# Chapter 1: Weary Nights

His eyes are devilishly black, as cold as the tech through which he peers at me. He’s part man, part machine—cables and motors blend with human flesh, whirring and rotating with each blink, each subtle turn of his head. His mouth opens with a mechanical hum as the processors within him prepare for speech. I hear his voice, but his words don’t register. My focus slips past him, over the precipice, into the endless sea of fire below—a place that holds the devil and his angels.

Figures engulfed in liquid flame rise and fall within the inferno, reaching out as if pleading for escape, their cries twisting through the flames. The unbearable smell hits me hard. Sulfur sears the air as it gnaws through their flesh. I want to cover my nose, to turn my gaze away from their agony, but I can’t.

I look down at my own hand. It’s flesh, yet it’s something beyond. I know what I must do, but I hesitate. The man before me—the one we now know as the Anti-Christ—is my child, born of my eighth wife in the royal harem. He’s still my boy and when I look at him, I don’t see the monstrosity he has become. I see a child look up at me with a twinkle in his eye asking me a question with inquisitiveness. A father’s love for his son holds me back, but a man’s love for his God compels me forward.

The innocent eyes of a child are an illusion. That child died long ago. His eyes continue to gaze at me, their wickedness continues to haunt me. I wish to speak to him, to say something to him, but there is nothing more to say. He has played his part as I have played mine. I gain immeasurable strength in my thighs, rear back with these unnatural legs of mine, and I kick. I watch him fly back of the cliff, his eyes still glaring at me, his face still expressionless as he falls back resigned to his fate. I watch him fall until the flames lick him up and swallow him whole.

I wake up, my heart racing as if it were my own child I’d cast into the lake of fire, helpless to stop myself from sealing his fate. I pull my ephod over my head, a sleeveless apron like garment tailored from a deep, royal blue fabric, bordered with golden threads that shimmer under any light. I step out of the royal chambers without disturbing the Queen. In the washroom, I splash water on my face and gaze at my reflection. Dark circles, long absent, have started creeping back again, a sign of the restless nights haunting me these past months. My youthful vigor is gone. I’m no longer the confident Prince Levi who has ruled the world from these hallowed halls. I’m a man haunted by the same dream—each restless night leaving me distracted, unable to focus on my duties during the day. My youngest child, Amiel, is always there at night, haunting me, twisted into a half-man, half-robotic monstrosity.

Ruling the nations has brought me joy, yet I feel the end closing in swiftly. This dream is the greatest threat to my rule I have ever faced. I feel like King Nebuchadnezzar, whose dream foretold his doom. I’ve sought counsel from my closest advisers, but none can reveal its meaning. How can my own flesh and blood be the one prophesied so long ago? If he is the one, it will mean ruin for the entire kingdom.

He was trained with the skills and weapons meant to defeat the man of lawlessness, yet now he might turn those same skills against us. My son, oh my son. I pull out my Bible and turn to the passages I’ve dreaded for so long:

*"Out of one of them came a* ***little horn*** *that grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. It grew up to the host of heaven and cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, trampling them.* ***He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him, the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down****. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground and prospered. “Then I heard a holy one speak, and another ask, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?"*

I know now that the little horn is the man from my dreams, and I am the Prince of the host. He will end the daily sacrifices and trample my followers underfoot. Yet he will not leave me. I turn to another passage in Daniel:

“*Know therefore and understand,  
That from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem  
Until* ***Messiah the Prince****,  
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;  
The street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.*

*“And after the sixty-two weeks****Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself****;  
And the people of the prince who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined*

*Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week****He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering****.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.”*

The words “cut off” linger in my mind, cut off from the temple? From my people? But I cannot dwell on it now. I must speak with my son and decide once and for all if this dream pertains to him—or it will be the end of my sanity. I must know if his eyes are set on the temple. This will reveal all that is to come. No man may perform my role in the temple. Any man who desires to take my place and claim to be God is the man of lawlessness. He is a false god who leads the world astray.

I turn to one last passage in the New Testament:

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,* ***who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.***

I let out a long sigh and close my Bible, placing it back in the drawer beneath my bathroom mirror. One thing that hasn’t changed since I began my rule is that my most important Bible reading happens in the bathroom. I chuckle, hoping to ease my heavy heart.

I pass through the royal wash chambers; my reflection catches the lines of concern sharp in the dim hall lights. Amiel is likely asleep; the night guards stand at their posts, and I greet each in turn as I make my way to his chamber. They greet me back, but I see the unease in their eyes, their brows knit with worry. These men, who have stood watch over me for centuries, know my ways better than I’d wish. They know when I rest, when I rise, and tonight, they see something on my face they had long forgotten: the shadow of suffering.

These are days of trouble indeed.

I reach his room, and the lights respond, softening to a gentle glow. Beneath the sheets lies my son, his breathing steady and calm, just as any twelve-year-old should be. But he’s grown—bigger, stronger, his form filling the bed with an impressive presence. Gavriel, head of the royal guard, tells me he excels in his training, that he’s one of the finest warriors he’s seen, even at this young age. I sit quietly at the edge of his bed, careful not to disturb him, though I know he’s been trained to wake at the slightest shift.

“Hello, Father,” he murmurs, voice steady. “Why so late? Have you come to test me?”

He says it with a hint of pride, a small clench in his jaw betraying the satisfaction he takes in his skill.

“You’ve passed with flying colors.”

“I sensed you before you opened the door,” he says, as though he had been expecting me.

I fall silent, trying to understand the thoughts drifting beneath his calm demeanor, seeking the guidance of God’s voice to perceive if there’s anything more here, anything beyond the innocence of my child.

"Is the training too easy for you, son?"

*Is it breaking him?*

"No, Father. I like our training." His voice is steady, but there’s an edge to it—something hard, older than his years. "But… we’re living in peace now, aren’t we? I don’t know the suffering you described. Shouldn’t we know it, though? To be strong? I want to understand pain and use it." His gaze sharpens, his fingers tap lightly on the bed frame, "What’s the point if I can’t train to kill?"

*He wants to cause suffering. He wants death.*

"For centuries, we’ve lived in peace with all men," I say slowly, hoping my authority sets him straight. "There hasn’t been a murder in 200 years. God wants us to live in harmony. We must not turn from His will. Only in special circumstances does he allow us to harm others."

"Yes, Father," he says, almost automatically. But a brief tightening of his fingers betrays a moment of resistance, his hand curling, then loosening as he quickly glances away.

Trying to find reassurance, I press on. "You’ve seen the power and glory of His temple, haven’t you? I stand before it every day, knowing He could end me in a heartbeat, as He did the world 400 years ago. We must fear Him, son, but also love Him. He gives us life, breath, everything."

"Yes, Father," this time he accepts my teaching with no resistance evident in his body or voice.

“You must be tired of hearing it from these four hundred- and fifty-year-old lips. But one day, you’ll understand why.”

He gives me a faint smile. I respond with a hug; his childish man hands reach around me and squeeze. Yes, I tell myself. It’s still my son in there. Everything will be alright. My weary heart finds a measure of peace, reassured by his words. I think to leave him in his rest, but just as I shift to go, his voice cuts through the quiet.

“Father.”

I pause, feeling a sudden chill. “What is it, my son?”

He hesitates, then speaks with a mixture of earnestness and something deeper, something I can’t quite place. “Would it be wrong to… to want the temple for myself? You’re getting old, after all. You can’t do this forever.” He looks up at me with an intense gaze. “Can I do your work, Father? Can I have the temple for myself?”

My heart skips a beat. The innocence in his voice, woven with ambition, tugs at my heart and unsettles me in equal measure. I search his face, seeking the boy I know, yet sensing an edge to his question that chills me to my core.

