

"You're right there!" Sable nodded. "He is obtuse to say the least."

Enoch was of the opinion that such talk was disrespectful of the Most High.

"You want to hear disrespectful Enoch?" There was an edge to Sable's voice now. His pipe was hanging loose in his hand now, his breathing becoming almost laboured, skin flushing and eyes flashing. His jaw muscles were hard and the cords of his neck standing out. "Let me tell you about disrespectful Enoch ..."

Atlantis. The weather was usually warm and bright, quite pleasant most of year. There was rain and a bit of cold but it was never a place for freezing temperatures or snow. Being on what would later be known as the Equator (to the Atlantans the Belt of the World) meant their seasons were steady and regular, it was pretty much warm all year round, there was the Monsoon season in September by our calendar and after that things got a little cooler but aside from that it was mostly warm and dry. It was truly a beautiful place to live and one where severe weather never happened.

The earthquake, when it came was incredible. Sable felt the very ground vibrate and lurch beneath his feet. The walls shook and there was a strange droning roar he felt inside of his bones. He looked out of the window of his rooms in alarm. There were strange dancing lights on the horizon and the sky was blacker than night itself. Flashes of lightning were dancing across the ocean and crazing lucent paths towards the coastline. As far as the eye could see there was nothing just empty darkness. One could normally see for miles from up here, now we could barely make out a stone's throw away. The ocean was leaping and lurching and he saw what he thought were fish leaping into the air. That was not until his mind calculated the distance that he realised they were ships from the docks down below. Great galleys being tossed around like sticks in a torrent!

The roar came again, the rumbling growl, he felt it in his teeth there was a strange flavour to the air. Something told him that outside may well be safer than inside so he calmly but efficiently began strapping on his armour and made sure that his swords were firmly in place. He grabbed filled his new pouch, replacing the one he had given to Enoch with all the coins he could immediately lay his hands on and took quick stock of his surroundings. He had a terrible feeling that this would be the last time he saw this room so whatever he left here would remain here.

Again the rippling, deep roar, tearing at the very air. It rose, it fell and it growled. It had a deep and brazen sound to it and it vibrated in his bones and his blood; he felt fear rise inside of him. *Oh no!* He had heard of this sound but had never heard it with his own ears; the hushed a reverent tones with which many of his uncles described it was enough though; it was the sound of the end of the world, a harsh brazen scream of God's wrath. *Michael!* It was the battle horn of the archangel. That could only mean one thing...*I have to get out of here fast!*

It felt like he was running on water, so much did the ground leap and rise beneath his feet, it was as if it were rippling and bending like a rug. The darkness was approaching quickly too and he saw the waves leap up high toward the window he just vacated. The rain came. Never before or since had he experienced rain like this. This was not just rain, this was an *assault*. Huge gobs of water smashed into him, causing actual pain and he held up his arms in a vain effort to protect himself. He knew he had to get off the island but he had no idea how he was going to do that. It seemed he was not alone in this assessment. The land was in panic, slaves and citizens were running and screaming,

People lay bleeding on the ground, turning the gathering water pink, still others ran over them, some struggling on, others falling only to be trampled themselves. All was chaos around him. The docks, his only chance was the docks, he had to get there, there was no alternative. He had seen

the ships being tossed into the air earlier but what else was there. He heard the brazen scream of Michael's trumpet again and the quieter but no less terrifying answers, he dared a look at the horizon and saw them.

The multitude of winged shapes within the rain and the clouds, it was as if they were the storm. The army of Heaven was coming! Enoch's promised Judgement was here. Caught between the crashing waves and the embodiments of God's wrath, Sable opted for the uncertain death of the water.

Surprisingly quite a few people, nephilim mostly, were present here. There were few ships tied up, the huge docks held close to 100 ships most of the time, though there were less than half that number there now. There had to be close to a thousand people pouring into main square now but no-one seemed to know what to do. Abaddon and Lucifer and a number of Fallen strode forward through shell-shocked looking nephs and slaves. Lucifer looked solid and unshaken, all command. Abaddon looked furious and ready to kill somebody, there was blood on his father's arms and hands, and some splashed across his face. Sable doubted it was his own. Lucifer saw Sable and smiled grimly *he is afraid, even the unshakeable archangel is afraid! He is just hiding it very, very well!* Lucifer gestured to the waiting docks; he was thinking the same sensible course of action. They had to run downhill though and the streets had become rivers. The screaming, blaring bray came again and now he saw fear in Lucifer's eyes...

