# Chapter 1: Weary Nights

His left intact eyeball is as devilishly black as his right bio mechanical one. Cables and motors blend with human flesh, whirring and rotating with each clicking blink and 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.

Veiled 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 of their decaying corpses mixes with the sulfur searing the air. I want to cover my nose, to turn my gaze away, but I can’t.

I look down at my own hand. It’s flesh, yet it’s something beyond, it’s a new body. 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. I don’t see the monstrosity he has become. Yet when I look at him, I see a child look up at me with a twinkle in his eye asking me a question with inquisitiveness.

“Hurry up father, you know what you must do, why do you delay?” His whirring mechanical lips work together in conjunction with the rest of his face creating a sound altogether inhuman.

*A father’s love for his son holds me back, but a man’s love for his God compels me forward.*

The innocent demeanor of a child is 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, wishing it wasn’t my child I’d cast into the lake of fire, helpless to stop myself from sealing his fate. The room senses I’m awake, but the queen is not, lighting the room only slightly so I can see my way in the darkness. I pull my ephod over my head, its deep royal blue fabric rich against my weary skin. Its golden threads shimmer faintly even in this dim light.

I step out of the royal chambers without disturbing her. In the washroom, I splash water on my face and gaze at my reflection. Dark circles rim my eyes, the toll of restless nights. 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 distraught, 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.

Amiel is trained with the skills and weapons meant to ensure his survival against the man of lawlessness and his armies, yet now he might turn those same skills against us. It will definitely mean the end of my kingdom. My son, oh my son. I open my bible reading prophesies written by Daniel so long ago looking for comfort. Still, my soul is tortured. I let out a long sigh and close my Bible, placing it back in the drawer beneath my bathroom mirror.

I pass through the royal wash chambers; my reflection catches the lines of concern sharp in the darkened 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 indeed days of trouble," I say aloud, as though speaking with Daniel the prophet himself, nodding in agreement with the wisdom of his words from so long ago.

I reach his room, and the lights awaken, going slightly bright then 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’re impressive.”

“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 contend, 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 yet thick man hands reach around me and squeeze a little too tight. 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, one 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. 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,” choosing my words with care in order to test him.

*Never son. If he is the one. I must double my efforts to protect my family. Their training regimens must intensify. I’ll try to save Amiel. I hope it’s not too late. Maybe he’s not the one. It’s still too early to tell.*

“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.

My visit with Amiel had 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 levitation lounger, my body completely supported in mid-air, with a view of the temple and the majestic flame that covers all of Mount Zion. 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 gentle light, and focus on her face. Her soft, delicate features catch the filtered sunlight—an oval face with smooth contours, expressive almond-shaped eyes framed by well-defined brows, and a straight, petite nose above full, naturally curved lip. Her warm complexion glows faintly in the light, and her long, dark hair flows gracefully over her shoulders.

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 gradually lower into the levitation lounger until I’m now resting on its cushioned exterior.

“I checked your mentat records.”

Her hand brushes her neck, fingers instinctively grazing the implant embedded there. Concern laces her voice. “Why don’t you speak with Amiel’s mother before court begins? There’s a disturbance to the North that requires your attention. You’ll need to refresh yourself.”

She perches on the edge of the lounger, looking down at me with a mix of authority and care.

“You’re checking my mentat records? Are you stalking me now?”

In a perfect world, privacy means little when there’s nothing to hide.

The mentat—a neural chip installed in every citizen at birth—allowed seamless sharing of information. Verbal communication was optional, chosen when mentat-to-mentat links weren’t preferred.

“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?” I smile, chiding her.

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

I sit up straight in my chair, shaking off the fog from a restless night. My voice cuts through the haze, steady but reflective. "She has her charms, no doubt—a Syrian queen with a rebellious spirit. Remember when her family refused to join the feast? A plague struck them down as punishment. I've seen the scars she bears, though she hides them well. She survived, but her parents did not. 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.” She stands up, her other concerns now invading her mind.

“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.”

*I wonder if she’s poisoning Amiel’s mind as an act of revenge?*

"Then I strongly urge you to visit her quarters in the royal harem," Dipti 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."

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 thoughts adrift in the echoes of the past. As I passed the towering walls I had once ordered built, their stones seemed to whisper of triumphs long gone. I ached for the days following our great victory, clinging desperately to those golden memories to dull the sting of the misery that now threatens to drown me.

Centuries have passed—over four hundred years since the war of Gog and Magog scarred the earth and changed my soul forever. In the aftermath, I took it upon myself to rebuild. Benjamin was reinstated as regent, bringing stability to Israel. Meanwhile, America lay shattered, the Great Earthquake splitting its land into four isolated regions. For fifteen grueling years, with dwindling resources and unyielding resolve, we restored what little we could.

When I returned to Jerusalem, knowing it would be my eternal capital, I carried the weight of my destiny. I decreed the city’s rebuilding, overseeing its triumphant rise from the ashes. Survivors from every nation gathered for a grand parade to witness the rebirth of the holy city, a moment of unity amidst the ruins.

But the glow of victory has long since faded. The cheers of that day now feel like whispers lost in the wind. The burdens of leadership grow heavier with each passing year.

Solomon’s words echo in my mind:

*"When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Nothing was gained under the sun."*

With a heavy heart, I wander through the park near the entrance of the harem. My eyes fall on my young daughter, Deborah, seated in the grass beneath a towering Tabor Oak. The tree, ancient and majestic, stretches high above the others, its sprawling branches teeming with the songs of rare birds gathered from distant lands.

Deborah stands, her small arms wrapping tightly around the lion by her side. She buries her face in its thick, golden mane as the mighty creature exhales a gentle, steady breath. Nearby, the lamb she had been petting rises, padding softly toward the lion. With quiet trust, it nuzzles the great beast, then begins grooming it tenderly.