In that moment, a surge of conflicting thoughts and feelings rises within me. From a logical point of view, he’s not wrong to think that one day he may assume a role in leading the people. But the temple… he cannot stand there. He’s wrong to assume that I will not be able to fulfil my duties. I will not die. I look into his eyes, seeing a spark of eagerness, an aspiration that feels out of place, and I wonder if I’ve misread him or if there is a flicker of something more.

*I lie.*

“Perhaps… one day,” I say slowly, choosing my words with care. “But for now, your duty is to learn, to serve, and to understand that the temple is not mine to give. It belongs to Yeshua alone. He chooses those who serve before him as I was chosen long ago before the creation of the world.”

Amiel nods, his expression thoughtful, yet an unmistakable glimmer remains in his eyes, like a spark waiting to catch. As I turn to leave, I catch one last look back at him. His eyes are already closed, but his hand rests above his heart, fingers pressed firmly as though clutching something.

For the first time, I sense what the future may hold, my visit with Amiel now having done little to quell anxieties caused by the persistent dream. Its early morning. Too late to fall back asleep. Too early to begin my work. I choose to relax on a recliner with a view of the temple and the majestic flame that covers all of Mount Zion. The early morning had not yet come so night still remains. The night clung to the temple's outline, and the majestic flame on Mount Zion flickers with an ethereal glow. Its amber light washes over the quiet halls, casting shadows that stretch long and solemn.

Somewhere in those shadows, I feel the spirit of Antiochus IV Epiphanes[[1]](#footnote-1)—a lingering presence, haunting the temple, seeking to exert his sway from ages past. Had my son already been possessed by Antiochus’ desire to exalt himself over God? Only time would tell.

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My much-needed rest is disturbed by Dipti. She stands over me with concern, her resolute stature matching her position as queen. Sunlight filters in through the cloud that now blankets Mount Zion. I squint, adjusting to the soft, filtered light, and focus on her face.

She studies me intently, her brows furrowing. “It’s not like you to sleep here, Josh,” she says, her tone laced with a gentle reprimand. “Did you have that nightmare again?”

I meet her gaze for a moment before rubbing my face, my eyes closing as I search for a way to convey what words cannot.

“I checked your mentat records. Why don’t you speak with Amiel’s mother before court begins. There’s a disturbance to the North you must attend to, you’ll need to refresh your faculties.”

“Of all my wives she is the most, how do you say? Unpredictable. You’re the one after all who selected her. Are you sure you made a wise choice?”

“Her beauty is legendary. I thought you would be pleased with her.”

"She does have her charms. A Syrian queen, from a land that’s always had a rebellious spirit. Remember, when their royal family refused to join the feast, they were struck with a plague. I’ve seen the scars she bears. She keeps them well-hidden—signs of a mercy that spared her but not her parents. They died that day, and she took the throne far too young. I wonder, does she still carry resentment?"

“Maybe, I figured your marriage with her would cement their country’s subservience, but maybe I was wrong,” Dipti’s voice trails off as she ponders, “I never considered that we might be taking a bitter queen into our home.”

“No, they became subservient, but I sense they resent the God we serve for the deaths that came as a result of their disobedience. I fear that resentment has poisoned her mind. She may be pretending to love the Lord of Hosts.”

"Then I strongly urge you to visit her quarters in the royal harem," she advises, her tone unwavering. "Our household must be kept in order, and any root of bitterness that takes hold must be cut away before it spreads." Her gaze was sharp, her authority as queen unmistakable. "If Amiel is indeed being negatively influenced, it is our duty to bring light to it before it festers. Sin grows in the shadows, not in the light," she adds.

I place two fingers underneath my throat activating my mentat that was synched with Dipti’s. My face hardens with seriousness, knowing that I’m at a critical juncture in my time as king. This was the first crisis in over four hundred years and the old Joshua Levi from before the war was coming back as if from a pleasure induced coma. “Sense for any irregularities in her actions. We will convene with our counselors in evening and examine the footage of our interaction. If she is lying about anything we will find out. If she has poisoned Amiel in any way I will send them back to her native place.”

I began the long trek from the royal palace to the harem, my mind wandering as I pass the walls I once built. I ached for those days after our great victory, clinging to memories of better times to dull the sting of misery that now threatens to pull me under. How quickly the centuries have flown—over 400 years since the war of Gog and Magog scarred the earth.

In the aftermath that great war, the world lay in ruin, shattered and scarred, and I took it upon myself to rebuild. One of my first acts was to reinstate Benjamin Netanyahu as regent over Israel, restoring stability to a fractured nation. But the challenges only grew as I returned to my homeland. The Great Earthquake had left America in ruins, split into four vast, isolated regions. Each part needed to be stitched back together, so with delicate hands and a burdened heart I dedicated myself to the task.

Laborers were scarce, but with resilience and resolve, we brought life to where there was desolation. Fifteen years passed, and, against all odds, the task was completed. In those years, I also issued a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, knowing that I would not stay in America forever. I longed to return to my eternal capital through which I would rule the world.

When I finally returned to Jerusalem, a grand parade filled the wide streets of the city. Survivors from every nation lined the broad avenues, eager to catch a glimpse of the prince—the one spoken of in the Torah—riding triumphantly on a great white steed toward the temple, whose glory now surpassed that of all temples before it. Jerusalem stood elevated, a city on a hill, with stone foundations and advanced technology as its backbone, and the King of Hosts as its cornerstone. Robots and drones kept the city running smoothly, replacing the old buildings that had been levelled by the great quake. No longer an ancient city, Jerusalem now shone with unmatched innovation and light.

As I approached the temple, sunlight gleamed off its towering structure, and a hushed reverence fell over the crowd. Its golden exterior glowed like a beacon, radiant. Its outer courts stretched wide, with massive gates carved with palm trees and cherubim standing tall at the eastern entrance. The white stone walls were smooth and solid.

I entered through the eastern gate, stepping into the outer court. Priests moved with careful precision around me, preparing their offerings, their hands steady and their expressions focused. The rich smell of incense filled the air, mingling with the voices of the Levites as they sang praises. Their songs echoed through the sacred space, resonating off the stone walls and filling the court with a powerful sense of peace and holiness.

Stepping toward the inner court, I climbed the steps to see the grand altar, its ledges layered to hold the sacrifices. That day marked the first offering—a spotless lamb, honoring the greatest sacrifice known to mankind. As I cut the lamb’s throat, the image of the cross flashed before my eyes, and its blood poured into the vase below. In future days, flames would rise high from this altar, offerings to the God of Israel from people coming from all corners, embracing the God of Abraham as their own.

As I approached the inner sanctuary, the air grew thick with the weight of God’s presence, each step bringing me closer to the Holy of Holies. Even after all these years of walking with the Lord, I felt unworthy to stand in this place, humbled before the heart of the temple where His radiance dwelled. This temple, set apart from the taint of the world, was not just a place of worship but the very axis of divine communion and peace. Its purity extended beyond these walls, drawing people from every nation, each pilgrim longing to glimpse the glory of the Lord of Hosts.

In those days, I had been entrusted with the sacred duty to judge among the nations, a justice that flowed with wisdom only he could give. Wars had ceased. His peace reigned unchallenged. The nations’ weapons lay reshaped, transformed into plows and pruning hooks, and the ground that once bore the weight of conflict now flourished with life. All human endeavors turned toward the land, sowing seeds not of strife but of abundance. Destruction had given way to creation, violence to plenty. This was the kingdom God had promised, a realm of unending peace that unfolded like a harvest under His gaze.