Kra-kra-BOOOOM! The bolt of lightning struck the ground almost right at Sable's feet and threw him onto his back, his hair dancing on end, limbs jerking spasmodically, jaw clenched so tightly his teeth hurt, there was blood in his mouth and his ears were ringing madly. There was a smell of meat burning in his nostrils. Ten of the nephs who had accompanied Lucifer had not been as fortunate as he. There was pitifully little of them left now, the clichéd smoking boots and little else. The rain almost magically stopped. Sable first thought that was a good thing until he saw the reason why. The angels were gathering, hovering in the air right above the streets. Vast pinions stretched out to brake, Michael stopped feet above the ground, slowly flapping his wings to remain aloft. Gone was the jovial and formally spoken fellow Sable had heard the Fallen tell jokes about. His face was cold, eyes blazing, and a great spear with lightning dancing down its length was clenched in his fist. He pointed the spear at Lucifer and shifted it to indicate the other Fallen.

Sable felt a smack on his arm and looked up to see Lucifer's intense gaze. He looked down and Sable followed his gaze. In the secret battle of hand and finger gestures, he spoke to Sable urgently, his fingers dancing. *Get the nephilim on the boats and clear now!* Fingers flicking quickly and emphatically. *I will occupy Michael and my brothers but you must get as many away as you can. It is you they want. I cannot save you all now but maybe ...* His gestures stopped. Sable did not need to be told twice. Shouting over the maelstrom for the others to follow him, he ran like hell towards the harbour.

Though it was probably unwise, he could not help but look back as the nephilim jostled and panicked their way onto the surviving ships. The ocean now was strangely calm though the sky remained the colour of the deepest depths, the darkness even deeper than nightmare. Darker than the nightmare he was about to witness. All told, close to a thousand nephilim were gathered on the decks of twenty-five ships, it was standing room only. All eyes were inexorably drawn to the hovering Michael, the silent legions right behind him. Lucifer and his brethren had climbed the steps to what was called the Garden of The First Tree and were gathered in a square formation, as is arrayed for battle, under said huge tree, up on the promontory just above the harbour. It seemed fitting somehow. Down on the ships they could still see everything. Somehow it seemed intention

to Sable. Lucifer was always a vain one. He wanted his last stand to be witnessed. From down here they would see everything that happened.

"LUCIFER! You have been judged by The Father and I am here to deliver His Judgement!" His voice easily carried the distance. "Because of your perfidy the sky is falling and all life on Earth shall be extinguished to cleanse the stain of your evil on Man!" His voice was thunder and his eyes were lightening. He was clad in enamelled armour of a deep cobalt blue, his chest, forearms and legs covered. In silver upon his chest was an omega deeply carved, strange patternings of angelic script curling across the metal. He looked splendid and incredibly business-like. In his hand he held the long sliver spear along which lightning flickered.

Sable could see the winged multitude behind him and there were millions of them, like unto a rain storm themselves. This was Judgement and they really should be leaving but every set of eyes was riveted on the unfolding confrontation on the hill.

"Brother," Michael's voice was softer but it still carried. "Why? Why must it come to this again? Why must you continue this ... this ... rebellion?"

"Because it is right Michael." Lucifer's equally soft voice carried through the silence to the ships as if the vacuum of sound created by a thousand straining ears were sucking the slightest noise towards them. "Because The Father is wrong and He must see it, because He refuses to see how wrong He is."

"What you have done is wrong, Lucifer!" Michael growled. "How do you dare continue to accuse The Most High? Still you dare?"

"Somebody must, brother and I am the only one with the nerve ..."
"You certainly have *nerve*, Lucifer!"

"I am making something better, Michael, breeding race which would please Him and make Him proud of *all* of His creations. We the first and they," He gestured to the ships, caused everyone on board to duck or flinch as Michael's gaze fell upon them. "The beginning of the new. Those," He indicated the mostly supine slaves. "Are an insult to Father. Look at what Adam and his wife did! Look at how they err and do nothing but fail and disappoint Him. I have made -"

"You, Lucifer, YOU assume to think you can do better than The Father? To improve what He made. To presume YOU know better?"

"I not trying -"

"You corrupted them with your evil and have forced His hand Lucifer! You know what is coming now. There is no appeal, no gentleness this time. No pulling of the blow. This is it. They," He swept his spear toward the ships causing a not very slight panic "Must be cleansed and undone. You, you know what you did and the price of it."

Lucifer bowed his head and remained silent.