As I watch my young daughter play with the lion and the lamb, I forget my troubles if for a moment. I admire Igor, the lion whom my daughter clings to. 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 me 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, her face bright and alive with joy, giving me a hug as big as she can manage. The lion stands too, brushing its side against my leg. 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 admiration.

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

“Yes, Deborah, these are difficult days. 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 at me, her small hands clutching my arm as if desperate to say more. “Daddy, we’re in bad times,” she whispers, her voice trembling. “Last night, I felt a cold breeze, and it sent a shiver up my spine—like the one you talked about, ya know, if Igor roared. There’s something here in the palace. I can feel it. It’s hunting us, and... I think someone’s being eaten by it. I want it to go away, Daddy. It’s bad.”

Her words send a chill through me, the same cold dread I felt after waking from my dream. Fear creeps into my heart again, this time sharper, more insistent. I fear for my children—for her. The heart of a child is so pure, so perceptive. They can sense evil in ways we’ve long forgotten.

I sigh, wishing I could offer her reassurance, a promise of a future as steady and unchanging as the world she’s known. But deep down, I know that time is slipping away. The prophecy of Daniel—the seventy sevens, 490 years—has almost reached its end. The shadow of what’s to come looms closer with each passing day.

Still, I must be diligent, I remind myself. I must save as many as I can, especially sweet little Deborah, who clings so tightly to my leg. “Oh God,” I pray silently, “help me. She must survive. She *must*.”

I kneel down, bringing myself to her level. Tears well up in my eyes, but I force them back. I must be strong—for her.

“Deborah,” I say, my voice steady but soft, “you train hard, just like your mother taught you. Be ready. When the evil comes, you will destroy it. You will rebuke it in the name of Yeshua. Even if armies rise to destroy us, He will deliver you. Do you understand?”

She nods silently, her wide eyes filled with both fear and determination.

I gently pry her small hands from my arm, though her grip is like iron. “The evil you spoke of,” I say, straightening, “Daddy has to deal with it now. So let go.”

Reluctantly, she releases me. I turn away, walking with purpose, my steps heavier with every stride. I don’t look back. I can’t. If I do, I’ll crumble—and she needs to see a father who stands firm, even when the ground beneath him shakes.

The crown on my head weighs down like iron, a symbol of power I never sought. I long to lay it before God in the temple, to surrender this unbearable burden. This crown—this cross—is too much for one man to bear. I never asked for it. From my youth, I’ve been driven by Yahweh who sometimes felt distant, his silence amplifying my pain till his glory returned to the temple. I eat daily in his presence filled with joy.

But now sorrow has taken the place of joy, as everything crumbles around me, I cling to a fragile hope: that he will gather the broken pieces and make them whole again.

This journey has stretched me beyond my limits. The trials have been relentless, the suffering sharp and unending. Will he see me through this final stretch? Will I endure to behold his coming?

I am a prince waiting for his King, yearning for the day I can lay my crown at his feet. Until then, I walk forward—alone, yet not abandoned.

# Chapter 2: Burning Blades

Gavriel steps into the training hall. He stops as his piercing gaze sweeps the room, searching until his eyes rest on his students. His military uniform is crafted from fine white linen. His high-collared jacket features intricate silver and gold embroidery, with epaulets on the shoulders signifying his rank. The cuffs on his uniform mirror the ornate patterns on his chest. His crisp pants match the pristine white of the jacket.

The sharp echo of his polished black boots against the hardwood floor fractures the silence. Amiel and his older half-brother, Uriel, stand at attention. Though born of different mothers, their bond is unshakable—rooted in blood and forged by duty. The young trainees are dressed in battle armor which is similar in design to Gavriel’s dress uniform. Their white armor has segmented plates crafted from advanced composite materials to ensure durability without sacrificing mobility.

Surrounding them are sparring robots—lifelike mannequins armed with a variety of deadly weapons. Motionless for now, their latent threat lingers, ready to spring into a formidable force with a single command. Sunlight streams through the glass wall behind them, casting long shadows that stretch across the floor. Beyond the glass, grass sways gently in the breeze until it meets a brick path winding through one of the many outdoor corridors that crisscross the palace grounds.

Gavriel stops and squares off in front Amiel, his gaze meeting Amiel’s eyes which are locked face forward.

“Activate your nanobot armor, Amiel,” he orders, his tone firm and commanding.

Amiel mentally commands his Mentat to act. Tiny nanobots detach from his body, shimmering as they swirl in the light streaming through the glass. They hum softly, pulsing in sync with Amiel's breaths. When he inhales, the swarm quickens, a blur of restless energy. When he exhales, they slow, as if mirroring his lungs—alive, responsive, and almost sentient.

Amiel’s face lights up with a wild delight. His focus during these sessions is unyielding, his fervor impossible to miss. Gavriel observes from a distance, impressed by Amiel's dedication but unaware of the deeper truth. To Gavriel, it is a display of mastery; to Amiel, it is far more—a vital step toward his secret ambitions. The passion surges through him, and the nanobots seem to echo his drive, orbiting like a swarm of agitated killer bees, sharp and purposeful, waiting for their moment to strike.

In a flash, a staff materializes in Gavriel’s hand, forming from the matter within his own body. He shifts his stance, swinging low, aiming for Amiel’s legs.

Amiel reacts instantly, leaping over the staff’s arc with fluid grace. As he lands, Gavriel fires several darts from a wrist device. But his nanobots, ever vigilant, neutralize each dart before it reaches its target.

“Very good, Amiel. You can deactivate your nanobots now.”

Amiel commands his mentat, and the nanobots come to rest, their microscopic forms settling along his skin.

Gavriel watches him, a flicker of pride breaking through his stoic demeanor. “I see you’ve been paying attention. Impressive.” He folds his arms, puffing out his chest ever so slightly. “You two are the finest students I’ve ever trained.”

