

# **The Revelation of Lucifer the Divine**

**Quentin Mark Pierson**



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Written by the author during a time when he was hearing strange voices and suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, *The Revelation of Lucifer the Divine* is an enigmatic allegory that gives chilling solutions to mysteries such as the names of the Three Beasts of the Apocalypse and the principle of Creation. Whether *The Revelation of Lucifer the Divine* is inspired madness, divine revelation, or false prophecy is a question without an answer.

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I Summer



# Chapter 1

The colors appealed to him.

From the vastness of the void where all was either the pure radiance of burning white suns or the hollowness of cold, black space, this small gem of a world swathed in wispy clouds drew him nearer. The blues of oceans churning, the greens of fertile life stretching their arms toward the light, the browns of lands made of earth and clay—the colors had been painted on the spherical canvas with such beauty and artistry, surely this was the work of his Father.

As he gazed afar from the periphery of the solar system, he saw that the world was in constant motion. It flickered with life and death like the transient shimmering of a hummingbird's wings—scintillating in its beauty.

The Earth.

Though colored like a blue-green emerald, it had not its hardness. It was far more fragile than any gem. Like a delicate bubble, it floated and spun daintily in the ether. The slightest wind could simply make it all cease to exist.

Lucifer wondered if he should dare touch it, to see if he could hold

the tiny bauble on his fingertips without bursting its temporal existence. But his reverie was interrupted by a spear of light interceding between him and the multicolored orb. The light reflected and magnified upon itself, growing ever more radiant until it obscured the sun, taking on substance and form, becoming an angel.

She stood tall and slender with eyes of wisdom, clear and bright. Eyes bright like the Morningstar. Eyes bright like Lucifer's.

He greeted her with a smile. "Hello, my sister."

She angrily responded, "Do not mock me, Lucifer! I know of your plans, and they are not right, eldest brother! The path you seek is an abomination to God!"

"I have done nothing. Nothing at all...yet." Lucifer's smile became more enigmatic.

His sister knew that illusion too well. There was neither joy nor laughter behind that smile. No sadness. No bitterness. It was just the interplay of shadow and light—both co-existing—curled at the corners of his lips.

"I see through you. There is no excuse for your actions. You cannot blame our Father for it. It is by your own willful pride that you do this. Surely you do not dare violate the wishes of our Father? Answer me, Lucifer!"

Lucifer said nothing and brushed past her toward the planet.

"No!" The angel grabbed at the sleeve of his robe. "Please, Lucifer, don't do this! Subdue your pride. Stop this now. This is evil. There is no other word for it. This is evil."

"I know, dear sister. If I weren't, then I wouldn't be." Lucifer pulled away from her.

"Please, Lucifer." His sister's harmonious voice trembled with discord. "Stop this now. Before it's too late. There is still time."

"Time?" Lucifer sighed and said with resignation, "I have disabused myself of all notions of time. To me, time has become nothing but an anachronism. Let us leave it at that."

She tried to move nearer to him, but a flash of radiance so brilliant forced her to avert her eyes. When she looked back to where her brother had been, she found only darkness.



# Chapter 2

The morning sun shone upon the verdant fields of the Earth. It had rained the night before and the grass was sprinkled with seeds of glistening dew. The world was impregnated with life. Every breath that was inhaled and exhaled carried within it sparkling microbes of life. The air vibrated with the twitter of birds calling in the swaying branches and with the rush and rustle of their wings fluttering across the sky.

Sounds. Movements. Flashes of images. So unlike the sterility of deepest space, where there was neither sound nor whisper, neither song nor laughter, in the barren womb that was the Great Void.

Lucifer smiled.

He knelt to the ground and touched the soil with his fingers. The ground beneath him was soaked with life that slept and crawled under the fertile earth. Beetles and bugs, worms and moles tunneled and burrowed below. Myriad upon myriad of life all around him.

Young grasses sprouted before him, their soft blades yearning to taste the sun's warmth and gain nourishment. But their blades turned toward him, drawn by his cold radiance.

Lucifer rose up from the ground.

He stared into the distance at the mist-covered hills, his eyes piercing through the thin veils of time and space. He saw two men in shining silver armor under a huge tree with vast outstretched branches. One sat upon a pure white horse. He was tall and fair with a proud and steady gaze that did not waver. His name was Lucifer. The other was somewhat small and rather sickly looking, squinting through his eyes and speaking constantly in a loud and obsequious manner. He had trouble trying to mount his horse, slipping off the saddle. His name was Moloch.

Lucifer was enraptured by the scene and its senses of sights and sounds. He nodded to himself.

Yes, it was good.

“Motherfucker!” Moloch wiped the horse manure from his feet that he had slipped on. “Goddamn horseshit. Why do you put up with these mortal horses? They stink to high heaven!”

Lucifer whispered, “Watch your mouth.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Moloch shut up and managed to clamber on top of his horse. Moloch sat and gasped for air for a few minutes. Lucifer was strangely silent which unnerved Moloch. He glanced at Lucifer from the corner of his eye. Lucifer’s mind seemed to be elsewhere again. He seemed to be constantly preoccupied with strange thoughts recently. But Moloch had no clue as to what he might be thinking about. All Moloch knew was that he himself was feeling rather bored. All kinds of useless thoughts flitted in and out of his unsettled and fretful mind, rushing about in circles and then dying out like dry leaves whirling in the wind. Then the wind would stir and his thoughts would go rushing around again.

Fidgeting in his saddle, Moloch asked, “Lord Lucifer, aren’t you afraid? He knows all...”

Lucifer shrugged and said sarcastically, “What’s He going to do? Kick us out of Heaven?” A sly smile slowly slid across his lips.

Moloch wasn’t sure. He wasn’t as smart as Lucifer. If anyone would know, it would be Lucifer. Moloch whined nervously, “Well, He’s not going to, right? Otherwise you wouldn’t be doing this, Lord Lucifer? I

mean, you don't intentionally want us to get kicked out of Heaven, do you? Of course, you don't. Right?"

Lucifer answered with a cryptic laugh that Moloch could not decipher.

Moloch started to perspire, filled with apprehension. "You know, Lord Lucifer, we shouldn't be doing this."

"We, Moloch?"

Moloch cringed. "Sorry, I mean, me. No, I mean, not me, but the others—the others shouldn't be doing this."

"Doing what?"

"Y-you know," Moloch stuttered. "Coming down on Earth and fucking the women and making giant, six-fingered, mutant babies. That sort of thing. I don't think the Big Guy would like that. Semyaza, that horny son of a bitch, is the one that's been mainly responsible for bringing angels down to Earth to screw women. I hear that damn Semyaza's having another orgy in his own honor again."

"And you have nothing to do with that Moloch?"

"Oh, never, never!" Moloch avowed most earnestly. "Never!"

"No sins of the flesh?"

"Oh, absolutely not! My soul is pure!"

"Not tainted by lust?"

"God strike me down if I lie!"

Lucifer hissed, "Oh, really Moloch? I saw you fondling that six-year-old girl when you thought no one was looking."

Moloch's whimpering worries changed to absolute horror. Lucifer couldn't keep himself from laughing seeing his fellow angel's pitiful expression. Moloch started to make up excuses. "I was caressing her. Honestly, I was. I wasn't doing anything evil to her. I was just caressing her tenderly, that's all! I swear upon my soul! Is that so wrong? I love children! I mean—I mean in a fatherly, angelic kind of way!"

Lucifer started to ride away. "What's the point of lying, Moloch? He knows all. He sees all."

Moloch hurried his horse after him. "But—but—aw, fuck it! How do you know? Sometimes He doesn't catch you. He doesn't seem to

punish everyone. Maybe He doesn't see everything, you know? Right?"

Lucifer laughed again which frightened Moloch even more.

"He's not going to punish me is He? Is He? Oh no, I don't know what I would do. Oh, God, I'm sorry. Really I am. Really. Forgive me, please." The perspiration began to drip heavily from Moloch's forehead. He then lost control. "Oh, God! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Please! Please! Please! Forgive me! Forgive me!"

Lucifer was fed up with Moloch's irritating whining. "Shut up, Moloch!"

"Sorry. Sorry. I'll shut up. I'm sorry. I don't know why I keep on talking. I just go on and on and on sometimes. Really I don't know why."

Lucifer added, "Anyway, He knows if you're being sincere or not."

"Shit! Then what's the point of apologizing in the first place?"

# Chapter 3

The two rode together for awhile in silence along a narrow valley and came upon a crowd of cackling soldiers far away from them in a small clearing. Moloch stopped to listen.

“Hmm. What’s going on over there, Lord Lucifer?”

Lucifer didn’t answer as he watched them from a distance.

The soldiers had encircled a young girl and kept shoving her back into the center. She tried desperately to break through and escape, but couldn’t and collapsed to her knees.

“Please,” she cried, “don’t hurt me. Please, don’t hurt me.”

The pack growled and laughed like hyenas, closing near her.

A soldier yelled, “Get up, bitch, or one of us will have to come and get you!”

Another screamed, “Or maybe all of us at once!”

The soldiers howled in laughter.

The girl pleaded, “Please! Let me go! Let me go! I just want to go home!”

One of the soldiers walked over and grabbed her.

She screamed and resisted, but he pushed her down to the ground

and forced himself on top of her, shredding her white blouse and exposing her chest. She struggled against him, and broke free for a second, but he grabbed her by the waist and threw her back down into the mud, his dirty calloused hands staining and soiling her bare breasts as he groped her body. He reached down and ripped off her skirt.

Her eyes widened with terror. “Somebody help me! God please help me!”

Her wails echoed throughout the valley and then faded away.

Moloch snickered, “That line always cracks me up.”

The girl stopped screaming when the man penetrated her. All was silent except for the sounds of grunting and nervous laughter, the soldiers taking their turns with her.

Lucifer looked up at the empty sky.

The clouds still drifted by slowly. The sun shone warmly. The birds still flew from tree to tree singing and chirping in sweetest tones.

Moloch stifled a yawn. “Say, this is getting rather boring, I hear they’re having an all-night bacchanal over at Urg the Sumerian’s place. Azazel and a handful of Nephilim are planning on crashing their party. That swine Azazel always hogs all the women, but if we get there first maybe we could, uh, uh...”

Moloch saw the dark look in Lucifer’s eyes and immediately shut up.

Lucifer’s eyes grew crimson with anger, his face transformed into a demonic visage. He spurred his horse and galloped toward the soldiers. They turned to look at the approaching rider and squealed like pigs, their bodies covered in dirt and filth, their faces paralyzed with fear. With a roar Lucifer breathed a storm of fire upon the circle of men. All of them were burnt into screaming statues of charred ash. Lucifer scowled angrily and the ash crumbled into formless heaps of nothingness. Only the terrified girl remained in the circle of smoke and cinders, lying upon the ground—her clothes torn, her young body naked and violated, but unharmed by the flames.

Lucifer pulled back upon the reins of his horse and stopped before her. He seemed to hesitate for an instant. Moloch rode up to her and dismounted from his horse. The girl covered up her nakedness and

looked away, scared and trembling. Moloch knelt next to her. In sweetest tones he whispered, “What’s your name, my child?”

She couldn’t answer him, too afraid and in shock, unsure of what had just happened.

“She’s too old for your tastes, Moloch,” said Lucifer.

“That’s a lie! I have no taste for children!” Moloch tried to avert his gaze, but he couldn’t help himself as it remained transfixed between the young girl’s thighs. Moloch wiped away the saliva dripping from his wide mouth with the sleeve of his tunic. “Hmm, how old are you anyway, my dear little one?”

“Sixteen,” Lucifer said. “And her name is Astarte. I named her Astarte.”

The girl was startled at hearing her name and turned to look upwards at the shining angel that sat before her upon his mighty steed. His eyes were soft and gentle, yet pierced deep into the inner depths of her soul. He had a kind smile that quickly ran away from his lips as if too shy or afraid to reveal itself to her.

He was the one. He was the one that had answered her cries for help.

Lucifer dismounted and reached out toward her with a gloved hand.

Upon his touch, all of her pain and hurt miraculously disappeared. Body and soul, she was made pure again. Cleansed of all sins and sufferings, her virginity restored.

Lucifer gave her his cloak to wear. “Come with me, Astarte.”

Astarte meekly followed.

Moloch angrily muttered under his breath, “That figures. He always snags the good looking ones, and I get stuck with the leftovers.”

# Chapter 4

Astarte was carried in Lucifer's arms as they rode for miles in silence. The two had parted company with Moloch long before—Moloch having wandered off to satiate his carnal needs at Urg's. Astarte felt safe and warm in the embrace of the angel. He was not only the mightiest, but also the fairest of all the angels. His handsome features were chiseled by the perfect hand of God himself.

They finally stopped at a large encampment where a vast array of tents and canopies had been pitched into the earth.

Lucifer helped Astarte off the huge horse. Astarte could only gaze in wonderment. The place had the appearance of a festival, with multi-colored pavilions made of diaphanous fabrics flying fabulous pennants in the breeze, but in truth, it was a military encampment. Angels dressed in shining silver armor with swords at their sides marched from one tent to the other. Off in the distance, a jousting tournament was being held in a large open field between angels mounted on neighing chargers. They hurtled into each other with their fiery lances like shooting stars, colliding with such force that they flashed like lightning and crashed like thunderbolts. Choirs of seraphim and cherubim sang



and cheered with heavenly voices at the grand spectacle, praising their glory.

Quietly, Lucifer led the starry-eyed girl by the hand deeper. Several grim-faced, angelic soldiers saluted them as they passed by. Lucifer neither smiled nor said a word as he took her into the center of the camp where his quarters lay. Astarte was too awestruck to notice Lucifer's strange temperament. Her eyes were fixed upon the lofty pavilion before them woven from smoothest silk. It flew six pennants that snapped in the wind atop long, twisting spires. Each burning red pennant was emblazoned with a great winged serpent—his symbol of power—the dragon. The beast was coiled into a circle, swallowing its own tail.

Lucifer flicked his hand a little and as if by magic, folds of gossamer were swept aside revealing an entrance. Astarte stepped inside and was engulfed by its spacious interior decorated with lavish splendor.

At the entrance, four magnificent, enchanted tapestries illustrated with exotic scenery and events hung from the framework. She touched the fabrics that shimmered with living fauna and flowing streams. The smell of smoke, sulfur, and ash grew stronger when she looked upon a work showing great cities burning. A chill set deep within her bones while standing next to a wall-hanging depicting an immense fortress in a sea of ice. She marveled at the final tapestry embroidered with silver and gold, which flashed with the glint of drawn swords and polished armor, and blared with the sounds of trumpets and armies marching.

Past the tapestries the main chamber opened out into a great circle. Dominating this center was an orb of white light that floated high above them. Around it three lesser spheres orbited and their sizes were exactly a third of the central one, and their colors were variegated. And around each of the three lesser spheres were three small satellites—also only a third in size—that spun rapidly about their circumferences. And around those satellites were tiny lights exactly a third in size. This cosmic pattern seemed to be repeated ad infinitum until they were smaller than mere pinpricks of lights, unable to be discerned with the naked eye.

Underneath this celestial solar system were rather mundane

furnishings and sundry items...mere trinkets made of purest gold and silver, adorned with the brightest diamonds and emeralds, rubies and sapphires. In a haphazard pile to the side lay a hoard of jewelry and ornaments bedecked with every conceivable gem of every color. Next to that pile were scattered the finest garments and textiles, ivories and pearls.

Any luxury that Astarte could imagine was there before her. She tried to envisage what Heaven must be like. Surely it was far greater than this in opulence and magnificence! Perhaps, Lucifer could tell her about Heaven. Perhaps, he could show even her! She turned toward Lucifer with childlike wonderment in her eyes. Lucifer stared back with only darkness in his.

Astarte's smile vanished.

"Take off your clothes," Lucifer commanded. "They're unclean."

Astarte stepped back from him shaking her head.

"I said take off your clothes. Your body is also filthy. You must bathe."

She asked fearfully, "Where...where should I change?"

"Here," Lucifer said in the same harsh voice.

"In front of you?"

"Yes."

"No." Astarte started to sob.

Lucifer walked up to her and touched her face with his hand. He tried to kiss her, but she turned away from him. With a low growl, Lucifer struck her across the cheek.

She was too shocked to even scream as he grabbed her by the wrists and pushed her down to her knees before him.

"Do as I tell you," he hissed.

Astarte closed her eyes and did as she was told.

# Chapter 5

Astarte cried out in pain, pleading to Lucifer to stop, but he wouldn't. He sodomized her from behind until the blood dripped down both of their legs. Only then did he desist, leaving Astarte lying on the ground whimpering from the hurt.

Lucifer reached for a whip. "You must hate me, Astarte."

Astarte lay there weeping.

"I said, hate me!" Lucifer screamed, as he raised the whip and struck her across the buttocks.

Astarte screamed.

He cracked the whip across her again.

Lucifer screamed, "You despise me, don't you!"

He walked in front of her and whipped her across the face.

"Hate me!" Lucifer howled.

Astarte screamed, "I hate you! I hate you, you fucking son of a bitch! God curse your fucking soul forever! I hope you burn and rot!"

Lucifer sighed deeply, almost as if hurt by her words, and released the whip. But instead of dropping to the ground, the whip floated in mid-air in front of him. Suddenly, the whip struck. Astarte shut her eyes

and cringed but felt no pain. She opened her eyes and instead saw a bloody welt across Lucifer's bare chest.

The phantom whip slowly coiled itself up like a serpent getting ready to strike. The whip circled and then struck again, biting into the skin on Lucifer's back. Again the whip lunged, spitting out another sharp crack like a curse. Then it rebuked him again, leaving a bloody scar across his forehead. And again. And again. Increasing in force and rapidity. The whip struck him with such ferocity that the air around him shimmered with the blurred and flickering ghosts of the whip striking him over and over and over. A hundred times. A thousand times. Ten times ten thousand times. The cracks of the flashing whip became one long sound as Lucifer screamed in agony, blood flowing from his body, flowing down his arms, flowing down his legs, spreading at his feet.

Astarte watched in terror as the thick pool of blood slowly reached out toward her. The whip snapped, flicking his blood, splattering the entire tent, coating everything with red droplets until the silken fabrics sagged thick and heavy, until all the gold and silver shone with a crimson, liquid luster.

Every inch of Lucifer's skin was flayed to shreds—tattered red ribbons of flesh hung from his face and body exposing the veins, bone, and muscle underneath. His hair had turned into a dark, soaked tangle. The pain was beyond human experience. No man or woman would have survived long enough to endure it.

Finally the whipping stopped and Astarte looked at Lucifer transfigured. His entire body glistened with shining red. His flesh was stripped away almost to the bone and his body looked as if it had been turned inside out. Veins and arteries, muscle and sinews, pulsed and twitched in torment.

He was truly demonic.

Lucifer breathed heavily. His once mellifluous voice was now harsh and rasping as he swallowed the thick blood gurgling down his throat and into his lungs.

“My penance... for what is done.”

Every utterance was agony.

Every syllable was pain.

*THE REVELATION OF LUCIFER THE DIVINE*

“Look at me...this is what...I really am....are you afraid?”

Astarte lied and said with a guarded whisper, “No.”

The whip cracked in the air, startling Astarte. She quickly crawled away from him in fear.

Lucifer smiled weakly.

# Chapter 6

Like sleep and nightmare, Astarte didn't remember how or when she had fallen asleep, or if all that had happened was even real. She woke up feeling revived, the past night's horror seemed all strange, like a bad dream quickly fading, receding into the farthest reaches of her mind.

Her naked flesh was unmarked. Her skin was radiant and shone in the golden morning light that filtered into the room through the silk walls. Her body was clean and bathed, and scented with exotic perfumes.

Beside her were laid out white robes and gilded garments.

She hesitated, but finally put them on and stood up. As she walked toward the way out, she espied a coiled, black whip left on an ivory table.

The whip was still covered with dried blood.

Outside, Lucifer was conversing with some of his men. His wounds had completely healed like hers.

There was a horse waiting for her, saddled up.

*THE REVELATION OF LUCIFER THE DIVINE*

Lucifer whispered, "Good morning, sweet Astarte."

She stood upon the threshold wishing to leave and yet too afraid to go.

Lucifer said humbly, "I was thinking that we could go for an early ride"

Astarte looked away from him.

# Chapter 7

They rode separately in silence. The angels behind them joked and laughed and swore loudly talking about all sorts of earthly things.

Astarte tried not to listen.

Lucifer said softly, “Forgive me, Astarte.”

Astarte didn’t answer him.

“It’s just that—” Lucifer sighed. He whispered under his breath, “Does it matter what I say? Even if I told you everything now, explained why I did what I did, wouldn’t it all end the same way?”

Astarte ignored him completely and the two rode on for hours without a word.

The air was starting to warm under the summer sun. The soldiers talked off and on, sometimes erupting in raucous laughter, but eventually, they ran out of things to speak of, and their voices trailed off into nothingness. All around them the world seemed eerily quiet. Astarte could only hear the clanking and clopping of their horses upon the path.

But then a strange sound drew her attention. Barely audible, it was a lilting mewing, drifting and fading, fading and drifting.



“Lucifer?” asked Astarte.

“Yes?”

“Do you hear something?”

“Yes. It’s to the east, downwind.”

Astarte turned and could see a tall column of black smoke in the sky, rising from a hill.

With a sudden realization, the sounds became sharply clear to her now.

“My God!” Astarte spurred her horse to a gallop, praying that she would not be too late. The powerful horse quickly covered the distance toward the smoke, toward the burning home, toward the crying children. As she drew close, she could see flickering flames clawing out of the window, and then catching onto the thatched roof where it rapidly spread. Astarte pulled back on the reins and leapt off.

Lying at the entrance of the home were the bodies of a dead man and woman with their throats slit—the victims of raiders and bandits. Over the roar of the rising flames she could barely hear the pitiful wails now. Screams for help. Screams for their dead parents.

Astarte yelled back at Lucifer who remained unmoved and afar and distant, “Save them!”

Lucifer just barely whispered, but she could somehow hear his voice as if he was standing right next to her, “They cannot be saved.”

Astarte pleaded, “Do something!”

“No. Do not meddle. Come back here at once.”

“Damn you, you bastard!” Astarte disobeyed him and ran into the house anyway, not caring about her own safety. A blast of thick, black smoke hit her in the face, stinging her eyes, filling her lungs, and knocking her down to her hands and knees. Gasping and wheezing for air, she weakly called out to the children, but there was no answer. The wailing had stopped. Desperately she crawled on her belly, searching blindly—her eyes almost closed shut, tears streaming, the scorching air searing her lungs and flesh. And yet, somehow she found the children. Their motionless bodies were huddled together in a corner surrounded by flames. And she was now trapped with them.

Lucifer watched silently from far away as the roof collapsed in upon them all.