But now, those days live only in memory. I walk to the park beside the harem, where my young daughter, Deborah, sits on the grass under a towering Tabor Oak. Its height dwarfs the trees around it, its branches alive with the songs of rare birds we’ve gathered from across the world. Deborah stands, wrapping her small arms around the lion beside her, burying her face in its thick mane as it lets out a gentle breath. The lamb she had just been petting rises and moves over to the lion, beginning to groom this magnificent creature with quiet trust.

As I watch my daughter play with the lion and the lamb I admire Igor, the lion whom my daughter clings to. This wasn’t just any beast—it was Igor, the embodiment of God’s harmony made flesh. For over 400 years, Igor had been more than a companion. His playful nature and gentle licks had brought joy to every trip to the garden since they first brought him from Africa. He had become sigil of the tribe of Judah, a symbol of strength and power. Igor had stood proudly beside Levi at every important event, his majestic presence lending weight to every speech.

When she sees me, Deborah leaves the lion and runs to my side, giving me a hug as big as she can manage. The lion stands too, brushing its side against my leg as if greeting me. I place my hands on both my daughter and the lion, brushing my fingers through Deborah’s well-kept hair. She looks up at me with a bright smile.

“Where have you been, Daddy? Busy again?”

“Yes, Deborah, these are difficult days indeed. How is Igor?”

“Igor’s good! I fed him some fruit from the river this morning. Daddy, lions used to eat meat in the old world, didn’t they?”

I smile, glad to answer her curious questions. “Yes, lions were the fiercest hunters of all animals. Every creature feared them when they roared.”

“Roar? What’s that? Igor is so sweet and gentle; I’ve never heard him roar.”

I chuckle, “You don’t want to hear him roar, my dear. It sends chills up your spine, and in that moment, he’s no longer gentle Igor—he becomes dangerous Igor. You’d have to stay far away from him then.”

“I could never stay away from Igor. I hope that never happens.”

I place my hands firmly on her shoulders, giving her a reassuring look. “As long as I’m here, that will never happen. I promise.”

Her grip tightens on me. “Thank you, Daddy.”

“I’m off to see your mother. You be a good girl okay.”

She tugs on me as if she wants to say more, “Daddy, we are in bad times. Last night, I felt a cold breeze and it sent a shiver up my spine, like the one you spoke of, ya know, if Igor roared. There’s something here in the palace. I sense it. It’s hunting us and I think someone is being eaten by it. I want it to go away, daddy. It’s bad.”

Once again fear creeps into my heart. Like the fear I felt after waking up from my dream. I fear for my children. The heart of a child is very receptive, more so than adults. They can smell evil. I sigh wishing there was something I could do to reassure her of the future that would continue like the world we currently live in, but I know that time is coming to an end. The time laid out by Daniel, the seven seventies, 490 years in total, the time had all but eclipsed. But I know I must be diligent and ready. I must save as many of those I love as possible including sweet little Deborah that clings to my leg, oh God help me she must survive.

I kneel down and look at her. Tears welling in my eyes. I hold them back.

“Deborah, you train hard, be ready like your mother. When the evil comes you will destroy it. You will rebuke it in the name of Yeshua. Though armies come to destroy us he will deliver you. You understand?”

She nods quietly. I have to peel away her grip as I stand up.

“The evil you spoke of, daddy has to deal with it now, so let go.”

She let go and I quickly walk away so as not to break down in tears in front of her.

When I arrive at my harem, most of my wives are navigating an obstacle course in the courtyard of the harem that would be nearly impossible for most men. The forty-foot tower dominated the course, with ropes tied to bars surrounding its top. Priscilla, the chief trainer—fit and elder among them—stood at the tower’s peak, barking orders to those below. She is the tallest and most fearsome warrior among all his wives. Most of the women were struggling as they climbed, but not Sejal, Amiel’s mother. Her toned arms pulled her swiftly upward, her movements as graceful as they were powerful. Her legs, though not in use, were beautifully strong, her thighs curved with muscle. Other wives spar with swords and spears, their nano bot armor glistening in the sunlight.

Sejal was a marvel—a true jewel of her people. Yet I wonder if her loyalty shone as brightly as her physical prowess. I realize at that moment I’d come unannounced. My wives might be embarrassed to be seen in their training clothes. My mind was so disturbed that I hadn’t taken this into account, but there is no point going back now and it would be impossible to hide my intentions for my other wives. I had to meet Sejal despite the political implications this might mean among them all. This also meant that I might have to refrain from showing my affections towards those whom I would genuinely be interested in spending the day with.

They line up in formation after the training regime concludes. Their beautiful skin glistens with sweat in the sun. The climate is not hot. It is never hot, nor is it ever cold, every day was always beautiful.

I appear from the shadows and take my place beside Priscilla. Priscilla’s face becomes flush with embarrassment realizing she hadn’t had time to clean and prepare for my unexpected visit. I think the others share her sentiment, smiles lining their faces, but more restrained since they have not been dismissed yet from training. I watch carefully Sejal’s reaction. Her’s is reserved like a poker player with a royal flush but hasn’t let on to the power of their hand. I’m suddenly struck with a desire to be with her, it fills my heart unexpectedly.

Breaking the silence, I nod to the women and speak with a voice both gentle and commanding through my mentat, which is also synced with theirs. “I’m sorry to come unannounced. I felt compelled to thank you this morning for your dedication. You honor me with your strength. I want to encourage you to continue your training. Although we do not suffer, we do live in a world where there is the grave potential for suffering. The devil still prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Until the Lord comes, these will always be troubled times.”

The words rang true, but even I knew they were not my real reason for being here. I have no desire to fill their minds with anxiety about my dreams. The last thing I need is seven hundred concerned women, all hoping to offer me some reassurance, to ease whatever burden they sense I carry.

As they pondered my brief message, I watched their reactions, each one a reflection of her unique character. Some nod with solemn resolve, embodying the strength I praised. Others looked to one another with faint smiles, as though they share a private understanding about my unexpected appearance.

But Sejal’s expression held no warmth. Her face, composed and unyielding, betraying only calm attentiveness, yet something in her gaze sent a chill through me. There was a hardness, a locked-away story behind her eyes, like a mask crafted solely for moments like this.

With my mind I direct my mentat to speak only with her.

“After everyone is dismissed, I will meet you in your quarters. Something is troubling me and I wish to speak with you.”

Her voice, calm and rigid, replies, “What happened? You have 2000 other ears who can comfort you with their sweet words. Why me?”

“Because I wish to feel your sweet embrace again. Watching you train has stirred something within me.”

Her voice gentles, a trace of warmth slipping in. “In that case, I’ll be waiting for you, my Lord.”

I direct everyone else to be dismissed, and they quietly disperse to attend to the day’s duties. I speak with and greet as many of my wives as possible. Being a husband to nearly a thousand women was no small task.

Eventually, I make my way to Sejal’s quarters. Her door wasn’t locked, so I enter. Each of my wives live lavishly, with every comfort provided. A robotic cook hums in Sejal’s kitchen, preparing the finest synthetic meat available—crafted to satisfy without the need for animal lives. This was a standard we upheld: to live without promoting death whenever possible. Only the Levites consume the animals sacrificed in the temple; for the rest of us, avoiding the suffering of any living creature had become our quiet commitment.

The room is bathed in natural light, filtering through a glass ceiling capable of projecting any landscape imaginable. My thoughts drift to a memory from years ago in India: a waterfall nestled at the base of the Himalayas. Sensing this through my mentat, her room transports me there in an instant. Though the mountains had vanished in the wake of the Great Quake, here they rose once more, timeless and untouched, surrounding her room and filling me with overwhelming joy.

