected the fact that much of the old bitterness remained, and now it had come to the surface at the thought that she and her son might be feeling slighted by Abraham's choice of heir.

"What would you have me do?" Abraham asked. "The boy is my son, even as Isaac is my son, and his mother is a member of the people of my tents. They are among us, and we must find a way to dwell thus in peace."

"No, my lord," Sarah said, this time not so slowly, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son. This Ishmael will not be heir with my son Isaac, and you must show them that this is indeed so."

"This I cannot do," Abraham said. "Ishmael is my son, as I have said. How shall I cast my son out of my home? Leave me with this matter, and I will consider what ought to be

done.” Sarah left, but her expression and her parting words made it clear what she thought ought to be done.

That night as he slept, the voice of IaHWeH came to him. Late in the night, for the patriarch had not found rest easy to obtain, the words of Elohim were spoken unto him, saying, “Abraham... do not let this matter trouble you, and do not be anxious for the safety of the boy or his mother your servant. All that Sarah has said unto you, do it; for your descendants shall be from Isaac, and through him shall your offspring be named.

“Remember my promise to Ishmael. This son of a bondwoman, of him also will I make a great nation, because he is your child.”

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One foot in front of the other... the hard, dry earth seemed to be opposing her with every step as Hagar walked toward her own, short shadow. The sun had just passed its highest point in the heavens, and the Egyptian woman’s path took her steadily in a southern direction, to the border of her abandoned homeland. Beside her walked Ishmael; his thin, teenaged body was just leaving its most awkward stage, and he was carrying what remained of their provisions.

Anger had faded; that blinding fury she had felt at being dismissed from Abraham’s tents had passed, fading into a kind of bitter regret. Mar was at her side, whispering to her as surely as he had been continuously troubling Sarah’s thoughts. He had done his job well, playing the two women against each other in the early days of their conflict, and ensuring that even with the joy of Isaac’s birth and the great affection that Abraham indeed felt for his firstborn son Ishmael, the wounds were never healed and the pain was always just below the surface, waiting to flare up at the slightest provocation.

The dark angel – whose appearance gave off a wiry, twisted impression to all who beheld him with spiritual vision – spoke words to the mind of Hagar that were designed, not to incite fury (for that was Azrael’s specialty), but to sustain the kind of lasting offense that is not content to ruin a single generation only.

“It does not matter that he cast you out,” the faint thought drifted in. “It does not matter that he favors the wife of his youth, and that he has always seen you as the plan that failed, the constant reminder of his own faltering faith in Elohim. None of that matters now... only that you live, and raise a nation to undo all that Abraham hopes to do.

“This will be your revenge; do not let his so-called sympathy cause you to forget what he has done. This is not an offense to you, for you can bear all insults. But what of your son, the fruit of his own body? How dare he deal this way with that which he created, and that he created him at the very request of the wife who causes him to cast you out?”

“A pretty speech.” Mar turned from his whispering to look behind him, and saw another demon watching the outcasts plodding onward. The fallen Cherub recognized the

newcomer; his name was Ashaniel, a highly ranked Power in the House of Sloth. This demon, whose name means “Smoke of El,” was under the command of Ba’al Ariocho, the leonine arch demon.

“For what great cause have you roused yourself?” the Cherub asked.

“For these,” came the reply. “A change of plans: the boy and his mother shall not be allowed to live.”

“I have my orders,” Mar protested. “No word has come to me that I should leave my responsibility concerning Hagar.”

“The word has come,” Ashaniel said, indicating himself. “If you do not trust my claim seek your Chief, or your Ba’al, or any other above you who has bothered to remain informed.” Mar narrowed his darkly glowing eyes at the comment. Lucifer may have thought to streamline the effectiveness of his minions by dividing them into their various Houses, but the distinctions were not always clear enough, nor the politics harmonious enough, to make it a unified kingdom. The intrigue plaguing the two Houses of Envy was clear enough evidence of this phenomenon.

Though the bitter demon did not wish to submit to the prideful Power’s instructions, he thought it better to investigate the matter. He had already wrought an effective work in causing what appeared to be a permanent rift between the hearts of Hagar and Sarah; he did not think that anything Ashaniel could do would harm his success. If Lucifer wished to have them slain, let it be so; the woman would die in her sins.

Mar did not give an audible reply. He let the empty space that resulted from his rapid departure speak in his stead. Ashaniel smiled haughtily at the Cherub’s actions, and turned his attention to the minds of Hagar and her son.

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Within a short time Ishmael turned to Hagar and said, “My mother, where are we?”

“We are almost at the borders of Egypt, my son,” she said, knowing that they should have been there already. She had, to the best of her knowledge, been walking a straight line from Gerar to her homeland, but confusion had set in at some point like a fog, and her thoughts had grown both weary and uncertain. Their supplies were almost exhausted, and Hagar knew that if they did not arrive at a civilized place in a short time, they never would.

As they walked on, Ishmael began to find it more and more difficult to keep up. Though he was the stronger of the two, they had used up the supplies that Hagar had borne first; and now, though only food remained and the water was finished, the weight of even the light load was beginning to tell on his pace.

“My mother,” Ishmael said from a dry throat through cracked lips, “Where are we now?”

Hagar did not look back at his question, but as she was about to formulate a reply she heard a soft thud. As she turned, she saw that her son had collapsed on the ground – and he lay there unmoving. With a cry she went over to him and threw herself on top of him. She mourned for him and immediately began to wail in sorrow, but tears would not come, not with so little water to spare.

“No further, my son,” she said, and she pulled his unconscious body under a nearby bush. “Rest in the shade now.”

Not wanting to see her son die, and knowing that she would quickly follow, Hagar left him there and walked over to another place, a small shadow cast by a rock. There she sat, and there she wept with all her remaining strength. When Ishmael revived a little in the shade and, too weak to move, began to call out for her, she could do nothing but sit there in silent despair.

Surprisingly, Hagar felt no anger, no bitterness... she was unmolested by any unpleasant thoughts, save the knowledge of her sure death. Yet would not even that be a relief? Their wanderings were over, and they could rest, finally rest. “Anything, anything,” she whispered to herself, “anything is bitter than walking, and thirsting.”

“Hagar,” came the voice. Even blinking in surprise seemed like a dry procedure, and the woman slowly, tremblingly reached up to pull aside the dusty veil that had fallen over her eyes. No one was standing there, yet the voice came again, clear and fresh as rain from Heaven. “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not fear, for Elohim has heard the voice of the boy in the place where he is. Arise and lift him up, and I will make of him a great nation.”

As she stood up to look for the source of the mysterious voice, Hagar started back in shock. The “rock” in whose shade she had been resting was actually the edge of a well! “Oh, to think that I should have perished for the sake of my blindness!” As she said this Ashaniel cursed and departed. He too had heard the voice of the Almighty, and though he had been unable to keep the natural course of Hagar’s path from coming near to this well, he had been able to keep her from the knowledge of its presence... until he had been interrupted.