He takes a measured breath, his voice steady and commanding. “Your nanobots are designed to shield you from projectiles and metallic threats, but remember, they can’t disintegrate your bio swords. The matter within your body is a marvel that no science can replicate.” His gaze sharpened, drilling the lesson into their minds. “But your mentat chip is key. Without it, you can’t materialize your bio sword. Its protection is second only to your heart and mind.”

In his hands, the staff formed seamlessly from his body. He held it aloft. “This is your most critical possession. Do not lose it. Do not break it. This weapon is more valuable than your body itself.” Gavriel’s hands moved with practiced precision, twirling the staff in fluid arcs around his form. After four centuries of training, he moved like a force of nature, every motion deliberate and lethal.

He pauses, letting the staff shrink and reshape into a small, gleaming throwing knife, the excess matter absorbing back into his body. “Yes, you can throw this knife,” he said, his voice measured, “and your enemy’s nanobots can’t destroy it. But ask yourself—do you want to risk losing a part of yourself that’s so vital, one that takes months to regenerate?”

His gaze hardens as he locks eyes with them. “Only do so when you’re certain your opponent surpasses you in every way. If they catch your weapon and destroy it with their bio blade, you’ll face a steep price. Sure, you can keep forming new weapons, but every attempt drains nutrients from your body. Take too much, and you risk cardiac arrest. Instant death. There’s no way to gauge how much your body can form, each person is different.”

Gavriel’s voice softens, but his tone no less serious. “So don’t gamble recklessly. Forge your weapon, and commit to it.”

Gavriel pauses for a bit. “Now a little more about the function of nanobots. Nanobots cannot deflect projectiles indefinitely. Your nanobots must be used with care. Take cover when possible. The amount of nanobots in your swarm goes down with each projectile intercepted. If you keep dashing into projectiles recklessly there may not be enough nanobots to absorb the blow. Let me show you.”

Gavriel double taps his mentat with his two index fingers. One of the robots comes to life and sprints towards the exit. A few minutes pass and the robot enters the training hall carrying something heavy and big. The robot stops before Gavriel and lays the gun at Gavriel’s feet. Gavriel hefts the weighty, well-oiled machine gun, its sleek metallic surface gleaming under the light. The machine has a hefty magazine, packed with bullets, locked securely in place, feeding ammunition smoothly into the gun's loader, ready for action. Gavriel then commands the robot to stand at the far length of the training hall where the window no longer reaches. The robot dashes off in a sprint, its mechanical feet briskly tapping on the wooden floor until it reaches its destination where other robots and their pieces and parts rest after being demolished by weapons and other forms of munitions.

“Bot 36 activate your nanobots!” He commands.

A swarm of nano bots now swarms its synthetic body.

“Now watch this boys! I’ll show you a thing of beauty!” His finger flips the safety off and pulls down the trigger releasing torrent of destruction.

Thunderous drumming of the machine gun fills the hall, each bullet blazing through the air in a relentless assault. Bot 36 stands at the far end, its synthetic frame surrounded by the shimmering shield of nanobots. The swarm works frantically, intercepting the oncoming bullets with dazzling flashes and faint wisps of vaporized particles.

Gavriel’s finger stays steady on the trigger as the rounds pour out in rapid succession. Each bullet strikes the swirling swarm of nanobots, but the cloud flickers only briefly, holding strong and deflecting or absorbing every shot with mechanical precision. Sparks and minute machinery fly as the projectiles are sent off course, clattering harmlessly to the ground or to the hard stone wall behind.

Then it happens.

The magazine runs dry, its barrel glowing red. The machine gun jolts violently with its final shot, ejecting the last shell with a sharp *cling*. The last bullet slices through the air like a predator seeking its mark. The nanobots, overworked and depleted, falter at the worst possible moment. The shield sputters out, and the bullet pierces through, slamming directly into the robot’s chest. A sharp metallic crack reverberates through the room as the impact sends sparks flying. The robot staggers slightly, a smoking dent now marring its frame.

Gavriel lowers the gun, its smoking barrel still radiating heat as the echoes of gunfire fade into the cavernous hall. Silence settles like a shroud. “And that,” he says, his voice cutting through the stillness, “is all it takes. One bullet, when your defenses are down.”

He gestures toward the robot, still standing but visibly damaged. “Your nanobots are good, but they’re not perfect. You’ve got to use them smart, or the last shot could be the one that ends you.” He turns back to the boys, handing the machine gun over to a waiting robot, who takes it and whisks it away to the armory outside the hall. “Always plan for when the swarm fails—because it will. Any questions?”

Both boys are silent in awe of the demonstration. He motions his hands for both of them to come forward.

“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,” satisfied, Gavriel steps away to allow them to spar. Some other pressing matter distracts his mind and he leaves them alone.

They face each other. Their weapons materialize in their hands. Their bio-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. Uriel is taller and more skilled than Amiel because he is elder, but Amiel is undaunted despite his disadvantage, his 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 as he flings his left hand forth. A dart shoots, exiting one of the round slots of the dart shocker, whistling through the air. Uriel is caught off guard once again.

The dart pierces his skin, catching Uriel completely off guard. The sting shocks him, his mind racing. His nano bots lie dormant on his skin. Only robots and members of the royal guard are permitted to carry dart shockers; therefore, sparring with active nano bots is never required unless sparring with members of the royal guard, making this ambush unthinkable.

Where was his mind? He curses himself for ignoring the faint warning, the flicker of danger that brushed his thoughts moments before. His chest tightens as panic sets in. Is the dart poisoned? Panic floods his mind as he yanks the dart out and hurls it away, blood trickling from the wound.

The sight of his own blood horrifies him. It’s the first time he has ever seen human blood. Animal sacrifices had never prepared him for this. The metallic tang of it sickens him, and a wave of nausea rises. He feels faint, but there’s no time to dwell. Amiel presses forward, unrelenting.