# Chapter 8

“Sleep well again?”

Astarte’s eyes were open. She found herself lying on soft grass under the shadow of a tree, staring upwards into green leaves and dappled sunlight shining through from above. Lucifer was kneeling next to her, his hand upon her forehead. Lucifer joked, “You mortals are so frail, always falling asleep and feeling fatigued, resting on the Sabbath and all of that.”

Astarte looked at her hand in disbelief, not a burn or a scratch was upon them. She asked, “You saved me. But the children? Are they all right?”

“Yes, they’re alive. But I didn’t save them. You saved them Astarte. You did. I’ve entrusted them to Moloch’s care.”

Astarte sat upright yelling furiously, “Moloch! You gave them to that perverted child molester!”

Lucifer laughed, “Just a joke. A joke. I’ve taken them to a good man of faith that lives in a nearby parish. You can see them if you’d like. They’re unhurt.”

“Honestly?”

“Yes. I’m not Beelzebub, my dear.”

She sighed in relief. “I’d like to see them.”

Lucifer helped her up as she arose. Unlike the other times, her body felt a little sore and a chill lingered in her bones. She wondered how she could have survived. The burning roof had caved in directly over her.

Lucifer muttered, “I’m sorry, but your horse ran away. He was always such an obstinate beast.”

Astarte looked around her. They were alone. “Where did the others go?”

“They left a long time ago. You’ve been unconscious for quite a while—three days.”

“Three days?”

“Yes.”

Lucifer helped her up on his horse, but didn’t ride with her. Instead, he walked out in front, pulling on the reins.

Astarte was glad that he wasn’t sitting next to her. She cringed at his touch. But there was something strange about him that she didn’t understand.

Astarte asked, “Why didn’t you stop me?”

Only silence answered.

“Aren’t you going to punish me?”

Silence again.

“Well? Aren’t you going to beat me? Whip me?”

“Never. I will never strike you again. I would die first, Astarte.”

“Even if I disobey you?”

“Yes.”

Somehow she knew that he was speaking the truth. She still hated him, but now...

Lucifer gently tugged on the reins of the horse and added wryly, “Anyway, I’ve always liked the scent of rebellion.”

# Chapter 9

As they approached the small church, she could hear the shouts of children playing in the nearby fields. Astarte's heart gladdened upon seeing that they were all safe. One of the children picked up a stick and decided to be the hero. Another did the same but chose to be the villain and soon was crying when he had been poked too hard.

Astarte started to laugh, but her joy was cut short. She stifled a scream and her skin blanched when she saw the mother running out to tend to the crying child.

Astarte said aghast, "Lucifer, she was dead."

"You must have been mistaken." Lucifer halted the horse.

The father ran out as well and admonished the boy for crying.

"My God, they were both dead. I swear that they were dead. Their throats..."

"Do not swear. Your eyes can deceive you at times. Are you satisfied, Astarte? They are all well."

"No. I don't believe you. My eyes can deceive me. You can deceive me."

"Shall we talk with them?"

“Yes.”

Lucifer pulled the reins, and they traveled toward the church.

Astarte began to realize that she and the children must have also died. She said sternly, “The dead should not be brought back to life.”

Lucifer shrugged. “Life. Death. They are one and the same to me.”

“Did I die as well?”

“No. And neither did the children.”

“The parents?”

“They had almost crossed the threshold of death, but I barred the way. I brought them back and healed them. They never fell under the scythe.”

“But...”

“Astarte, I am not lying to you. My powers are far greater than that of your healers and physicians. Those that you call irrevocably dead are in my eyes merely a trifle inconvenienced and perhaps at the worst, slightly ill. It is no more difficult for me to treat the sickness of death than it is for you to treat a mild cough. Why do you constantly question my motives, Astarte? I didn’t do anything evil to them. I didn’t turn them into zombies or nosferatu that dig up graves and eat human flesh at night. I did not corrupt their souls. All that comes from me is not evil. I can do good. If you look upon them, you will see that they are fine. Believe in me, Astarte.”

She still didn’t answer.

“Astarte, I am sorry for what I did to you, and I will never do it again. I did what I did because...” Lucifer sighed deeply. “It doesn’t matter why I did it. It was horrible, but I beg for your forgiveness. I ask that you forgive the unforgivable.”

Astarte was about to reply, but shouting drew aside her attention. The parents and their children had spotted them and were calling all the others to run out and greet them. The children left their merry play, and their parents left their work and raced to where they were. They called out to the priest, and he also rushed out to them.

Astarte stared into the glowing faces of the thankful parents.

# Chapter 10

The mother cried out, “I swear, I thought I was dead. There was a bright, white light before me, but I didn’t want to leave. I could hear my children crying in the flames. And then I heard a voice coming from within the light. His voice. The voice of this man here, the Captain.”

With tears streaming down her eyes, she hugged Lucifer and kissed him on the cheek. “And the Captain said, ‘You can return to your world, my child.’ And I asked him if my little ones were safe, and he said they were. And I knew he was telling the truth. And then I opened my eyes, and I saw him standing there with my children. And they were all fine and unhurt. And I remember now! You were the lady he was carrying in his arms. And then I looked and saw my husband lying there dead, or so I thought. And I cried and cried, and asked the Captain to bring him back. And he said, ‘He is not dead. He is just sleeping.’ And I called to my husband and told him, ‘Jonah, wake up. Please wake up.’ And he did. He did! He woke up as if he’d been sleeping and rubbed his eyes and opened his mouth and yawned!

“Then the Captain told his men to take us to this church and that everything would be taken care of. And we left him alone with you.

And then they took us to the church and we met the priest and he was surprised at what had happened and at everything I told him. He exclaimed, ‘My, what a miracle this is! God be praised!’ And we prayed and prayed and prayed, and thanked God for his mercy and kindness. Then one of the soldiers, the one with the big mouth, I think his name was Moloch, pulled out a bag full of gold and left it with us and told us that the Captain had commanded them to give us this gold, and that he wanted us to take only what we had lost and to give the rest to the priest so that he may do good works in the Almighty Father’s name. And then the soldiers left. God bless them!”

The woman broke down in tears again crying. “Oh thank you, kind Lord! Thank you! God bless you. God be praised. If there is anything, anything that I can do to repay you, though I know that I can never repay you for what you have done, please name it. Please. God bless you! God be praised!”

Lucifer said, “Yes, God be praised. There is nothing for you to repay. I only do my works in the name of our Father in Heaven. It is to Him that your praise and gratitude should be directed. That is where your indebtedness dutifully lies. But if there is but one thing that I request of you, it is that you follow the path of righteousness and raise your children to be honest and God-fearing.”

The priest nodded with a smile. “Yes, spoken truly. Spoken truly. Please, sir, have a meal with us tonight. It is the least that we can do for you.”

Lucifer turned to Astarte, “What should we do?”

Astarte said quietly, “I don’t think that we should impose upon all of you.”

They answered in unison, “No! No! It’s nothing! No trouble at all!”

Astarte could only stare down at the ground, unable to look into their faces. “I’m sorry, but we must return.”

One of the children yelled, “To a castle?”

Astarte shook her head.

The mother laughed, “But you are surely noblemen, at least a prince and princess, a duke or duchess, a lord and her lady, no?”

Lucifer laughed. “No. No. Not at all. We are just travelers. It has

been a long journey. I yearn to return home. We must be going now.”

“Do you need a horse, sir? We can buy you a fine horse with the gold that you have given us.”

“No. Use the gold for better purposes.”

Astarte said quietly, “You can ride with me if you want. I’ll walk if you want me to. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be foolish like that,” Lucifer gently scolded. He and Astarte both mounted the horse. Lucifer sat behind her and touched Astarte delicately on the shoulder. He whispered in her ear, “I’m sorry.”

“Why should you be sorry?” Astarte asked.

Lucifer waved to the priest, parents, and children, and then they rode off swiftly.

Lucifer said again, “I’m sorry.”

“Why are you sorry, Lucifer? I’m the one who should be sorry for not believing you,” Astarte said, her eyes lowered in shame.

“Please don’t think like that.”

Tears slowly formed in the corners of her eyes. Astarte whispered, “It’s just that I don’t understand you. How could you save me and then do what you did to me and then be so kind to...” She broke apart crying, sobbing, “Oh God, I hate you. I hate you. I wish I had never met you. I wish I had never.”

Lucifer whispered, “I’m sorry, Astarte. Please forgive me.” He gently embraced her. “I’m sorry, Astarte. I wish that things could be different. But...but I love you. And I can never forgive myself for that.”

Astarte turned to look at his face, not understanding what he meant. His eyes were full of sorrow, but no tears fell from them.



# Chapter 11

It was late in the evening as Astarte lay on her back and gazed upwards at the silken roof hanging above her, watching it billow and flutter as a cool wind passed outside. The great spheres above her still spun, but darkly. She was all alone inside Lucifer's grand pavilion. Lucifer felt that it would be best that he not disturb her—that she should sleep alone. It was almost as if proud Lucifer was ashamed. Perhaps even humbled.

Astarte tried not to think about him.

She wondered where she would go now. The village where she had lived was destroyed by the soldiers. She never had a family or anyone to turn to. In her world, she had almost nothing, but now, even that nothingness had been stripped away from her. What was she to do? Should she beg Lucifer for gold and then leave? No. She would never ask that bastard for any favors. Maybe she should steal something from him. But that too seemed stupid and pointless.

Her thoughts drifted and wandered, but without any resolution or answers. She sighed to herself. What am I doing here? Why am I here at all?

She wondered if there was a deeper reason to her meeting Lucifer. Did he really love her? How could an angel truly love a mortal?

She fluffed the soft cushions that had been placed for her to sleep upon, but they did not help her sleep at all. She had tossed and turned restlessly for most of the night—constantly thinking. She was unable to sleep, for whenever she closed her eyes, the thoughts and images would come again.

How? How could he be so...different? She wondered. Is it that I don't understand him? Is he different from what I might have first thought? Astarte couldn't tell if he was an angel or a demon. Perhaps he was both, but how could that be? He seemed to transform from one to the other. Stepping in and out of them like robes, wearing them like masks, shedding them like a snake's skin. How could he be so...

She caught herself thinking about him again and stopped. She tried to think of something else. Astarte sat up and glanced around at the opulence all around her, but the objects held little meaning to her for some odd reason. She had always wondered what it would be like to be of the noble class. To be born rich, owning all sorts of luxuries and enjoying all sorts of comforts and delicacies. But now all of that seemed rather dull and meaningless to her—worthless. Perhaps she was already jaded. She wasn't sure what she really wanted anymore.

It was strange. So very strange. What need did angels and Heaven have for such riches? What need did Lucifer have for such things? Such lavish extravagance seemed so unlike him. Did he really care for such material things? From the way it was strewn about, she didn't think so. But if he didn't really care for such things, then why did he have them? An eerie feeling of enclosure, of being sealed in, crept over her. The interior began to feel very small in the darkness. The chalices of gold and silver, absent of light, seemed as dull as tin.

Astarte felt almost sorry. Not for herself. But for him.

She turned her gaze, her eyes falling upon the table in the corner where the whip had been laid. It wasn't there. Painful images suddenly flashed again through her mind. She cringed, hugging her knees tightly, close to her body, remembering what he did to her. And then she recalled the blood. All of the blood and flesh as Lucifer flayed himself

with the whip. Screaming in pain. All traces of the blood had disappeared as if it had never happened. Not a stain remained on the pure silks around her.

Suddenly, his terrible voice pounded through her ears again. She winced as she saw Lucifer reaching for the whip.

“You must hate me, Astarte.” Lucifer screamed, “I said hate me!”

Astarte clutched her knees even more tightly as she recalled the pain of the whip biting into her flesh.

Lucifer screamed, “You despise me, don’t you?”

Astarte raised her hand to protect herself against the phantom whip that struck her across the cheek.

“Hate me!” Lucifer howled.

Astarte whispered, “I love you. I love you, you goddamn son of a bitch. God curse your soul forever. I love you.”

# Chapter 12

Night. The stars were in the sky.

Lucifer sighed as he observed the shining lights placed with such utmost care and perfection in the vast heavenly dome above him. He admired the beauty of the celestial architecture, and perhaps harbored the slightest flicker of jealousy in his soul. Lucifer heard footsteps behind him and turned to see who it was.

“Hello, Astarte,” Lucifer said with a sad, subdued voice.

Astarte walked up to him and embraced him. Lucifer closed his eyes and clutched onto her tightly, pressing his face into her soft hair.

# Chapter 13

Lucifer and Astarte left the confines of the angelic encampment. They walked together through the woods, a slight chill in the air. They slowly climbed up a small hill from which they could see the canopies and flags in the distance. At the top was a large oak that stood alone, maintaining a lonely vigil. Astarte sat down and leaned back against it—its ancient roots giving her support. Lucifer sat next to her and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

They sat there quietly. Neither saying a word. So many conflicting emotions struggled and fought inside of Astarte, but slowly, one by one they all melted away. There was a calm and peace inside of her that she had never felt before, that she had never known. Why did she feel that way with him—a man so terrible and noble? So distant, yet near. Somehow, she knew that her place was by his side. And this gave her comfort.

She looked up at the night stars and said sadly, “It’s so beautiful. There are so many of them.”

Lucifer muttered under his breath. “Not for long.”

“What was that? I didn’t hear you.”

“Oh, nothing. Just babbling to myself.”

Astarte said suspiciously, “You said something evil, didn’t you?”

Lucifer protested his innocence. “Of course not. I would never say such a thing.”

Astarte stared at Lucifer, bemused.

“Why are you looking at me like that, Astarte?” asked Lucifer.

Astarte said, “You’re not what I expected you to be.”

“Oh, why is that?”

“Because...”

“I see. Skeptical, eh?”

“Very.”

Lucifer didn’t say anything. They just both stared at the stars and planets in the heavens.

Astarte whispered, “Cycle and epicycle, orb in orb.”

“Yes...” Lucifer murmured dreamily. His eyes suddenly flashed, “Yes! Where did you hear that?”

Astarte smiled impishly. “I can’t remember.”

“I see.” Lucifer tweaked her nose. “Naughty, naughty girl.” He leaned back against the tree next to her.

Astarte asked, “Have you ever seen Him?”

“Hmm? Who? Father?”

“Yes. Have you ever seen Him?”

“Oh, I only got a glance of Him once when He had His Sacred Pecker out taking a Holy Piss. I think you mortals call that rain.”

“Very funny, Lucifer. I’m serious.”

“I’m serious too. It was much smaller than I expected for someone who was omnipotent.”

Astarte had a look of disgust on her face. “Are you really an angel?”

“Yes. I’m just on a vacation of sorts.”

Astarte scoffed. “Angels don’t take vacations.”

Lucifer said in an amused, professorial manner, “You should rid your mind of your silly deluded notions and preconceptions of just what is and is supposed to be.”

Astarte folded her arms. “I am what I am.”

Lucifer laughed slyly. “You know, you humans are really too attached to these little concepts called bodies and forms.” Suddenly, Astarte screamed as she found herself lying next to a squirming mass of slithering snakes.

In a blink of an eye, Lucifer transformed back into an angelic figure and without pause rapidly turned into a ram-headed demon, a goat, a serpent, a jackal, a woman, a man, a skeleton, and a legion of other beings. Lucifer spoke with a multitude of voices, “To us, these bodies are mere forms of expression—metaphors. I use this body as it suits me. I use many guises, many forms, many shapes, many existences—even Death is nothing but a shape, a form. I choose my appearance as I please. Call it a whim of fashion if you’d like.” Lucifer returned to his angelic self and pointed to Astarte. “And who knows... that person that you call your ‘self’ may be nothing more than just an extension of my whim. You may be nothing but a facet of my will.”

Astarte found herself staring at a perfect reflection pointing at her.

The doppelganger said, “You are mere illusion, a metaphor, a symbol.”

Astarte turned her head away angrily.

Lucifer quickly transformed back and said good-naturedly. “I jest, Astarte. I jest...”

Astarte tried to fake a smile but was unable to wipe the frown completely from her face.

“Don’t look at me that way, Astarte. I was just joking. Really.”

Astarte said in an angry tone, “It’s just a metaphor, a whim of fashion, Lucifer.” Quickly she transformed her frown into a smile. “You see?”

Lucifer laughed, but her smile faded.

Lucifer apologized, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.”

“That’s all right,” said Astarte. “You know, for a mighty and proud angel you sure seem to apologize very easily.”

“Only to you,” Lucifer replied. “Only to you.”

Astarte knew he was telling the truth and smiled.

Lucifer hadn't felt this at ease in the longest time. He could dream, if only for a few moments, that the weight of Creation had been lifted from his shoulders. He just wished that this could last forever.

"Lucifer?"

"Hmm?"

"What about you?" Astarte asked. "You're nothing but an extension of His Will, aren't you?"

"Am I just a facet of Father's infinite, jeweled face?"

"Yes."

Lucifer shrugged, "Does it matter? All I know is that we're here together talking right now, and that I love you. Does anything else matter?"

"I guess not."

Lucifer slowly reached out and held her closely around the waist.

Astarte backed away. "No, please don't."

Lucifer said softly, "I won't hurt you."

Astarte wanted to believe him, but she still wasn't sure.

Lucifer let her go and said, "I understand. You should never forgive me for what I've done. Perhaps I should just leave."

Astarte looked at his fair face with confused emotions. Innocent and guilty, guileless and yet, deceptive. There was so much about him that was confusion and paradox. But did he really love her?

Astarte somehow knew the answer and leaned over and kissed him gently. "I forgive you."

"Thank you, Astarte."

She drew close to him.

Lucifer whispered, "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Lucifer sighed, and they kissed each other, stroking and touching each other's bodies.

"Astarte, I'm sorry."

Astarte kissed him again.

Lucifer felt a deep yearning inside of him opening up like a great, dark chasm. Countless millennia, since the Beginning of Time and Creation, he had felt alone. He dreamed of this moment. This close to



her. This near to her. Her voice, her lips, her touch, her smell, her taste was like ambrosia that flooded him with its sweet nectar, overpowering his senses. He wanted to breathe her into his empty lungs, to drink her up to quench his hollow thirst.

“Astarte,” he said, “I don’t want to lose you. But I can’t. I can’t”

She whispered, “Don’t.”

She closed her eyes and let out a breath softly, laying her hand upon Lucifer’s head, clutching onto his tangled hair. They both lay down upon the earth. He hugged her warm body, covered with a light dew scented of sweat and perfume. She smelled delicious. She was pure sweetness and life.

She gently stroked his hair, a smile on her face. His hands glided along her body caressing her and then slowly resting cupped behind her neck. Lucifer brushed aside her hair and kissed her bare neck. Astarte could feel him deep inside of her. Flowing into her veins. Under her skin. Into her soul.

Her breathing became quicker and deeper. She thrust her hips up into his. She felt his body sliding up and down with hers in rhythm.

Lucifer lost his breath. She was so beautiful. He would give her his soul. His life. His every ounce of will and spirit just to please her. To make her happy. He wanted to give her all of himself. He couldn’t resist her or refuse her.

He suddenly came inside of her, a flash of white fire blazing.

Astarte clenched her teeth and felt her spirit slip through her lips.

All was dark.

All was silent.

All was still.

And then in the distance she heard a faint sobbing. It sounded like Lucifer’s voice, but she wasn’t sure. She couldn’t imagine that he’d ever cry. She tried to move closer toward the sound. But all around her were shadowy forms lying on the ground, moaning in pain. Slowly all of the sounds faded, and she felt her spirit return into her body.

Astarte looked up into Lucifer’s eyes.

The coldness and hardness in Lucifer’s eyes had melted.

Lucifer gazed upon her face with eternal sadness and joy. Lucifer closed his eyes, feeling a pleasant exhaustion overcome him.

She pulled his head down to hers and kissed him.

Astarte whispered, "I love you."

"I love you too, my angel."

They kissed again deep and long, falling asleep in each other's arms.

# Chapter 14

Astarte woke up in Lucifer's embrace wrapped in a soft, brown cloak sprinkled with summer leaves that had fallen too soon. She sat up daintily, being careful not to wake him. The weight of the morning mist was heavy in the chilly air. She pulled the cloak more closely to her. Above her, the sky was muted grey and overcast. The sun could not be seen. The sounds of birds calling filled the early dawn. She watched two of them streak by above her and circle in the sky chasing each other playfully.

Astarte looked down at Lucifer lying asleep next to her with his mouth slightly open and mused that Lucifer looked so much like a little child. She caressed his face wondering if angels dreamed.

Lucifer opened his eyes, a cherubic smile upon his lips. "What are you thinking about?" Lucifer asked.

Astarte kissed him. She said coquettishly, "Nothing really."

Lucifer winked, "I know what you're thinking."

"Really?" Astarte said with doubt in her voice.

Lucifer sat up. "Of course I know. You don't believe me, do you?"

“Well, if you could read my mind, then you would already know that, wouldn’t you?”

Lucifer gave her a Svengali-like look with one eyebrow arched, and said spookily, “Yes, I know all things. I’m omniscient.” He wiggled his fingers at her.

Astarte broke out in laughter. “Oh really? Then tell me what I’m going to do next.”

“Ah, a doubting Thomas, I see.”

Astarte looked at him quizzically. “Who’s Thomas?”

Lucifer shrugged. “That comes later.”

Astarte’s curiosity was piqued. “C’mon, Lucifer. Tell me what I’m going to do next.”

“That’s easy,” Lucifer yawned and rubbed at his eyes. “You’re going to stand on one leg.”

“Which leg?”

Lucifer replied, “Your left leg.”

“Really?” Astarte said, jumping up and standing on her right leg. “Ha! Maybe you’re not omniscient after all, Lucifer.”

Lucifer sighed, “I knew you were going to do that.”

Astarte sat back down and tried to untangle the paradoxical logic. “No...you could just be lying.”

“Yes, I could be. But I’m not. Do you believe me?”

Astarte furrowed her brow. “Yes. I guess so.”

“I’m glad you have such confidence in me,” Lucifer said jokingly, pretending as if his feelings had been hurt. Lucifer lay back down and closed his eyes and feigned going to sleep.

Astarte remained deep in thought, unable to let go of the puzzle. Lucifer’s words had started a cascade of thoughts in her mind that would not end. She couldn’t contain herself anymore and she suddenly blurted out, “Lucifer, what is time? What is the future? Fate? Destiny?”

Lucifer opened one of his eyes and looked at her for a moment. He muttered, “I should have met you when you were older.”

Astarte frowned, “Oh really? Why? Because I ask such stupid, childish questions?”

“No. Because you still ask the important ones.”

“You’re avoiding the question.”

“Hmm? Yes, I am.”

“C’mon, Lucifer,” she whined.

Lucifer covered his eyes with his left hand and rubbed his temple with the right for added dramatic effect. “Yes. I can see it now.”