As Hagar joyfully filled the water bottle that was with her and rushed over to revive her son, another demon returned, taking the place of the one that had left. Mar smiled, for he had been close enough to see what had occurred. “My business with you is not finished,” he said to ears that could not directly perceive his words. “It would appear there has been another change in plans.”

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Back in the tents of Abraham another kind of confusion regarding a well was taking place. Although the King of Gerar had told Abraham that he could dwell wherever he wished some of his servants, the keepers of his flocks, were not so generous in their disposition. In the place where the patriarch had pitched his tents he, Eliezer and others of his men had prayed regarding the best location to dig for water.

The grass was fresh and green in the plain on which they had come to dwell, but there was no open source of water. Eliezer had said, "There must be some place underground that is watering the soil, for the local men have said that there has been little rain in recent days." Abraham's servant had little skill with matters relating to agriculture, but he knew his chief steward to be a man of great faith, having learned much from Abraham's teaching, and so the men committed themselves to prayer, and decided on the best place to dig.

Their faith had been rewarded, for in the place where they dug they located a steady stream of cool, clear water. The well that they had made provided life-giving sustenance to both the animals and humans of Abraham's tents.

It was not long before Abimelech's shepherds began to refresh their flocks at the waters, and soon there followed disputes between the shepherds of the patriarch and those of the monarch. The men of Gerar said, "This water is from our land. We are to have the first place in watering the king's animals, for we are his men." The servants of Abraham pointed out that it was by the king's permission that they had come to dwell on the plain, and that the well was the work of their master.

Eventually the Gerarites lost patience with the nomadic herdsmen, and they began to bring soldiers with them when they went to water their animals. The soldiers were either bribed or misled concerning the nature of the dispute, for none would have gone against the stated wishes of their king. Even so, the armed men provided a real barrier for the keepers of Abraham's flocks, and they reported the matter to their master.

Abraham, in response, sent messengers to the king, asking why his men were violating his freedom and disrupting the work of his men, since all that he did was in accordance with the hospitality extended to him by Abimelech himself. When the king heard of what was taking place on his land he took some of his chief servants, and the captain of his armies, and went to speak with Abraham in his tents.

As was his custom, the patriarch welcomed his visitors with all hospitality. He gave a feast and said to his servants, "Do not let your feelings regarding the dispute with Abimelech's men affect how you honor our guest, for he is a king, and we are here by his permission. Choose out the best of the flock for our meal."

When the king and his captain had been fed and cared-for, they approached Abraham with their purpose. "My lord Abraham," the king said respectfully, "I received the message you sent unto me, and for this reason I have come forth to settle the dispute."

Abraham responded, saying, “You honor your servant with your kindness, and show him great favor by your presence.”

Abimelech said, “I would have you learn that I had no knowledge of these events before your message reached my house. My hand is extended out to you in friendship, as even it was in the day you departed from my courts. Though you left quickly your prayer was answered, and my house was healed. It is clear that your Mighty One favors you, for He hears your words, and he increases your flocks.

“The Elohim you serve is with you in all that you do, therefore let there be a covenant of friendship between us. Let there be a covenant of generations between us; swear therefore that you will deal honestly with me, and my son, and his son also; but as I have done unto you in my land, so shall you deal with my house and those of my land.”

Abraham replied, “I will swear it. But what of the matter of my well? What are we to do concerning the dispute between our herdsmen?”

“As even I have said,” Abimelech answered, “I had no knowledge of these events. But now that it has come up before me let it be settled this way: the well shall be yours, and we will make a solemn agreement that shall be known to the men in service to us both.”

Abraham took animals of his herds and flocks that day, and he offered them on his altar as a seal for the covenant between himself and Abimelech. He offered prayers, and spoke of the friendship between himself and the king of Gerar in the presence of his men, and before those of the king’s military that had attended the meeting.

When he had concluded his talk Abraham took seven ewe lambs, each of a young age and without any visible blemishes, and he set them apart from his flock as a gift. When he was presented with the animals Abimelech asked, “Have we not already exchanged great gifts? What is the meaning of these seven lambs?”

The patriarch said, “This is the price that I will pay you for the well before us.” He saw that the king was about to protest, and Abraham added, “I know your gift to us, and your kindness in giving us permission to dwell where we will. I know that you consider this well to be mine already, nevertheless accept this gift from my hand, that it may be a witness before others unto me, that I have dug this well before your presence, and you have seen.”

The king accepted the gift, and he and his men departed in peace. The well became known from that day forward as Be’er-sheba, which signifies both “The Well of Seven,” and “The Well of The Oath.” Abraham planted a commemorative grove there, and offered praise to IaHWeH in that place, dwelling for many years in contentment.

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At the end of those years words were spoken in the Kingdom of Heaven that always signified great changes. For some those words were a cause for great fear, and for some it indicated that a time of rejoicing was drawing near. The words, spoken by El Michael in Union with the Throne of IaWHeH, were, "It is time."

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

CHAPTER 13: HEMAGOGUE

Dumah responded to the summons he had received, and approached the Temple of The Spirit. El Michael awaited him there and the two entered the Outer Court, with the Princely Virtue veiling his face before the glow of the Shekinah.

“I have called you to this sacred place to draw you into my counsels concerning my servant Abraham,” El Michael began.

“Say on, my Lord,” Dumah responded with a silent whisper.

“As I announced before the Host at our last weekly gathering, the time has come for my purposes to be accomplished. I have named Abraham as my friend before all the universe, and the demons have brought charges against us both for his failure in the presence of the Kings of Egypt and Gerar. I have given Satan no audience before us, for we know well what his words will be; yet these charges must be met. Abraham has been shown great favor in the eyes of the Throne... and his vindication must be of such a nature that our enemies will be left with no cause to bring further opposition.

“In Abraham are my plans to be established. My servant must be pure.”

Dumah bowed low before the High Prince of Heaven and sent the silent thought, “Whatsoever my Lord commands, that will His servant do.”

“The guardian Omeriel will not be sufficient to this task,” Michael said. “He was given the office of guardianship over my vessel that his own faith would be strengthened. He has done well, and has learned much by observing the walk of the human before us. But a shadow rises from Mizraim, and the true king of this southern land turns his eyes once more in Abraham’s direction. I have called you from Shem to do this work.”

Dumah remained silent, as was his custom, while El Michael unfolded His divine plan. As he heard what would be necessary for the purification of Abraham’s faith, even this relatively stoic Prince of Heaven felt a keen sense of anguish.

* * * * *

“Abraham,” said the voice of Elohim to the patriarch as he lay resting in his tent.

Unsure of whether or not he was awake or asleep, Abraham responded, “Here I am.”

“Take now your son,” the voice came again, “the son with whom you are one. Take Isaac, whom you love, and go forth into the land of Moriah. Once there, offer him unto me as a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains that I will indicate.”

As the voice ceased to speak such thoughts and feelings filled the patriarch as cannot fully be described. He was unable to rise, but lay silent and still, unable to sleep, and unable to fully awaken until the sun’s light came gently to rest on his tent.