Her bedroom door was slightly ajar and I walk in as quietly as possible in order to catch her in her natural behavior. Water was running, filling her large bath tub. I peek into her bathroom. She is preparing for me. I am overcome with the smell of lavender. She stands up from the bath. Her nude, fit body overwhelming my eyes with her beauty, arousing my desire which causes the weariness of my concerns to momentarily drift away. Her long, golden blond hair falls to her waist, that slightly covers her large plump breasts. I put my mentat on rest mode.

“Please join me my lord.”

I happily oblige.

# Chapter 2: Burning Blades

As Gavriel enters the training hall, the sharp echo of his boots on the hardwood floor shatters the silence, drawing the attention of Amiel and his older half-brother, Uriel. Though born of different mothers, the two brothers share a fierce loyalty, bound by blood and duty. They straighten as they notice Gavriel’s approach.

Amiel, the youngest, approaches these sessions with a fervor that even Uriel can’t match. To him, combat is more than skill—it is the path to his deepest ambitions. This burning drive surges through him, resonating with the nanobots in his armor. As he trains, they mirror the intensity of his spirit, shifting with the same relentless energy that courses through his soul. Each movement he makes stirs the armor to life, the nanobots pulsing and flowing in sync with his determination, as though they too share his unyielding desire.

Since the Great War’s end centuries ago, warfare has transformed. While other nations abandon the ways of weaponry, Prince Levi continues their development in secret, aware that his foe will one day rise again. His scientists pioneer a method of fusing soul and machine, breathing life into armor that blurs the line between the physical and spiritual realms. With the restoration of the temple, heaven and earth seem to merge, granting warriors glimpses into the supernatural. The soul is no longer speculative—it is a living force, a tool, and a weapon.

Gavriel surveys the two warriors before him, his gaze lingering on the soft glint of their armor. Each suit shimmers with a silvery network of nanobots, thrumming in sync with the warriors’ breaths. Their armor can shield against the deadliest projectiles, sensing true danger and reacting in an instant, neutralizing the projectile mid-air. But Gavriel knows that this level of soul-binding is not without cost: the more often the armor blocks high-velocity attacks, the more it drains the spirit within. To constantly ward off projectiles weighs heavily on a warrior’s soul, eroding his strength with each impact deflected.

Therefore, both of the young warriors train to conserve their soul’s power, relying on their physical strength in melee. When the need arises to call upon their soul’s full strength, they can do so with a fresh spirit, fortified through hours spent in prayer and deep reflection. This discipline ensures that their soul will be ready—its power undiminished by the rigors of lesser threats.

Gavriel squares off, facing Amiel directly. In an instant, a staff materializes in his hand, forming from matter contained within his own body. With a sudden shift in stance, he swings it low, aiming at Amiel’s legs. Amiel reacts instantly, leaping over the staff’s arc.

As he lands, Gavriel springs back, firing several darts from a device on his wrist. But each dart vanishes as the nanobots hovering around Amiel’s body neutralize them, their programmed instincts responding to each threat.

“Very good, Amiel. I see you’ve been paying attention—impressive. Now, both of you will square off against each other. What’s our main rule for sparring?”

They both shout in unison, trying to deepen their voices despite puberty working against them, “Love one another!”

“And what does love do?” Gavriel continues.

“Love builds up and doesn’t harm.”

“Exactly. Love builds up and looks out for our brothers, to strengthen them, not tear them down. That’s why we’ve been free of injury all these years. Let’s keep it that way today.”

Amiel and Uriel step forward, facing each other. Their weapons materialize in their hands, formed from a unique bio-organic composite derived from their own bodies with the help of their mentat chips. These swords have become unique during Prince Levi's time. They are stronger than the toughest Damascus steel. As a result of the sword being made from their own body, they can channel energy from their soul into the sword, producing immense heat that can melt even the strongest metal. Both Uriel and Amiel begin to enter their unique fighting stances.

Amiel plants his feet in a wide, grounded stance, lowering his center of gravity. His sword angles downward in front, gripped firmly with both hands. He stands like an anchor—unmovable, resolute, as if prepared to withstand any strike. His gaze is fierce, almost feral, focused on Uriel with a burning intensity that feels strangely unfamiliar, almost unnatural. Uriel shifts uncomfortably, the glint in Amiel’s eyes making his skin prickle. They have sparred countless times since childhood, but he has never seen this look in his brother’s eyes before. It is a look filled with something he has never seen before, a fire that seems almost… ungodly. It is as if for a moment, the light in Amiel’s eyes has turned black.

For the first time in his life, Uriel feels the sensation of danger prickling his nerves—a primal instinct buried within humanity for centuries. He hesitates, instincts screaming at him to be cautious. But he dismisses the feeling, pushing the thoughts of danger out of his mind. Maybe it is only nerves, a fleeting fancy. After all, he has never known suffering or truly understood the threat danger carries. Confident again, he steps forward, sliding into his stance.

Uriel adopts a light, agile stance, positioning one foot forward and the other angled back for balance. His sword hovers at chest level, gripped firmly in one hand, while his other hand floats near the blade, fingers splayed as if channelling an unseen force. Built for agility, his stance lets him weave and dodge, waiting for the perfect moment to spot and exploit any weakness. Though he can unleash a powerful soul-infused strike, he holds back—this is training with his brother, not a ruthless fight. Still, he has proven himself against hundreds of training bots in a single month, but sparring with Amiel is different.

Uriel begins a slow, measured dance around Amiel, who stands like a stone pillar, steady and unreadable. Separated by two years, both boys are strong and agile, untouched by the malnourishment or ailments common in the previous world. They are nearly identical in height, and Amiel’s muscles flex with a quiet readiness, holding tension that shows he is prepared for anything. This isn’t their first spar; they know each other’s strengths and flaws. Uriel always wins with his agility and experience.

But today feels different. Amiel has been practicing in secret, refining a new stance beyond Uriel’s watchful eyes, and now he is ready to put it to the test. He will wait, patient as stone, letting Uriel make the first move. The plan is simple: absorb Uriel’s momentum, then counter in one fluid motion. As Uriel’s strike comes in, Amiel will shift his weight smoothly, his back leg sliding forward while his sword arcs high above his head.

In his mind, he envisions the movement, each shift of his muscles precise, every angle calculated. He can almost feel the clash of their blades and hear the metallic ring that will follow. A surge of anticipation rises within him, and he tightens his grip, his knuckles white around the hilt. This isn’t just training. To Amiel, it is a test of his new power, of the control he has painstakingly built over countless hours alone.

With a steady breath, Uriel advances, raising his blade in a quick, sweeping arc aimed for Amiel’s shoulder—a controlled strike, yet one with enough force to stagger if it connects. This is the moment Amiel has been waiting for. In a flash, Amiel’s stance shifts. His back foot surges forward, his body twisting as his sword comes down from above, intercepting Uriel’s strike with a force that sends a shock up both their arms. The clang of steel rings through the air, vibrating between them, and for a split second, Uriel can feel the raw power in Amiel’s movement. This isn’t the brother he has sparred with countless times before.

Uriel staggers back, momentarily thrown off balance by the unexpected force of Amiel’s counter. But before he can fully recover, Amiel surges forward, abandoning the defensive stance he usually relies upon. This is a new Amiel, aggressive and relentless. Uriel’s heart races as the familiar sparring pattern crumbles, replaced by this newfound ferocity in his brother.

As Amiel presses forward, that unsettling sense of danger creeps back. He can no longer ignore it. The dark gleam in Amiel’s eyes returns. Each swing of Amiel's blade is calculated but ruthless, leaving Uriel barely enough time to deflect or dodge. Uriel is in a panic, something he has never experienced before. He decides that it’s time to end the sparring session and call it quits for today.

“That’s enough for today, Amiel. I’m done.”