Another dart flies toward him, but this time, his nano bots react, intercepting it mid-air. Amiel fashions two daggers in both hands and rushes at Uriel flinging the bio-dagger in his left hand. Uriel manages to deflect it with his sword but is distracted, leaving him vulnerable to the next dagger that follows. Uriel dodges it but is off balance. Amiel’s sword slices his arm, and fresh blood spurts from the deep gash.

Pain and exhaustion begin to take their toll. He’s losing blood. He’s always fought offensively, commanding the flow of combat. Now, forced onto the defensive, he’s completely out of his element.

The world around him starts to blur. His reactions slow, his vision spins. The truth hits him like a hammer—the dart was poisoned. That’s how Amiel managed to slice his arm.

Uriel stumbles, his strength fading fast. His legs give way, and he collapses to his knees, helpless as Amiel looms over him, relentless and unstoppable.

“Amiel have mercy. I’m your brother,” Uriel pleads. His words fall on deaf ears.

Amiel begins channelling his soul power within the blade for one last strike. His sword glows with an indescribable aura.

Amiel’s nostrils flare as he prepares to take the greatest step of his life. “The weak will not have mercy; this is my destiny,” he declares, his voice steady, repeating words he has rehearsed countless times in his mind. For the past year, he has meticulously planned for this moment, envisioning every word, every gesture, and the look of desperation he expected to see on Uriel’s face.

But the reality surpasses even his wildest expectations. The situation brims with tension, and Amiel basks in the thrill coursing through him. To hold such power—to command another's life and hover on the edge of deciding whether they live or die—is intoxicating. A thrill like no other.

Amiel raises his glowing blade, a cold detachment fills his eyes. Uriel 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."

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.

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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 attempts to scramble 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 struggles to get up. He’s completely exhausted having formed so many weapons in his anger and rage he’s surprised that he’s even alive. He crawls to his cell bars and pulls himself up. He bangs his fists against the heavy iron bars, 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 makes his way to his bed carefully trying to keep his balance. He stumbles and falls on the firm mattress. Composing himself he sits up, takes a deep breath while picking up the bible then opens it skimming for words he could use. He comes 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: Encroaching Darkness

When Prince Levi arrives through the front gate of his harem, most of his wives are navigating an obstacle course in the courtyard that would be nearly impossible for most men. The forty-foot tower dominates the course, with ropes tied to bars surrounding its top. Priscilla, the chief trainer—fit and elder among them—stands at the tower’s peak, barking orders to those below. She is the tallest and most fearsome warrior among all his wives. Most of his wives are struggling as they climb, but not Sejal, Amiel’s mother. Her toned arms pull her swiftly upwards, her movements as graceful as they are 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. Her every movement radiated precision and grace, a reflection of her unparalleled physical prowess. Yet, Levi couldn’t silence the nagging question in his mind: did her loyalty gleam as brightly as her skills?

He realizes his mistake—he had come unannounced. His wives on guard duty are in a shock. They panic, getting ready to announce his coming through their mentats. He immediately gives the order for them to cease, their eyes acknowledging with bowing heads that they had received and understood his command.

One of the guards, as striking as an Amazonian warrior, steps forward, her graceful form exuding strength and confidence clearly wanting to speak but falters under the weight of unpreparedness. She stammers, unable to find the words for a proper greeting. Levi smiles softly, his warm gaze meeting hers, and offers her a wink. Her face flushes crimson, his simple gesture carrying the grace of poetry—a silent reassurance that no words were needed.

The breach in protocol would undoubtedly unsettle his wives. They might feel exposed, caught in the informal vulnerability of their training clothes. Typically, his visits to the harem were heralded with great pomp. Trumpets would sound, and every wife would present herself in resplendent attire, their skin adorned with rare oils and perfumes sourced from the farthest corners of the world. The harem, usually an oasis of lavish preparation, had been disrupted by the urgency of his visit, and Levi could only hope his wives would forgive the oversight.

There was no turning back now. Leaving abruptly would only worsen matters, sparking speculation and inciting weeks, perhaps months, of relentless questioning: why had he come unannounced? Why had he left so suddenly? Concealing his intentions to meet Sejal was equally futile; the intricate bonds of the harem ensured that no motive went unnoticed for long.

He had to meet her. Despite the political undercurrents this might stir, the encounter was unavoidable. Yet Levi knew the delicate balance he must maintain. To make time for Sejal, he would have to temper his affections toward others, gently pushing them aside without causing offense. It was a careful dance—one that demanded understanding and patience to maintain the fragile harmony within the harem.

They line up in formation opposite of the tower after the training regime concludes. Their skin glistens with sweat in the sun. The temperature today is like a temperate day during the middle of spring. It is never hot, nor is it ever cold, every day is always beautiful.

Levi emerges from the shadows of a nearby veranda, his presence commanding attention as he moves to stand beside Priscilla, who stands elevated on a platform to address his wives. Priscilla's cheeks flush with embarrassment, the suddenness of his arrival leaving her no time to compose herself. The same sentiment ripples subtly through his other wives—smiles flickering on their faces but kept in check, their formation not yet officially dismissed.

Levi’s gaze shifts to Sejal, studying her reaction intently. Her demeanor is calm, guarded like a poker player holding a royal flush, revealing nothing. A surge of longing rises in him—unexpected and overwhelming—a sudden, unshakable desire to be near her, filling his heart with an ache he hadn’t anticipated.

Breaking the silence he nods to his wives and speaks with a voice both gentle and commanding through his mentat. “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 ring true, yet Levi knows they are not his real reason for being here. He has no intention of burdening them with the weight of his dreams. The last thing he needs is seven hundred concerned women, all eager to offer reassurances, hoping to ease whatever burden they sense he carries.

As they absorb his brief message, Levi studies their reactions. Each face reflects a unique facet of character. Some nod with solemn resolve, embodying the strength he commends. Others exchange faint smiles, as if sharing a private understanding about his sudden appearance.