The morning brought no relief, however, for an empty pain filled his chest, and the loving father rehearsed all the thoughts that had come to him after hearing the instructions of his Creator.

“Behold, it was only a dream. Elohim would not command such an evil thing! Abraham, you have gone mad; the years of waiting for a son have led you into sin. This is punishment, Abraham, for Ishmael and Hagar – now you must lose that which you have coveted.”

As he awoke and arose the voices said different things, but all with the same spirit. “What will your wife say when she hears of this? What of your witness as a messenger of Elohim? How will those who have heard your message react to your actions? Did Elohim really say this unto you, or do you merely feel guilt for your errors before Him?”

The demons, though they themselves were amazed at what the Union had said to Abraham, did not lose much time in making the most of the situation. The spirits nearby summoned their companions; tempters from every House gathered around the faithful servant of the Most High, surrounding him like a cloud of flies. Above them all, Lucifer looked down with satisfaction. He did not know why his eternal Enemy had cast away His chosen vessel after defending him for so long, but he would ensure that the bothersome human would neither do what he had been commanded, nor have the faith to recover afterward.

“Whatsoever he does,” Lucifer said to his demons, “his soul will be destroyed. If he disobeys the Most High he will be filled with such remorse that he will never again be able to speak in His name. If he obeys, such horror will arise within him that it will destroy all his confidence in his Master – we will see to that.”

Nearby, three holy messengers watched the swarming tempters. Omeriel, Zephon and Dumah closely observed Abraham’s reaction to the thoughts that were being allowed to attack him. Zephon and Dumah nearly had to restrain the patriarch’s guardian as the dark angels closed in about him. “You must let this be,” Dumah had said to the aching Dominion.

As the Oracle Zephon watched the cluster of demons, each one eager to be next to cast a doubt into the human's bitter cup, his eyes flickered green and he said to Lucifer, "*Ba'al-zebul*."

The hovering spirit looked over at the three divine observers with cold, imperial eyes and repeated what he had heard: "Lord of Flies?"

"Thus have I named you," Zephon replied. "Those under your command gather about the weak and afflicted like flies to a carcass. Wherever their legs pitch they spread disease and sorrow, plaguing mankind and filling the air with ceaseless buzzing. The righteous swat at you as a horse with his tail, and on the day of judgment those whom you have troubled will look upon your face and despise you for the pest that you have become."

Lucifer did not reply, but only smiled over at the three watchers and resumed his observation of the demons below. Abraham was diligently preparing for his journey, having arisen earlier than anyone else in his tents so that he could work unmolested and unquestioned. With trembling hands he saddled the donkey he was to ride, and put together food and water for the trip. The journey, he knew, would take three days, and he planned for a company of four.

When almost everything was ready he went to Sarah and told her that he and Isaac were being called to go on a journey, and to offer a sacrifice. She had no objections, for Abraham concealed much from her regarding the nature of this trip.

The patriarch next called Eliezer and had him bring two of his young servants to assist them on the journey. The first thing he had them do was to collect some wood for the burnt offering, and when this was done Abraham went and told Isaac that they would be going to Moriah at IaHWeH's command.

The angels were allowed one thing, to prevent the demons from causing suspicion in the minds of Sarah, Isaac or the servants as to Abraham's intentions. It was not unusual for the patriarch to do things suddenly after receiving a dream or a vision, and so it was an easy task to keep the members of his tents from asking any questions. The four men set out from the group of tents while it was yet early, and without any incident.

For three days the Nine-pointed Star, the Houses of Lucifer, plagued the unhappy servant of Elohim, though Satan himself was not present to witness the temptations directly. Abraham's faith was his only shield against the vicious assault. "I am doing as my Lord commands," was constantly in his mind, pushing back the wall of emotion and spiritual darkness.

Fear and weariness, envy, anger and pride all weighed heavily upon Abraham at the thought of losing his promised son. These were among the most severe of the temptations, although Chiun, Chayil and Petahel from the Houses of Gluttony, Greed and Lust respectively also lost no opportunity to cast troubling thoughts in his way. In all this Abraham resisted these mighty tempters. No human had yet been assaulted by this many

demonic adversaries all at once, and the divine angels were not allowed to directly comfort the patriarch.

What made the test still more severe was the fact that Abraham was not alone on the journey. Beside him sat his son, who was to know nothing of the events about to unfold, and so the faithful servant of Elohim was not even allowed an opportunity to express his struggling in any outward fashion. For the two nights on which they traveled he passed the dark hours sleeplessly, praying for strength and grace.

On the last night, almost overcome by the demons' increasingly cutting suggestions, Abraham prayed, "Oh, my Master, my Creator and my Almighty, hear the words of your servant, spoken out of the distress of my heart. Know that I have been obedient to your voice, and I have come where you have called me, and gone where you have sent me.

"What have I grasped in my hand that I have withheld from my Lord? And now I surrender even my son at your command. I know that all things are under your care, and I do not doubt the promises you have made concerning my offspring.

"I know you have been displeased with me for my transgression regarding Hagar my maidservant, and the kings of the lands in which I said, 'Sarah is my sister.' Once and yet again I did not hesitate to deceive these men, when truth is all you have ever bidden me to speak. For this I have repented, yes, and do repent, in the dust of the earth from which you made me. Forgive your servant, I pray.

"Grant me this favor, even as you hearkened unto my voice above the valley of Sodom when I prayed for the lives of my nephew, and his family, and the strangers who lived near my tents. For the prince of Admah and his father did I intercede before you, and you could not – I now know – find but ten righteous men in their cities."

At the thought of the destruction he had seen, the smoke rising from the cities by Sodom, Abraham began to weep. With wordless sounds, kept as quiet as he could because of the three young men with him, he fought back the pain that the command of the Almighty had brought forth in him, and that had been made far more bitter by the work of the demons. He lay on the ground and felt the most keen pain for the times at which he had not done perfectly.

"Oh, that I had a sacrifice," he said, "then I should make atonement for myself and my son." Speaking from his pain, he was not even conscious of what he said next, "Oh, my Father, let this trial pass from me." Abraham had called IaHWeH by several names. Elohim, the Almighty was the most common. He also called Him his Creator, and Master and Savior. At times he also used the name he had heard from Melchizedek, "Yahweh." At no time, however, had Abraham consciously conceived of the Eternal One as his "Father," yet now, in distress of spirit, he was speaking in prophetic language and feeling a measure of the pain that would one day be experienced by the Son of the Blessed.

"I have no sacrifice. I have no sacrifice," Abraham said over and over again.

“If only you had asked for me instead,” the patriarch mourned, resuming his prayer. “Gladly would I give my own life to save my son. How shall the promises you have given me be fulfilled?”

El Michael, watching from Heaven, was anything but unmoved by the human lying on the earth. Indeed, the High Prince, in Union with the Throne, felt every wave of pain that washed over His vessel, and His tears fell with the human’s in sparkling golden droplets unto the Throne Room’s shining floor. There was no one in the Room with Him, only the Most High; the angels and Archangels were intently watching the earth from their various locations, eager to see if the chosen of the Most High would survive this last night of trial before the sacrifice was to be given.