Sable nudged the neph next to him and signed to him *Cast off now! We don't have much time.* Silently he nodded and nudged the man next to him. It passed along the chain and the last man who, with painful and deliberate care began to undo the rope from the ship. Others eased their way to the rowing benches and took hold of oars. The nephs on the other ships saw them and began to do the same. Slowly, in deep silence and considered fear, ships began to back out towards the ocean. Nothing could be heard but carefully restrained grunts of effort and the slap of wave on oar. If they could just get clear of the harbour...

"Lucifer and you Fallen rebels to God!" Michael roared. "You have been Judged and Sentenced. We are here to complete your Punishment!" He quietly and held up his spear on high, a strange light flickering under his skin, as if his very blood were fire or lightning; the electricity from the spear flowing over and under skin.

The ships were carefully backing out of the harbour, silent oarstroke by terrified oarstroke. No man or woman dared breathe, let alone speak. One stroke of exaggerated deliberateness at a time. Every creak or splash seeming to sound like a thunderclap. Almost clear...

"Do you have anything to say, brother?" Michael asked, almost gently.

Lucifer shook his head and, together with at least fifty other Fallen, he stood tall and proud, looking straight at the host suspended above him and right into Michael's eyes. "Do it and get it over with."

"You could still beg His forgiveness Lucifer!" Michael pleaded. "Throw yourself on His mercy. He is a forgiving God. Beg Him with an open heart and He may welcome you back to His Halls ..."

"I cannot, brother," Was that regret in his voice or resignation?

Sable looked ahead of the ships, tearing his gaze away from the scene with a great effort of will. They were nearing the natural breakwater at the mouth of the harbour now. They needed five more minutes and, once clear of the bay and in open water; they could bend the oars and maybe, before the rains returned ... maybe...

"Please Lucifer! Return to us! He is so pained by your stubbornness and your accusals, Lucifer! Please; ask his forgiveness, brother," he help out a beseeching hand. "Come home."

It was like every single neph on every single ship stopped breathing at the same time. All hands froze, all eyes locked on the two figures on the hill. Nothing else mattered, nothing else existed. There was no sound but the soft splash of the waves and the creak of the decks. Such was the pleading tone of Michael's voice, so strong his wish, so deep his desire and so convincing his manner that every single one of them were silently begging Lucifer to accept, to go home and end this happily. Many fell to their knees, tears streaming down their faces, expressions twisted in anguish, hands help aloft in supplication. They waited, they watched, their hearts straining and every desire begging...

"No." Lucifer stated and every voice on every ship cried out in horror, they wailed and lamented. Hands fell nerveless from oars. Sable's eyes widened and fear tripped in his heart. "No, Michael I cannot."

"Can not, Lucifer, or will not?" Michael's voice dripped disgust, enunciating every word, voice shaking. On the ships hands clenched on oars in rage also. Sable watched with curious detachment as his fellows fell under the magic of Michael's voice, muttering and murmuring, eyes wide and mouths poised to cry out, eyes angry. *Why am I unaffected?* He wondered. *How are my ears proof to his spell?* "Will not? How can you be so cruel?"

The next sound was so unexpected, so dissonant and strange that no-one could believe they were actually hearing it. So incredible was sound. Lucifer was laughing. Long, hard and mockingly. He was laughing as if he had just heard the best jest in the world. He clapped his hands and continued to vent his apparent mirth. They all stared at the two figures in shock and disbelief. Sable too was amused for some reason he could not fathom but, watching his colleagues he decided to keep his smile hidden. Lucifer laughed and vented his apparent mirth on and on for what seemed like forever. Sable was trying desperately to contain himself. Michael was hanging there, looking somewhere between bemused and embarrassed, his wings clipping the wind to hold him steady.

Lucifer's laughter switched to a chuckle, the tall Fallen shaking his head and walking towards Michael. He began to pace in a loose circle before his estranged brother.

"Michael." He said, swallowing his chuckles. "Michael. The stern and serious one. The general,

the soldier. The pure and stainless one. So moral and about as flexible as a rock. About as intelligent and imaginative as one too. You think Father gifted us with intelligence and with discernment that we ignore these gifts and become simply mindless slaves to His every Word? That we do not think for ourselves?" He waited for Michael to reply but the flying figure simmered in silence. "You think Father wanted us to be blithe idiots like them?" Again he pointed at the quivering slaves. "Do you really think that Michael?"

Again the archangel remained silent. "I want to serve Him, not by giving Him what He asks for but by giving Him what he needs. I was created, we -" He indicated his Fallen brethren, Michael and the host behind.