Gavriel is distracted. He is attentive at times but sometimes his duties are divided as he is also head of the royal guard. Amiel’s expression doesn’t change. He appears possessed by something dark and unknown, pushed by an unstoppable force. Uriel successfully parries Amiel and kicks him away. He finally gets a breather to stabilize himself and come to terms with what is happening. His breather doesn’t last long.

Amiel’s intensity increases. He has obtained a dart shocker, hidden underneath the cuff of his training jacket. The device senses the momentum in Amiel’s hand. A dart shoots forth, whistling through the air. Uriel is caught off guard once again.

The dart pierces his skin; Uriel is completely surprised and distracted. Why don’t his nanobots react? Where is his mind? Only robots and members of the royal guard are allowed to have these. A worry crosses his mind. Is it poisoned?

Poison is contained in the armory and only senior members of the guard have access to it. He pulls it out as fast as he can and throws it, blood flowing from his wound. This is the first time he has ever seen human blood and it sickens him. He had seen the blood of animals during sacrifices, but this is different. He wants to feint, but here is Amiel continuing his attack. Another dart flies forth but this time he is ready and his nano bots intercept it. More continue as Amiel sallies forth. He intercepts one dart and is distracted as Amiel’s sword follows. He fails to gauge the direction of Amiel’s sword and he’s sliced on his arm. He’s bleeding, now profusely as blood gushes forth. After dodging so many darts he feels exhausted, but Amiel is relentless. He’s completely on the defensive after so many years fighting offensively. He’s in uncharted territory. Things are starting to get blurry; his reaction is dulled. The dart was poisoned, but how? That’s the only way Amiel could have slashed his arm. Things grow blurrier, his head is spinning. He’s now helpless. He stumbles and is now kneeling.

“Amiel have mercy. I’m your brother.”

Amiel’s sword begins to glow bright. He’s channelling his soul within the blade for one last strike.

“The weak will not have mercy. I must take your life. It is my destiny to be the greatest warrior ever.”

Memories of their childhood together flash before Uriel: days of training, laughter, and a bond forged through countless training session. But all of that seems so distant now, overtaken by Amiel's hunger for greatness.

As Amiel raises his blade, a cold detachment fills his eyes. Uriel realizes that this is not the brother he once knew. His strength fades, yet he clings to the only source of hope he has left. He whispers with all that remains within him, "Lord Yeshua, my life is in Your hands."

As Amiel’s blade slashes forward, Uriel’s vision is hazy, yet the flash of light cuts through the darkness like a beacon. The clang of Amiel’s broken blade echoes, and he struggles to comprehend what has happened. The detached half falls to the ground with a thud. His unknown defender then trips Amiel, sword pointed at Amiel’s chest, halting his advance. Slowly, Uriel’s vision sharpens enough to recognize the figure.

“Gavriel…” he breathes, relief mingling with shock.

As Uriel is carried away, Gavriel glances down at him, a look of quiet intensity in his eyes. “Sorry I couldn’t intervene sooner. Your father ordered me not to until the last moment. He wanted to test Amiel.” Gavriel then turns back to Amiel, a heavy disappointment evident in his gaze. “He failed.”

Amiel’s breathing remains excited, his grip tight around the broken shaft of his sword. When Gavriel looks down and meets his eyes, Amiel looks away, unable to face the displeasure of his longtime mentor and trainer.

“We’ve been following you, watching you closely,” Gavriel says, his voice firm but saddened. “Your father worried about you, Amiel. He even left the armory unlocked to see if you’d resist temptation. I thought he was mad to do it, but now… now I understand.” Gavriel shakes his head. “What has gotten into you? This breaks the law of love, Amiel. Killing your brother doesn’t make you great. A true warrior knows when to take life — and when to spare it. You ambushed Uriel, ignored his plea for mercy. The evil one… he’s been whispering to you, hasn’t he?”

A flicker of something, doubt, guilt, perhaps anger, flashes in Amiel’s eyes, only to be smothered by pride. He struggles to get up, refusing to meet Gavriel’s gaze fully, his silence a mixture of shame and defiance.

Gavriel watches him with a weary sadness, as if mourning the death of a student he once knew. “There’s still time to turn back, Amiel. What has the evil one been whispering to you? Does he offer you the world? Promise to make you invincible? Maybe give you a place among the greatest warriors who ever lived? Don’t listen. These are lies, empty, hollow promises. He may seem to offer you the world, but he’s taking something far more valuable — your soul.”

Amiel’s silence stretches, his mind struggling to process Gavriel’s words. He doesn’t know what to say. Finally, he mumbles something, barely audible.

“Speak up, Amiel!” Gavriel’s deep, commanding voice pierces the haze clouding Amiel’s mind, jolting him from his inner turmoil.

Amiel’s voice cracks as he replies, “It was me. It was my desire. I wanted to know suffering… to see if I could bear it, and to watch it inflicted on someone else. To have power over them. To feel my superiority in battle, to strike fear into the heart of someone who always defeated me in sparring. That… that was why.”

Gavriel’s face softens, though sorrow fills his eyes. “Amiel, power isn’t in causing suffering but in choosing when to show mercy. You think causing suffering in others is strength? True strength lies in overcoming the desire to inflict, not inflicting it. In the old world, there were those who were sadistic—who took pleasure in causing others pain. They were horrible, wicked people. You don’t want to become like them.”

Two members of the royal guard appear behind Amiel.

“Take him to a cell until I know what to do with him. I haven’t received instructions from his father yet. His mentat is in rest mode, but once he reviews this conversation, further orders will follow. Amiel, you’ll have ample time to think about your actions in your cell.”

One guard steps forward, with a pair of handcuffs. He takes hold of Amiel’s left wrist, locking it in place, then secures the other. Amiel begins to struggle, his face twisted in rage and indignation.

“Once he knows, he’ll make sure you pay. My father’s ruler of the world! He won’t allow this!” Amiel shouts. “When he finds out, he’ll punish you all. He knows I want to be a great warrior; he’ll understand!”

Gavriel presses a hand to his temple with his left and, with his right, shoos him away, sighing. “Take him away, quickly—he’s giving me a headache.”

Amiel continues to kick and struggle as the royal guards lead him away, his defiance echoing down the corridor.

Gavriel watched Amiel being led away, he felt the familiar weight of regret settle over him. So much of his life had been spent striving to prevent moments like this. He’d seen what happened when power and pride overtook wisdom and mercy, when warriors forgot the very principles that once bound them in brotherhood and honor. He had once believed Amiel was different—that his heart could be guided, his ambition tempered. But the young warrior had come dangerously close to the edge, and Gavriel couldn’t ignore the signs any longer. His father was right to be suspicious of him. Nothing could escape that man’s perception. It was as if he could see through your skin and into your soul.

Gavriel sword dissipates slowly returning to his body. Memories of the Great War flood his mind—the lives he had taken, the faces that haunted his dreams. A deep, unspoken longing fills him: the hope that history would never spiral back into that ruthless cycle of war and vengeance. Moments ago, as he had swung his blade and disarmed Prince Amiel, a dark fear had crept into his heart. What if, one day, he would again be forced to take human life?

He glances down at the broken fragment of Amiel’s sword. Turning it over in his hand, he realizes the shattered blade symbolizes something much greater than mere steel. It represents the ongoing struggle that transcends this world—a battle not fought with flesh and metal but with spirit and resolve, against the powers and principalities of darkness. Against these powers weapons are useless. Prince Levi had warned him that, though peace had come for now, the shadows would one day rise again. And when that day came, they would stand as the last guardians of truth and justice.

….

Amiel hit the cold, hard floor of the cell with a thud, the echo of his impact fading into the silence. Anger burns in his chest as he scrambles to his feet, hands clenched into fists. How dare they treat him this way? He is a prince, destined for greatness, and yet here he is, locked in a cell like a common criminal.