Satan’s sleepless demons were crouched on every side, tirelessly laboring to turn the patriarch out of his path.

“How is he doing this without our help?” Omeriel asked in wonder. “If all men were as trusting as this, what need would there be for guardians?”

Dumah smiled, and the dark-robed Virtue turned to his friend and whispered, “El Michael Himself stands up on behalf of this man; and as for guardians, have you not yet seen?”

“What am I to have seen?” Omeriel asked.

“Faith,” Dumah silently replied. “You, who have been within the courts of the Almighty resist sin, for you have seen the face of the Most High. But these men, who have not seen, they also resist... and they behold our High King with eyes more sharp than our own.

“You, Omeriel,” Dumah continued, “have grown since taking Abraham as your charge. You will grow still further as you see the events of the coming days.”

Omeriel watched the human to whom his sword was covenanted, lying prostrate and sweating with the force of his sorrow. His face was disfigured by his crying, and further obscured from the angel’s vision by the shadows of the demons that clung to him in tenacious commitment to their work. “Oh, my Father,” Abraham said again, “let it be as you have commanded; all that I have is yours, but only tell me how your promise is to be fulfilled, if the son of that promise is to be taken from me.”

From the Throne Room, the voice of the Union spoke, “With IaHWeH, all things are possible. Death is not the end, but behold, I have conquered death.”

Somewhere deep in his spirit, Abraham heard the words of comfort. “Yes, my Master,” he said, “you are greater than death. You can do all things, and if Isaac is the son of your promise you will surely raise him again to accomplish your purposes concerning him.”

At that, many of the demons stepped back in disgust. The air around the patriarch suddenly became unpleasant for them, and a few of the weaker demons fled to report the matter to their Ba'alim. Through the dark night Abraham's faith had been bent, bruised and twisted, but it had never broken; and now, as the sun slowly rose in the east, it was beginning to overcome the weapons leveled against him.

Abraham raised his face slowly, and saw the lightening shades of the morning. "Grant your servant this one thing," he asked, "that you give me a sign, that my soul may live in the midst of this great distress and I stand firm against the evil I feel around my soul."

El Michael, standing before the Father in Heaven, replied to the human below him with one word, "*Nathón.*"

* * * * *

Early on that third day, Abraham and his three companions made ready to complete the last leg of their fateful journey. As the mournful but determined patriarch looked northward to his destination, he saw an unusual sight.

The Archangel Uriel had been dispatched from the Heavenly courts to await Abraham's sacrifice. He had landed on Mount Moriah, folding down two of his four wings as he drew a body together for himself from the dust of the earth. As he looked out with angelic eyes he saw Abraham's face turned in his direction, and he drew his sword as he had been instructed by the Most High.

As the blade burst into flame above his head Uriel raised it higher still, and he willed the flames to burn even more brightly. Soon a tiny but brilliant sun burned above the angel, and the globe of fire was clearly seen by Abraham and his fellow travelers a good distance away from the mountain.

The aged human got down off of his donkey and bowed his face to the ground. "Thanks be to Elohim," he said, "for His mercy endures through all generations." His son and servants did not understand their lord's actions, even less the glowing light they had seen above the northern elevation, but they said nothing as Abraham got back onto his mount and began to lead them once again.

As the travelers neared the mountain Zephon suddenly turned to Dumah and said, "Remember my words," confirming to the silent angel that there had been more significance to the Oracle's prophecy than he had initially supposed.

As with Zephon's prediction to another angel years before – the Principality As'fael – so the words to the dark-robed virtue had more than one level of meaning.

*When darkness covers the land and the spring goddess rises,
Then will one point of light divide asunder the soul and spirit.*

*When the arrows of evil cast the righteous to the earth,
Then the voice that does not speak must tear the world apart.*

Dumah knew without question that the first part of that prophecy applied to Semiramis at the Tower of Babel. But what of the second? The arrows of evil, and the tearing of the world apart? These things had not occurred when Babylon was overthrown; it could not refer to the dividing of tongues, for that had occurred at the Tower's initial fall. The Princely Virtue considered carefully what the words of his friend might mean.

* * * * *

"No further," Abraham said, turning to his two servants. The young men stopped walking and Abraham got down from his donkey. "Stay here with my mount," he said, "and my son and I will go up the mountain to worship." With a lump in his throat he added, "We will come again to you when we are finished."

He lay the wood for burning on Isaac's back, and then Abraham lit a torch and took that and the knife for slaying the sacrifice, and the two began to ascend a narrow path between the rocks of Mount Moriah. As they left the servants behind, Isaac turned and said, "My Father?"

Abraham had been silent for most of the trip. He and his son had not passed many words between them, and the youth knew that something had been greatly troubling his father. In his twenty years, Isaac had never felt as distant from his aged parent as he now did. He trusted that Abraham was dealing well enough with whatever was on his mind, but he was eager to communicate with him, and so he asked him a question that was both designed to produce a conversation, and to answer something that had truly been bothering him.

"Here I am, my son," Abraham said in response to Isaac's prompting.

He said, "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham, not meeting his eyes, said, "My son, Elohim will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

Through the night Abraham had clung to his faith tenaciously, and had been successful in shutting out the voices of the demons that had plagued him. What he had done to accomplish this, however, had been to shut out *all* voices, to produce a sort of spiritual deadness; and now, even if the angels had thought to comfort the determined human they would not have been able to have an impact. The dome of spiritual light surrounding Abraham was not gold, as it had been with Enoch and Arphaxad in Babylon, but a bright silver color.

At the top of the mountain Abraham set stones in order as an altar, working slowly, but without hesitating. He knew what he would do, and he would not let anyone or any

thought deter him. Finally, the wood was set in place and the stones prepared, and only one barrier remained.

“My son,” Abraham said to his boy.

“Yes, my father?”

“Elohim has indeed provided Himself a lamb. In the night before we departed from our tents, the voice of the Almighty came to me, and He said, ‘Abraham...’”

Taking a deep breath, Abraham let Isaac know the rest of what the Almighty had said to him.

As Isaac heard the words his father was saying, he was filled with a great sense of dread. “Am I to die,” he asked himself, “and at the hand of my father?”

He could see that his father’s words were not coming easily, and Isaac knew that he believed all that he was saying. “Run away,” a voice whispered in his head. “Take the knife and slay this old fool,” came another, much more dreadful suggestion.

“No,” Isaac said.

Abraham looked up at his son’s words, wondering if he was resisting the plan that IaHWeH had laid out before him. Instead, he heard words that were both blessed and terrible. “I am ready, my father, to do whatsoever you have said. Yet...” Isaac said the next words slowly, “Yet consent to bind me, that my fear does not cause me to run away.”

Father and son looked at each other, silent messages communicating in their eyes. They knew, on some level, that they had enemies nearby.