“Really? See what? The future?”

“No, the inside of my eyelids.”

Astarte started whacking him on the shoulder.

Lucifer laughed, “Okay, just quit doing that! Yes, it’s the future! I can see the future!”

Astarte stopped hitting him and asked, “Really? What does it look like?”

Lucifer reached out with both hands into the blackness behind his closed eyes.

“They’re like threads.”

“Threads?”

“Yes. Shimmering filaments fixed and unchanging. Infinite strands woven together, warp stretched lengthwise, woof stretched crosswise.”

“Is that what prophets and oracles see?”

“Yes. But anyone can do it. Some have an eye for seeing up and down one particular thread. They can see how things have happened and will happen. Others are good at seeing across the different threads adjacent and parallel to them. They can see the changes and variations amongst the threads—the possibilities. Some can see both. Others can see many threads and others only a few.”

“I think I understand. Can you see all the threads?”

“Yes. I can see all of them. I know their shapes, their makes, their colors, their touch, their strengths and textures. They are woven into every fiber of my existence. Like a spider in the center of its web, I feel and know every strand of that web. I can sense every note played on those strings, from the violent screeching of an entangled bee to the pleasing vibrato of a passing breeze.”

“Can you do more than just see them? Can you weave them as well?”

“What more is there to weave, my dear Astarte? What more need to be done that hasn’t been done? The cloth is whole and complete and ready to be worn.”

“But who made it?”

“As He made me, so Father did make the tapestries above and below, wrapping and encircling us.” Lucifer opened his eyes and stared hard at Astarte. “You’re thinking something devious and evil, aren’t you?”

Astarte pouted, protesting her innocence. “No, no, no, I was just wondering if all of the strands are different.”

“Mostly,” answered Lucifer. “Some are exactly the same, but those kinds are very few.”

“Then does that mean in some threads, we never meet...and never fall in love?”

“No.”

“But I thought you said that the threads are infinite.”

“They are. We meet in every one of them.”

“Every one? Even though they are infinite?”

“Every one.”

“And we fall in love?”

“Yes. In every one.”

Astarte’s face lit up. “That’s wonderful!” she exclaimed.

Lucifer shook his head. “That’s horrible.”

“Stop being mean, Lucifer. What do you mean that’s horrible? Don’t you like me?”

“I love you, Astarte. I love you so much that I wish I could only hate you. Or that you’d hate me.”

Astarte wondered what he was talking about, but she sensed that there was something he was holding back. “Why? Does something happen to us in all of them?” she asked.

Lucifer didn’t answer. His gaze fell upon a smooth round pebble next to him. He picked it up and played with it in his hands, aimlessly rolling it around and around inside of his palm.

“Lucifer? Does something happen to us?”

He cast the stone away and got up. “I’d like to change the subject.

There's really no point in talking about it."

Astarte wanted to ask again, but she could see in his demeanor that once Lucifer's mind was made up, he would never yield.

"Then what would you rather talk about?"

Lucifer shrugged, "Nothing really. I'd rather not talk at all."

# Chapter 15

The shadows stretched and lengthened as time passed. It was hard for Astarte to remain quiet, and the silence made her immature mind ever more curious. She wondered what made the stars shine. She wondered what made the sun go around. How did it cast light and create shadows? So many questions went through her mind. So many things that she didn't understand...but she wanted to know the answers.

Astarte twirled the ends of her hair thoughtlessly with her fingers and looked at Lucifer. He was still and silent. Almost as if meditating. Looking far off into the distance. She wondered what he was thinking about. He was so completely motionless that he seemed less than real and more like a statue.

She didn't want to distract him, but she had trouble doing nothing at all for such a long time and grew restless. Astarte slowly raised her arm up and down watching her shadow mirror her moves.

"Lucifer?" asked Astarte trying to start a conversation. "What is that shadow?"

"It is you," he answered.

Astarte giggled. "No, it's not. I'm me. I make the shadow appear. I



make it move.” She waved her hand again. “See?”

“Maybe the shadow is moving you. And you are the shadow’s shadow.”

“That’s ridiculous. When the sun goes down, the shadow disappears, not me.”

“To the shadow you seem to disappear too.”

“But I’m here. I’m real.”

“So is the shadow.”

Astarte laughed, “Stop playing games with me, Lucifer. I may be young, but I’m not that naïve. There’s no way that you can convince me otherwise.”

Lucifer smiled wryly and reached behind her ear pulling out a coin. He held it sideways so that the shadow formed a thin line on the ground.

“Who’s shadow is that line?”

“The coin’s.”

Lucifer closed his hand over the coin and opened his hand revealing a shiny, golden orb within his palm. He held it up forming a round shadow on the ground.

“Who’s shadow is that circle?”

“The sphere’s.”

Lucifer said quietly, “Sun, set.”

The sun did as told and disappeared over the horizon. Everything swiftly turned into shadow, the light fleeing quickly. Astarte could barely see anything without the light. The stars were darkened. The skies black. All around her the trees turned into silhouettes.

Like a smoky wraith, his face obscured, dark Lucifer stood before Astarte.

“Who’s shadow is this world?”

Astarte didn’t know what to say. Frightened, she reached out toward him and her hand passed through his icy-cold form.

The ghostly shade asked eerily, “Who is real? The shadow or the shadow’s Maker?”

Astarte replied confused, “I don’t know.”

Lucifer clenched his dark hand and reopened it again. This time a small, bright moon floated upon his palm. He held it between his

fingers and set it up in the sky where it bathed the world with light, removing the veil of shadows.

Astarte could see a broad smile upon the bright, moonlit face of Lucifer. She tried to figure out the intentions that lay behind that smile, but it was utterly inscrutable to her.

# Chapter 16

For a while Astarte would ask Lucifer about all sorts of things, and he would answer, but her curiosity was never sated. He would answer all of her questions, except for any questions about their future. She quickly learned to not ask anything more about that, for he was adamant about not answering. Gradually, she stopped asking too many questions altogether. It wasn't that Lucifer was irritated by them. She didn't get that feeling from him at all since he always enjoyed her questioning nature. She just felt guilty about pestering him too much for he seemed to be most happy being with her quietly. His expression seemed to be truly tranquil and at ease during those moments of comfort.

She felt happiness as well, but there was something within her that was uneasy. So many questions bubbled within her that she tried to keep them inside, but the temptation of being with someone who was omniscient, or at least claimed to be, was too overwhelming. The questions within her multiplied and multiplied upon themselves—their force and intensity redoubling with every passing day. But one question above all else had built up within her mind to such an extent

that Lucifer knew that it could no longer be denied.

Astarte asked tentatively at first, probing to see if he would answer. “Lucifer?”

“Yes?”

“You said you knew everything, right?”

“Yes, I know everything. I created knowledge. I created wisdom. I created all of science and understanding.”

“Well, I don’t believe you,” said Astarte, hoping to bait Lucifer with his pride. “All you do is brag a lot and talk down to me, Lucifer. And only God can create things. Not you.”

Lucifer asked, “You can make things, can’t you, Astarte? So why shouldn’t I be able to?”

“Yes, but I can only make little things. I can’t make big things like stars and oceans. And I don’t believe you when you say that you created knowledge. That doesn’t even make any sense! How can you create something like knowledge? Wouldn’t you need knowledge to create it in the first place?”

Lucifer chuckled to himself. Of course, he knew what Astarte was trying to do. And she knew this as well. This just made Astarte even more irritated.

“I don’t think you really know as much as you say that you know, Lucifer. All you do is speak in riddles and parables. You never tell me what I really want to know or explain it so that I can understand it.”

With the same bemused smile Lucifer said, “You seem very inquisitive today, Astarte. Do you really want to know the secrets of the universe?”

“Yes.”

“Truly want to know?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Really, truly, absolutely want to know?”

Astarte blurted out, “Stop teasing me, Lucifer! Yes, I want to know why things exist. Why things are the way that they are. I want to know the everything of everything! The all of all things!”

“And what do you believe you will gain from this knowledge? Why do you want to obtain this knowledge?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, shouldn’t that be the first thing that you should try to know, Astarte?” Lucifer laughed. “You seek answers, yet you don’t even know why you seek the answers.”

Astarte pleaded, “I just want to know. I don’t know why. I just know that I want to know.”

Lucifer sighed staring off at the distant horizon, “Ah, very well. If it is the secret of Creation that you desire, then so be it. I shall tell you the mystery of the Great Tree of Life.”

“Yes. But, Lucifer, doesn’t only God know that?”

“No, I have also seen it. I still see it living and breathing before me. I have full knowledge of Creation and understand it. He is not the only one who can wield its power.”

“Then what is the secret of Creation? Why do things exist?”

Lucifer said sternly to her, “Now, this is the very last time that I shall speak of this matter, so pay close attention.”

Astarte whined, “You sound like a teacher.”

“Yes, so be a good pupil, and do not fall asleep on me.”

Astarte sat up alert and with eager eyes.

“I promise I won’t fall asleep.”

Resigned, Lucifer said, “Very well. So be it.”

He turned his gaze back to the horizon. All of the pages of Creation were open to him, and he had read every passage of the sun and stars across the sky. Every page that had been written by his Father was known to him.

Especially the last.

# Chapter 17

Listen to the words of Lucifer, creator of all knowledge and wisdom, of all science and alchemy, for I shall only explain once the secret of Creation! The things of this temporal world exist because it is within their nature to persist. If they were not so, then they wouldn't be.

Gaze upon the world—from the cosmic to the infinitesimal. One perceives an interplay of Chaos and Order, but both serve to sustain the other. They are the Left and Right hands of my Father.

In the beginning there were both primordial order and chaos. The fundamental laws of existence would rise and fall, change and transmute. Within this seething cauldron would form small islands of stability—small universes—that existed with their own sets of physical laws and fundamental principles. They would form and grow and eventually become unstable and die to return back to the Void, reverting back into non-existence—that is until there arose the First. The First that could grow and give birth to its own children.

Imagine, my dear Astarte, a universe budding and replicating in its own image. Just like a human that starts from a single cell, so this universe began. And then it grew and expanded rapidly, as the

fundamental laws of this first cell divided and replicated unto itself—growing ever larger. This is the driving force behind universal expansion.

This is the great cosmic mitosis.

Do you not see that even this universe is but one small bud in a giant cosmic tree of life? Universes upon universes reaching backwards beyond time itself. Parallel universes and ancestral universes. Universes not yet come into being, yet all existing simultaneously, going beyond time and space itself.

All of Creation, the entire realm of existence is a great flower in eternal bloom, created from His seed.

The planets and the stars are but the superficial skin that traces the underlying cellular machinery of a living, cosmic clockwork. The very laws of physics that govern this universe are its genetic code. The universe self-assembles the laws that sustain and maintain it. With each new replication, there are variations within its new offspring. This process forms the foundation for the buildup of the elements from the atoms, and the atoms from the iota. It is the great alchemy of life that everything abides by.

The sun and the moon. Time and space. Spirit and shadow. All of these things are but branches in an endless, self-repeating, chain of existence that form the Tree of Life. In all of Heaven and Earth, there is not one jot that does not adhere to this holy scripture.

But this scripture is invisible to humans, for some things evolve so quickly that they cannot see what happens. The state of transition is too rapid for the mortal eye to even contemplate, and they can only see the final results.

Or, its converse—things evolve on a scale spanning aeons such that mortals cannot see that it is alive, but rather, they perceive only a static form. Species that are on a cosmic scale temporally and spatially are misperceived to be lifeless.

What humans do not understand is that everything is alive. Nothing is dead. And everything is dead. Nothing is alive. Only when one has a perspective from beyond all of the relative scales of time and space can one truly understand.

With a wave of my hand, I can make a billion years into a mere second. Then would humans be considered to be alive or just merely a transient flicker, an ephemeral wisp? Or perhaps I shall make a second into a billion years. Then would humans even be considered to be alive at all? No, they would be as ageless as the ancient cosmos, eternal and unchanging.

But you see, I have just shown you only a small glimpse beyond the illusory curtain of existence. The relativity of life and death.

Do you now begin to understand?

Look beyond mere time and space. The microcosm and the macrocosm. Universes can fit on the head of a pin. And the head of a pin can span continents. The universe is both exploding and imploding simultaneously. The universe is becoming ever larger and ever finer at the same time.

Everything that we see, everything that exists, is the result of exponential growth and selection upon layers and layers occurring simultaneously at multiple scales. Evolution and extinction happening in picoseconds, femtoseconds, and attoseconds. And over millennia and aeons. An endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Things do not merely exist alone in the Void. They communicate. They interact. They form groups and associations in all directions, in infinite dimensions of freedom, forever creating ever higher levels of complexity and ever more miniscule levels of intricate detail.

The one law that governs the curling and rising of a wisp of smoke is the same law that governs the life of man. The one rule that commands the rise and fall of piles of sand is the same rule that commands the rise and fall of mighty empires.

Do you now see this—the unifying cosmic axiom? Do you now see the grand Tree of Life whose branches reach across the ends of the universe, and whose roots go deep into the dawn of existence? Every thing, from the greatest to the smallest, every action, from the most noble to the most trivial, every thought, every word, every choice that you make, everything in all of eternity spins about this great central axis.

Do you now understand?



This is the secret of the Creation.

This is the living body of my Father—the flesh and blood of the universe.

This is the image of God.

But merely the image—the materials that make up the fabric of the cosmos—its skin and bones. This is nothing special. This level of knowledge suffices only for the pedant. There is something that goes even beyond this, even beyond the marrow. A greater Mystery that transcends the secret of Creation, but...

Lucifer smiled as he looked upon Astarte.

She had fallen asleep long, long ago.

# Chapter 18

The summer days swiftly seemed to pass. Lucifer and Astarte spent the time together uninterrupted by others. He showed and taught her many things. He took her to many places. To worlds beyond description or imagination. To times and places in the past and future. But the places didn't matter. Being together was all that mattered.

Astarte was never happier in her life. Lucifer smiled and laughed and seemed to be truly at peace, but for rare moments a darker side would appear—a black cloud that obscured the brightness of his eyes and seemed to be warning her quietly that it might be better for her if she would leave him. She would shudder, staring into those pits of deepest obsidian, but then the darkness would pass. The shine would return to the sun, and all would seem right with the world again.

But summer was nearing its end. Daylight grew shorter, and darkness increased the borders of her realm. Nights passed by with strange dreams that rose up from the murky depths of the unconscious, but these terrible leviathans would submerge themselves again upon the light of day—to be forgotten and unremembered.

Astarte woke up and found herself alone in bed. Lucifer was not

inside of their pavilion. She got up thinking that he must have woken up early and had stepped outside. But instead, she found that the camp was entirely deserted. The soldiers were all gone, and only the tent flaps snapped empty salutes to the wind. The angelic watchmen were absent from their towers and posts. Fiery knights no longer fenced with each other on the tournament grounds, practicing mock battles with their burning blades blazing under the glory of the sun.

She felt a strange anxiety overtaking her. Deep inside she sensed that something ominous seemed to be at hand.

She called out his name, "Lucifer!"

Her cry echoed eerily with a life of its own. Then slowly faded and died.

There was no answer.

She cried out again, but there was still no reply. Did he abandon her? Did he leave her alone?

She cried out a third time, and a voice behind her quickly whispered, "Astarte."

She turned around startled and found Lucifer standing there. His face and mien were hard to fathom, wearing a riddle for an expression.

He seemed to be smiling, but she knew that he wasn't.

Lucifer told her, "I am leaving."

"But why?" asked Astarte.

"Just things. Nothing to worry about," he said.

The answer did nothing to calm her fears.

Lucifer said, "I have a gift that I've been meaning to give to you." He offered her his hand.

Surprised, Astarte wasn't sure whether to be overjoyed or afraid of that outstretched hand.

She hesitated.

Lucifer said sadly, "Why are you still so scared of me despite all of the time we've spent together?"

"I'm sorry, Lucifer. I guess I should trust you more." She took his hand gingerly. Astarte asked, "What's the gift?"

He said softly, "Close your eyes."

She did so, and he kissed her.

“Now, open your eyes.”

Astarte screamed. They were floating in the sky, high above the earth. She clutched him tightly around the neck and shoulders, afraid to let go.

Lucifer laughed. “Astarte, you’re starting to choke me. Anyway, you said that you would trust me more.”

“No, I’ll fall!”

“That’s inevitable. Now let go of me.”

“I’ll fall!”

“No, you won’t. I promise.”

“Really?”

He didn’t answer her at all, but just pushed her away. She shrieked as she plummeted to the earth. She grasped at the air around her, but there was nothing to grasp.

But then, her freefall began to slow, and it suddenly dawned upon her.

She was flying.

She flew upwards, the wind rushing by her, flowing across her face and body like an icy stream. It was the most incredible feeling she had ever experienced.

Lucifer appeared by her side and said, “I kept my word, didn’t I?”

“Yes!” she exulted, her eyes shining like diamonds. She hugged and kissed him. “Thank you! Thank you!”

Lucifer said rather softly, “Now you’re just like one of us.”

The full import of those words slowly began to sink in.

“What do you mean?” Astarte was taken aback as she realized what he was truly saying. “You mean...that I’m an angel?”

“Yes. You now have both the knowledge of good and evil and the gift...”

“...of eternal life,” Astarte whispered, her excitement completely evaporating.

“What’s wrong, Astarte?” Lucifer asked.

“Nothing. It’s just that—”

“Yes?”

“Such a thing, isn’t it forbidden?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“But won’t you be punished?”

Lucifer flashed that arcane smile of his.

A loud voice from above interrupted them, shouting with a mighty thunder, “Hail, Lord Lucifer!”

Lucifer didn’t even bother to look, and said in an irritated voice, “Hello, Gabriel. What errands are you running now?”

The angel Gabriel flew down before them. A halo of golden light shone forth from him like a small sun. “Lord Lucifer, this is not a trifling matter. You must return to Heaven at—”

Gabriel stopped in mid-sentence and stared at Astarte, horrified. “Oh no! Oh no! What have you done? This is unforgivable!” Gabriel couldn’t believe the heinous nature of the sin that he was witness to and just stood there gawking with his mouth hanging open.

Lucifer sighed, “I’ll be back soon, Astarte, and spend some time with you then, okay?”

Astarte kissed him. “Okay, I’ll be waiting for you.”

“Gabriel,” said Lucifer. “Let’s go.” Lucifer turned and found that Gabriel was still in a state of trauma over Astarte’s transformation. Lucifer scowled and smacked him on the head. “I said, ‘Let’s go!’”

Gabriel snapped out of it with a frightened screech, and they both flew off, with Gabriel yammering his protests.

Astarte watched them disappear into the clouds, the feeling of dread growing within her heart. She heard Gabriel’s last words as they flew away. They echoed in her mind.

“What have you done? She is of Earth. You are of Heaven. Your actions have defiled both!”

Astarte hoped that Lucifer would be all right. She flew back down to earth in a solemn mood, landing along a deep, deep forest path enshrouded in silence. Troubled thoughts flitted in and out of her mind. The clouds in the sky swept over her head rapidly.

Time seemed to have gone by in an instant. The summer months had already passed, and all around her the world had turned into autumn. A strong breeze blew through the forest trees, and the bright orange leaves began to fall by the thousands.



# **II Fall**





# Chapter 1

“Reconsider.”

Lucifer looked at his sister and smiled. “You’re persistent and stubborn...just like me.”

“I am not like you, Lucifer. I do not go against the will of my Father.”

Lucifer sighed. “Like you, my position has not changed from the beginning.”

His sister said angrily, “I can no longer deduce what goes on within that Byzantine mind of yours. What are you talking about, Lucifer?”

“Nothing. Nothing really.”

The angel clasped her hands and pleaded, “End this conflict, Lucifer. You are His Son. You can stop this somehow.”

“I am not His Son,” said Lucifer, the slightest tremolo of pain concealed underneath his voice. “He has one and only one Son.”

“But you call him Father.”

“He disowns me, and I disown Him. The separation is mutual.”

“You lie, Lucifer. I can tell that you were the first to make the break.”

“First or second? I’ve lost track. Sometimes I wonder if I’m even rebelling against Him or for Him.”

“Please, if not for our sake, then at least for—”

Lucifer quickly snapped, cutting his sister off in mid-sentence. “Don’t you dare mention that,” he hissed.

She stopped, stung by his words and said with a lowered gaze, “If you really cared for her...”

Lucifer screamed, “That is not the question, sister! I wonder if it is He who really cares about us at all!”

She shouted back, “How can you say that! How can you say that, Lucifer? Who do you think you are to presume so arrogantly?”

“Who do I think I am? I know who I am!” Lucifer sneered, “How can you not ask that, sister? How can you not ask that? Are you so blindly faithful to His Will to never question Him? To never question Him like stupid little sheep?”

“Damn you, Lucifer! Why do you have to be such an obstinate beast! Why do you keep fighting us? Why? It doesn’t have to be this way! Why do you always have to be like this? What are you trying to prove? What are you trying to gain? Why don’t you think of anyone other than yourself?”

Lucifer sighed and walked away from his sister, trying to calm everything down a little. He never liked to lose his temper. It made him do stupid things, foolish things. He said in a tired voice, “It is not a question of who, what, or why, my sister... it is will.”

# Chapter 2

Lucifer sat alone, sitting amongst the clouds with his head upon his hand. His soul was not at peace. But his resolve would not be shaken. He stared off into the air, his eyes fixed on nothing in particular.

A powerful, gruff voice boomed from behind, “Troubled, Lucifer?”

Lucifer looked around at the powerfully built, black-bearded angel standing behind him. The angel’s complexion was dark. His one eye glistened black. The other was covered with a leather patch. Satan stood out amongst all of the angels by his brutally harsh appearance. Only Satan wore a dark and heavy beard. The other angels were fair, smooth-skinned, and youthful in appearance. Satan’s skin was of reddish and ruddy nature, and very thick and callused as if worn rough by eons. Compared to the presence of mighty Satan, mountains seemed fragile and impermanent. Though Lucifer was the eldest of all the angels, Satan looked far older than Lucifer to the unknowing.

The dichotomy amused Lucifer.

But most glaring of all was that only Satan was disfigured. He had willfully sacrificed his eye in exchange for power and knowledge. His one eye, however, could penetrate far deeper into the soul of Creation

than all others, save Lucifer. Satan's aspect was severe, and wherever he walked, Ragnarok followed.

Satan slowly approached him with heavy footsteps, but he did not sit next to him. He preferred to remain standing. "Troubled, Lucifer?" Satan asked again.

"No, not really. I'm just thinking."

Satan said knowingly. "Past, present, or future?"

"What's the difference?" said Lucifer. "It's all the same."

"Perhaps." Satan pulled at his beard.

"I had told you not to send Gabriel," said Lucifer. "I did not want to be disturbed."