But Sejal’s expression is different—unyielding and devoid of warmth. Her calm attentiveness masks something deeper, something unsettling. Behind her composed gaze lies a hardness, a locked-away story he can’t yet grasp, like a mask forged for moments precisely like this.

Reaching out with his mind, Levi directs his mentat to speak only to her.

“Step forward, Sejal.”

She hesitates. “Why? What are you planning?”

“Let’s have some fun,” Levi’s face still exudes seriousness despite the playfulness in his mind.

Without a word, Sejal steps forward, her composure unbroken as she moves to stand before the formation.

Levi’s voice shifts, shedding its earlier gentleness. Now, he speaks with the commanding authority of a leader addressing his army. “You all know we don’t train for fun. We train for survival. The coming of the lawless one means utter doom for this world. You train to survive. He will oppose me. He will try to destroy me and everything I hold dear—including you.”

He pauses, his piercing gaze sweeping over them, gauging their reactions. The faint smiles and uncertain glances vanish, replaced by stoic determination. Satisfied, he continues.

“You do not train for vanity, to sculpt glamorous bodies or chase flawless beauty. You train as warriors. Warriors who will stand against the darkness. Today, I will test one of you—something I have never done before. The time is close, and I must see that your training has been more than just a ritual.”

Prince Levi’s voice rings out like a battle cry as he leaps from the podium, landing with a thundering impact that reverberates through the courtyard. Without hesitation, he surges toward Sejal, his weapon materializing in his hand mid-stride. The blade arcs toward her in a swift, deadly swing.

Sejal reacts in an instant, her training coming alive in her every movement. She steps into his charge with calculated precision, pivoting on her heel to redirect his momentum. Gripping his arm, she uses his own strength against him, sending him hurtling over her shoulder. Levi crashes onto the ground, a grin spreads across his face.

Levi catches his breath, his voice low and raw with exhilaration. “How exhilarating. You’re absolutely stunning, woman.”

Sejal’s lips curve into a sly smile, her eyes blazing with challenge. “This is just foreplay, husband. You haven’t seen anything yet.”

Her words hit him like a spark to dry tinder, and for a fleeting moment, he’s captivated by the blush coloring her cheeks—a subtle betrayal of her own enjoyment of his sudden assault. But before he can respond, Sejal moves, her body a blur of precision and purpose.

She presses forward with a series of rapid thrusts and slashes, each motion fluid and relentless. The air hums with the force of her attacks, the glint of her weapon catching the sunlight like shards of fire. Levi struggles to match her speed, his muscles straining as he parries each strike. Their blades clash, until finally they are locked.

“Let’s see how you can do without your weapon,” his face now inches away from Sejal’s. He trips her and she lands on the soft ground her body not feeling any pain in the process. He pins her to the ground, his knees resting on her arms. Their weapons have returned to their bodies and now they wrestle both trying to gain the upper hand. She locks her legs around Levi’s waste, and pulls him off of her. She now sits on top of him looking down into his eyes the accomplishment of overpowering a man filling her with joy. In that brief moment of looking into her unfiltered expression Levi can see pain and anger; she covers it up.

“Do you yield? I’m not letting you up,” Sejal’s chest heaves with exertion sweat dripping from her brow onto Levi’s face.

“Okay, I yield,” Levi concedes having obtained when he desires.

Levi now speaks through his mentat into Sejal’s mind.

“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. Wrestling you has stirred something within me.”

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

They both stand up and compose themselves brushing the grass and dirt from their bodies.

Prince Levi directs everyone else to be dismissed, and they quietly disperse to attend to the day’s duties. He speaks with and greets as many of his wives as possible. Being a husband to nearly a thousand women was no small task.

Eventually, Levi makes his way to Sejal’s quarters. Her door isn’t locked, so he enters. Each of his 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 they upheld: to live without promoting death whenever possible. Only the Levites consume the animals sacrificed in the temple; for everyone else, avoiding the suffering of any living creature had become their quiet commitment.

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

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

“Please join me my lord.”

Prince Levi happily obliges.

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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 spending the entire morning fighting and making love to Sejal 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.

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 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.

….

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

A sleek robotic attendant glides toward him, balancing a tray of delicate hors d’oeuvres. Its mechanical voice humming, “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 devour the distance, the tight bun of her crimson red hair bouncing slightly with each step. She is a vision of strength and elegance, the slit of her bright red dress revealing muscular legs that move with purpose, the fabric clinging to her powerful curves.

Priscilla was the daughter of one of the most influential families in Jerusalem, a lineage steeped in power and prestige. It was a great honor for her family when she became the wife of the most powerful man in the world. Rising through the ranks of the prince’s wives, she had earned her place as one of his most trusted confidants.

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

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 flickers 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 and Priscilla break into a sprint, his heart pounding as Deborah's scream echoes through the palace gardens. Priscilla follows close behind, her long strides easily keeping pace. As they near the towering Tabor Oak, the scene before them brings 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, growling low and guttural, his mane streaked with blood. His golden eyes, once filled with calm, now blaze with primal fury. The air seems to crackle with tension, the serene garden transforms into a place of horror.

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

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

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

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

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

Levi’s mind races. 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 breaks free from her paralysis and stumbles toward him. The movement catches Igor’s attention, and with a deafening roar, the lion lunges.

Priscilla grabs Deborah shielding her with her body while Levi acts on instinct. He steps in front of Priscilla, his blade meets Igor’s claws mid-air, the impact reverberating through his arm. The lion recoils, momentarily stunned.

“Get her out of here!” Levi barks to Priscilla, who doesn’t hesitate. She scoops Deborah into her arms and begins to retreat, her long strides carrying her toward the palace.