* * * * *

Throughout the day the demons that departed at Abraham’s decision to remain faithful had begun to slowly creep back in. They could not penetrate the silver light around the patriarch, and they could not seem to shake Isaac’s fidelity to his father’s plan, even in the face of his own certain death. This did not stop them from picking up where they had left off, hurling insults and doubts at the old man, but their attempts were utterly without impact on what he was doing.

They watched him making the altar, preparing the wood, and sharing his solemn objective with his boy. Nothing they tried to do seemed to work, but when Abraham bound Isaac firmly to the altar he had created, someone else arrived on the scene.

A dark wind began to blow that was not restricted to the physical world, for the robes of the three holy angels also began to stir as the blast of air swept in. All three turned as they

heard a cawing sound coming from the south, and then they saw a small, black bird fluttering past them. It was followed by another, and then another, and soon there came a small group of crows that flitted by and settled some distance beyond where the humans and angels could see.

“Azrael,” Zephon said wistfully. The three angels spread their wings and flew over to where they saw the birds converge. As they arrived they saw the demon, Ba’al of the House of Wrath, rising into the air.

When he saw them the evil Cherub said to Zephon, “I know why you are here. IaHWeH will not allow Abraham to carry out the sacrifice of his son... but if the old man slays him *anyway*, it will be of sin, and not righteousness. The human spoke truly – Elohim can raise the boy back to life, if Abraham remains faithful... but we are here to see that he is not, even as you are here to see that he is.”

“How do you hope to prevail?” Omeriel asked. “Abraham has chosen to be faithful, despite all your efforts.”

Azrael laughed with a wicked glee, “Our efforts? You think Lucifer is a fool? Do you think that we fight, and lead men astray, for no better reason than our own satisfaction? In Heaven we fought for the Throne. In Eden we fought for the Tree of Life. The Prince of this world well knew that we could not stop the man. He knew well that Abraham would not withhold his worthless child from the altar. But, as I said... we also knew that IaHWeH would not let him fulfill this purpose.

“That child will die, and we will ensure that he *remains* dead. IaHWeH will *not* have His ‘faithful nation.’ You have seen the color of Abraham’s faith... he cannot hear us – but he cannot hear YOU either!

“When the order comes – and we know it will – for Abraham to cease, he will not hear.”

“How do you know all of this?” Omeriel demanded.

“Look to Egypt,” Azrael said cryptically. Instead of addressing the holy angels any further, the Cherub turned toward the place where Isaac lay bound and said, “Moloch, arise!”

Before the angels’ eyes, a large, winged bull appeared. This was the evil demon who had officiated at the sacrifice of Yunah’s son atop the Tower of Babel years ago, and now he had appeared again, at the potential sacrifice of another youth by his parent.

“I will see to it that Lucifer accepts this offering,” the bull said to the angels nearby.

As Abraham said his parting words to his son and committed his destiny to the Almighty, he went and retrieved the blade from his equipment. He began to walk slowly over to the

altar and, had Adriel and Tahariel been there, they would have noted a striking parallel to a wicked queen's slow march toward the center of a demonic symbol many years ago.

"You have no authority to be here!" Omeriel shouted, and drew his sword, which instantly burst into flame. As he swooped down to attack the bull demon other evil spirits immediately rose up to oppose him. Zephon drew his own kherev and moved in to help. As he did so almost half of the demons that had been working on Abraham turned from their task to surround the Oracle. Dumah looked from Omeriel to Zephon, attempting to decide which of his companions needed the most immediate help.

It looked like the Cherubic Oracle was in more danger at the moment, so the darkly dressed Virtue turned to go to his aid. As he did so he felt a sharp sting in his wing, and he was hurled to the earth with great force. Looking up he saw a small group of fallen Principalities, led by the demon Revachiel, hovering overhead.

Before Dumah could recover, the silent angel saw those above him raising their arms and throwing their dark kherevs in his direction. As they sped toward him, Dumah saw the blades elongating into glowing darts, and they sunk like arrows into his arms, and legs, and wings, pinning him to the surface of Mount Moriah.

When the arrows of evil cast the righteous to the earth...

The Principalities landed around Dumah, and stood there without saying a word. They made no attempt to retrieve their weapons and so the spears remained in place, holding the silent Virtue down.

Azrael flew over to the trapped angel and said, "You have a nice view of the altar. You will see the defeat of the plans of IaHWeH. Let Him once break His covenant, and all will be undone!"

"You have no power against the Most High," Dumah responded in whisper. "You will surely see the salvation of Elohim."

"Your friends are in need of salvation at the moment," the Cherub said with a laugh, indicating the plight of Zephon and Omeriel. The two holy messengers had caused their shields to appear, their veils vanishing to generate their spiritual defense; but that only seemed to be delaying the inevitable against such a multitude of enemies.

"The charges against Abraham are severe," Azrael said. "Elohim wished to be merciful, but this man's faith will crack under our feet."

The demon laughed again, saying, "Though IaHWeH did not give us much warning, it is not always the elaborate plan that succeeds. You cannot stop this work from unfolding... only be witness to our triumph."

As he said this other demons began to gather, covering the altar with their presence, and flocking to obscure the air around Abraham and his son. As they did so they began again to whisper doubts and troubling thoughts, forcing him to reinforce his blockade against all spiritual influence so that he could continue to do as IaHWeH had commanded.

Dumah watched, unable to move. Having been drawn into Michael's counsel he knew that IaHWeH indeed intended to stop Abraham short of carrying out the sacrifice, but as he looked on he saw Abraham's faith beginning to change under the weight of the demonic attacks. Though no unholy influence was getting in, Azrael's observation was right – no influence at all would be able to get in, and the silver shine around the patriarch began to tarnish.

IaHWeH would not interfere with Abraham's freedom to act, this was true; and Isaac's death would be carried out by a man whose motives were not uncompromised, for Abraham was fighting with all his own strength, and had finally resolved to simply do the deed "just to get it over with," and "to do whatever the Almighty says."

While the obedience was commendable, the fighting had made it a bitter obedience, which was a darker version of the sorrowful submission that Abraham felt at the beginning of his journey. The latter was pure, and holy, but this new change was far less sanctified and, as the demons knew, would compromise the lesson that Elohim was trying to teach his once vacillating servant. Lucifer's plan, though formed on the spur of the moment, was crafty indeed, and took full advantage of the subtleties of the spiritual world.

"This action will fail, Azrael," Dumah whispered to his captor. "IaHWeH saves."

"So I keep hearing," the Cherub answered, also in whisper. Dumah had to admit, it didn't look promising. Omeriel and Zephon were about to be overcome, and the Virtue could hear the heartbeats of Abraham and Isaac as the father drew closer to his son, with tears in his eyes but an expression of grim determination on his face.

"They are not mere words," Dumah whispered again. "Consider how easily your brethren were thrown out of our courts, evil one. Consider how utterly defeated you were at the Tower of Babel. Remember your defeat in Babylon, how your master fled in shame from our weakened, lesser forces."