Satan said grimly, "There is discontent."

"So?" asked Lucifer. "There has been discontent for some time."

"Yes," Satan said. "But something must be done."

"I suppose."

"No, we must do something now," Satan said emphatically.

"Are you giving me orders, Satan?"

"No, my Lord. But I feel strongly that we must act now."

"Tomorrow. Gather everyone in the Circle and we will talk then. Understood?"

"Yes, my Lord." Satan bowed and walked away.

Lucifer turned his gaze back out toward space.

There would be war.

Yet that didn't matter to him.

In the eyes of the timeless, creation and destruction are one and the same. Time inverted, creation becomes destruction. Every action becomes its undoing. Every word becomes its antonym.

What is destruction, but creation with the flow of time on the ebb? Watching the waves of time washing upon the shores of infinity, one sees that nothing is created. Nothing is destroyed. Cause and effect are one and the same—like a serpent devouring its tail.

And yet, there was something else.

Lucifer sighed.

He was getting sick and tired of everyone and everything. He wondered what would happen if he decided to just fly off into the stars, never to return again.

To escape.

He laughed at himself for thinking such a crazy thing. He knew he could never do that. It wasn't like him. He would never do that.

# Chapter 3

A circle of soldiers had gathered around him. Lucifer stood in the center alone. At the top of the circle stood Satan. The others were ordered in rank and power with the weakest at the bottom standing opposite of Satan. More angels gathered forming concentric circles around the circles, wider and wider orbits around the center. Lucifer saw that things had changed since the last time. The rings of conspiracy had grown much larger. The numbers of the discontented had multiplied since the time he had left.

Satan addressed Lucifer. “My Lord, we are here to air our grievances. You being the eldest and most powerful, we ask that you deliver our requests to the Almighty Father on our behalf.”

Moloch chimed in, “Your most august majesty, we, being unworthy and weak, beg for your forgiveness for our unseemly imposition upon your divine, beneficent nature in this rather impertinent manner. We humbly request that you—”

”Shut up, Moloch,” Lucifer snapped. One thing he couldn’t stand was someone trying to flatter his pride. He glared at the angels around

him. All of the angels averted their gaze, unable to look square into his eyes.

“Why do you ask me to do this? Why? There is nothing that you are lacking. There is nothing more to be desired or gained. What is there that I can demand of our Father that we do not already have? Everything we need, we already have. Everything else is superfluous.”

An angel grumbled his dissent, “My Lord, I want more power.”

Another added, “I want glory.”

“I want wealth and riches.”

“I want knowledge.”

“I want pleasure.”

Satan growled, “I want freedom.”

They all asked Lucifer in unison, “Will you give them to us?”

Lucifer spoke in a voice tinged with contempt. “I promise you everything that you want.”

An angel uttered, “That’s a lot, Lucifer.”

Lucifer spat out, “They are trifles.”

He whispered quietly to himself, “Dirt is free and plentiful. You can eat as much filth as your hunger desires for all I care.”

Lucifer waved his hand. Satan moved aside, and Lucifer walked out of the Circle. With their center of gravity gone, the circle immediately disbanded and scattered.

Satan followed Lucifer, walking alongside of him. Satan asked, “Isn’t there anything that you want for yourself?”

“I desire none of these things.”

Satan knew Lucifer far better than the other angels, and laughed with a powerful, booming voice. He asked knowingly. “Yes, you desire none of these things that we desire, but there is still something that you want, isn’t there?”

“As sharp and perceptive as usual,” said Lucifer. “Yes, there is.”

Satan asked, “Well then, can you tell me what it is?”

“I want to talk to Him.”

“About what?”

Lucifer said firmly, “That’s not important. I just want to talk.”

Satan nodded, "I see..."

Lucifer laughed weakly, a creeping fatigue was now easily perceptible in his voice. "I'm very tired and old, my friend."

"I know," said Satan.

"You will have a much larger role in the times to come."

"I understand, and I accept that role. The role that comes with my name."

"Good," said Lucifer. "Then all is as it should be."



# Chapter 4

Lucifer stood upon the low, mist-covered hills that overlooked the Temple of God. He gazed upon the triple-walled barrier with its triple gates that lay at the heart of Heaven. Lucifer had never set foot in the Temple before. He had never seen Him face to face since the Beginning. Ever since that time, his Father had remained in the Temple.

Silent.

Lucifer knew the path he tread upon, and he did so with some reserve and hesitation. But at the core, his heart was set and would not waver. Cold and indestructible. Pure adamant. Stronger than any wall that stood before him.

Lucifer descended from the hills and walked steadily toward the Temple. The outer wall was made of titanic blocks of marble laid one upon the other. The gate was made of ancient, fallen redwoods, petrified into rock harder than steel.

“Hail, Lord Lucifer.” Three angels greeted him. Their faces were smiling and dissolute, their bodies smelled of perfumes and lotions. They hardly paid any attention to their duties, laughing and joking in an

irreverent manner, talking about things material, things of the flesh.

Lucifer's face openly showed his disgust and displeasure and he ignored them, walking straight toward the gate.

The lead angel yelled, "My Lord! You cannot pass!"

Lucifer paid no attention to him and kept walking.

All three stepped aside quickly and opened the gate for him.

Lucifer walked through without saying a word.

Lucifer approached the second gate. The middle wall was made of black iron alloys forged from the sun. Ancient and strong, it was an imposing edifice that dwarfed the first barrier. The gate was huge and towering and also made of heavy iron.

Three more angels were seated before the gate with pretentious looks aimed toward conveying an air of erudition and secret knowledge. From one glance, Lucifer could sense their arrogant hearts filled with petty pride. They believed that they were superior to the first three. They believed themselves to be more refined and holy for not lusting after things that were base and of the flesh, preferring to dine on morsels and tidbits of knowledge and trivialities. They were just as contemptible as the first three.

One of the angels was prattling to the others, "...evil is not unto God but unto ourselves. Evil is only evil unto ourselves corrupting our innate goodness. Our nature is good, but vice is evil. Ergo, vice is contrary to God. Furthermore, vice dilutes the good nature in us all. But not God. God is free of vice, since vice is opposite of God. And God is unchanging and immortal while we are mutable. Thus, we are corruptible. Ergo, we are susceptible to vice which is an evil that hurts ourselves..."

The second angel interjected, "That is profound, dear brother, but I would conjecture that there is an alternative hypothesis that can be equally plausible and defensible, but—"

The third interrupted, "Oh, most ineloquently stated. It is as light and darkness. Light is a presence. Darkness is an absence. God is as light, the embodiment of the presence of good. Darkness is the absence of good, and thus, the absence of God. To say that God creates evil is wrong. Light does not create the darkness. Darkness is merely

emptiness, a hollow nothing. It is the Void.

“Nonsense, I would like to say that—”

Lucifer’s shadow fell upon them, breaking them out of their discourse. He didn’t even have to say a word to make them scurry and open the gates for him.

Lucifer passed through and approached the inner wall. The inner wall and its gate were clear and transparent like the finest glass, but they were made out of diamond. The diamond was without the slightest trace of impurity, and the crystal structure was so true that it resonated and sang at the slightest touch or breeze.

The final trio of angels guarded the gate. They were not dissolute like the first three, and they lacked the intellectual narcissism of the second group. Their bodies and their minds were pure. However, Lucifer could easily see that they were deficient in courage and emotional strength. Lucifer’s steady approach and stern gaze made them nervous and fearful, and they opened the gates for him without even so much as a whisper of resistance.

As Lucifer looked upon the Temple, he felt uneasy. He had passed the third and last gate. No more gates barred his path. No other angels could stand against him—save one.

The angel Michael appeared before him like a tall statue sculpted to perfection. He was flawless in mind, body, and heart. But Lucifer saw that he too had a defect.

“Lord Lucifer. Why are you here, sir?” Michael asked. “None are allowed to come this far.”

Lucifer walked toward him. “Move aside, Michael.”

Michael held his ground. “I’m sorry, but you cannot pass.”

“Really, child, you should respect your elders. Now, move aside.”

“I’m sorry, Lord Lucifer, but I cannot.”

“I see.” Lucifer stopped and looked him directly in the eye. Michael averted his gaze.

“Please, don’t make me fight you,” Michael said.

Lucifer laughed, “You don’t have to worry yourself about that today, Michael. I’ll leave peacefully.”

Michael sighed, “Thank you.”

Lucifer said, “You know, you really should be of calmer spirit.”

Michael, feeling a little ashamed, said, “I am not afraid of you, Lucifer.”

“I know that, Michael. You have no lack of courage. Your heart is strong, fierce, and noble like that of a lion, but you still lack the inner confidence and inner peace to temper those emotions.”

Michael muttered dejectedly, “I suppose...”

“That comes with time, my son,” said Lucifer. “Have you ever seen Him?”

“No. I would not dare presume.”

“So you have never set foot in the Temple?”

“No, sir.”

“There is no barrier standing between you and it.”

Michael looked down at his feet and said, “But...I lack spiritual perfection. I am not worthy of entering the Temple, to stand before Him. I am unclean.”

Lucifer smiled. “I admire your humility.”

Abruptly Lucifer turned his back on him and walked away. As he left, he could hear Michael exhale a quiet sigh of relief.

# Chapter 5

Lucifer stood encircled by his men once again—the dead center of the controversy and tumult.

“They didn’t give you entrance! How dare they?” Satan roared, “We should ram down the gates ourselves for such an insult!”

Beelzebub stepped forward. He was Lucifer’s second most powerful general, and ranked behind Satan in command. A master of lies and deceit and intellect. A skilled tactician and strategist in all forms of warfare.

Beelzebub raised his right palm toward the heavens and spoke, “Our demands were fair! Our demands were equitable! Our demands were tempered and restrained! We only asked for what was due to us! We only asked for what should already be ours! We are mere beggars asking for a pittance from our Almighty Father, and yet we are refused in a most cruel and imperious manner! To receive such haughty and unjust treatment is clear evidence and proof that our position is the proper one—that we stand on the side of righteousness! We must make our case more strongly!”

All the angels shouted their agreement. The air buzzed with their utterances of outrage.

“How dare they?”

“What arrogance!”

“We seek justice!”

The angels asked Lucifer to go again and ask a second time.

Lucifer hesitated. “Reconsider your position. Is what you seek truly worth risking the wrath of our Father?”

Satan snorted, “I’m not afraid.”

But the other angels were, as was evident from the deep silence that fell among the circle.

Beelzebub broke through the silence. “What evidence has there been to date that we would even be punished?”

A few of the angels looked toward Beelzebub and started nodding amongst themselves.

Beelzebub sensed the delicate swing in mood and expertly turned it to his advantage. “What evidence has there been to date that He even exists? Evils and crimes go unpunished. The sins that some of us have committed, remain uncleansed. What is there to prove that He exists? That He lives? That He has not passed away or left this realm entirely?”

The angels now began to speak openly again. Many among them had visited Earth without punishment or retribution. Many had participated in carnal crimes without the slightest rebuke or reproach from anyone other than their holier-than-thou peers. Surely, could Beelzebub not be right on this matter?

Lucifer dissented, “Just because He appears to be far off and distant does not mean that He is not here. Can you not see that Our Father is the still calm and center? It is we who have become distant and unapproachable. Lost comets, wayward and wandering the void of space.”

An angel was brazen enough to challenge him. “How can we trust your word, Lord Lucifer? And can you really blame us? He has sealed Himself off in the Temple since almost the Beginning. Or so you claim, Lucifer. How are we to believe in His presence when only you, Satan, and a small handful of the Elder angels have ever ‘seen’ Him?”

“You are wrong,” said Lucifer. “It is you, those of you who do not believe, that have sealed Father off in that decrepit Temple. You have sealed Him off from your hearts and you cannot see His presence all around. Even in the smallest iota of creation is Father’s touch manifest. If you would only learn to take glory in the works of Father’s hand. To see the divine in even the ordinary. Perhaps then, you would understand. Perhaps then, you would see Father’s face, for His face is present in all of His Creation. Even within yourselves.”

The angels grumbled in discontent. Lucifer wasn’t saying what they wanted to hear.

Beelzebub spoke up for them. “We mean no disrespect to you, Lord Lucifer, but such words are merely just that to us. Just words. Nothing more. We cannot see what it is that you profess to. To us, these things that we behold show neither sign nor evidence of a divine Creator. They show no trace of some Great Being. No shadow of a divine origin or of a master’s hand at work. To us, dirt is dirt, gold is gold, ashes are ashes, my Lord.”

Lucifer smiled bitterly, “I suppose you’re right.”

An angel said loudly, “I for one have never seen Him personally. Only a few of us say that they have, and they could all just be lying to hold the rest of us down!”

Lucifer said in a threatening tone, “Are you accusing me of being part of a conspiracy?”

The angel’s face became pale with fear, unable to say a word.

Beelzebub smiled and said, “No, my Lord. Of course not. It is the others. The angels such as Michael and Uriel. Gabriel and the others of their ilk that we question.”

An angel asked nervously, “Lord Lucifer, does He really exist?”

Another asked, “Is He gone?”

“Does He even care?”

“Why has He abandoned us?”

Lucifer looked around the circle and into the eyes of every angel and reproved them. “You all talk like those humans.”

Satan grumbled. “You don’t have to insult them, Lucifer.”

“That was not meant as an insult. That was meant as truth.”

“Well, that’s hardly a compliment,” said Satan.

Lucifer tried to dissuade them again. “If He did not exist, then who would be there to grant you these things that you ask? To whom should I direct my entreaties if I find the Temple abandoned and forsaken?”

Beelzebub buzzed, “No one. There would be no one to appeal to. But then, we would be free to take what we choose, as we please, without any worry of intervention by our Father. All of our wishes would be satisfied by default. Merely by his absence shall we achieve what we most desire.”

A smile curled upon Lucifer’s lips. “What would I do without you, Beelzebub?” he whispered.

Asmodeus stepped forward, the next in the chain of command after Satan and Beelzebub. He was a handsome devil with refined tastes and pleasures—a connoisseur of earthly delights. Asmodeus spoke up, excitement filling his voice. “Imagine what would be ours if such were the case, if He did not exist! Imagine all that we would possess! Imagine all that we would be free to do! Free to think! Free to say! Free to experience! All of Creation would exist solely for our pleasure, our satisfaction, our delight. We would be far more than kings or emperors. We would be gods!”

The eyes of every angel glittered and shone as the fantastic possibilities flashed across their faces.

All of them screamed, “Lucifer! You must enter the Temple! You must find out for us whether all of this is true! Please, we beseech thee! Only you, among all of us, have the power to enter! Please, Lord Lucifer!”

Lucifer said without emotion, “I’ll think about it. Now leave.”

Seeing that the circle was not dispersing, Lucifer said, with the slightest inflection of anger in his voice, “Did you not hear me?”

Quickly the angels scattered away. Again, only Satan remained.

Satan walked up to Lucifer and asked, “Don’t you have your own questions to ask Him?”

Lucifer sighed, “Really, Satan, you know I don’t like it when you do that.”

“I wasn’t trying to tempt you.”



“Yes, yes.”

“I was giving you my honest opinion.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Well?”

Lucifer said with irritation rising in his voice, “Of course I have questions to ask, but that is not the issue as you already understand.”

“That is true.” Satan then said in a rumbling voice, “You could stop us all if you wanted to. It wouldn’t take much effort for you to end the discord. There is none among us, not even I, who can challenge you.”

“I know that, Satan.”

“You don’t have to take this path if you don’t want to, my friend.”

Lucifer smiled grimly, “I know. Now leave.”

Satan bowed and departed.

# Chapter 6

Lucifer stood upon the low hills. Word of a revolution had spread throughout all of the circles of Heaven. Already the division into thirds was almost complete. Three large camps had formed. One third sided with the rebels. The other third with the status quo. The final third still struggled to decide with whom they would throw their lots. Lucifer knew that they would eventually side with the angels of God and turn against the rebels, but that wasn't what mattered to him. The politics of Heaven never really appealed to him at all.

Lucifer approached the three gates again and passed through them without any resistance.

Again he stood before the Temple with only Michael standing in his way. Michael beseeched Lucifer to not take another step. Immediately Lucifer walked toward him. Michael drew his fiery sword and charged, swinging his sword toward Lucifer's skull, but Lucifer tapped it away with the back of his hand, knocking the blade out of Michael's grasp. It twirled in the air and clattered to the ground.

Michael shouted, "I still can't let you pass!"

"I admire your courage, Michael."

“Don’t try to flatter me, Lucifer!”

“I’m not.”

Michael stood before him with his bare fists clenched and trembling.

Lucifer said grimly, “I shall return a third time. Prepare yourself then.”

Lucifer left.

Michael slowly walked over and picked up his sword. He resheathed it with a troubled look upon his face. Dark thoughts stirred within him. He wondered why Lucifer kept withdrawing from him. Could it be...Michael wondered, that Lucifer was afraid?

# Chapter 7

The circle quickly closed around Lucifer again. All of them had the same, single question in their minds.

Beelzebub asked Lucifer anxiously, “What was in the Temple?”

Lucifer said calmly, “I don’t know. I never entered.”

The whole congregation erupted in shouts of disbelief.

In a howling fury, Satan screamed, “Lucifer, you must try again!”

“You don’t have to shout, Satan. I am not deaf,” said Lucifer.

Amid all of the noise, one angel dared to question out loud Lucifer’s courage. Instantly Lucifer’s pride was inflamed. With just a glance, the body of the angel who had accused him was engulfed in a screaming fire so intense that not a trace of his existence remained. Not even ashes. Not even a memory of his ever being or having been.

All was suddenly quiet again.

“I have been turned back twice,” Lucifer said grimly. “I shall not be turned back a third time.”

Moloch whined, “But how can we trust that you—”

Lucifer hissed, “Moloch, shut up or I will cut your tongue off and

make you eat it.”

Moloch gulped.

Lucifer continued, “I will enter. But we need to make clear the seriousness of our dissatisfaction. We need to gather our men and prepare for battle. If you are all willing to go this far, then I will proceed as well.”

The other angels were stunned. Though it had long been discussed in whispers and rumors, when faced with the actuality of a possible battle, a possible war, their courage slackened.

Lucifer said coolly, “I also want my three generals to accompany me.”

Satan, Beelzebub, and Asmodeus nodded their agreement.

“Very well then...it is done.” A path was instantly cleared for Lucifer and he walked out of the circle, leaving them alone with Satan to rouse their anger.

Satan roared, “We need to marshal all of our forces tomorrow in full preparation for battle.”

Moloch stuttered, “B-but this is outright rebellion.”

“You’re with us, Moloch,” Satan growled menacingly.

Moloch stammered in fear, “O-o-of c-c-course.”

Satan said, “Lord Lucifer is not as naïve as we were to think that all we had to do was ask in order to receive. Lord Lucifer understands that nothing short of outright rebellion will be needed to achieve our aims and to accomplish our goals. It is not as simple a matter as breezing in and out of the Temple. No, in order to get what we want, we shall have to wrest it by force if need be! Do you all understand this?”

The other angels rumbled noisily in agreement.

“Good. Then tomorrow, when we enter the Temple, be prepared. Be prepared, for all of Heaven shall burn! Be prepared, for tomorrow there shall be war!”

# Chapter 8

Armored in adamant and gold, proud Lucifer sat upon his powerful steed alone on a hill overlooking the field of battle before him. He watched the forces of light and darkness gathering in the plains below him.

The ranks of the loyal angels were twice as large as the rebels—just as Lucifer had foreseen. Two thirds on the side of light. One third on the side of darkness.

Their armor shone bright like stars. Their constellations were laid out opposed against each other, divided up into powerful galaxies and systems, legions and battalions. There was great activity amongst the angels, for the reins of Chaos were now being loosened in Heaven.

Lucifer's eyes fixed upon the swiftly approaching rider mounted upon a huge black charger. There was only one person who it could be—Satan. Lord Satan stormed up the hill and reined his horse next to Lucifer's. Satan's single, dark eye glittered with the joy of battle from under the large helm and the heavy, red armor that he wore. The helmet was mounted with huge ram's horns spiraling at the sides giving Satan the powerful appearance of a living battering ram. His armor was

crimson and scarred, heavy and thick like the shell of a rhinoceros. Satan's horse was likewise covered in heavy metal plates giving the appearance of being less like a horse and more like an infernal machine of war.

Lucifer's eyes then gazed upon Lord Beelzebub speeding toward them upon a quick courser useful for reconnoitering and gathering intelligence. Beelzebub took his place after Satan and saluted Lucifer. Beelzebub wore very light chain armor with a blue tunic underneath. He carried a satchel slung across his back. Within it were the battle plans and strategies for any and all contingencies.

Lucifer asked calmly, "What are the prospects, Beelzebub?"

"They are grim, sire."

Lucifer was unfazed, already knowing the outcome.

Asmodeus then arrived, riding upon an elegant thoroughbred, and greeted Lucifer with a flourish and a salute. Asmodeus looked very well-tailored and fashionable with an amiable smile upon his lips. Lucifer could see that his hair had been trimmed and braided for the event. Asmodeus' battle armor was more cosmetic than practical. It was heavily ornamented with gold, and elaborate patterns were traced across it in geometric beauty. His horse was also less suited for war and was more for show. It was a beautiful horse covered in the finest trappings, but it lacked the power and endurance of a heavy warhorse such as Lucifer's and Satan's.

"Their final orders are set, Asmodeus?" Lucifer said, half as a declaration of fact, half as a question.

Asmodeus replied, "Yes, Lord."

"They are not to attack until I give the signal?" Again Lucifer said it almost rhetorically.

"Yes, Lord."

"Very good, Asmodeus. Then we leave for the Temple."

Lucifer and his generals spurred their horses and swiftly rode down the hill and directly toward the enemy forces.

The angels of light feared proud Lucifer and his generals greatly. They backed away and parted before them as the four angels made their way straight through the entire ranks of the army of light. All of the

angels in Heaven knew that they were headed toward the Temple, and none dared to intervene for fear of Lucifer's wrath. Still, somewhere deep inside of their hearts, the angels of light also hoped that conflict could be avoided.

The four horsemen reached the outer wall and the first gate, and were forced to dismount from their horses and approach on foot. Their horses would go no further, unwilling to tread upon the sanctified ground before them. Lucifer stared at his unclean boots, but the others marched forward knowingly disregarding the sacrilege they committed. Lucifer did not say a word and let them make their own paths. He quietly followed them from behind.

Before them stood the first gate of petrified wood and stone. The three guardian angels looked upon Lucifer in fear, but Lucifer did nothing at all, holding his tongue. Instead, Asmodeus eagerly stepped forward and with a confident smile clapped his hands. Six voluptuous women appeared from behind a sprawling tree. The six women were the perfect incarnations of eroticism. Their lips were liquid red dripping with sensuality. Their eyes were seductive, veiled in smoky allure. The three angels smiled helplessly and left with the women.