"- were all created in His image to serve Him. His Plan needs us or He would not have created us. He needs us to be as He created us to be. He made me as I am, who I am and how I think. The Father did that. The Father knows All so how could He not know that I would do as I feel He needs me to do? I have Watched the humans from the first day that apple eater and his wife first dumbly became aware of the Garden. I followed them after they were expelled, I saw humans repeat the same mistakes over and over again. Look at how easily Cain Fell, just like his father! Two disappointed God in an instant without a second's thought! Watch them brother! All they do is disappoint our Father! Every chance they get they will do what pleases them, not Him. Do you think we had to force and cajole them to accept and make children with us? Do you think that they -" Again he gestured to the bay, where the nephilim ships were approaching open ocean. "Are the products of rape? No! They are not, the women were willing, they even started to beg to mate with us! They wanted what we gave them. We did not force them. Any given human being, given an attractive though wrong course of action with no immediate consequences will leap at the chance to break The Father's Commands!" In his passion, his voice had risen considerably and, in the sudden silence, his words echoed off the cliff walls. Michael continued to watch impassively.

"I knew what would happen if humans were left alone to do as they will, they would have wiped themselves out hundreds of years ago! I have given them not only the opposite of God, a Darkness to contrast His Light but also a future! I am not corrupting and destroying them as you accuse, brother. No I am not! I am improving them! Look at my nephilim now! Yes we had monsters and giants at first. Yes the seed of angels was too powerful for women to contain but now, we have those who look and act like humans but are better than humans. We have beings who are halfway between us and God, as far above the original humans as we are above of them! You come to destroy the hope of the human race itself! Do not what Father asks, brother." He held out a hand in supplication. "Do what he needs."

The silence which followed the final echoes of Lucifer's words was complete and total. On the ships, now clearing in circular bay of Atlan, every face was turned upward, to Lucifer, to Michael. They were absorbing every word. They felt honoured, privileged to be what they were, part of the very future of the race from which they sprang but destined to replace it and be the true masters of Earth and pleasing in the eyes of God. Michael seemed to hesitate, at a loss for words. His lips quivered, his mouth opened and closed several times but he spoke not. Behind him, the countless host of Heaven waited uncertainly also, ready to follow whatever Michael's command would be.

Sable gently pushed to one side the tall man who was blocking his view and strained to make out the expression on the archangel's face. He was torn, it seemed. Anger flickered and was gone, confusion took its place, uncertainty, something resembling grief, was that fear next? The broad tip of his spear, which had been pointed at Lucifer's face, wavered and began to drop downward. His indecision was clear for all to see. A deep sadness crossed his beautiful features for a moment and Lucifer smiled, holding out his hand again for Michael to grasp in fellowship as they once had, long ago. The archangel looked at the hand, considering it, as if it were some exotic flower he had never seen before, his mouth opened again and then closed. He looked down at the

ground, around at the gathered Fallen and out towards the escaping nephilim, he glanced over his shoulder at the multitude of Heaven. The tip of his spear pointed toward the ground and it looked for a moment like it would fall from his fingers and he would reach out with his then empty hand and take hold of Lucifer's extended one.

Every set of eyes was pulled towards this moment, focussed completely on those two hands. Nothing else mattered but the outcome of this moment. Once those two hands met everything would change. On the nephilim ships, all oars were still, the rowers ready to return victoriously to Atlan in a heartbeat rather than flee in terror. Michael's hand twitched, his spear remained loosely held in his fingers still. Lucifer's hand remained directed up towards him, frozen in time; this image was etched upon the eyeballs of every being present. Lucifer offering peace and a future for them all. A truce, the war over before it started and the beginning of a glorious new age.

Sable found that he was holding his breath...

Again Michael, as if waking from a dream, looked down on Lucifer's open hand. He looked for what seemed like centuries...He opened his mouth, licked his lips and looked down at his spear, which was quiescent now. His wings twitched nervously. Lucifer smiled as was about to speak.

No-one ever found out what he was going to say. Michael's face turning blank he tightened the grip on his spear, pointing it at Lucifer. He slapped the extended hand away with the flat of his blade.

"God has Spoken, God has Judged." He said through gritted teeth, his eyes blazing. "I exist to obey The Father. Repent Lucifer."

"No, I will not repent when I have not even sinned."

"So be it." Michael said sadly, shaking his head. "I loved you once, but you are my brother no longer." Lightning arcing like actinic snakes down his spear, he pointed it at Lucifer.

His face calm and bland, Lucifer met Michael's pained gaze. "Do it."