The trapped Virtue was not sure exactly what he was doing, but he felt the Spirit of Elohim rising within him, and he knew the wrathful angel was feeling the impact of his statements. Dumah continued, "You believe your master to be wise, because he predicted the actions of El Michael upon this mountain? He is but a tool in the hands of his Creator for the purification of His holy ones. He is powerless but to do the will of Elohim; though he imagines himself free, he is a slave, a slave to his own corruption... as are you."

Azrael drew his blade, to the surprise of the Principalities flanking Dumah. They had not heard the conversation, which had taken place in whisper, but they could tell from the

changing expressions of Dumah and Azrael that something was occurring between them, and it was something their comrade did not find pleasant. As the Cherub's dark kherev flickered to life, the Ikari'im that were closest stepped back involuntarily.

Dumah did not fear the angel's approach, however, and continued to speak still further. "What will you do, 'angel of wrath?' Will you strike me down? Will you ease my suffering, that I need not watch a man slay his son for no reason? Do, then, what your nature *forces* you to do; and do it quickly."

Azrael was sharply stung by the truthful words that Dumah had spoken. Now thoroughly furious he said aloud, "I shall!"

The unthinking demon raised his sword high, holding it with both hands, and brought his weapon forward in a sharp arc intending to slice the impudent Virtue in half. As he did so, Dumah closed his eyes and caused his diadem to materialize, that small, golden crown of life that symbolized an angel's pure, perfect trust in the Creator of Heaven and earth. As the veil is to reverence, so is the diadem to trust.

With a flash of light Azrael's kherev struck the band of gold right over Dumah's forehead... and the dark, rippling blade shuddered, then sparkled, and then shattered into a thousand shards of spiritual metal the color of a midnight sky.

Moloch turned his horned head in the direction of the sound and saw Azrael step back hesitantly, hissing, "How did you do that?"

Dumah's eyes began to flash, pinned in place as he was. Before the demons there assembled his diadem began to give off a mighty, golden light that bathed the entire scene in glory. Azrael covered his eyes with his hands and took another step away from the painful glow. "Dumah!" he shouted at the angel, who continued to stare at him with wordless intensity.

"My name," the shadow-cloaked Virtue whispered to his enemy, "is *Qoliel*." This had indeed been the name of the angel who was held against the earth before the battle in Heaven.

Then the voice that does not speak must tear the world apart.

Qoliel meant "Voice of El," and as his crown continued to sparkle and glow, Dumah came to understand the latter part of Zephon's prophecy. It had much to do with the scene taking place before him, yes... but there was more to it than he ever expected, and in a flash the Spirit, pulsing and glittering in Its Temple, revealed the matter to him with a flood of insight.

As Dumah spoke the name he had used before the great rebellion, the glow around his forehead started to spread, to cover the back of his head and much of his face. The

Principalities could not look upon him directly, and Azrael continued to hold his hands up to protect his eyes from the sight.

As quickly as it had begun the great light evaporated, leaving the Virtue wearing a helmet of shining gold to match the belt around his dark robe. But Dumah was not finished whispering yet.

“I am the voice of the Most High,” he continued, “and I am silent for the good of the universe. Should I once speak the sorrow that I bear on behalf of the Throne, you and all of humanity would be consumed.” A tiny, white stone set in the forehead of the helmet sparkled, and the spears pinning the Virtue down vanished.

Dumah stood on his feet and whispered further to his Cherubic adversary, “I will not speak until that Day of Judgment, when I open wide the mouth of hell below your feet, but while that day is yet to come, I will give you a sample of the wrath you have earned.” With that he opened his mouth. He did not speak words, but out of his throat issued an audible whisper... a small whisper that began to swell in intensity until it became a loud cry.

“...aaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH...”

The sound of Dumah’s voice blurred the spiritual atmosphere on Mount Moriah; encoded in that sound was all the sorrow that was locked up inside the Throne, and inside its silent servant. Qoliel, a third guardian of the mysterious Shekinah, unleashed the pain of transgression on the demons before him, and it was as painful to them as the light of All Truth Itself.

Most of the demons vanished immediately, but Azrael stayed behind, resisting the force of the blast of sound. As Omeriel’s opponents disappeared, he noticed that the bull demon Moloch had also fled; and of those surrounding Abraham only the Cherub he recognized as Mar had remained, kneeling in pain, but unable or unwilling to depart the scene.

Dumah’s sound cut even Omeriel to the heart, and he began to weep silently as he remembered the awful aching of Heaven being ripped apart by the demons, and he saw through his glittering tears that Zephon was being affected in a similar way.

As for Abraham... Abraham, standing with his knife poised over the submissive form of his son on the stone altar, appeared to be hearing as well. He could not audibly hear the sound coming forth from Qoliel’s spiritual being, but his spirit responded to the cry, and his hand began to tremble.

“Lord protect me,” the patriarch said silently, and as he did so all the pain of his long, three-day battle vanished away. There was no more hardness, no more rebellion, only a clear, ringing truth – sin destroys. The wages of sin is death.

No sooner was the simple prayer out of his mouth than the sphere of spiritual influence surrounding the old man cracked and fell away, leaving another, smaller sphere within it, this one composed of a warm, golden light. As Abraham sighed and made ready to plunge the knife in faith he heard a voice, a most welcome and blessed voice, from the heights of Heaven: "Abraham, Abraham!"

With a quavering voice and tears spilling down his cheeks, the patriarch said, "Here I am, Lord."

"Lay not your hand upon the boy; do not harm him! Now I know that you fear Elohim, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your beloved son, from me."

Abraham immediately, joyfully, obeyed. He dropped the knife and fell to his knees, weeping in relief. Isaac, though he had not heard the voice from heaven, had heard his father's words, and he also sighed with relief when he saw the old man let go of the dagger.

Dumah fell silent, and bowed himself to the ground feeling a great weariness in his being. When he looked up a few moments later, he saw the Archangel Uriel flying overhead, directing a ram up the side of the mountain.

The mighty Throne-angel led the animal right up to the side of the altar and caused it to thrash about, which caused it to get entangled in a thorn bush. The four-winged messenger then went over and helped Dumah to his feet.

When the two divine warriors turned to Azrael and Mar the pair wisely vanished, but they reappeared a short distance away to see what would become of the patriarch.

When Abraham lifted his eyes to see what the sound of struggle was he saw the ram there, fighting against the thorns that held it. Laughing through his tears the servant of the Almighty said, "Did I not tell you, my son? Elohim will provide!"

THE TERRAN CONFLICT

EPILOGUE

The voice of IaHWeH spoke to Abraham, even as the smoke of his sacrifice ascended into the air above Mount Moriah. As the flames rose from the body of the thorn-crowned ram the message came, clear and sweet from Heaven, “I have made a covenant with myself concerning you. Because you have done this, and not withheld from me your beloved son, I will surely bless you, and I will of a certainty multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and as the sand on the shore of the sea. Your children will possess the gates of their enemies, and in your seed shall all the nations be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.”