Levi squares 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 holds his ground as Igor circles him. The beast’s golden mane bristles with tension, and his amber eyes glow with primal rage. The muscles underneath his fur twitch with aggravation, his back legs ready to thrust himself forward with one killing swipe ending Prince Levi’s life.

Levi’s hand twitches as he holds 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 tense muscles leave no doubt: this will end in blood.

“Igor,” Levi says 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 hesitates hearing the gentleness in Prince Levi’s voice. The fire in his eyes flicker, and Levi thinks he saw a glimmer of recognition. But the corruption within the lion roars back to life, drowning any trace of the creature he once knew.

With a deafening roar, Igor lunges. Levi sidesteps, his blade flashing to deflect a swipe of razor-sharp claws. Sparks fly 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 staggers, his breath hitching from the sharp pain. But there was no time to falter. Gritting his teeth, he raises his blade, pouring every ounce of his energy into it. The weapon glowed red-hot, the heat radiating from his very soul, fueled by his resolve.

“Forgive me, Igor,” Levi whispers, his voice heavy with sorrow.

Igor charges, a blur of feral strength, his claws poised for a fatal strike. Levi swings his blade with precision born of desperation. The strike connects, cleaving through the corruption that had bound Igor’s heart.

The lion roared in agony, his mighty frame collapsing to the ground. The fury fades from Igor’s eyes, replaced by a soft golden hue—gentle, familiar. For a fleeting moment, Levi sees the old Igor: the companion, the guardian, the friend.

Igor lets out a soft rumble, almost a purr, before his eyes close for the final time. Levi drops to his knees, tears streaming down his face. The garden falls silent, save for the gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze.

“Sin has reached even here,” Levi murmurs, his voice breaking. “And I was blind to it.”

The blade in his hand dissolves, retreating back into his body, its heat now a fading memory. Levi knew this wasn’t just about Igor. This fight was a warning—a harbinger of what was to come.

Blood seeps from the deep gash in his shoulder, soaking his tunic. Weakness spreads through his limbs like poison. He tries to stand, but his strength fails him. Was this the end? Could this be the moment his life was meant to close, despite all the promises?

His thoughts drift to the prophecy spoken so long ago, back in that dim mental institution after a demon nearly tore his arm from his socket:

*"She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne."*

Levi clings to this prophecy, believing it with every fiber of his being. For centuries, Christians had called it the Rapture—the snatching away of believers before the coming of Yeshua. He wasn’t alone in this hope; the first part of the prophecy had already come to pass. But now he awaits the second.

Kneeling there, blood pooling beneath him, Levi prays silently. He wasn’t ready to give up—not yet. The prophecy wasn’t finished, and he clung to his faith that the Lord’s word was true. But how much longer could he hold on?

The world began to swirl around him, the edges of his vision darkening. Weakness overtook him, and he felt himself slipping, teetering on the edge of unconsciousness. Just as the darkness threatened to claim him, she appeared—like an angel sent to deliver him.

Priscilla.

Her strong, yet unmistakably feminine arms wrapped around him, lifting him with surprising ease. The warmth of her presence radiated strength, steadying his faltering spirit. Around them, others rushed in, working swiftly to tend to his wounds.

Tears streamed down her face as she cradled him close. “You’re not leaving us yet, my love,” Priscilla said firmly, her voice trembling with a mix of determination and panic.

Her words pierced through the haze of his pain, grounding him. As she carried him in her arms, Levi’s heart swelled with gratitude. Her unwavering strength was more than just a comfort—it was a testament to the unbreakable bond they shared. For the first time in what felt like ages, a faint flicker of hope stirred within him.

In a delirium caused by loss of blood, he entered a dream like state that reminds him of their wedding night, when she had jokingly swept him off his feet and carried him across the threshold of the most opulent chamber in the royal harem.

The chamber of the royal harem was filled with craftsmanship and sacred artistry. Golden sunlight poured through tall, intricately carved windows, illuminating marble floors inlaid with gems that shimmered like stars. The walls were adorned with vivid murals depicting scenes from the Torah—Moses parting the Red Sea, David standing triumphant over Goliath, and the fiery chariot of Elijah ascending to the heavens. A grand bed draped in silks and adorned with rich embroidery stood at the center, its posts carved with motifs of olive branches and cherubim. A fountain at the far end, surrounded by rose petals, mirrored the serene flow of the Jordan River, while the faint scent of frankincense and myrrh lingered in the air, creating an atmosphere of sacred splendor.

He could still see the shy hesitation in her eyes as she began to undress, her back turned to him, self-conscious about her physique. She worried that her strength, her broad shoulders, and her powerful frame might overshadow her femininity. But to Levi, she was a vision—a woman whose beauty rivaled that of a Valkyrie, embodying both fierce grace and unyielding power. In her, he saw not just a warrior, but a partner whose strength complemented his own in every way.

Levi approached her from behind and kissed her shoulder and quoted one of his favourite verses to her:

“I praise him because you are fearfully and wonderfully made, his works are wonderful, I know that full well. You have nothing to be ashamed of, now come to bed.” She turned around and leaned down to kiss him.”

Levi swept her up into his arms, a feat that at any other time might have left him nursing a herniated disc. Priscilla let out a shout of ecstatic laughter, while he, in stark contrast, grunted and wobbled, his legs trembling under the effort. Staggering toward the bed, he nearly dropped her more than once, each misstep drawing a delighted giggle from her and a strained groan from him. By the time they reached the bed, he was teetering like a laborer about to collapse under the weight of a quarry stone. Yet, with a final surge of determination, he steadied himself and gently laid her onto the bed, his tenderness eclipsing the comedic struggle that had brought them there.

Soon after, he returns to her arms, his consciousness flickering like a flame fighting the wind. His spirit, undeterred by the weakness of his flesh, summons its last reserves of strength deciding to carry her once more, this time with his words. “Take heart, my sweet Priscilla,” he murmurs, his voice soft yet firm. “This is not the end.” His heavy eyelids finally close as nano-bots and blood transfusion bags work tirelessly to preserve the life slipping from him.