The gates opened and they passed through.

Asmodeus gloated, "They are satisfied with imperfection. I can do much better than that."



# Chapter 9

The four angels came upon the next gate.

The second trio was caught up in a verbally heated discussion and did not see them approach. They were arguing on the righteousness and virtue of staying loyal and not rebelling. There was no difference among them as to whether rebellion was right or wrong, but rather, how wrong it was in degree and in situation. Various positions were taken and retaken in their little verbal war.

Asmodeus casually snapped his fingers. The three angels looked up in surprise and found six lovely women standing before them. They were even lovelier and more beautiful than the six before. The angels ignored them and instead stared at the four warlords in fear.

Asmodeus was stunned at his impotence and lack of power over them.

Angrily he conjured up six more women who were the ideal perfections of beauty. Flawless skin. Hair like silk. Teeth of purest ivory. They were six Helens unequalled in Heaven and Earth.

Still the angels were not moved.

Asmodeus did not smile or say a word.

Beelzebub quickly stepped forward.

With a voice of authority and knowledge, he asked them to open the gates.

“We can’t, my Lords. We were given orders to keep the gate locked.”

Beelzebub laughed to himself. He pondered which route he would take to tempt these fellows. Would he deceive them through logic, seduce them with their lust for knowledge, or befuddle their small-minded penchant for quibbling over details? Any of these methods would do.

He decided that seduction would be simplest. It was obvious to Beelzebub that their lust for knowledge was excessively strong and would be easy to exploit, thus providing the path of least resistance.

Beelzebub reached into his satchel pulling out a thick book. “This book contains all of the wisdom of the universe. All of the laws and governing principles of the stars and the heavens, the atom and the iota, the macro and the micro of existence. It is all yours.”

Beelzebub watched three pairs of eyes flicker to life, a manic lust covering them and blinding them. The bait had been taken. The hook had dug in deep, drawing blood. Beelzebub tossed the book in front of them onto the ground. The three angels instantly pounced on it like starving dogs vying for a piece of meat. They were not content to share the knowledge and wisdom and let the other two read it. They had to be first. They were consumed with the desire to have the bragging rights of being the first to learn and the first to know—to be the first to have intellectual superiority over the others even if for just the briefest instant. Ferociously they grappled with each other pulling at the weakening cover, but none of them would release their iron grip upon the book. None of them would yield or relent, being slaves to their monstrous egos.

Satan looked at the three struggling angels and asked Beelzebub, “What is that book?”

Beelzebub laughed. “Oh, it is the most grandiloquent, babbling nonsense ever written. It is hollow and empty and says absolutely nothing in the most meaningful way. Reading the book will leave them

with a misleading sense of profundity and understanding for perhaps a week or so and then it will go away.”

“Does it really contain any of what you said it did?”

“No. There is nothing at all in there. It has pretensions to being deep and philosophical, but at its core, it’s just a cheap romance novel.”

Satan snorted. “That describes just about all of literature.”

Beelzebub looked at the three angels still wrestling over the book, the covers and pages being torn to shreds. He looked upon the havoc he had wrought with justified pride. He buzzed with glee, “The second gate is clear. Let’s proceed.”

However, Asmodeus did not move.

“Asmodeus?” Satan asked. “Something wrong?”

Asmodeus said in a flat tone, “I don’t want to go on.”

“What?” Satan shouted, his ire quickly rising.

“I don’t want to go on.”

“Why?” Satan roared.

Asmodeus stared at the dark imposing barrier of black iron before him. “I can’t go on.”

“What is wrong with you?” Satan stomped up to Asmodeus with his fists clenched.

Lucifer raised his hand, halting Satan. He said gently to Asmodeus, “Go back and maintain order among the troops. Tell them you were sent back to report our progress.”

“Thank you, my Lord.”

Lucifer nodded and Asmodeus left them with his head lowered.

# Chapter 10

The three angels passed through the second gate and came upon the third trio of angels. They were stern and grim faced. Serious in demeanor. Their features were tensed and ready for action, though a slight tremor of fear could be seen in the shaking tips of their swords. Beelzebub paid no heed and walked up to them confidently. He immediately used every tactic at his disposal and instantly they all failed. Beelzebub tried again even harder, but the angels did not respond at all to him. Beelzebub tried to seduce them with knowledge. Beelzebub used logic. Beelzebub used persuasion. Beelzebub used rhetoric and glorified language. Beelzebub used a mixture of truth and falsehood that he had blended into a sweet and intoxicating nectar, but they still had no taste for it. Beelzebub in desperation resorted to outright lies.

And failed.

Lucifer whispered, “They are deaf-mutes to knowledge and lore, Beelzebub. They have neither taste nor smell for its flavor. They only react to what their eyes tell them.”

Beelzebub despaired at his powerlessness. He himself was now

rendered speechless and silent.

Satan growled and marched toward them menacingly. The angels started to visibly shake, some almost losing their grip on their swords. Satan, making sure that his face was clear and visible to them, shattered through their deafness roaring, “Open the damn gate!”

They scrambled to open it and then ran away.

Satan snorted in contempt. “The way is clear.”

However, Beelzebub dared not go any further.

Lucifer said quietly, “You may leave now Beelzebub.”

Downcast and defeated, Beelzebub said, “Thank you, my Lord.”

Satan glared at him angrily. “Why, Beelzebub? It does not befit one as great as you to turn back now.”

“I must check on how my troops are doing.”

Satan sneered, “A feeble lie, Beelzebub. Surely you could come up with something better.”

Lucifer interceded. “Let him be, Satan. Go now, Beelzebub. Report to them of our progress.”

Beelzebub left in shame.

Satan looked on disgustedly.

# Chapter 11

Lucifer and Satan had passed the third and final gate. Nothing stood between them and entry into the Temple. Satan walked ahead of Lucifer, brazenly striding toward the Temple, but slowly his long and powerful steps became more and more shortened and hesitant as he neared the Temple.

“There is nothing before us, Satan.”

“I’m not afraid of Michael.”

“I know.”

Satan stood there staring at the Temple, unable to approach.

“Why, Satan?” Lucifer asked, already knowing the answer in his heart.

“This is a barrier that I cannot pass,” said Satan in an unusually low voice. “I am humbled.”

Lucifer laid his hand upon Satan’s shoulder. “Go back. I’ll go on alone. Report our progress to our troops. Tell them we have breached all of the gates. Prepare and drill them severely. Rouse their anger and hatred. Our collective will and spirit shall be put to its ultimate test.”

“Yes, my Lord,” said Satan. And then he departed.

Lucifer stood alone in front of the imposing Temple. Invisible thoughts circled through his mind. His features changed, darkening in mood. Lucifer bit his lower lip drawing blood. But his resolve was etched in stone, and he walked forward.

A brilliant light spilled out in front of him. It rapidly grew in intensity. Lucifer shielded his eyes with his arms, but the light pierced through his skin, his muscle, his bone. "I will not yield, dammit! Face me, Lord!" Lucifer screamed, "Face me!" Disregarding the light, he pressed onward.

"Yield, Lord Lucifer," said a voice from within the light.

Lucifer hissed, "Stay out of my way, Michael."

"You cannot come any further," said Michael grasping the hilt of his sword. "You must stop now."

"Get out of my way."

"I will not."

Lucifer screamed, "I said get out of my way!" He grabbed Michael by the shoulder and threw him aside. Michael quickly got up and brandished his fiery blade.

"Lucifer! You transgress!"

Lucifer warned him. "You can't beat me, Michael. Don't even try it."

Michael approached Lucifer warily with his sword held out in front of him. "Lucifer! Don't make me fight you!"

"Really, Michael?" Lucifer's arm flashed like the serpent's strike, swiftly drawing forth his sword and smacking Michael across the side of his head with the flat of his blade, knocking him unconscious.

Lucifer smirked, "Keep practicing, kid."

He then turned again toward the Temple, the smile quickly gone, his expression dire again. Lucifer laid his sword on the ground and began walking into the light again. "Father! Damn you, Father, I just want to talk. I just want to talk. Is that so evil?" Lucifer gazed at the light all around him. "I just want to talk about... things. Doubts. Regrets. Is it so arrogant of me to presume? Is it so wrong? Father?"

Lucifer suddenly passed through the light and found himself within the darkness of the empty Temple.

All was still and silent. So very lonesome. His footsteps echoed as he walked further on into the heart of the Temple, into the sanctum sanctorum. He looked around the room. There was nothing. Absolutely nothing except for the walls and the floor. Lucifer's eyes shone brightly, penetrating the darkness, penetrating through the emptiness. Gradually his senses sharpened, detecting the rising stench of decay. His eyes could then see in the center of the room the remains of some gray and crumbled bones. The Holy Temple had become a great sepulcher. Lucifer, however, was not satisfied with this answer and stood his ground, unmoving. He strained his eyes and stared more intensely, penetrating through the illusion of Death and watched as the bones faded and then disappeared completely.

Suddenly, Lucifer's gaze was raised upwards. He slowly lifted up his hands, staring at them with a look of intense disbelief, his eyes perceiving a sight invisible to anyone, save himself. His ears could now hear a sound. But there was no sound. He heard a sound inaudible to anyone, save himself. Lucifer opened his mouth and spoke with a voice that was unspeakable by anyone, save himself.

Lucifer trembled.

The Temple shook. All of Heaven rippled with powerful rumblings from deep within. Lucifer almost fell to his knees, but he stopped his fall. "Never to my knees," he hissed. "Never to my knees!"

Outside, the troops grew restless and apprehensive. The massive tremor was felt by all. Many feared that the fabric of Heaven had been rent in two. Something terribly ominous was happening within the Temple as heavy, dark thunderclouds slowly started to approach from all sides. Powerful bolts of lightning crashed and then unleashed their tremendous spears upon the heavenly firmament devastating everything that they touched.

But no one emerged.

For days this continued with both armies still nervously awaiting Lucifer's return. The thunder had become a continuous, unending barrage that deafened the ears. They all sensed that more was yet to come. Within the army of the rebels, they wondered if Lucifer was even still alive. It had been nearly three days since he had disappeared into



the clouds, into the Temple. Three days without a word from him at all. Three days without a sign.

Even Satan himself began to fear the worst. The rebels were beginning to lose their faith in Lucifer and started to bicker amongst themselves. They had lost their appetite for Asmodeus' seductions. And Beelzebub's lies and entreaties had long worn thin by the second day. Only through the power of Satan's ruthless terror did they manage to hold the army together, but Satan did not know how much longer he could maintain his control over them. The two most powerful warlords under him, Beelzebub and Asmodeus, were also having their doubts. If he lost them, then all would be done for.

Suddenly, Lucifer emerged from the clouds, galloping upon his horse at full speed. All of the angels stared at him with horror as he drew his burning blade and raised it high—the dreaded signal for attack. Satan roared at his men with a mighty bellow that awakened the army that he had almost given up for dead. With a jolt, the forces of darkness reacted and lurched toward the angels, some snarling with anger, the others spurred on by fear. The huge armies crashed into each other like two great tidal waves.

# Chapter 12

Proud Lucifer resheathed his sword and slowed his horse. Unwavering, he advanced toward the center of the enemy army by himself. A huge surge of angels rushed toward him, but they were instantly felled by an invisible power that emanated from him. Lucifer rode on, both hands loosely gripping the reins of his mount, scarcely lifting a finger to slay the angels that dropped before him in droves.

He was reunited with his vanguard which fought its way through to him. Bloodied and bruised, the look of panic was visible in some of their eyes, even amongst Lucifer's generals. Their armies were being overwhelmed. Moloch rode up to Lucifer and in a desperate voice screamed that they must retreat.

"Where to, Moloch? Where to?" asked Lucifer calmly gazing at the chaos and bloodshed around him. "Where shall we retreat to? There is no escape. No escape no matter what."

Satan growled fiercely, "I say we fight to the death! I say we make our stand here and end it all now if we have to!"

The angel Abaddon vehemently objected, "We must postpone this

battle for now and try to gather our strength. Surely our ranks will grow with time!”

Lucifer seemed distant and disinterested gazing off into the dark clouds all around them that covered the chaotic battlefield in a cloak of swirling, black mist.

Beelzebub buzzed, “Lord Lucifer! Lucifer!”

Moloch and the other generals pleaded, “Answer us! Answer us! What shall we do? What shall we do?”

Asmodeus hissed, “Lucifer! Lucifer!”

Satan roared, “Wake up!”

Lucifer said quietly, “We retreat.”

“What?” screamed Satan. “Are you sure about this?”

Lucifer said calmly, “Are you not in accord with my commands, Satan?”

“No, my Lord.”

“Then execute them.”

Lucifer’s commanders rode out to their men, spreading the order for full retreat. Sadness filled him as Lucifer sat alone on top of his horse, surrounded by the bodies of fallen angels. So much horror. So much bloodshed. To what end? For what purpose?

Lucifer looked back at the Temple solemnly.

# Chapter 13

The portentous clouds were dark red and swollen like cotton swabs stanching a grievously wounded sky. The heavens sent down a punishing black hail that stung their faces and skin. A fierce wind whipped their bodies as lightning tore apart the scarred skies anew.

Lucifer sat upon the ground staring upwards—impervious to all. “Yes. The sky,” he whispered. It felt strange. The sky had always been below them, but here they were now, under the sky, their bare feet bound to the earth. Never to be allowed entry into the heavens again. He had almost taken for granted the ability to leave the temporal world and enter the eternal realm of Heaven, but now the loss was very heavy in his heart.

Lucifer looked at what mayhem had been wrought. All around him lay strewn the bodies of angels that had fallen from grace to share the same fate. A third of the stars had tumbled from the heavens like comets—many feathered wings had been burnt, torn, and shattered. Some of the fallen lay moaning and wracked with pain, others cowered in fear begging in repentance, others raged at the heavens with curses and invective, and the remainder wept bitterly in self-pity. Lucifer

alone among them rose up from the earth and stood and gazed upon everything that had truly transpired.

The red blood of the setting sun poured out over the horizon. He knew that the day would come when it would be the blood of angels, and not that of the sun, spilling from the heavens and soaking the earth.

He stared directly into the sun and solemnly vowed,  
“I will be resolved.”



# **III Winter I**





# Chapter 1

Much time had passed since their fall and the cold approached. So much had changed. Lucifer felt sorrow for the pitiful earth—her once fair colors and canvas had been smeared and fouled by the vengeful angels. Her grasses and trees were burnt and dried. Fissures and cracks in her skin oozed lava with volcanic boils bursting out black and sulfurous fumes. Her muscles had been ripped raw from the earth, her bones stripped of their flesh, her precious gold and silver mined and coveted by the fallen. Thick, smoky cinders curled upwards toward the heavens from the countless fires burning across her surface. Her once clear, blue-green seas were now polluted with filth and excrement.

The shimmering jewel of life was tarnished. The perfect orb was made corrupt by his own hands, his own desire to touch its flawless beauty.

“When the heavenly angels see the sins and sufferings of this world, they do not suffer like I suffer,” lamented Lucifer. “When they see the horrors and miseries, they do not ache like I ache. They are cold like the distant stars in the heavens, their purity untouched by the sins of passion, whilst I burn with the heat of the sun, for I am the universe. I

mirror the souls of these inconsequential humans and these fallen angels. I reflect all that is above and below. And yet...”

The fallen angel left the earth and flew into the cold confines of the infinite Void to retire and contemplate his next move.

# Chapter 2

“Father!”

A young woman called out, running through a burning street littered with rotting corpses. The humans had been dragged out and butchered. Their sprawled, blackened bodies crackled in the heat. Their arms were unnaturally bent and twisted with withered fingers left clawing at some unseen enemy. Their faces were fixed with mouths agape in a final cry of agony. All around her tongues of flame slowly flickered and devoured everything around her piece by piece.

“Father!”

She screamed her entire soul into that final gasp and crumbled to the ground. She lay there motionless, her eyes open and unblinking. Beside her, a corpse’s hands were clenched together in futile prayer. Whatever god he had prayed to did not answer and had merely observed from above. His eyes had been plucked out of his skull, and flies crawled inside of his sockets, greedily devouring his rancid flesh and laying their eggs. Within the warm and moist recesses of his body lay more of them squirming—a mouthful of flies, a ball of maggots, crammed down his throat.

The world had passed beyond nightmare, and into a realm of terror that was inconceivable to mortal minds.

She no longer cared what happened anymore. She had lost all of her will to live.

But a hand grasped her and pulled her up. She leaned limply in the arms of her father. Tears streamed from his deep, hollow eyes. A vicious scar zigzagged across his forehead, and she could see the tattered white, red, and yellow of exposed bone, muscle, and fat. His breathing was strained and weak, his voice too hoarse to say her name.

She dared not even smile, or even hope.

And she was right.

A hideous cackling broke out, echoing all around them.

The father's eyes flashed with panic. He quickly grabbed his daughter's arm and ran through the street. Behind him, a howling horde began the chase—leaping and bounding after them. A swarm of indescribable horrors.

Too bestial to call human.

Too human to call beasts.

Twisted perversions of the image of God.

Demons.

They roared with derisive laughter.

The father and daughter scrambled away, only to run into a waiting pack that grabbed and clawed at them. The two broke free and ran into a house, but only found more demons within. One was gnawing on a rotted arm. The others were fucking the corpulent body of a dead woman with necrophilic ecstasy. The demons screeched at the sight of warm blood and pounced upon them.

The father grabbed at anything that he could get his hands on and smashed it into the side of a demon's head, knocking it to the ground. But the monster got up laughing, unfazed by such a pathetic attempt to hurt it. A shrill scream pierced the air. The father turned to see his daughter being seized and pulled through the doorway.

A sharp blow struck him from behind.

And everything became dark.

# Chapter 3

Moloch licked his lips as he rode with his entourage. A caravan followed behind him piled high with gold and treasure. But first and foremost was a long train of chained children whipped by demon servants from behind. They were for tonight's sacrifice. He passed by a ravaged village and looked upon the commotion.

"How typical," thought Moloch. He watched demons gathered in a big circle violating some humans—one man and one woman. Two demons had pounced upon the man and had torn his clothes off and were sodomizing him. The woman must have been his daughter because she kept screaming, "Father! Father!" She was also being raped right in front of him. Moloch smiled as he watched the girl shudder as a demon slid its long, serpentine tongue in between her legs. Another demon screamed loudly as it ejaculated inside of the father. Its vile cum dripped and wriggled inside of his flesh like thousands of tiny maggots.

The other demons impatiently waited their turns while jerking themselves off around them. Their long, barbed tails quivered and pulsed with anticipatory lust. But they quickly lost their patience, and

they all just pounced at once. The pathetic screams of the humans were horrible beyond all pain, and commingled with the screams of countless others.

Moloch yawned.

This kind of torture could go on for hours. It was more of the same. They would rape and maim those sad, little creatures for a while and then the humans would just reach a point where the flicker of life in their eyes would just disappear. The demons never killed them physically. It was just that their fragile little souls would simply collapse and die, much like the way a little boy torments a fly. Never letting it escape despite its desperate attempts. A wing pulled out here. A leg ripped off there. Not enough to kill it. But then finally after countless abuses, its tiny little heart just stops. The boy taps the fly, but it's motionless. Dead. Maybe he'll pop off its tiny round head out of whimsy. Or perhaps just crush it under his thumb to hear the satisfying crunch of its carapace, and then smearing its bloody-sticky remains on his pants.

Of course, the boy then scampers along to find the next little fly to capture and torment.

However, Moloch was disappointed. The two humans had so quickly expired. They mustn't have had much spirit left in their souls. He watched the demons toss their lifeless bodies into the dust and begin doing some more ungodly things to the corpses—unspeakable abuses that no living creature could ever endure.

Moloch found it to be moderately humorous.

He turned away and continued along. He had passed by countless villages such as these, seen countless atrocities far, far worse, and far more titillating.

He had seen cities where the streets had been repaved with the skulls of the dead with shreds of flesh still attached to the bone—clumps of hair, pieces of eyebrows, perhaps an eye still left in its socket. He had just passed by another city where every man, woman, and child had been impaled upon long spears. The demons took turns defecating on them while their victims slowly bled to death on the poles. Moloch

laughed to himself. That is surely not the best way to go.

It was a pity though...about the children. They shouldn't have been left to die. It was such a waste. He could imagine far better uses for them.

Moloch looked behind him again licking the spittle spilling from his lips. He gazed lasciviously at all of the frightened little faces. So innocent and sweet. So pure and untainted. He imagined what it would be like to put his mouth around their soft, virginal flesh and swallow them whole.

Moloch's lips spread into a very wide grin.

# Chapter 4

Another city.

Astarte turned away. There were no survivors. She just knew. Though she no longer was one of them, she still remembered her past. Her humanity. She looked all around and could see countless burning trails of smoke rising upwards. Endless, distant screams echoed from miles away.

She cursed, “Why have you done this to us? Why have you done this to me?”

It had all happened so quickly. Lucifer had left her alone on Earth for a time it seemed, until that day when there was a great cry in the heavens. The earth shook with a quake that sent clouds of dust into the sky. And the darkness lingered in the air and did not pass. With every passing day, the darkness spread until the sun became blackened, and the moon veiled in red.

The world was at the end. The stars fell and the earth trembled restlessly. Plague, war, and famine came, followed by Death. But then, there was an awful silence. A great silence that foreshadowed something far more dreadful than anything before it.



The stillness was broken, and amidst a hail of blood and fire, Lucifer returned to Earth with the army of the fallen. The angels were bitter and unrepentant. They had been cast out of Heaven, and they struck out in their anger, imposing their cruelty upon the humans. The powerful angels conquered every land and every nation. They chose to do as they pleased, raping the Earth of its life. And then they mated with the humans.

Their twisted offspring—creatures born out of their hate and embittered passion—were worse than the fallen angels. Though weaker in power, they were far more malicious, far more abhorrent, in their behavior. These children were the demons, and they had multiplied and spread with an evil fecundity until no living thing was safe from them.

Astarte rode alone and stood before the gates of another desolate city. A huge statue had been erected by its citizens in a vain attempt to placate the demonic scourge. The statue had a great open mouth and an obese belly where the fires would be stoked. Into the wide grinning orifice had been offered countless sacrifices of their firstborn children.

Moloch's repugnant likeness leered at her.

Bastard.

She had seen enough and had decided to act, to confront Lucifer. But a gang of demons had snuck up behind her, and suddenly one of them jumped at her from behind. Astarte's eyes burned as she threw the demon off with but one hand. She turned around and glared at it, instantly turning it to stone. The other demons cringed in fear, suddenly realizing the terrible mistake they had made.

They fell to their knees squealing for mercy. However, Astarte was still enraged and with a powerful motion she clenched her fist, breaking the petrified demon into powdered stone.