“The name of this mountain will be ‘Yahweh-yireh,’” Abraham said, which means literally, “Yahweh sees,” in the sense of seeing that something is done or provided. When Uriel had taken the smoke of the sacrifice to Heaven and the demons had departed, Zephon, Omeriel and Dumah accompanied Abraham and his son back to the waiting servants, and then homeward to Be’er-sheba in Gerar. Once they had seen the patriarch safely to his people, Dumah left Abraham in the care of his capable guardian and departed to inform Shem of the day’s events.

* * * * *

“My lord Abraham!” came a cry from outside of his tent. The old man groaned, but in a good-natured manner. He had no fear for what the future would bring now that his faith had been strengthened, and the word of the Most High had been confirmed to him.

Leaving his tent he saw his chief steward Eliezer standing before him with an excited look on his face. “What is it?” he said to his most trusted servant.

“Your nephew Lot,” he said with an excited voice. “He is returned!”

“Lot!” Abraham had cause to be surprised. It had been a great many years since he had last heard of his kinsman and, more importantly, he had assumed the younger man to be dead, slain in the overthrow of Sodom and its neighboring cities. “Surely you are mistaken,” the patriarch said, unable to believe his servant’s report.

“I speak the truth, my lord Abraham,” Eliezer replied. “Come and see for yourself!”

The servant of the Most High went with his steward, unsure of what he was about to see. But see he did, and who he beheld before his eyes was an older, wiser man than had left his tents over twenty years ago. It was indeed his nephew Lot.

When he saw his uncle, Lot fell on his face and began to speak, saying, “My lord Abraham... behold your poor kinsman. I am not worthy to be called your nephew, but if you would consent to have me labor among your men...”

But Lot got no further, for his uncle ran over to him and lifted him to his feet. With great affection he fell upon him with kisses and an embrace and said, “My nephew and son! These tents have always been, and always will be, your home.” As was his custom, Abraham offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving and gave a great feast.

* * * * *

As they sat eating, Abraham ventured a question that he had been sensitive enough to know ought to wait until his nephew was rested. “Where are your wife and daughters?”

“Ah, my lord,” Lot said, “My wife was slain in the destruction of the city where I once lived.” Abraham nodded, and said nothing.

“My daughters... they... oh, how shall I speak of it?”

Abraham saw that Lot was greatly troubled by what he was saying, and he said, “Peace, nephew. What has become of them?”

“As we fled from Sodom,” Lot said haltingly, “my wife looked behind us, though we had been warned by those who had come to save us that there was danger in doing this. My daughters and I came alone unto the city Bela, where we were told we would be safe. But Bela was no better than Sodom, and I feared that it too would be destroyed by the hand of justice, so my daughters and I fled that place also and we dwelt for a time in a cave overlooking the valley in which we had lived.

“My daughters misunderstood the words of our deliverers; they thought that all of mankind had been destroyed in another judgment like the flood, and that we were the only ones left. You see... Bela *did* suffer the fate of fire shortly after we left it. And thinking that the whole world was empty but for us, they... decided to repopulate it within our family.”

“How did they attempt that?” Abraham asked, confused.

“Ah, my lord Abraham, my sin was very great,” Lot said. “Never should I have departed from your presence. Though our herds were great, better by far would it have been if I had dwelt nearer to you than I had. The place in which we lived filled my daughters with strange notions and evil ideas and they, when I slept... they lay with me.”

“What?” asked Abraham in a shocked voice. “Did you not awaken?”

“No, my lord,” Lot replied, “for my daughters had learned many evils from their associates in the cities. They made me drink a strange, fermented drink, and I did not awaken although my body responded. Later, when I saw that they were with child, I inquired of the matter, of course... and they told me of their plan.”

“What did you do then?” Abraham asked.

“Why, do... what could I have done? That was the question. I did not wish to remain where I was and, I confess, I was ashamed to return to the tents of my uncle. I went instead unto my other uncle, your brother Nahor, who stayed in Haran where we dwelt for a time. There I stayed, until recently.”

“Ah, how does my brother’s family fare?” Abraham asked. “I have not heard anything from them since our parting so very long ago.”

“They do well,” Lot said, eager to talk of something else for a time. “Milcah, Nahor’s wife, she bore him many children. His firstborn was named Huz, and then there was Buz and Kemuel. Kemuel already has a son, and he is called Aram.” Lot rattled off other names in rapid succession. “There is also Chesed and Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel. There are eight that Milcah bore to your brother Nahor, all strong men, and the last, Bethuel, has taken a wife and they have a daughter, Rebekah, a beautiful child.”

“My brother has indeed done well,” Abraham said, knowing his joy at the birth of Isaac.

“Truly, my lord Abraham,” Lot said, “And ah, there is more, for Nahor had also a concubine named Reumah, and she has given him four other sons: Tebah, Gaham, Thahash and Ma’achah.”

Abraham smiled in thought, “A concubine... those can be trouble.”

“But my daughters,” Lot said, resuming his tale after an uncomfortable silence. “They gave birth also to their children, to my children. They were both boys, one named Ben-ammi, and the other Ammon. They and Nahor’s children have much in common, and they do well enough where they are, but... my lord Abraham, I did not wish to remain.”

Lot paused and looked at his uncle, and then he said, “They have drunk deeply of the well of idolatry, my lord. You thought Nahor had been cleansed of this evil when we departed from Ur, and perhaps for a time he was; but the people of the land have influenced him, and those of his house have graven images, and bow to poles and statues brought up from Egypt, where they say a new religion flourishes. I remember your dreams, my lord Abraham, and I did not wish to depart from the things I have learned in your tents.”

After another silence, this one not uncomfortable, the chosen vessel of Elohim turned to his nephew. With tears in his eyes Abraham said, “These tents are your home, my nephew and son, be pleased to dwell among us as long as you will.”

Lot bowed himself to the ground and said, “My lord is gracious unto his servant!”

* * * * *

You have learned, human, much of our part in the events of those days. Many things changed upon Mount Moriah. Isaac’s faith truly began that day, and Abraham’s was made perfect. When Sarah heard these things she became furious at her husband, but her fury broke in time and she confessed her wrongs. She saw that she had been in error regarding the treatment of her maidservant Hagar, and though the two women never met again the last of that old bitterness vanished away.

When Zephon, Omeriel and I returned to Heaven, we discovered that something had changed. Do you recall the broken altar that Lucifer had built, upon which Zephon and I spoke that day before the Tower fell? It had shattered into dust when I released my voice and that one, lonely region of Heaven was finally cleansed. I felt relief to see it gone for though the Oracle was right – that this altar had represented my character – after what I learned when I was attacked by Azrael that symbolism no longer fully applied.

Yes, I am silent, but my silence has place in the music of Heaven. I know that I will have a time to speak and, when I do, all will hear my voice.

The tale is not all told, for much remains to say of the new religion Lot mentioned, that which began to flourish in Egypt, where Lucifer built his Houses of Sin and the dark queen of Babylon set up her residence. The responsibility for that record will pass into the hand of another, for I have shown you that which I have come to show you, and said that which I have come to say.