# Chapter 4: Justice

I’ve often heard it said: *If God allowed even one unrepentant sinner into heaven, heaven would turn into hell.* As I slowly open my eyes, the truth of that statement has never been clearer.

Deborah clings to Yaffa’s dress, trembling as if to shut out the world. Gavriel paces in agitation, his shoulders sagging under a weight I can’t yet grasp. Priscilla sits beside Dipti, her bloodshot eyes a testament to relentless weeping. Yet Dipti remains composed—a steady center amidst the storm, her hand resting on Priscilla’s in quiet reassurance.

The room comes into focus. The soft glow of nanotech walls adjusts as I stir, tracking my vitals. The medical pod beside me hums with holographic updates on Uriel’s condition. Even the robots, silent and precise, seem to mirror the tension in the room.

Igor’s gentle face flashes before me, frozen in the moment of his final breath. My chest tightens, and I force the image away, but the weight lingers, pressing down on my heart. A tear escapes my eye. I can’t bring myself to tell Deborah about Igor—or maybe she already knows. Either way, the world I know is spiraling into chaos, hellbound on a freight train.

Dipti’s gaze meets mine, searching. There’s an unspoken understanding between us. I look away and turn to my left, where Uriel lies pale and motionless.

A blood transfusion tube runs from his arm. His eyes snap open, wide with shock, and his bandaged right arm twitches. I don’t need to ask what happened—I already know.

“Amiel,” I mumble under my breath.

Gavriel sees that I’m awake. He stands to my left, his footsteps hesitant. Our eyes meet, and he doesn’t have to say anything. Dipti moves to my side and grabs my hand.

“Your sons and daughters are waiting outside,” she says gently, patting my hand.

“I know. I can see them.” I glance toward the door, their anxious faces etched in my mind. “They’re distraught.” I tell them to wait. I don’t want them to see me like this. I glance at my wound, covered in tight bandages. The nanobots have done an incredible job, but I feel my condition would be disheartening for those who rely on me most. If they see me like this, I fear they might panic—or lose hope.

“It’s begun, Dipti,” I say, squeezing her hand. “The rebellion—it’s begun.”

I glance at Uriel, my mentat accessing his thoughts. Images flicker—Amiel as a boy, the two of them training under the sun, laughter echoing through the yard. Those moments once felt unbreakable, yet now they’re ghosts, eclipsed by Amiel’s relentless hunger for power. Uriel’s heart tightens; the cracks were always there, he realizes now. The quiet resentments, the ambition lurking behind Amiel’s smiles—he had been blind to it all. A fairytale, shattered in the face of this betrayal.

I know what I must do. Righteous anger fills my heart. I will punish Amiel to the fullest extent of the law, but first I must gather all the evidence against him and put him on trial for the world to witness. They must see that my judgment is not reserved for outsiders alone but extends to my own blood. Justice does not waver before the bonds of family. No one escapes the consequences of sin—not even those closest to me.

Ever since my dreams began, I knew I needed to test Amiel. My agents, now rebranded as SpecNet Operatives, carried out my will in silence. Former Mossad legends, they infiltrated every mentat connection and channel.

I designed a test for Amiel—a whisper of temptation crafted to reveal his true nature. The operative planted a ping in his network, hinting at an opportunity to buy a mentat faker—a rare and illegal device capable of mimicking mentat signals of any individual of choice. A tool that could rewrite the truth itself and be used to access places and do things as someone else.

The opportunity was irresistible. Amiel moved quickly, unaware that every step of his journey was being tracked. He met the operative in a hidden enclave outside the city—a haven for rebels and others who dream of dismantling my authority. There, under the cover of shadows, he bought the faker.

The price? An impossible sum—one million shekels. Enough to purchase a home along the Dead Sea's shores. Where could he have found such wealth? Certainly not from the modest allowance I grant him. Someone else must be involved.

I suspect he’s using mentat blockers. It’s the only explanation for how he’s managed to evade my mental grasp. Without access to his thoughts, I couldn’t intervene before his attack on Uriel. Perhaps that was his plan all along: to operate beyond my reach, shielded by cunning and chemicals.

Still, I allowed him to proceed. I needed to see the depths of his ambition. The mentat faker was just the first step, but his actions suggest a web of alliances and motives far larger than I anticipated. Perhaps his mother gave him this sum? Could she be part of this conspiracy? No, her thoughts remain open to me. I would have seen it.

Amiel is more dangerous than I imagined—a clever and conniving boy. But I will uncover the truth. I’ll test his blood for traces of mentat blockers. If he’s tampered with his very physiology to outwit me, that will confirm how far he’s willing to go.

Amiel must have used the mentat faker during his sparring sessions with Gavriel, bringing himself close enough to sync with Gavriel’s mentat signals. But this is still conjecture. The faker requires close proximity for five to ten minutes to complete the syncing process—a difficult task during a dynamic sparring match.

Tracking data revealed the faker was in Gavriel’s quarters for over an hour before being discarded in a waste container nearby. What was it doing there? Another mystery. Late at night, Amiel retrieved the device from the container. Using Gavriel’s mentat signals, he then accessed the armory in the dead of night.

How Amiel bypassed the heavy security remains unclear. I suspect he used a cloaking device, slipping past the guards during a moment of distraction or rest. The gate logs confirm it opened without any visible presence—a clear indication of cloaking technology at work.

Once inside the armory, he secured a dart shocker, a vital weapon in our warriors’ arsenal. The shocker allows users to fire deadly projectiles while maintaining agility and proficiency with their bio-weapons. Amiel used it on Uriel, striking him with a poisoned dart. The toxin is highly lethal; had Gavriel not intervened, Uriel would have perished—either from the poison or Amiel’s blade.