He rushes to the heavy iron door and bangs his fists against it, his voice rising in furious protest.

“I’ll have your heads on a platter, you’ll see.”

One guard speaks with him patiently and respectfully.

“Prince Amiel please note that your personal bible has been placed by your bed. Please take this time to reflect and examine yourself. We hope this experience will end in your repentance.”

Amiel's fists fell silent, his defiant shouts echoing away as he heard the guard's calm words. A bitter scoff escapes his lips, “*Repentance?”* Then he thinks, as if he, of all people, needs to reflect or change. Yet something in the guard’s respectful tone gnaws at him, a quiet discomfort settling beneath his anger.

Turning, he spots the small, leather-bound Bible resting on the edge of the simple bed in his cell. It looks untouched, pristine—the very same one he had been given on the day of his baptism on his eleventh birthday by his father, though it had rarely seen his hands since. Most of his siblings lived like saints falling in line with lordship of the God written within. He had also initially, but the past year or so had begun to resent the God who sat in the temple with his father. Even his father claimed to be God in human flesh. He was so patient it made him sick. “Do this son or do that, don’t do that, love Yeshua he died on the cross for you, for your sins…..he exists, he’s real, look at his glory in the temple, my face when I leave his presence and on and on…..he clenched his hands in a fist and slammed them on his bed. His flesh cried out as if he could take a knife and just jam it in his father’s face.

A thought pulses through Amiel, sharp and intoxicating*. I will be greater than him, than their God.* The words echoed within him, feeding the fire that seemed to consume his very bones. The idea of power—real, unyielding power—was like a balm to every wound, every slight, every ignored cry for independence. They wanted him to bow, to repent, to submit, yet in his heart, all he craved was dominance, freedom from this relentless weight of expectation.

Amiel’s anger flickered, tempered by a spark of hope. He remembered his mother’s words, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder as she’d looked at him with a rare warmth, a belief that he could indeed be the warrior she envisioned. She alone saw him, understood his restless spirit. *One day,* she had said, *you will take your father’s place, but only if you forge yourself into someone worthy.*

The image was there in his mind—himself in the temple, cloaked in the reverence and respect his father commanded. But his path to it would not be through quiet piety or meek submission. It would be through strength, a strength that could only come from relentless dedication, from pushing his body and mind until he was unmatched. The title of warrior was not a gift to be given, but a prize to be earned.

He would appeal to his father once more, try to make him see his true nature, his potential. *Let him see me as I am,* Amiel thought, *not as a hollow image of him.* If he could make his father recognize his vision, perhaps then he could finally step into his own, free from the heavy chains of expectation. He still wanted to please his father, still loved him. It was true that his father had been nothing but good to him.

But a gnawing fear surfaces in his mind. How would his father react to his attack on Uriel? Amiel was certain he would not accept it easily. Nothing like it had ever happened in the royal palace for centuries.

He recalled the court histories he had studied, delving into every decision his father made to understand the workings of his rule. He wanted to be prepared for when his time would come. In Egypt, he remembered, a murder had shaken the court. Upon the testimony of three witnesses his father’s response had been severe—he sentenced the man to death, invoking the Old Testament as his justification: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." That unyielding judgment hung in Amiel's mind, a reminder of the consequences he now faced.

*Would he apply that same law to his own son?* Amiel wonders. Or could his father look beyond the act, seeing not just the offense but the purpose, the vision, beneath it?

The thought twists in his mind. Would his father punish him as he had punished others, perhaps slashing and poisoning him like Uriel, or would he devise some other form of public retribution? Amiel feels as if he were already on trial, though his judgment had yet to be passed.

He remembers how his father often didn’t need witnesses to make a decision; he could cut through lies with unsettling clarity. God sees all things, even what’s done in secret, his father would say, catching the accused of guard. He saw the money you stole, his father would declare, knowing the truth without a single witness. Amiel knew what he must do. He must evoke the Bible as his own defense quoting some passage of Scripture to keep himself from feeling his father’s wrath. He knew the Bible quite well. He and his siblings were brought up on its principles from the time they could read which was very early on.

Amiel took a deep breath and opened the bible skimming for words he could use. He came to the ten commandments. He would look his father in the eye and say, "Father, the Bible says, 'Thou shalt not murder.' But I didn’t hurt Uriel without reason. I did what I thought had to be done, to protect us all. A true warrior must kill. Killing and murder are different. My motive was not malice.” It’s true, I hated Uriel, he always was able to defeat me in our sparring sessions. My father would see through the lie. Maybe there was another route.

He closes the Bible and falls back onto his bed. His voice echoes off the stone walls of his cell as he murmurs, *“Let that man do whatever he wishes. No matter what he says, my path is set in stone.”*

# Chapter 3

Sejal’s half-clothed form lies sprawled across her queen-size bed, the blankets in casual disarray. The prince’s royal attire lies scattered on the floor, tokens of their shared bath. In the kitchen, he pours coffee as a sleek robot completes the final touches on their breakfast. Without her noticing, he subtly activates his mentat device by pressing his neck, taking it out of rest mode. Urgent alerts related to Amiel flash across his mind, demanding his immediate attention—yet he knows he must finish his interrogation of Amiel’s mother first.

Sejal props herself up on one elbow, watching as Prince Levi approaches with two steaming cups in hand. She admires the striking figure he cuts—even after nearly five centuries, his body remains lean and strong, transformed from its once-frail state in the aftermath of the Great War and his rise to power.

He returns to her bedside and catches sight of her exposed breast as she adjusts herself. A surge of desire stirs within him, but he tamps it down. Dipti and the council are likely monitoring their interactions now, making any further intimacy unwise.

Sitting beside her, he gazes at her golden blonde hair contrasting with her dusky skin. He reaches out, his fingers drifting through her hair, while she meets his gaze carefully, as though guarding the unspoken wishes in her heart—the hope for Amiel’s eventual ascension, or the simmering resentment she holds toward a God she feels unjustly punished her people. Together, they sip the scalding coffee, unaffected by its intensity; their perfected cellular structures are far more resilient than the fragile forms once marred by a world steeped in sin.

“Are you going to keep me in suspense?” she finally asks, her voice soft but direct. “You mentioned something troubles you, my Lord. Has your heart been put at ease now?”

Prince Levi momentarily ignores her question, his eyes drifting to the scars on her back—marks from the plague that ravaged her flesh and left her marked for life. A part of him wants to ask her about those scars, to understand the pain that left such deep traces. But he holds back; he knows better than to pry into a past she’d rather keep buried. Sejal senses his curiosity, her defenses ready, unwilling to let him use Scripture to justify what was done to her people.

Breaking the tension, Prince Levi turns his gaze out the window, where the waterfall cascades down the Himalayas, and memories of his years in India stir within him a long-lost peace. But the moment is fleeting. The troubling dream returns to his mind, and he turns back to her, his voice low.

“I keep having….” But just as he begins, the servant robot glides in, setting their breakfast plates on the table, interrupting the fragile moment between them.

The robot sets two plates and serves a slice of synthetic lamb, its texture and flavor engineered to closely mimic real meat, with subtle marbling and a rich, savory taste. Alongside, is placed a colorful array of real vegetables—bell peppers, zucchini, and spinach—each carefully chosen to complement the meat substitute with fresh, earthy flavors.

The scent of the food fills Prince Levi with an intense hunger. After an hour of intimacy, he’s famished and a bit weary, but the meal rekindles his energy, preparing him to face the day’s demands with renewed strength.

As they eat, Sejal gives him a playful, mischievous look. “Before the war, were you this incredible in bed?”

Prince Levi smirks, leaning back with an amused glint in his eye. “In my younger days, yes. But as I grew older, I needed a little… medical assistance.”