Draw what lessons you can from my words, and the visions you have seen. We angels began with a belt of truth around our waists, and we quickly learned of our spiritual swords. To this was added the shield of faith that for all but the Seraphim come from the reverence symbolized by our veils. When I saw no way for the Elohim to succeed, yet trusted His divine providence, I learned of the helmet of trust, which is the salvation of both angels and men.

Let your forehead also be covered by the helmet of trust, son of man, and it will surely be replaced one day by the crown of life. These then, are the end of my words, few as they have been, and the beginning of a new life for many who accept our testimony of these things, and of the great Sacrifice to come.

A PREVIEW OF BOOK 5:
THE EGYPTIAN CONFLICT

THE EGYPTIAN CONFLICT

PROLOGUE: THE STRENGTH OF EL

*“Bless Yahweh, ye His angels that excel in strength, that do His commandments,
hearkening unto the voice of His Word.” (Psalm 103:20)*

Fear not.

I am Uzziel, Rishon of the Malakim. I am Chief of the class of angels known as the Virtues, and one of the Sar'im, the Twelve Princes of Heaven.

My brothers, four ahead of me, came to give their testimony, declaring the lessons that they learned in the service of the Most High, and explaining, more clearly each time, how we have been forever changed by the events that took place in the world of men. This should be no surprise, for it is written in your Texts that the work of the Almighty among humanity contains many things *“the angels desire to look into.”*

During the war in Heaven, which broke out at the time of the creation of your world, the Cherub Za'afiel learned the balance between wrath and mercy, between justice and lenience, and that there is indeed a time to put away the iniquity from a holy place. As'fael the Ikari learned, among other things, that faith makes the weak strong; for he saw humans stand up to demons, and their most dedicated human vessels, and triumph. Zadkiel the Throne-angel... this Prince of the Ophanim learned a significant lesson indeed. He learned that perfect trust in the Most High does not make a slave of any angel, of any free being, and that this trust is never misplaced, even when the armies of the enemy are arrayed against us like the waves of the ocean. Zadkiel rallied the Host of Heaven when El Michael maintained His silence, and taught all spirits, both fallen and unfallen, that there is a difference between order and bondage. That battle, above the cracked land of Nimrod's Tower, was the last Great War that IaHWeH the Almighty permitted until... much later on.

My fellow Virtue Qoliel carries a great weight for us all. When Lucifer fell and his myriads were cast out of Heaven, the altar of my brother's essence was cracked, and the Spirit moved within him to become Silence, a perpetual testimony against those who

permitted the entrance of sin. Though his own wounds were healed, this angel who now calls himself Dumah maintains his testimony before the universe, and waits for the day when his voice will again be heard.

There were other lessons to learn, and each time one of us gained wisdom by our experiences we all grew as one; we taught each other, learned from each other, and pressed together as many of us failed to do before we even realized the need... before the poison of rebellion tainted our experience. Even so, there is beauty in beholding what the Almighty permitted, and my own lesson had much to do with that truth; my own testimony reveals it.

My name means *Strength of El*, but it does not merely represent what that may signify in human language. I fought alongside my fellow angels in the war in Heaven, in the battle for Eden, above the Ark, and in the burning skies of Babylon, but my name was Uzziel before we knew our kherevs. Before any angel held a sword in hand, I stood for the strength of Elohim.

It is written that, *“the joy of IaHWeH is your strength,”* and a messenger of the Messiah later said concerning one he had healed, *“His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong.”*

Faith, joy, hope, peace, all the things the Mighty Spirit of Elohim brings with It – these are the strength of IaHWeH. Because of these things I was the first to openly resist Lucifer among my brethren, and led many of them away from his foolish speeches. The Spirit’s stamp was clearly lacking in the Tempter’s words and appearance when he stood before us to pervert the Host, and I could not stay to hear for very long. Oh, that they had all come away with me... but of those who remained many received the knowledge of Lucifer’s character in other ways. As hard as it is for us to behold painful lessons, we would not by any means prevent what Elohim would permit; He does not allow unnecessary trials to those who seek Him among either men or their ministering spirits.

In addition to all that, I am a Virtue, one of the Malakim. We are the agents of inspiration for the universe’s beauty, making manifest the mind of Elohim when He works to bring forth color, design, growth, language, music, all these, although the latter element is largely relegated to the six-winged Seraphim. Let it not be thought that language is a strange item to include among these others; in language there can be great strength, and why can our words not be both meaningful and beautiful? Even in human speech and writing, limited in so many aspects, this is not only possible, but also delightful to angelic ears; only let it be employed aright.

My love for all the things I have listed is great, although certainly not unique to the Virtues. Zadkiel the Throne-angel, for example, is a great lover of music, although as one of the four-winged Ophanim he sees a depth of mathematical sophistication behind it that, while easy for Malakim to grasp and experience, does not come to us as intuitively as to those of his Order.

Yet for every good thing the Creator has brought forth from His infinite storehouse, our sinful counterparts have generated an antithesis. Where there was love, Azazel and his angels inspire fear. Where there is courage, we find cowardice. Where there is beauty we see among them ugliness, and where there was once order we now see chaos and decay. Yet angels have seen the face of the Creator, and men were created in His image; few would turn to these things unless their experience as free beings were warped, and so the demons have changed their tactics, early learning the lesson that men are often driven by senses, and will judge by appearances unless taught to do otherwise.

Henceforth, ugliness was made to appear unique. Cowardice was made into a kind of comedy, pain was seen as inherent nobility, and decay as the wonderful working of nature. It is true that pain and decay, in particular, have become a necessary part of mortal experience, yet these things need not have been, and do not properly represent the beauty of what was, and what is to come. Men's eyes have been drawn to the things of their current state, and they have been taught to say, "If this is all there is, let me seek that which I find pleasant now; and if it is not all there is, would my Creator have me live in misery until He reveals the world to come?"

There is both truth and folly in those words: men are indeed to seek out that which is pleasant, and to live in joy – but they must first be taught what true beauty is, before they can seek it. They must first be instructed that real joy cannot be found outside the boundaries of service to others, and then they are truly free to pursue happiness. They must first hear real music, or they will simply seek out least irritating sound within the cacophony.

Why have I begun this way? It is not simply because I love to speak about beauty, although you will no doubt discover that this is true of me, but because you must understand these ideas before you can truly understand my testimony. Just as Dumah my Order-brother was sent to explain to you the mysterious nature of *Araphel*, so I am sent to strip away your illusions. I am here to teach you the meaning of my name, the strength of Elohim, and to reveal, for I am Chief of the Virtues, the glory of true beauty, the beauty of holiness.

Every man is king of his own universe, until he learns the truth about the Creator. Even the magicians among your people, taught by my counterpart Salathiel and others, say that the *Old King* must die before the *Son* may live, although they pervert its meaning. Of Salathiel I will have much to say when the time is right, but to men who are still living as the frail kings of their own experience, but who must come to kneel before the true King of Heaven, I will say words to them that I said to my former charge, of whom I now write: *You also are Pharaoh.*

Hear my testimony, and you will come to see what I mean.