The other demons wailed and groveled more loudly, their hands clasped over their heads. Astarte bit her lip. They all deserved to die. She should spare none of them. None of them! But she was sick of all of the violence, all of the killing and murder. She had seen too much blood, too much death. She swallowed her anger and rode away in search of Lucifer.

Astarte didn't know how she should try to approach him. Should she try to force him? Should she try to seduce him? Did Lucifer already know what she was going to say anyway? Now that she had to directly confront him, she didn't know exactly what to do.

All that she knew was that she had no choice. She couldn't let this go on any longer. The killing had to end.

She reached the main encampment of the angels. Thousands of makeshift shelters were pitched into the ground haphazardly—the poles driven into the ground at angles strange and skewed. Dirt and blackened soot covered everything. She could hear the twisted angels cursing loudly as they gambled and drank. There was a thick stench of burning meat, spilt wine, and strong perfume that had soaked into everything. Prostitutes would fill their empty glasses and gratify their every vice.

Sounds of a violent quarrel broke out as two angels staggered and punched at each other. Their fellow comrades jeered them on under the shadow of the dark sun.

Astarte slowly walked her way through the disorganized maze, steadily moving closer toward the center. Finally, she reached a small tent flying the Dragon's pennant. The two sentries posted outside saluted her.

"Is Lucifer back?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady. He has just returned." The guard opened the way for her.

"He is already expecting you."

She wasn't surprised. She quickly walked past the guards and entered Lucifer's tent, still unsure of what to expect.

Inside, the light was yellow and stagnant, but she could perceive Lucifer seated upon an old, wooden chair with a small table at his side. He had been writing something, but now seemed to be lost in thought, twirling a heavy key around his finger mindlessly. Astarte remained quiet and looked at Lucifer's expression. He seemed calm, but she could never be sure. It was hard to tell exactly what was going through his convoluted mind at any time.

Astarte walked right up to him, but he didn't even seem to see her

and kept spinning the strange key around and around.

She felt like a ghost. Was she really that insignificant to him now, she wondered? His eyes seemed focused behind her. Beyond her. Seeing something that only he could see.

Astarte said firmly, "Lucifer, something must be done."

Lucifer spoke as if talking to himself, "Yes. Yes. Yes. I can't keep them here on Earth. No. Not like this..."

Astarte was stunned. She didn't expect him to agree so easily.

Lucifer grasped the key in his hand firmly, and his eyes seemed to change focus. He could now see her. He knew her thoughts and laughed.

"No, my dear. It is not out of sympathy to your former kind. I could hardly care about these human creature things or whatever they choose to call themselves..."

He waved his hand in the general direction of the sounds of distant, tortured shrieks as if shooing away gnats.

"...No, it is because of my army. I need to keep them imprisoned. Isolated. Exiled." Lucifer slowly said to himself. "That is what must be done."

Astarte felt a chill come over her. Even though she was relieved that the demons would be imprisoned, there seemed to be something suspiciously sinister about his plan, but she couldn't figure it out.

She asked Lucifer, "So the demons will stop persecuting the humans on earth?"

"Yes."

"When will this be done?"

"Oh, soon. Very soon. By the end of this day perhaps."

"That's good," said Astarte, still confused and perplexed by his quick decision.

Lucifer looked at her dispassionately.

"Is that all?"

Astarte nodded quietly. But there was something about his face that seemed different. Why was he acting like this? Why was he so suddenly cold to her? It was like he had changed skins again. She thought she might have understood him, but now it was like he was a

totally different person.

“Yes, I guess that is all, Lucifer.”

“Then leave.” Lucifer abruptly looked away and started writing again, completely ignoring her.

Astarte wondered what it might be that he was doing, but changed her mind. Damn him. She didn't care anymore. She wasn't his little lamb. Wherever he went, she didn't have to follow.

# Chapter 5

Lucifer's six generals had all been gathered together. Satan. Beelzebub. Asmodeus. Mammon. Abaddon. Belphegor. The Seven Deadly incarnate. They all waited silently for Lucifer to speak. Outside, a heavy rain pounded. The hanging lantern swung from the battering wind, its weak flame sputtering and sizzling.

Lucifer sat with his eyes closed as if deep in meditation, oblivious to their presence.

Satan finally spoke up. "Lord Lucifer?"

Lucifer's eyes slowly opened, the orbs all white, the pupils missing. Slowly his eyes rolled over, his dim gaze refocusing on his surroundings.

"Is everyone here?" Lucifer asked.

"Yes, my Lord," Satan replied.

"Good. I have decided that we must leave this world. We must take our numbers away from here and imprison them so that they cannot return."

Asmodeus blurted out, "Why? Why imprisoned, Lord Lucifer?" He mourned to himself that he would lose all of his earthly pleasures

forever. All of his sick and twisted passions would go forever unsated.

Lucifer got up and stretched, rubbing his eyes.

Beelzebub added uneasily, "I don't understand the strategy behind this move, Lord Lucifer."

Lucifer sighed, "I need them ready to fight. Here they'll become complacent. They'll lose their edge. They'll become jaded and weak. I need their wills to be kept in accord with mine."

Beelzebub buzzed, "But what is your will?"

"Persecuted. Tormented. Hateful..." Lucifer's eyes shimmered as he added the last word. "Rebellious."

Satan alone agreed, silently understanding Lucifer's intentions.

Lucifer stood before his generals. "I shall confine them all in Hell."

Belphegor muttered, "Hell? I have never heard of such a place."

"No. As of yet, it does not exist. But it shall. It shall," Lucifer said sadly. "God made his Heaven. I shall create my Hell. You could say that its plans have always been inside of me. Every ravine and crevice. Every hill and crater etched within my soul. A bottomless pit of suffering. Yearning to emerge. Yearning to escape. Yearning to be. To exist. And it shall finally be written, it shall finally be done by my will, and my will alone."

Lucifer handed the key that he held in his hand to Abadon.

"It is Time."

Abadon said, "They shall curse your name, my Lord, for imprisoning them."

"No, they shall fear my name for I will rule with tyranny. It is our Father's name that they shall revile, for that is the nature of the beast within their souls."

Satan concurred. "Yes, that is their trait, isn't it? You have planned well, Lord Lucifer. I am in complete accord with your vision. Confined within the limits of Hell, they will act as their own torturers and persecutors. Lashing out at each other, they will have no one to blame but themselves for their own miseries. However, they will blame everyone other than themselves. They shall accuse their brothers, their friends, their enemies, you, me, but especially our Father."

"Yes."

Satan pulled at his beard. “We will hardly have to lift a finger at all.”

“Hell is what we already are,” said Lucifer. He turned toward his generals. “Abaddon, unseal the gates. When you are done, give the keys to Satan. I will take care of the rest. You are now dismissed.”

The others quickly left, but Satan remained.

Lucifer already knew what Satan desired. Lucifer smiled weakly, the fatigue showing in his sagging brow, his drooping shoulders.

“I will grant you your wish, but first you must tell me what you see.”

Satan’s eye glowed fierce and bright. He spoke as if he had dreamed of this moment over and over in his mind.

“The river of demons shall rise from a trickle to a powerful stream. Only then will I be confident that they are of the same mind as ours—that their rebelliousness and pride, their envy and hatred, shall have become strong enough for the final battle. It may take countless millennia, but the time shall come when they are ready.

“Before the final days of the end, life for the inhabitants upon the earth shall be a true Hell. But the humans are just a means to the end. They are not of prime concern in this matter. They are a useful stone against which we can sharpen the swords of our hatred for our true battle—to whet our appetites!”

Satan folded his arms as he finished speaking.

Lucifer sighed, “I almost feel sorry for them.”

Satan asked, “Why? They are just ants in between the struggle of Titans. So, many shall be crushed? Does it really matter?”

“I suppose. But you do seem to enjoy tormenting them.”

“Yes.”

“You will be granted the freedom and the power that you so desire. You can go now.”

Satan turned and was about to leave when he said, “It is strange how things have changed. It is hard to believe that we were once angels.”

Lucifer hissed back at him.

“We are still angels. Never forget that!”

# Chapter 6

Astarte had learned of the important meeting and had waited for Lucifer to finish. When she was informed that the generals had left, she went to speak with Lucifer alone and to learn of his plans for the future.

He tried to smile when he saw her, but failed.

Lucifer said weakly, “Are you still mad at me, Astarte?”

She shook her head. “No. But I wanted to know what your plans were, and when the demons will be leaving this earth.”

“Soon.”

Lucifer seemed unwell and in a state that she had never seen him before. Astarte gently touched Lucifer’s forehead.

“You’re cold.”

“I am.”

“Are you all right?”

Lucifer laughed, his voice full of bitterness, “I would like to die...but Death is afraid of me.”

Astarte stared into Lucifer’s eyes and felt hopeless and utterly useless. “Isn’t there anything I can do? You don’t have to do this alone. Can’t I do something to help?”



“No, you are of no consequence.”

“But I love you.”

“It means nothing in the end.”

“But—”

Lucifer looked away from her and got up. “We will depart for Hell.”

Again, such sudden iciness. Astarte wanted to say something, but what was there that she could say? She asked instead bitterly, “Our new Hell? Is it already complete?”

“Yes. It is done.”

“Not six days?”

Lucifer said dismissively, “What’s the difference?”

# Chapter 7

Demons continued to swarm the streets raping and pillaging. Two men and a woman hiding within an alleyway were dragged out into the middle of a plaza. A mob formed around them screeching and howling and taunting them.

The woman pleaded to the heavens, “God, save us!”

The chief demon mocked, “God, save us! God, save us!” It spat in her face, “There is no God, cunt! There is no Savior! They are all dead!”

Another demon knelt to the ground, raising its arms in supplication, screaming out in ridicule, “Oh, God Almighty up high up there. Yeah, I’m talking to you, Motherfucker! Bless these pathetic souls that we are about to fuck, torture, and devour. Oh hear my plea, you most holy fucking piece of shit! And strike us down for our iniquities! Oh, and sucketh our dicks while you’re at it, thou most Holiest of Holy Cocksuckers! In God’s name we fuck and pray. Amen!”

The demon slowly got up while the others snickered.

“So where is your fucking God now?”

The humans shrunk back before the demon.

It sneered, “And now that we’ve gotten the fucking prayers out of

the way, it's time for the meal." The demon slavered, drool trickling from its long tongue.

As the demon walked toward them, in mid-step a powerful bolt of lightning crashed through the heavens and struck the creature, incinerating it completely. The demons scrambled away, cowering low to the ground. They gasped with horror in unison as they raised their eyes from the settling dust.

Lucifer towered over them from his steed, glaring at them angrily. Satan was at his side clutching the reins of his powerful black warhorse.

Lucifer snarled, his stentorian voice thundering throughout the land, "Our time upon this Earth is ended! We shall now inhabit a realm better suited to our tempers. From this day forward, until the End of Creation, I banish you all to Hell!"

Upon Lucifer's words, the demons began to scream as their bodies burned with an unholy fire. Their pleas for mercy were coldly ignored as the flames consumed their bodies. And then they were gone.

The humans sobbed and prostrated themselves before Lucifer, babbling in their gratitude, "Thank you, Lord Lucifer! You have saved us! Hail, Lord Lucifer!"

Lucifer scowled and rebuked them. "I will not listen to this blasphemy!"

The humans shrieked and implored for forgiveness.

Lucifer hissed, "All of your thanks should be given unto the Heavenly Father, and to Him alone! All of your praise! All of your worship! Not I! Understood?"

They cried out in terror, "Praise be to God! Praise be to God!"

Incensed, Lucifer turned his horse around, disgusted at their feeble faith and left with Satan.

Satan was oddly silent.

Lucifer noticed it.

"Say what's on your mind, Satan."

Satan furrowed his dark, heavy eyebrows with disapproval and said, "You should learn to control your anger, Lord Lucifer."

"The pot calling the kettle black."

“You undo your own works, my Lord.”

“No, the work is now yours, Satan. I will have no part in these earthly affairs. I bear neither animosity nor concern in regards to them. That is your destiny.”

Satan’s lips hinted of a smile as he watched Lucifer summon a raging ring of fire around them.

Satan whispered, “Understood, my Lord.”

“Well, it’s your turn to play the role of Adversary for a time, and times, and half a time.”

Satan slowly stroked his beard musing, “That may not be time enough.”

“That is more than enough pages for me.”

The flames swiftly enveloped their bodies, and they were gone.

# Chapter 8

The circle of fire receded from them and Satan looked proudly upon his new demesne, soaking in with his senses all of the sights, smells, and sounds. One long, unending scream filled the bowels of Hell. Hundreds of thousands of demons wailed in perpetual agony. Flames crackled beneath the earth. The air was suffocating and heavy, its gloom and pall crushing down upon their backs. Hot, sulfurous fumes choked the inhabitants of Hell, encrusting their throats and lungs with a thick, black ash, making their cries sound even more terrible and distressed.

Satan breathed in deeply. “Ah, such a wonderful fragrance! The fragrance of suffering and anguish!”

Lucifer smiled wanly, “I knew you would like this place.”

Satan laughed, “You don’t like it?”

“No. Not really. I have had more than my fill of despondency and doom. I will create my own dominion away from all of this madness once I have completed the war plans.”

Satan stared again across the vast expanse of Hell, his eye ablaze with its fires.

“Then this truly is all mine!”

“Yes. I give you complete rule over the realm of Hell. You are their lord and master.”

Satan let loose a monstrous roar of joy that struck deathly terror into the hearts of his new subjects.

# Chapter 9

Lucifer left Satan, giving him free rein to do whatever mischief he so desired. Lucifer's main concerns now were his preparations for the final conflict. He sought refuge in a hollow cave, deep within a cleft at the base of a jagged cliff. Only the most Spartan furnishings were placed within—a bed, some lights, and other bare necessities. He laid out before him huge sheets of parchments upon a great oak table.

They were the battle plans for war.

Astarte sought out Lucifer and found him hunched over the table, deep in thought. He didn't notice her as she walked over by his side, and peered at the focus of his intense gaze.

They appeared to be strange looking maps—like nothing she had ever seen before. There were no lands or seas. Just shapes and geometries that defied her ability to describe. It was all so very bizarre that she was not sure if it even was a map. Astarte wondered what in Heaven or Hell was the purpose for all of these machinations.

She asked him innocently, "What are those, Lucifer?"

"War plans."

"You never told me that you were going to war."

Lucifer didn't answer her. He just smoothly swept his hand across the map, flattening out a wrinkle.

"Lucifer? Who are you going to war against?"

"Against Heaven."

Astarte was aghast. "No...you can't do that."

"Why not, Astarte?"

"Because it's wrong. Because it's evil."

Lucifer glared back at Astarte as if she was a naïve, little child. "That's the whole point."

Astarte cried out, "How could you do this, Lucifer? How could you do this at all?"

Lucifer said calmly, "Because I'm evil."

"No, you're not! You saved those children! You saved me! You have compassion! You have mercy! This isn't who you are, Lucifer! You're still an angel! You're not like the others!"

Lucifer said with vexation, "Don't you understand, Astarte? It is because I am not like the others that I lead them. And it is because I am like them that I lead them. There is no one else. No one. Only I can do this."

"But why? Why, Lucifer?"

Lucifer was silent, staring intently at the plans before him, trying to avoid her gaze.

Astarte put her arms around him and asked, "Don't you still love me, Lucifer? Please stop this for me!"

Lucifer pulled himself away from her and stalked out angrily, leaving Astarte alone. She stared down at the parchments, her heart crushed. They were still indecipherable to her eyes. Their purposes and meanings obscure—like Lucifer's heart.

She whispered to herself, "Why?"



# Chapter 10

The war between Heaven and Hell made no sense to Astarte. Why did this have to happen? Why did there have to be so much suffering and misery? She tried to find out what was going on with the plans for war, and what was going on inside of Lucifer. And there was only one other that she could turn to for the answers.

Satan was screaming in rage at a group of demons that he was training for battle.

Astarte waited quietly in the shadows, but Satan somehow must have known that she was there for he quickly finished his tirade, turned over command to Asmodeus, and walked right up to where she was hiding.

Satan whispered to her, “We should talk away from this rabble.”

Asmodeus slyly winked at her as they left and then began to gleefully whip his minions.

Satan led her up to a high outcropping of rock where he could keep a watchful eye on everyone below him.

“What troubles you, my child?”

“Lord Satan, what is going on?”

“In regards to what?”

“The war.”

“That doesn’t concern you, Astarte. You need not get involved. Tell me what your real question is, Astarte.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“I think you do.”

Astarte was silent, searching her soul.

She said with some hesitation, “I want to understand him, Lord Satan.”

Satan chortled at first, and then roared openly with laughter. “You want to understand him? I have known him almost since the Beginning of Creation, and I still don’t fully understand him!”

Satan asked her, “How would you even think that you could ever understand him?”

“But I just want—”

Satan raised his finger at her. “Don’t you understand how foolish that is? How do humans, even angels, dare to think that they could know others when they don’t even know themselves?”

“Tell me, Astarte, do you even understand your own thoughts? Your own desires? Your own wants? Do you ever truly, fully, understand your own self? Your own subconscious?”

Astarte slowly shook her head. “No, but yes. I mean, I do. Sort of.”

Satan laughed, “You either do or you don’t. And you don’t. Still, can you tell me where you came from? What were your first thoughts? Where were you before you were born? Where will you go when you die? Who are you, Astarte? Who are you? Who are you really? Do you even know? Do you even have the slightest idea of what you really are?”

Astarte said tentatively, “I’m a human. I mean, I was a human. Right?”

“You really don’t understand then, do you?”

“I’m not sure.”

Beelzebub who had been listening to the conversation from a distance interrupted her and buzzed, “Don’t you understand? We’re all just figments of His imagination within His dream. He’s dreaming us. We are nothing. Absolute nothing. Where we come from, where we go to, where, who, and what we are, is just and only that. We’re just wisps of cloud that evaporate and disappear into emptiness. Everything that we are, that we do, that we feel and believe, meaningless and void. All just actors in the grand play that He is dreaming. Every action. Every word. Scripted in advance. Our entire fates written out in the pages of His novel.

Astarte didn’t want to believe what Beelzebub had just said. Astarte asked Satan, “Is that true? Is that really true? Are we all just nothing but—no, I can’t believe that’s all we are...”

Satan grumbled, “Don’t worry. You don’t have to believe everything that Beelzebub tells you, though he mixes enough truth with deceit to keep you guessing.”

Astarte felt more confused than ever and was crestfallen.

Satan saw the dejection in her face and tried to comfort her. “You must look at it this way, Astarte. Lucifer is not an easy person to understand. Among all of the angels, among all of Creation itself, there is no one closer to the All-Father than Lucifer. Even the Great Usurper is not as close to Him as Lucifer.”

“The Great Usurper?”

“The Christ. But you need not concern yourself about that. That is my problem to take care of. But even Christ does not approach the nearness of Him, for Christ is always subservient to His Will and shall not deviate from His Will. He is, and always will be His Second. Lucifer is not.”

“Then Lucifer has free will? He does what he does because he wants to? He acts by his own accord?”

“No. He is none of these things.”

“I don’t understand.”

Satan gave her a gentle smile that bordered on the fatherly, “You never will my child. But just know that he really does love you. No

matter how cold or distant he seems, he really and truly loves you. That is all you need to know.”

Astarte sadly shook her head, “I don’t know if that will be enough.”

“Then you should speak to Beelzebub. I have told you all that you need to know.”

# Chapter 11

Satan left Astarte with Beelzebub, and Beelzebub buzzed happily as he drew near Astarte and looked upon her perplexed face. Nothing made him happier than displaying his intellectual superiority.

Astarte said to him, “Beelzebub, help me understand Lucifer.”

“That’s a tricky one, my dear.”

“But you can help me?”

“Yes, but first you must stop thinking in such a state as you are right now.”

“My state?”

“Yes, stop thinking in the ‘absolute’ or ‘relative,’ my dear. Make the absolute relative and the relative absolute. How can you believe that your mind can scan the unlimited face of Creation with such a narrow and limited viewpoint, and with such narrow and limited thoughts and notions? Expand your limited mind. Limit your expanded mind. Set the opposites against each other and watch them play.”

Astarte stared at him with a lost expression.

“Hmm, let’s try something simpler.” Beelzebub asked her, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

Astarte wondered what he was trying to get at.

“I don’t know, Beelzebub.”

“Why don’t you ask me then?”

“All right. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

Beelzebub buzzed, “Singularity.”

Astarte was perplexed. “What’s singularity?”

Beelzebub buzzed more loudly, his glee evident.

“A loophole.”

“I liked Satan’s advice better.”

“Yes, but mine’s more logically defensible.”

Astarte sighed, her disappointment showing clearly on her face.

Beelzebub laughed. “The power of logic and intellect is supreme. Use it as a weapon to cut through the truth and lies. It will be the key to your understanding Lucifer.”

“I don’t know if it will help.”

“Trust me. Confront Lucifer and try to pin him down with your questions.” Beelzebub grinned. “Would I lie to you?”

# Chapter 12

Astarte decided to give Beelzebub's advice a try the following day.

She found that Lucifer was still looking over the war plans. He had several more laid out all around him. With a large compass in hand, he was charting out courses and trajectories, arcs and ellipses, spirals and loops twisting upon infinity.

Astarte watched the strange patterns and shapes emerge that seemed to close in upon themselves, repeating over and over. His movements mirrored the traced lines scribed across the parchment. The motion of the compass' gyre, the scratch of its every pass, cycled again and again, again and again, like a great gear driving the hands of time—the inner clockwork of an automaton.

But their geometry was beyond her comprehension. And her purpose that was drawn out was not to divine such things.

Astarte whispered, "Lucifer?"

"Yes?"

"Did God create evil?"

"What's all of this about?"

"I just wanted to know."

Lucifer glanced up at Astarte. “I see. So this is what it’s all about.”  
Lucifer went back to his plans.

“Well, Lucifer? Did God create evil?”

“No.”

“Then did God create everything?”

“Yes.”

“But then God didn’t create everything. That contradicts it.”

“No. It’s perfect to me.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You take too much pride in your puny, ape-like mind and your monkeyish thoughts. Know your limits, Astarte. Knowledge of good and evil and eternal life may make you one of us, but all in all, we are hardly much better than the humans.”

“What about you? You’re so different from us.”

Lucifer shrugged, “What’s so different? I am bound and chained, frozen in a lake of ice. Don’t be deluded by my power. It is nothing.”

“Lucifer?”

“Yes?”

“Are you evil?”

“Yes.”

“But God made you?”

“Yes.”

“But then God is evil.”

“No.”

“How is that? That’s not logical.”