She raises an eyebrow, intrigued. “Oh? What kind of assistance? I’m only 200 years old—I want to know more about what that world was like.”

“They had a little blue pill back then called *Viagra.* Worked wonders. It could make even an old man like me stand as strong as a young buck,” he replies with a chuckle.

Sejal laughs, shaking her head. “If you were to combine that pill with your performance now, you might need another harem to keep up with you.”

Prince Levi chuckles, savoring the playful exchange. “Another harem?” he muses, raising an eyebrow. “I’m not sure the council would approve.”

She gives him a sly smile. “Well, what they don’t know won’t hurt them.”

He grins, leaning a bit closer. “True. But I think I’m satisfied with the company I have right here.”

He could almost see Dipti in his mind rolling her eyes with a slight smile and the Council chuckling through his mentat.

She looks down. He can sense her resistance against his attempt to draw closer to her. This was the unpredictable part of her nature. Whenever he tried to get closer, she would push away, but then she would try to draw him in, only to push him away. It was as if he was the rope in a continuous tug-of-war between two parts of her soul. He could not figure her out and the Lord continued to hide the thoughts of her inner nature from him, leaving him only to guess as to what she could be thinking.

Prince Levi turns back to the window, his gaze lingering on the mist rising from the waterfalls cascading down the Himalayas. The dream, haunting and vivid, drifts into his mind again, and he begins to describe it, his voice low and strained.

“It’s this dream, Sejal. Our son… Amiel. He’s there every time. But it’s not really him—it’s some monstrosity. His body, it’s fused with our robotic tech, as if he’s become something half-human, half-machine. And there’s nothing left in him, no soul, no emotion. But somehow, he’s still… there, in some twisted form, as if everything human in him has been corrupted, contorted beyond recognition.”

Sejal listens, her expression filled with concern as he continues. “I feel it in my bones, Sejal. In the dream he’s become what’s foretold—the man of lawlessness. It’s like I’m watching him in the lake of fire, just like it was prophesied. And deep down, I know why he’s there.” He hesitates, struggling with the next words, choosing to leave out the worst part: the part where it’s he, himself, who delivers the final push that seals Amiel’s fate.

Sejal tries her hardest to make her voice distraught and gentle as possible, feigning her sympathy to the king’s plight, “Dreams are strange thing my Lord. They can mean many things. Maybe this dream is from the evil one trying to cast doubt in you about the goodness in our son. My son is no beast. How could our little one deceive the entire world into worshiping him. Look at him. He just wants to play games and practice sword, he has no desire for your throne, let alone pretending to be God. Maybe the lake of fire is symbolic of your doubt in him? If you place faith in him then maybe your future dreams will find him swimming in a beautiful lake, pristine, and clear.”

Prince Levi's gaze shifts from the window back to Sejal, and he studies her face, noting her earnest expression, but trying to discern if its genuine or not. Her words, though gentle, settle uneasily in his mind. He wants to believe her—wants to believe that Amiel is pure, free from any darkness. Yet the dream had been vivid, unshakable, like a warning branded into his very soul.

"Perhaps," he murmurs, his tone uncertain, "but there’s a weight to these visions, Sejal. They feel more than symbolic. I sense a prophecy in them, something... inevitable."

Sejal places a calming hand on his arm, her voice taking on a reassuring tone, masking her inner conviction. "My lord, sometimes dreams are a test—testing our loyalty, our hope. Amiel is still just a boy, innocent and unscarred by the burdens of prophecy or fate. It’s only natural, especially for a father, to fear for his son’s future. But what if these fears are the very things that could steer him toward darkness?”

*She’s hiding something. I sense her convictions are not genuine.*

He decided to press her, “I spoke with Amiel. He seemed to have a desire to inflict harm on others and one day rule in my place. Interesting, I never once remember trying to cultivate these desires and him. I wonder, where they could be coming from? Have you been teaching him these things?”

Sejal's expression falters for just a moment, her eyes flickering with something unreadable before she quickly regains her composure. She smiles softly, yet the warmth doesn’t reach her eyes.

*Impetuous boy. I told him many times to hide the secrets of his heart deep inside his soul.*

"My lord," she replies, her tone carefully measured, "I would never teach Amiel anything that would lead him astray. All I’ve tried to instil in him is love for his family and loyalty to you. But he's a curious boy—perhaps... perhaps he has discovered these things on his own. You know, our depraved nature has never truly gone away even after the restoration. He spends hours in the library reading books, maybe the voices of the past have only inspired desires that were already there."

Levi narrows his eyes, studying her closely. "His depraved nature, you say? It’s strange none of my other children for the past four hundred years have been given over these inclinations. I’m starting to wonder if he’s being influenced—by someone, or something. A boy doesn’t simply develop a desire to harm others on his own."

Sejal lets out a soft, almost imperceptible sigh. "Sometimes, my lord, children inherit the traits we try hardest to suppress. They see shadows where we show them light, or they feel strength in areas we would rather they left untouched. But I assure you, I have done nothing to steer him toward such thoughts."

Levi’s gaze remains fixed, unyielding. He lowers his voice, leaning closer. "I want you to swear to me, Sejal. Swear that you have never whispered anything to him that might fill his mind with darkness."

Sejal nods, her voice steady. “I swear, my lord.” Yet Levi catches the faintest tremor beneath her words. Her eyes harden for a moment before she looks away. Rising from her seat, she begins gathering the plates left after their meal.

Levi’s gaze lingers on her, captivated by her presence. But he pushes away the thought of another round with her, despite the tension between them. His love for his wives is relentless, passionate even in the face of their faults.

“Let it be. The robot can handle it,” he says, gesturing dismissively, as though waving away an unnecessary burden.

“No, it’s fine. I’ve got it,” she replies, carrying the plates to the sink. The sound of dishes rattles softly as she begins washing them.

Levi watches her for a moment longer, then decides his time here is done. He has learned enough for now. His thoughts turn to the urgent message about Amiel.

Quickly, he dresses, the urgency weighing on him. Before leaving, he approaches Sejal, her back turned as she continues washing the dishes. He leans in, pressing a gentle kiss to her head through her freshly scented hair, his hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

“If you notice anything strange about Amiel, please let me know,” he says softly, his tone firm yet tinged with unease. His mind churns, still grappling with the troubling message delivered by his mentat.

“I will, my lord,” she replies with a small smile, watching him leave.

As the door closes behind him, Sejal’s smile fades. She exhales deeply, her shoulders sagging as she releases the tension she had been holding. A dish slips from her grasp, clattering softly in the sink.

“Take over,” she commands the robot, stepping away from the task as it whirs to life, efficiently resuming the work.

She turns towards the door and locks it quietly. Her room is transported from the Himalayas to a place of complete darkness as if it’s floating in space.

A faint glow flickers to life, a purple flame suspended in the void. The scent of incense curls through the air, thick and intoxicating. She bows her head as a towering, robed figure emerges from the shadows, its presence filling the space with an oppressive weight.

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Prince Levi strode through the sunlit corridors of the palace, his thoughts consumed by the ever-complicated Amiel. His path wound through the harem, a sanctuary of color and laughter. Women reclined on plush cushions; their conversations interwoven with the soft, haunting melodies of a robotic harpist.

A sleek robotic attendant glided toward him, balancing a tray of delicate hors d’oeuvres. Its mechanical voice hummed, “Can I assist you, my lord?”

“I’m looking for Priscilla. It’s urgent.”

“I’ve notified her mentat to summon her,” the robot replies, inclining its head with programmed courtesy.

Levi nodded absently, his gaze sweeping over the room. The women’s beauty and elegance seemed to reflect the diverse nations they hailed from. The Indian women, in particular, drew his attention—graceful and poised, their attire and presence a testament to centuries of diplomacy and admiration. But his eyes linger on the emptiness left by the absence of Chinese women, their nation lost in the ashes of the great war.