I could have stopped the fight the moment Uriel was poisoned, but I didn’t. I needed to know if Amiel truly had the will to kill his brother in the most gruesome way possible.

I glanced at Gavriel. He was stroking his beard—a habit he’d held for as long as I could remember. Despite the years, he still resembled the young man I had fought beside during the Battle of Jerusalem. His thoughts flowed into my mind, unguarded. I saw him, cloaked and hidden, watching Amiel and Uriel fight. He had waited until the last possible moment to intervene. Relief coursed through him, but so did a palpable shock as he looked at me in my current state.

Our eyes meet. “I can’t believe it,” he said, his voice trembling. “Seeing you like this—it’s too much for me.” His gaze darted to the wound on my shoulder, then to Deborah, who stirred at the sound of his voice.

She lifted her tear-streaked face from her mother’s lap, her red, swollen eyes locking onto Gavriel before she rushed to my side. Her small hands clutched at me as she buried her face in my chest, her sobs shaking her fragile frame.

I winced sharply as her weight pressed against the wound from Igor. Though the nanobots had expertly sealed the surface with regenerated skin cells from my body, the internal damage was still raw. Pain flared with each movement, a relentless reminder of how close I had come to death. Her tears soaked through my shirt, warm and persistent, as though trying to cleanse the horrors she had witnessed.

The physical pain was nothing compared to the ache in my soul. Deborah's innocence—the precious light I had fought so hard to protect—was gone. The old world, with all its cruelty and sin, had unveiled itself to her in ways I had tried so desperately to shield her from.

I had always known I couldn’t keep her safe forever. But knowing didn’t make it any easier. I held her trembling body, feeling the weight of my failure press down on me. I had hoped, foolishly, that I could delay this moment, that I could keep her untouched by the scars of this broken world for just a little longer. But now, no matter how tightly I held her, I couldn’t undo what had been done.

Her voice cracked as she choked out, “Why, Daddy? Why did Igor have to go? He won’t wake up. You… you killed him, didn’t you?”

Her words cut deeper than any blade. I opened my mouth to explain, to tell her the truth: *It was either him or me.* But the words stuck in my throat. Would it even matter? Could anything I said soothe the waves of pain coursing through her body and heart?

Instead, I let her see the memories, her own mentat showing her what had happened—how I had tried to stop Igor, how I fought to keep him alive. But we had never fully domesticated him before bringing him here. In the end, he reverted to his old nature, something I had never anticipated, never planned for.

“I tried,” I whispered, the words breaking as they left me. “I tried so hard, Deborah. I’m so sorry. I didn’t want this to happen.”

Her sobs quieted, but the weight of her grief, and mine, hung heavy in the air. There was no undoing the damage, no way to turn back time. All that remained was the fragile hope that, one day, we might find a way to heal.

In the midst of my sorrow, my mind wandered to the temple. I longed to rise from this bed, to leave these burdens behind, and to sit in His presence. There were so many questions, so many things I needed to share with Him—things I couldn’t make sense of alone. The weight of recent events felt insurmountable, one pressing matter piling upon another, leaving me no time to breathe, let alone find clarity.

My thoughts drift from the temple to the river and its fruit. The image of its glistening waters, flowing from the holy sanctuary into the Dead Sea, brought a flicker of hope. Soon, I would draw strength from its life-giving leaves and fruit. They would restore what the nanobots couldn’t reach, knitting together the unseen wounds in my body and soul. I clung to the promise of renewal, to the belief that I would be whole again.

But a shadow of doubt crept into my thoughts, a gnawing worry I couldn’t shake. What if this *is* the rebellion? What if these strange events are the first signs of the upheaval we’ve long feared? And if it truly is, what will become of the river and its fruit?

A chill ran through me as the possibility took root. If the rebellion overtakes us, will the river dry up? Will the fruit that grants us restoration vanish? Without them, their miraculous effects would cease, and the inevitable decay of the world would reclaim me. I would begin to feel the aches and frailty of my once-ailing body again.

The thought was unbearable. I had come so far, fought so hard, only to face the prospect of losing it all—the strength I had regained, the life I had rebuilt. I closed my eyes, my grip tightening around Deborah as if holding her could anchor me against the storm in my mind. I know the end has to come, but that doesn’t comfort me. I’ve been happy with the life that I’ve lived till now. Memories of my old life return to me. My aching knees, the sleepless nights, the quarrels, the arguments with my enemies, prison, my withering eyes as they poured over the Scriptures searching for answers as to the reasons behind the purpose of my difficult trials, the rejection, my heart sick from hopes deferred and on, on…. The burning anger, the righteous indignation, I just want to jump out of my body.

I closed my eyes and whispered a prayer, my voice breaking under the weight of it: “Let the river flow. Let the fruit remain. Not just for me, but for all of us. Please… let this not be the end.

Uriel’s voice breaks through my ponderings. He’s in my mind.

“Father, I’m filled with something I’ve never experienced before. It’s something that burns within me. I don’t know how to explain it. My jaw clenches every time I think of a Amiel. My stomach burns, my hands clench, my palms become sweaty. I’m filled with us overpowering rage. I want to find Amiel and…and….”

I see an image of Uriel’s burning sword flash through the darkness and Amiel’s head severing from his muscular yet developing body. I see Uriel over his body gloating.

“I want justice. I want to avenge the wrong done to me by Amiel. I will kill him father I swear. The Lord is my witness, I….” I interrupt Amiel, I understand his anger. I’ve been there a thousand times, that dark place where only the hand of the Almighty can pull me out.

“Vengeance is mine, I will repayeth says the lord,” I quote to him. “You give Amiel to me. I will do your vengeance. He will be punished in front of all of Israel.”

I sense tears flowing down his eyes and intense pain in his body caused by the deep cut in his arm and the poison coursing through his body having been blocked by the antidote.

# Chapter 5: The Prince of Darkness

”*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)