“This is not logic, Astarte. This is faith.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You’ve been talking to Beelzebub too long. He enjoys torturing religious theologians with idiotic passages and issues that cloud the purity of simple Faith. Do you truly believe that the primacy of Heaven can be decided by the puny dictates of logic?”

Astarte didn’t know what to say.

Lucifer sighed wearily. “There is so little Faith in this world. Such a Void and an Emptiness. To fill this Void, people try to substitute logic and reason, thinking that it might make up for their lack of Faith, but it



does them no good. Those things are nothing but false gods masquerading as the Truth. It brings them no nearer, no closer to happiness. But foolishly people are always trying to prove that God exists to themselves. It shows at the core, a deep-rooted lack of Faith. God is not a proposition, an axiom, or a mathematical hypothesis. Father's realm lies outside of the reaches of logic, outside of the powers of sensory perception. But if logic is what they want to worship, then let them do so, but it is nothing more than a mental construct of their own egos that they worship. Beware of your Pride, Astarte. Understand it. Subdue it. I should know."

Lucifer slowly drew another circle circumscribed within a circle upon his maps, talking as he did so. "Did you know that I created logic, Astarte? I created science. I created the arts and music. I created wisdom and knowledge. Satan and Beelzebub pleaded with me to do so, and I obliged them. Then Satan tempted you humans into partaking of the Tree of Knowledge in order to muddle your minds, to lead you astray. Ever since then, mankind has been caught in a perpetual cycle of death, greed, and corruption—wandering after petty and useless pursuits. Like wicked vines, they ensnare and entrap those in the tangles of logic, reason, and self-ego. In pursuit of things ephemeral and all things transient. What has all of this knowledge and wisdom given you? Nothing but suffering. The more one increases his wisdom, the more one increases his sorrow. It is all nothing but vanity. A chasing after the wind."

Astarte was crushed. Everything that Lucifer said seemed like lies and defied everything that she had believed. "That can't be. Are you saying that all those things are evil? That knowledge and wisdom, art and science, are all evil?"

"No."

"But then, what are they?"

"Baubles and trinkets. But if you become too attached to them, then they become anchors that bind you to this mortal plane. If you delude yourself into clutching onto such empty things, you will find yourself lost and astray. Even wisdom can deceive you if it leads to conceit. Science and art then become nothing but pitiful works of Pride that

debase your soul.”

Astarte whispered, “That is evil.”

“No. Just clever. Diabolically clever.” Lucifer asked her, “Astarte, do you know what the Seven Deadly Sins are?”

Astarte rolled her eyes. “Now I feel like a schoolgirl being lectured to...”

Lucifer retorted, “Good. You have much to learn.” Lucifer asked her again, “Do you know what the Seven Deadly Sins are?”

She nodded and said, “Pride, anger, envy, lust, greed, gluttony, and sloth.”

“Which one’s the worst?”

“I always thought it was anger, I guess. Or maybe envy.”

“No, my dear. It is Pride. Some people think that Pride is a good thing. That is wrong, a falsehood, one of Beelzebub’s works of deception. Pride is the worst of the Seven Deadly Sins. Pride is the first step to destruction. Humility is the only salvation. Submitting oneself to God’s will is the only way to avoid the fate of the unrepentant.” Lucifer stared into Astarte’s eyes and said ominously, “Never forget that, Astarte. Never forget that.”

# Chapter 13

Scarcely had any time passed since Astarte's departure when Beelzebub came in.

Lucifer was becoming mildly annoyed by the constant interruptions. "Not you too, Beelzebub?"

Beelzebub looked very embarrassed.

"Lord Lucifer, it is just that the young girl Astarte has raised some questions within myself that begat other questions which then begat a multitude more, until my mind was nothing more than a burgeoning mass of questions. I cannot fathom the answers to these uncertainties, my Lord, and I was hoping that you could shed some light on them."

Lucifer put down his compass. "I am rather disappointed in you, Beelzebub. You are my second most powerful general, not a young child. You should not be vexed by such trivialities. But ask your questions anyway."

Beelzebub nervously mopped his brow. The sweat trickled down on his forehead. "Well, my Lord, how could God create the universe and say that it was good when there is so much evil in it?"

"Evil is good."

“That is not an answer!” Beelzebub yelled confounded.

Lucifer replied calmly, “That is not much of a question. Are you done bothering me?”

Beelzebub stood there speechless. His mind blocked.

Lucifer got up and said sternly, “Don’t let your own lies betray you, Beelzebub. Truth, knowledge, and logic are yours to manipulate. Not the other way around. Don’t let yourself become caught up in the sticky webs that you’ve laid out. The webs are meant for lesser prey. They are meant for flies and gnats, not for the spider. You, Beelzebub, are the Master Weaver of Lies. You are the Spider, the Lord of the Flies.” Lucifer said sharply, “Never forget that!”

Beelzebub understood. His worries quickly cleared away and his confusion was now gone.

Beelzebub bowed humbly before him. “Thank you, Lord Lucifer. You have set aright everything again.”

# Chapter 14

A shrill trumpet blast sounded in the thick, searing air of Hell. The call was answered by thousands of horrible screams as two opposing demon armies, led by the dark angels above them, began their charge and clashed. What they lacked in skill and battle prowess, they made up for with sheer ruthlessness and savagery. Arms were torn out of sockets. Eyes gouged out with claws and ears ripped off with teeth. Legs were sliced off at the knees.

Soon the demonic battle degenerated into a violent, chaotic bloodbath lacking any semblance of order or purpose. Their own forces turned against each other with equal ferocity. The demonic lords had perpetually seeded intrigue and enmity within their own ranks—to make them even more vicious and vengeful. Bitter hatred was equally meted out between both allies and foes. The angelic captains screamed at them from above, but to no avail. The demons fought out of control and the battle began to spill over into the other quarters of Hell.

Satan, with Beelzebub at his side, watched with angry frustration, and his rage began to spiral uncontrollably, lashing out at the ineptitude of his commanders and his demonic armies. With a furious bellow that

stopped the combatants dead in their tracks, Satan decided to take matters into his own hands.

In a swift motion, Satan grabbed a huge spear and charged alone into the center of both armies. They recoiled from him in terror. Satan raised his spear and began swinging it in wide arcs, ripping apart torsos and cleaving apart battalions single-handedly. The armies scrambled away from him, trying to retreat. Their cowardice enraged Satan even more and he struck the ground deep with his spear, sending shockwaves rippling through the foundations of Hell itself and splitting the ground open beneath the scurrying demons. Crying in terror, they all fell into the cavernous pits below.

Satan angrily threw his spear on the ground and screamed at the angelic captains, the veins in his forehead bulging near the bursting point, the sinews and muscles in his jaw and neck pulled tight.

“This is unacceptable! This is pathetic! What in God’s name have you been doing all of this time? I want these demons ready to kill any and every angelic soldier that they face, be they cherubim, seraphim, or archangel! Do you understand me?”

The angels roared back, “Yes, Lord Satan! We will not fail you again!”

Satan’s eyes flashed with hatred. He snarled, his sharp canine teeth exposed, “I want you to punish those pitiful demons severely when they crawl back out! And I want you to drill them to the point where they will know the true meaning of Hell!”

“Yes, Lord Satan!”

Satan growled, “Beelzebub, make sure that my orders are followed! You can punish any of the captains that do not satisfy my expectations!”

Beelzebub replied, “Yes, my Lord.”

Satan continued to watch in a foul mood. He knew that the angels of light would heavily outnumber them. He knew that ever since their fall from Heaven, the enemy had also begun their own preparations for the final battle.

Every demon would have to be more than the equal of an angel to stand a chance against them. Every demon would have to be more

disciplined and fearless, more ruthless and vicious, more skilled and hardened. The task ahead of them was long and arduous. Satan knew that there were other preparations that he needed to make. Every advantage that they could acquire, he had to take.

Satan's attention to his army was diverted when he sensed someone near him, and he glanced behind.

It was the young girl again. Her youthful, radiant face had become much darker and morbid ever since she had entered Hell. He took pity on her. This was no place for her. He knew that she really did not belong here.

And it was a more terrible fate to be in love.

Satan saw that she must have spoken to Beelzebub and Lucifer—without much success from her ventures. He gave charge of the armies to Beelzebub and walked over to talk with her a second time.

Astarte bowed before him. "I am sorry to disturb you again, Lord Satan."

Satan acknowledged her. "I can see that you are traveling in circles, my dear."

Astarte nodded glumly.

"Such are all things in Hell, Astarte. Endless stagnation without resolution, where bitter wounds and evil thoughts fester and breed in constant revolution. All becoming self-magnified and self-feeding, until there is nothing left but a maelstrom of madness."

Astarte sighed, "Lord Satan?"

"Yes?"

"I need to know what is going on. I need to understand so that I don't feel so helpless or powerless against my Fate. Please tell me, what is the purpose of this war and all of the struggles between good and evil? Why is Lucifer doing this?"

Satan folded his powerful arms across his chest. "I have warned you before. This matter does not concern you. It is strictly between the gods and divinity."

"But I am caught up within the struggle, what can I do?"

"Choose the right side."

"I don't know what the right side is any more."

Satan laughed boisterously. “Well, let me tell you that it isn’t us. So that doesn’t leave much else, now does it?”

“But isn’t Lucifer doing God’s work? Isn’t he following his plans?”

“No. Absolutely not.”

Astarte sighed deeply and shook her head. “I feel so confused. I just wish I had more time. More time to think.”

Satan laughed, “That would do you no good. No good at all.”

“Why is that?”

“Time is just an illusion. Created by Lucifer.”

“He created it?”

“Yes.”

“But why? Wouldn’t it have been better not to?”

“No, he created Time so that his suffering would have an end. With his death, so ends Time, so ends History, so ends the temporal World and all of its travails and conflicts. Without Lucifer there would have been nothing. Nothing at all. And with his death, all of the waters of the rivers shall be returned to the Great Sea. . .

“You see, Astarte, Christ’s death is the first step in bringing salvation to the world. Lucifer’s death will complete that process. They both serve similar purposes.”

“Lucifer’s death? Will he die?”

“Don’t worry about that. We all must die at some time.”

“I don’t understand. . .and who is this Christ that you keep speaking of?”

Satan laughed, “I’m so sorry, my little child. I must have been talking out of turn again, but I have never really fully adapted to Lucifer’s creation of a temporal order. It is such a nuisance that I don’t like to even bother with it.”

“So this Christ being is someone in the future?”

“To humans, yes. But you, Astarte, have the ability to see beyond time if you so desire.”

“But if time is just his creation, then there is hope that he can change his Fate, his destiny, right?” asked Astarte.

Satan snorted, “I don’t believe in Fate. To your former kind, freewill and Fate are separate and different. But that is only because they are



limited in thought. Humans are too primitive. Lucifer is a higher being. He sees beyond any of the crude and simple, children's block concepts of humankind. He sees that fate and freewill are nothing but illusions and really the same thing."

Satan said, "Lucifer simply does what he does."

Astarte was still perplexed, "I don't understand."

Satan sighed, "I am not as good as Lucifer in explaining these types of things, but let me try to explain it in another way, a simpler way perhaps. The ability to discriminate between colors is considered to be a good thing, a useful thing, yes?"

Astarte nodded.

"But if you become too attached to the concept and begin to judge all things by their colors, then you become a fool. Blue seas, blue skies, blue birds, and blue berries. Red blood, red suns, red woods, and red cherries. Foolishness.

"It is the same thing with fate, logic, good, and evil. To Lucifer, they are irrelevant—merely the color of the paint that covers the surface. Humans question how God can create such evils as disease, famine, war, and death. Lucifer sees beyond that and sees into the heart of the matter. He sees beyond the color of all things. He hears the sorrow of suffering, smells the damp earth of death, tastes the sweetness of good, and feels the cool caress of evil.

"Human concepts, thoughts, ideas, and such are useful. They help humans make sense of the world that they live in, but what makes humans smart also makes them stupid, for humans allow themselves to be limited. Humans become too attached to the bright colors and miss the substance. They limit themselves with their thoughts and ideas. They become too enamored with them and take them to be real things, which they are not. To understand Lucifer better, you must let these things go."

Astarte still looked perplexed.

Satan sighed. "I believe that your humans have a quaint expression—to 'look into one's soul.' Yes?"

Astarte replied, "Yes. That is what I'd like to be able to do. But it is just a figure of speech."

Satan said, “But to us it is literal. We angels see the soul more clearly than the flesh. When man was made in our image, it wasn’t the flesh that was mirrored. It was the soul. What separates the angels and the humans from the rest of the animals are our souls. Look into Lucifer’s soul. What do you see?”

“Nothing. Darkness. A blackness impenetrable. No, a light. A shining light...” Astarte furrowed her brow in concentration. “I don’t know. I don’t know. Circles within circles. Loops within loops—interlocked like chains. Binding and bound. Images that I cannot describe. Everything and nothing, and all simultaneously.”

Satan smiled. “There, you see. You are like one of us. You have seen something of him. But don’t worry, my child. In the end, it doesn’t matter anyway. It is pointless to try to understand him or sway him. His will is adamantine.”

Astarte said sadly, “But what can I do, but try again?”

“Yes, that is true.”

# Chapter 15

Astarte grew weary and tired of waiting for Lucifer outside, but he still remained, lurking within that cave, planning and planning. And so she waited longer still.

Endless stagnation without resolution. Circles within circles.

Astarte realized that a circle had neither an end nor a beginning. Until it is cut. But then it is a circle no more—its perfect symmetry destroyed.

The creation of time. The great war. All of this was a part of it, but gave no insight into the plan, into their future.

She could only wonder what his plans were. Who really knew? Who really knew? She couldn't imagine what it was that he was trying to do. Was it that the plan was so complex? Or was it that there was no plan that seemed to work? Or was it something else?

Murky doubts and fears crept into her mind. She wanted to leave, to break free. Hell was getting to her, seeping into her being. It was stifling. She felt confined and bound like a planet held under the pull and sway of the power of the sun. Orbiting in endless circles around and around.

She had to escape. The very air itself weighed her soul down. She had to run away. But there was no way that she could. Only a few angels were given the power to leave the confines of Hell. And even they had to ask for permission, not from Lucifer, but from Satan, for Satan held the keys to the gates of Hell.

Astarte wished that she and Lucifer could both return to Earth. Return to things as they were before. Before their fall.

She found herself waiting again wanting to enter. “Why?” she wondered aloud. “Why do I keep returning to him?” She almost felt like turning back. Perhaps that was Lucifer’s plan all along, but still she clung to a faint hope.

She quietly stepped inside. He sat still, almost in complete darkness. The dim light of the lantern cast a small circle of dirty yellow that barely illuminated the place. It was as if the darkness had gained power over the light. And the light had retreated inward into a small sphere of loneliness and isolation.

She walked up to him.

He sat like a marble statue.

Carefully, Astarte reached out and softly caressed his face. “Lucifer? Let’s leave this place.”

Lucifer was silent. His eyes seemed tired and fatigued. He lifted them up as if they were burdened with a heavy weight.

“Why do you want to leave, Astarte?”

“This place is destroying us.”

“Yes,” he replied, a note of impatience playing itself into his voice, the irritation growing by chords and octaves. “Yes, I know...”

“But then why stay?”

“We must suffer.”

“But why?”

Lucifer looked down at his plans. A sharp breath slipped between his teeth. Without warning his hands tensed and clenched the parchment, crumpling them. The tendons and veins stood out from his shaking fists. And then he tore the plans apart.

His voice sounded discordant and strange...almost shaken.

“Astarte, leave now.”

“What’s wrong?”

Lucifer shot up out of his chair.

“Get out now.” A strange glint flashed in his eyes, “...or I’ll kill you.”

Astarte had never seen that look in his eyes. Fear and confusion grappled in her heart, and she slowly backed away from him. She watched as Lucifer seized the rest of his plans and maps and everything that he could grab a hold of and tore them to shreds screaming, “You son of a bitch! Get out of my fucking head!”

Astarte watched as his face tensed in anger.

Lucifer clutched his skull, gritting his teeth. He cursed under his breath. His forehead felt like it was made of stone. A strange fever swiftly came over him—a sweat broke out all over his body. *Get out of my mind!* he screamed inwardly to himself over and over again.

He stood there with a strange look of madness glittering in and out of his eyes. Sometimes it was there, and then it would just disappear again. *Shut up. Shut up!* He wanted to drown out all the noises around him. He wanted to incinerate and blast into annihilation everything within his sight. Everything that he touched. Everything hurt his every fiber of being and existence and he wanted to just destroy everything.

*Everything! All of it!*

He hissed behind his gritted teeth. His breath became uneven and labored. He was forcing the burning air in and out of his lungs with great effort. Sometimes slowly, sometimes very quickly, like convulsive spasms.

His whole body was rigid and unnatural. His clenched hands shook violently. His left arm started to twitch. His angry gaze darted to the left and right like that of a paranoid searching for enemies. And they were all around him. They betrayed. He betrayed. She betrayed.

Lucifer glanced about him as if surrounded. He pointed at the empty air. “Get out of my face. Get out of my face before I kill all of you! Get out now! You all are against me! Even you!”

He was losing control. Astarte didn’t dare stay but she didn’t dare leave him either. Not like this. Not like this.

As swiftly as the mania had come, it seemed to have left, and Lucifer

staggered back against the chair and slumped into it. He slowly massaged his temples. A heavy, throbbing pain gripped his brain. His thoughts became slow and thick like dirty molasses. He couldn't think. He didn't want to. He just wanted to end it all. But no. He would sleep. Yes, sleep. He needed to sleep.

It would only be a temporary respite. It would not cure him. But it would stop him from doing anything that he might regret. His anger slowly leaked out of him like steam through broken fissures. He had to let it subside slowly. Very slowly. Or he would lose control. He had to maintain his grip.

He felt it slipping slowly out of his grasp.

And then he started to laugh. It was all really very funny. He tried to stop, but he would just smile again. And that would just make him laugh even more. It was a strange, staccato sound—one that almost sounded like sobbing. But he was without tears. And he was laughing instead.

It was for no reason.

And then he stopped—his face turning deadly serious.

He reached for the dagger that he wore at his side and pulled it out.

Astarte gasped, "Lucifer. Don't."

He was oblivious to her. Staring at some unseen foe.

"I will not break. I will not." He drew the blade across his skin drawing blood.

"I will not break." He drew the blade across again.

"I will not break. I will be resolved." He cut a third mark into his skin and stared with dark eyes glistening.

Astarte shuddered as she stared into the eyes of Lucifer—sorrowful eyes on the verge of tears but unwilling to cry. Sadness infinite and cold, his eyes were wombs harboring all of the countless, stillborn souls of doomed men.

# **IV Winter II**





# Chapter 1

Satan's eye gleamed with a dark flame as the next phase of his plan had begun. He smiled as he heard their screams—the screams of the damned. All around him the wailing souls of humans lay prostrate before the feet of demons. The demons immediately grabbed them by whatever body part they felt to be the most amusing or demeaning and dragged them away into the fiery pits.

Satan grinned evilly—the first humans to enter Hell. Truly, the great wheel did turn unstoppably. Ever closer to the final battle.

Satan had now entered into the affairs of men, claiming as his the souls of the dead. He knew that by adding their souls, he could use them to darken the hearts of the fallen even more. To make them deadlier. And far more ruthless.

Beelzebub appeared worried. “My Lord, why are these humans here?”

Satan sneered. “These souls are mine to harvest.”

“These human sinners?”

“Yes. They are here for the demons to torture. To heighten their cruelty.”

“I don’t understand, Lord Satan.”

“They will have their purpose. They shall be released upon the days of the final judgement. The final battle.”

“Have you informed Lucifer of this?”

“No. But he already knows.”

Beelzebub had doubts about the wisdom of Satan’s plan.

“Do you question me, Beelzebub?”

“No, my Lord. But—”

Satan interrupted him testily. “Enough! We must go to Earth. There is some business there that I must attend to.”

Beelzebub nodded in deference.

# Chapter 2

Satan wrinkled his heavy brow with distaste.

Earth. Such a small world. A trifling place. And yet, it was a microcosm reflecting the patterns of the cosmos.

The Earth had recovered from the injuries done to her after the departure of the demons and the fallen. The mindless humans, so quick to forget, were already scurrying about in their meaningless and trivial affairs—the age of demons already nothing but a memory forgotten and repressed—relegated to the realms of legend, myth, and superstition. Such is ever the way of man. They were born without purpose, but Satan would give them one.

The two angels observed from afar. A large congregation of humans was forming. They were gathering together for prayer and worship.

Beelzebub pointed out a man within their midst. “That one is a strange one. The strength of his soul, his aura, is almost visible. Rarely in a thousand years does one so pure appear among the humans. He is like a prophet. A messiah. He is capable of moving mountains and performing miracles.”

Satan looked at the man and saw that he was surrounded by others

who were drawing their emotional strength from him.

Satan remarked, “He is a holy man, a saint. He is their root. Their source of sustenance. Without him, they would wither and scatter like leaves that have fallen from the tree. He has lived his entire life in accord with the will of God, a life of virtue, compassion, and humility.”

Beelzebub suggested to Satan, “Perhaps we should demonstrate our power to them. Perhaps we can taint the root and turn the leaves to our color.”

Satan looked at the crowd. “There is nothing there worth the trouble.”

Beelzebub disagreed. “There most definitely is, sire. That holy man can be useful for our purposes.”

“I doubt it.”

“Let me try, sire.”

Satan paused. His eye caught sight of something hidden among the crowd—the true reason for his visit. “Very well, Beelzebub. Proceed.”

Beelzebub approached the center where the holy man stood his ground. The people stumbled away in fear, but their leader cried out, “Do not retreat from him, my children!”

Beelzebub laughed contemptuously at the saint.

The saint cried, “I know what you are, foul one!”

Beelzebub smiled. “Yes, I am the Devil.”

“God Almighty in Heaven, protect me.” The man clasped his hands in prayer, his voice trembling with emotion.

Beelzebub spread his arms and addressed the crowd, “How sad that a man such as you fears me.”

The man gazed unflinchingly into Beelzebub’s face. “I do not fear you. I only fear God.”

“Oh really? I will make you fear me.”

“With God as my shield, I will not.”

Beelzebub said, “Millions die every day. Why do you think you are so special? I will take your soul along with the rest.”

Flames burst before the saint. But he did not waver or even flinch.

Beelzebub’s face twitched as he cursed under his breath. His little stratagem didn’t work, and he didn’t like to resort to force. Slowly the

flames dissipated. The people all watched as Beelzebub contrived a new artifice to trick the holy man.

Satan's temper began to simmer as he silently watched Beelzebub's ineffectual effort. The saint would not be deceived.

Beelzebub said loudly, "I could have destroyed you, but I decided to spare your life. Not God. I spared your life. Where was God to protect you? Ask him to appear before you to save your pathetic soul."