Before long, Priscilla appears, her commanding presence parting the crowd like a ship through water. Her long strides close the distance quickly, her hair, tied in a tight bun, bounces slightly with each step.

“Prince Levi,” she greets, her voice steady, her smile respectful but warm.

Levi looked up—despite his impressive six-foot height, Priscilla still towered over him by at least six inches.

“Priscilla,” he begins, his tone firm. “You’re exactly the person I need right now.”

Priscilla raises a curious eyebrow, her tone measured. “What can I do for you, my prince?”

Levi leans in slightly, his voice dropping low enough to avoid attracting attention. “I need your help with something... delicate. It’s about Sejal.”

Her expression sharpens; her intrigue barely veiled. “Sejal? What about her?”

“She’s been different lately,” Levi admitted, his brow furrowed. “I suspect she’s hiding something, and I need you to find out what it is—discreetly.”

Priscilla folds her hands thoughtfully, her sharp eyes already calculating. “The women of the harem are observant, my prince. If there’s something amiss, we’ll uncover it.”

Levi nods, but his urgency to confront Amiel pulls at him. Noticing Priscilla’s expectant demeanor, he adds diplomatically, “I have pressing matters to deal with concerning Amiel, but you’re welcome to walk with me.”

For a moment, disappointment flickered across her face—evidently, she had hoped for a more private moment. But she quickly composes herself, offering a gracious smile. “Of course, my prince. Let’s walk.”

Outside the entrance of the harem Priscilla is able to speak freely now as they walk.

“Amiel, Sajel’s son?”

I tell her about my dream, “And now there’s some emergency regarding him. I hardly slept and now this. I don’t think my day can get any worse.”

A loud spine curdling scream in the direction of the garden sends a shiver up Prince Levi’s spine.

“Deborah!”

Prince Levi broke into a sprint, his heart pounding as Deborah's scream echoed through the palace gardens. Priscilla followed close behind, her long strides easily keeping pace. As they neared the towering Tabor Oak, the scene before them brought Levi to an abrupt halt.

The lamb lay still on the ground, its pristine white coat marred by deep crimson. Standing over it, Igor, the once-gentle lion, growled low and guttural, his mane streaked with blood. His golden eyes, once filled with calm, now blazed with primal fury. The air seemed to crackle with tension, the serene garden transformed into a place of horror.

Deborah stood frozen, her small hands clasped over her mouth, tears streaming down her cheeks. The child who had so recently embraced the lion as a companion now faced it as a predator.

Levi stepped forward cautiously, his voice steady but firm. “Deborah, come to me. Now.”

The girl hesitated, her eyes darting between her father and the lion. Igor’s growl deepened, his massive frame tensing as if preparing to strike. A sword instinctively materialized out from his hand.

“Deborah!” he called again, sharper this time. “Move!”

Priscilla stepped to his side; her voice low. “We must act quickly. That lion is no longer the creature she knew.”

Levi’s mind raced. He had trained for battles, negotiated with rulers, and faced enemies of every kind—but nothing had prepared him for this moment. *This* *is this what Deborah feared. This is the evil she spoke of.*

Deborah finally broke free from her paralysis and stumbled toward him. The movement caught Igor’s attention, and with a deafening roar, the lion lunged.

Levi acted on instinct. He stepped in front of Deborah, shielding her with his body. The blade met Igor’s claws mid-air, the impact reverberating through his arm. The lion recoiled, momentarily stunned.

“Get her out of here!” Levi barked to Priscilla, who didn’t hesitate. She scooped Deborah into her arms and began to retreat, her long strides carrying her quickly toward the palace.

Levi squared off with the lion, his heart heavy.

But now, something had changed. Igor’s corruption could mean only one thing: sin had crept into this sanctuary, a place meant to be free from the evil that still plagued the world. Could this have anything to do with the urgent call about Amiel?

Igor had reverted to the primal instincts of his ancestors, a fierce predator driven by the law of survival. Now, that same majestic presence that was once the sigil of the tribe of Judah was now a threat. Levi held his ground as Igor circled him. The beast’s golden mane bristled with tension, and his amber eyes glowed with primal rage. The muscles underneath his fur twitched with aggravation, his back legs ready to thrust himself forward with one killing swipe ending Prince Levi’s life.

Levi’s hand twitched as he held his blade, its shimmering surface flickering with the faint warmth of his soul’s energy. He didn’t want to use it—not against Igor. But the lion’s guttural growl and tensed muscles left no doubt: this would end in blood.

“Igor,” Levi said softly, his voice wavering. “Come on boy, remember who you are. Remember what you’ve meant to this place—to me.”

For a moment, Igor hesitated hearing the gentleness in Prince Levi’s voice. The fire in his eyes flickered, and Levi thought he saw a glimmer of recognition. But the corruption within the lion roared back to life, drowning any trace of the creature he once knew.

With a deafening roar, Igor lunged. Levi sidestepped, his blade flashing to deflect a swipe of razor-sharp claws. Sparks flew as the weapon met the hardened strength of the lion’s corrupted form. Each clash sent a shudder through Levi—not just from the force, but from the heartbreak of fighting a creature he had loved for centuries.

The garden, once a sanctuary, became a battlefield. Igor attacks with the ferocity of the wild, his movements swift and brutal. Levi counters with precision, his strikes calculated to avoid killing blows. He aimed to subdue, to bring Igor back if even a spark of the old lion remained. Cuts appeared on Igor’s body as Levi dodges and weaves leaving behind slashes in his wake.

A swipe catches Levi off guard, claws raking his shoulder and drawing blood. He staggered, his breath catching in pain. But he couldn’t stop now. Raising his blade, he pours his energy into it, the weapon glowing hot with the heat of his resolve emanating from his soul.

“Forgive me, Igor,” Levi whispered.

Igor rushes at him for one last fatal swipe. Levi swings, the blade slicing through the air. The strike connects, searing through the corruption that bound Igor’s heart. The lion roars in agony, collapsing to the ground. The fury subsides in Igor’s eyes returning their gentle golden hew and for a fleeting moment, Levi sees the old Igor—the companion, the guardian, the friend.

Igor lets out a soft rumble, a sound almost like a purr, before he closes his eyes. Levi falls to his knees, tears streaming down his face. The garden was silent, save for the soft rustle of leaves in the breeze.

“Sin has reached even here,” Levi murmured. “And I was blind to it.”

His blade dissolves back into his body, Levi knew this fight wasn’t just about Igor. It was a warning, and it was only the beginning. He looks at his wound. The blood flow is profuse.

*My son is the chosen one. Sejal’s chest swelled with pride. I’ve been given the glorious honor of bearing our savior—the one who will break the chains of my husband’s god.*

*But beneath her pride, fear quickened her heart. How did he come to know of this destiny? Was it revealed by the god I pretend to serve? Can he truly see so deeply into our souls? She clenched her hands, determined. I must convince my husband that his dream is just that—a dream. Fictitious, symbolic, full of harmless metaphors. Yes, the lake of fire is merely a metaphor. She steadied herself. I need time to prepare. Amiel will become God and rise above, but the time is not yet. Amiel is unready. He must learn, grow strong, master the art of combat if he’s to defeat the saints.*

*Her mind raced with a single, unbreakable resolve. I must ease my husband’s doubts about our son. If he knows… if he truly understands, Amiel may face a fate from which there is no return.*

1. Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king, claimed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem during the 2nd century BC, sparking one of the most infamous episodes in Jewish history. His actions, known collectively as the "Abomination of Desolation," included severe violations of Jewish religious practices and desecration of the temple itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)