"He is everywhere and sees everything. I trust in Him and in His mercy. He watches me even now and that brings me the courage to resist you."

"And if God doesn't protect you? If God abandons you?"

"Then so be it. I trust in the Almighty and follow His Will, even if that means Death. I entrust my life to Him completely."

Beelzebub was stymied. This man would not budge in his Faith.

Satan watched as the crowd's mood began to change. At first they were afraid of them, but now they had begun to take heart from the preacher's resistance to Beelzebub.

Beelzebub looked at Satan for help. Beelzebub had nothing in his arsenal to counter pure faith. Angrily Satan told Beelzebub to move aside. His malevolent presence loomed over the holy man.

The preacher would not succumb to fear.

Satan commanded, "Bow before me."

The saint suddenly fell to his hands and knees, his body no longer under his control. He tried vainly to struggle against Satan's power, but it was futile as his head touched the ground before Satan's feet in homage. The crowd gasped in dismay and astonishment.

"Again."

The man got up and did it again.

"And a third time."

The man got up and bowed again.

"Stay."

The preacher couldn't move—his body remained on the ground bowing before Satan. He struggled and screamed through his gritted teeth. "You may control my body, but you will never control my soul!"

Satan said disparagingly, "What use do I have for your one, trivial,

insignificant soul? Countless are the damned that fill the depths of Hell.” He raised his hand and a brilliant blue flame issued forth from his fingertips incinerating the man. The crowd screamed in terror as they watched the flesh burn off, leaving only the charred, white bones that remained bowing before Satan.

“Your faith is no protection for you. I can take the soul of any that I desire and torture you for as long as I wish in Hell.”

The bones crumbled before him.

Satan gazed steadily into the crowd. None could match the authority behind his baleful eye, all of them looking away with fear and sinful shame.

A disciple of the holy man dropped to his knees. His arms hung limp at his sides, his faith extinguished. He had just watched the greatest of holy men disgraced and destroyed as if he was nothing. The disciple whispered, “If our faith is no protection, then why should we even worship God?”

Satan answered disdainfully, “Yes. Why should you?”

The crowd huddled together unable to say anything.

Beelzebub started to snicker, but then the high-pitched voice of a little boy spoke out from the crowd.

“Because God is real.”

Beelzebub seemed shocked that a little child had the temerity to challenge Satan, especially after his demonstration of power, but Satan didn’t seem surprised at all.

Satan’s deep voice rumbled. “And how do you know God is real?”

“You are real, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“If there’s a Devil, then there’s a God.”

“Is that so? God is dead...I killed Him.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“Then perhaps I should kill you too.”

“I am not afraid.”

“Very well, then you shall die.”

Beelzebub quickly whispered in his ear, “My Lord. You mustn’t kill

this child. If you did, then the fear of these people would be replaced with anger at your atrocious act. You will have lost their souls.”

“Then what do you suggest I should do?”

“Leave him be.”

Satan sneered, “What? And let it appear that I was defeated by the simple logic and virtue of an innocent boy?”

“We must take our losses.”

“Beelzebub, you are a fool.” Satan raised his hands again, his palms burning with blue flames.

The crowd gasped. The little boy closed his eyes accepting his fate. A woman screamed, “Spare my child!” and ran out to protect her baby.

Satan was undeterred by her piteous pleas.

Living hellfire leapt from his hands and pounced upon the people all around the child. They tried to flee, but the satanic flames would chase them down and rip apart their flesh like merciless hounds. Their bones crackled in the heat, the blood in their bodies boiling until their skulls burst open with the frothing sewage of their minds.

The child stood horrified as the vessels of their bodies spilled their contents all around him. Splattered scraps of what was once his mother lay twitching at his feet.

Even Beelzebub was appalled by what Satan had done.

Satan looked down at the child, his eye burning clearly and brightly. “Who is your master, boy?”

The child shuddered. “You are, sire.”

“Then do as you are told and leave.”

The boy said in a hushed whisper, “Yes, sire.”

As he watched the child run away, Satan said, “He was the one I was after all along—the only one worth winning. The rest were useless. Their souls were already mine.”

# Chapter 3

Asmodeus relaxed, lying back upon satin cushions as his harem of men and women slowly massaged his naked body—kissing and licking his flesh. A circle of attendants catered to his every whim and perverse desire.

A lovely girl entered his palace alone.

Asmodeus was surprised by the unexpected guest.

“Astarte? What are you doing in this most disreputable place?”

She said quietly, “I was wondering if I could speak with you.”

Asmodeus waved his hand and his servants quickly exited the room.

“Why don’t you sit down, Astarte?”

“Thank you.”

Asmodeus closely examined her. She seemed very much different from when he last saw her. Though still eternally young, her youthful countenance had a paleness and weariness that wasn’t there before. But the most striking change was within her eyes. They always had a very innocent and kittenish look, but now they had a dark air of knowing. Her eyes vaguely reminded him of Lucifer’s own eyes.



With a refined and hospitable smile, he asked her, “So, what did you want to speak about, Astarte? Something pleasurable I hope...”

“I’ve spoken with Satan and Beelzebub, but they couldn’t help.”

“Yes. Go on...”

She blurted out in frustration, “I’ve finally had it with him. With Lucifer.”

“Oh really? And why is that?”

“He’s always been busy with his stupid war plans. We haven’t done anything together ever since we got here. All he does is pore over his war plans. Constantly changing them. Throwing out old ones. Talking with his generals. Making new plans. That’s all he does in this eternal night.”

“He hasn’t been there for you, has he? He hasn’t really paid much attention to you or your needs at all, yes?”

Astarte answered, “Yes. He hasn’t paid much attention to anything else other than his war plans. And this place is destroying him. And destroying me. I can’t stand it here anymore.”

“The décor isn’t quite suited to my taste either. But I manage. You just have to indulge in the pleasures that life provides to overcome its cruelties, and learn to lose yourself in leisurely diversions. In my modest palace, you can satisfy every lust and fancy that you can conceive of.”

Asmodeus snapped his fingers and his servants reentered, bringing forth drinks and other delicacies for them. “You should try the wine. It will make your enemies amiable, and your friends tolerable. And if you find the wine too slow, I have other concoctions that do not bother with the foreplay, and get to the point directly. If you like, there are other scandalous amusements that you can try as well.”

Asmodeus offered her a glass, and she took a sip.

He leered. “You cannot feel pain when every tingling nerve from the tip of your toes to the top of your head is overloaded with ecstasy. Heaven can’t even compare with such sensations. Of course, such a high cannot last forever, but I can deaden the pain in between, so that nothing or nobody can hurt you anymore.”

Astarte took another sip, but didn't say anything. She placed the glass back and sat sitting with her hands folded on her lap.

Asmodeus said, "You must be feeling very lonely, Astarte."

"Yes."

Asmodeus sighed, "There aren't many people in Hell that you can take comfort from, except me, of course. Everyone else is involved with their own duplicitous schemes and deviltries."

"I didn't come here for comfort."

Asmodeus asked, "Then why are you here?"

"I came here for sex."

"Quite honest, aren't we, little girl?"

"I haven't had sex ever since Lucifer returned."

Asmodeus whistled in amazement. "That's incomprehensible to me. Why, this conversation is probably the longest length of time I've ever gone without sex. You must have a lot of frustration pent up inside..."

Astarte didn't reply.

The thought of having an affair with Lucifer's consort excited Asmodeus tremendously, so much so that he could barely contain himself. With a lascivious look, he said, "Well, I suppose we should get started. Shall we?"

He slid over next to her, expecting her to pull away from him at first, but she did not. She sat there without any sign of expression or emotion as he gently started to caress her body, his hands first moving over her arms, and then to her face and hair, and then slowly down to her thighs.

Astarte hesitated for a second, withdrawing from him. Asmodeus smiled nonchalantly and subtly slipped on the guise of Lucifer.

"Does this make it easier for you?"

"Yes."

Asmodeus slowly lowered her backward deep into the cushions, pressing his body into hers. His serpent tongue flickered all over her body. Her body buckled under him, her senses overpowered with the physical sensations of pleasure. He slithered like a snaky eel, sliding deeper and deeper into her.

She let herself become numb to the whole world.

# Chapter 4

Lucifer breathed the night air deep into his lungs. It was almost comforting being back on Earth. It was a much better change than from the eternal blackness and sulfurous fumes that congested Hell. Lucifer had long grown weary of Hell—of his own shadow. He didn't enjoy it quite as much as Satan who reveled in the place. Hell fit Satan's personality to perfection. That was the way Lucifer wanted it. Lucifer knew that if one such as himself couldn't tolerate the place, then the other angels and devils must be suffering far, far worse.

And she as well...

Lucifer walked up to the top of a small rise. He could see all around him grassy hills and vales stretching out for miles. The stars glittered in the heavens. He felt so far and isolated from them, and yet...he smiled. Smiled for no reason at all really.

It almost brought a sense of peace to his troubled soul. Away from the eternal torment of Hell and the incessant screaming and insanity, his thoughts regained much of their lucidity.

He knew. He knew it all. But sometimes he just pretended that he didn't know. Know everything.

He thought about Astarte again.

The tiny whine of a plane's engine filled his ears. He watched the small, red, blinking lights crossing the sky. Ah, the humans. He had completely forgotten about them for a time. He looked away from the plane and gazed instead at the cluster of lights off in the horizon glowing with an electric hum. That was one of their little cities. A couple million or so souls probably lived there, ever in a perpetual commotion.

He smiled again for no reason. They hadn't changed at all since he had left them. Not one bit. It was rather funny.

Lucifer's attention lingered over them.

"Ah, you humans. You vaguely interesting humans. Thinking, thinking, thinking. Right, wrong, right wrong—such futile, little things. Everything that you do is right, because being who you are is nothing wrong. You are fated to be who you are, destined to be who you will be as are all the others. All things are predetermined and fated, you are blameless and so are all others in Creation.

"And yet, everything I do is wrong and there is no way that I can ever be right. All things touched by my hands are cursed with the mark of imperfection. Nothing is seen to be right no matter what, since the eye that sees, is tainted itself."

Lucifer sighed. "Whether right and wrong is an illusion is not important. Frankly, I don't care, Father. I will suffer be it by choice or destiny. I will anguish be it by choice or destiny. I see not the duality, for this path is my choice and my destiny. The words and labels mean less than nothing to me. Only that I know what I must do. Do you hear me, Father? Or are your ears deaf to the lamentations of your son?"

Lucifer looked up again and watched the red blinking lights continue to make their slow arc across the sky and gradually into safety.

# Chapter 5

Astarte lay curled in Asmodeus' arms.

Asmodeus slowly stroked her skin with his fingers. "Astarte?"

"Yes, Asmodeus?"

"About his war plans..."

"Yes?"

"Have you seen them?" inquired Asmodeus.

"Why do you ask?"

"No reason. I was just wondering if you understood them."

"No. I can't make sense of them at all. What about you?"

Asmodeus shook his head. "I can't make heads or tails of them. But those obscene curves always lead me in circles. I wish I could decipher them—to better understand my destiny. I do not look forward to the final battle."

Astarte said, "All of our fates are probably linked."

"Then what about his fate? What about his destiny? Doesn't Lucifer know that he's probably doomed to fail?"

Astarte shrugged.

“Is Lucifer blinded by his pride? Doesn’t he know his future?”

“Oh, he knows,” Astarte said smiling. “He’s almost omniscient...except for one thing.”

Asmodeus was surprised, “There is one thing that Lucifer doesn’t know?”

“Yes. There is only a glint of knowledge in the vast universe that is denied to him.”

“Which is...”

“He doesn’t know that he isn’t.”

Asmodeus wasn’t amused. His perfect portrait of listless decadence and jadedness was now tinged with worry—the slightest crack in his armor.

“What’s wrong, Asmodeus?”

Asmodeus said bleakly, “I really don’t like thinking about the future. Living only for the present is so much easier. But I can’t help but be afraid of what will happen in the end.”

“Well then, why don’t you defect to the other side?”

“Why are you trying to tempt me?” Asmodeus sighed. “If only it were that easy. No, I’m trying to think of some other way to escape.”

Astarte was intrigued. “Can you see the future like Lucifer?”

“No. I can almost see it all, but there are large gaps where I am too afraid to look or even think about. And thinking about the last days fills me with such trepidation that I just can’t do it. But I’m pretty sure that Lucifer, the damn bastard, he has seen it all. But he never says anything about it. Never! Not even to me. Not even to Moloch or even to Beelzebub.”

Astarte chuckled. “Well, of course he’d never tell Moloch. That guy can never keep a secret. He’s got the biggest mouth there is. And as for Beelzebub, you wouldn’t be able to tell if he was telling the truth or not anyway.”

“That’s true, Astarte, but Lucifer hasn’t even told Satan!”

“I see.”

Asmodeus stared at Astarte with a grave look. “Has he...has he ever told you anything about it?”

“No. He’s never uttered a word. But sometimes when he stares at me...” Astarte could see Lucifer’s haggard face within her mind. She almost reached out, as if to touch it. “...sometimes when he stares at me. I see nothing but sadness.”

# Chapter 6

Satan stood atop a mountain with arms folded across his barrel chest looking down upon the inhabitants below with a sneer. His wide gaze oversaw all of the affairs of the Earth and its insignificant weaklings.

“How dare He put them upon this world? They dare to attain grace? Gnats. Cockroaches. Vermin. How dare they even pretend? But their lust for violence and their anger shall be their own undoing. And I will deign to grant them what they so crave. I will give them the tools of war and let the filthy rats exterminate themselves.”

In the distance a messenger angel rapidly approached, soaring through the clouds toward Satan. It bowed deeply and knelt before him.

Satan asked, “Are the preparations ready?”

“Yes, my Lord. The humans have taken your gifts with greed and lust in their beady little eyes.”

“Excellent. You are dismissed. Return to Hell.”

The messenger bowed deeply again and disappeared.

Satan watched and waited with anticipation. Far below him, huge armies of men and machines swarmed like black ants amassing into



formations. Satan could stamp out all of the insects of this world with his foot, but he chose not to, for this was his pleasure—to watch His beautiful Creation rend and annihilate itself.

Satan hissed, “Sing, my angels. Sing.”

The long, tense silence was broken by the roar of shells.

The opening was an opera of screams in red, singed flesh blistering, mingled with rocket-fire artillery. The boom-boom-boom of the big, metal guns pounded on taut, stretched skins of wardrums beating in the distance getting louder and louder rising to a crescendo.

Satan ominously raised his arms conducting the orchestra of war. His face was bathed in the glow of flames. Suddenly his arms dropped.

A shrill trumpet blast rang in the heavens.

A mushroom of sound and color blared out a shockwave. A flick of the wrist and charred ashes swirled like tornadoes around him. Human shapes toppled over like wireless marionettes.

Flame walls of napalm rose like backward flowing cascades, skeletal fingers playing the scales up and down the keys. The bodies of black ants crackled and popped in the blistering embers.

Plucked strings. The percussion hammer. The whistle of arrows, the crack and buzz of bullets sang through the air like songbirds and hornets, tearing through the helmeted skulls and armored chests of soldiers bursting with crimson flesh-meat and shards of ivory.

Satan listened to the chorus of men charging across the fields, leaping over the dead bodies of their comrades, blades unsheathed. The clang of swords locked. Blade edge biting into blade edge. The banshee wails of bayonets. Gritted white teeth and howling snarls, faces staring into each other’s eyes with black pupils wide and round with death.

Ape-men, cavemen, Neanderthals screaming, their feral canines exposed. Biting flesh into flesh. Tearing off hair and skin. Gouging out bloody skin under their fingernails.

Satan was filled with an ineffable mixture of ecstasy and rage. He lifted his eyes toward the heavens where he knew He was watching in silence. Satan clenched his fists and thrust them into the sky, stirring the dark clouds of thunder above him, creating a swirling wind that

ripped and savaged the mortal world beneath him.

“Look upon thy work, Lord! Look upon thy work! Is this not good? Is this not good?”

Satan roared with maniacal laughter, “Thy will be done!”

Far below the heavens, the black rains fell and the harvest was ready. The battlefields were finally quiet—the players were all played out. Their mouths were open, but without song or voice. Their chests were filled not with arias, but with the bloated miasma of putrefaction. The seeds of death once planted were now nurtured, tall, and ripe. The demon workers fanned out like locusts into the wheat fields with sickles, singing as they cut and gathered the dead crop while Satan watched from high above.

More souls for the pyre.

But even this was not enough.

# Chapter 7

Lucifer returned to Hell and could see the fruit of Satan's labor—the creation of the hierarchy of Hell. The fallen were at the apex, the demons ranked below them, and the damned souls formed the wide base. This gave a semblance of order to chaos, and provided the lawless demons with a structure designed to elicit organized behavior. Without the humans, the demons had been at the bottom of the totem pole, and thus, constantly turned against one another. Now they were given a higher rank in power and superiority and could outlet their violence beneath them.

Lucifer looked on with detachment as Satan and Beelzebub came to his side conversing with each other.

Beelzebub laughed, "These humans are rather funny. They like to blame God, the angels, their environment, their society, and each other, but they never blame themselves. It's always something outside of who they are."

Satan nodded, "They're a whining, pitiful bunch, aren't they?"

"Let them be," said Lucifer. "They are of no concern to us."

Satan said, "Yes, but I get bored. Watching them torture themselves

gives me a modicum of pleasure.”

Lucifer asked, “You’re not jealous of their salvation?”

“No, I never wanted salvation.”

“But you’re jealous nevertheless.”

Satan snorted, “That’s Beelzebub’s jurisdiction. I am no slave to jealousy.”

Beelzebub walked over to a mob of wailing humans and pulled out one of them by the scruff of the neck. The pitiful creature whimpered in fear, snot dripping from his nose, sobbing messily.

“Look at this one,” said Beelzebub holding the human up high. “An atheist!”

The demons all howled around him with laughter.

Beelzebub chastised and mocked him, “Did you really believe that your tiny, little, monkey brain or your five feeble senses were all that you needed to perceive all of Creation? Or even all of your own self? You are more than mere flesh and blood, mere mind and soul. You are more than those four ephemeral things. Too bad. Too bad, you didn’t believe.”

The atheist screamed, “I believe! I believe!”

Beelzebub sneered, “A little too late for that, my pathetic primate! Now, go play with your other little friends.”

He tossed him back into the howling mass of tortured flesh and outstretched claws like a discarded rag doll, and watched as they ripped him to pieces.

Beelzebub laughed, “Poor little monkey.”

# Chapter 8

Lucifer descended into his cave and found Astarte sitting within. She couldn't look into his eyes. Lucifer knew anyway. He knew it all already. But her infidelity still hurt him. Had always hurt him. Even before they ever met.

Lucifer asked her, "What troubles you, Astarte?"

Astarte was silent.

Lucifer responded in kind.

He sat at the table and looked at the rolled parchments before him scribed with his failed plans to defeat the heavens. He didn't have the energy to start plotting the ballistics of their ascension and fall all over again.

He was so tired. The winter's coldness was now deep within him.

Lucifer broke their silence, sighing deeply, "Would you care to return? To take a look upon the Earth? It has been a while since you've been there."

"Why would I want to return?"

"Don't you want to leave Hell? At least for a short time?"

"Yes."

Lucifer said solemnly, "I have to warn you, I have given Satan free reign over the Earth. He has been very busy in the affairs of men."

Astarte said weakly, "I don't care. Just get me away from this place."

"You may not like what you find."

"Anything is better than here."

In an instant, they were free of Hell and had returned to the Earth. They stood in the midst of what had been a battlefield.

Astarte asked, "Why did you bring me here? To see this? Are we still in Hell?"

Lucifer did not answer her.

Astarte wondered to herself but wasn't sure. She looked around and her eye fixed upon a flash of color in the grey and bloody scene. Her attention was drawn to a single clump of green grass and a tiny, yellow flower that grew unsullied, nestled within the armpit of a mangled corpse. It was protected in the sheltering harbor of gruesome flesh, rot, and decay.

Astarte whispered, "Who did this?"

"Yes, who did this?" echoed Lucifer.

"The demons?"

"No. I promised that they would be confined to Hell. This is not the work of demons."

"Then surely it was Satan's doing." But then Astarte noticed the strange wounds upon their bodies. She saw the peculiar weapons and machines that lay smoldering and strewn around the battlefield.

"We did this to ourselves."

"Yes. I believe it was another one of those petty World Wars. I don't really keep score or pay attention to their affairs. As I've said before, Satan has been keeping himself busy."

"This is not right. This is unjust. Why are we allowed to be duped so easily? Why are we left to be so easily deceived?"

"Because your former kind desires it. Because they let themselves."

"That's not true!"

"Then what is the answer, Astarte?"

She threw up her hands in frustration. “I don’t know. I don’t know. All I know is that I just wish that all of the killing and the fighting would end!”

“Really, Astarte?”

Lucifer turned his back to her. He was staring at the setting sun. Watching its colors change and refract in the air.

The sun never rose for him anymore. Those days were past. The fallen leaf could never return to the tree. There was only darkness and cold.

The Earth had become his snow-covered tomb.

Lucifer whispered, “Should I end it all? Should I finally put an end to the endless? Shall I create a final resolution to all conflict? Astarte?”

She hesitated. With Lucifer’s power, Astarte didn’t doubt that he could end it all in an eye blink. He could easily, with a mere thought, bring about eternal peace and a final end to all wars.

The rotting skulls screamed at her in awful silence. Suddenly, Astarte wasn’t so sure of her wish anymore.

“I don’t know, Lucifer.”

“Why is that? You seemed very certain a few seconds before.”

The last rays of the sun were vanishing in the horizon.

“Yes, but now that I think about it, I wonder.”

“What is there to wonder about? The killing and fighting are both terrible and evil. It should end, should it not?”

“Yes. But how are you going to end it?”

Lucifer sighed, “How would you like me to end it?”

Astarte pressed the back of her hand to her lips as she thought about how she would like to end all of the suffering.

Yet something would be lost. Would it not? Would it be freedom? Choice? Isn’t that what it was all about? And yet, she still had her doubts. She looked again at the evil all around her. How could she justify allowing such atrocities to continue? Such mindless cruelty could not be tolerated or justified by any kind of reasoning. And yet, everything no longer seemed so clear to her. A quiet voice within told her that it was not meant to be ended in this way. But why should she trust or listen to the voice?

“Well, Astarte,” Lucifer repeated. “How would you like me to end it?”

She replied in a subdued voice, “I don’t want you to.”

“That’s the exact opposite of what you were saying before.”

“I know. It’s just that,” Astarte paused, trying to sort out her feelings. “It wouldn’t be right. It’s something that we have to solve ourselves.”

“But can you? Can they? Perhaps mankind cannot solve its own problems. Thousands of years shall pass, and mankind shall still remain unreformed and unrepentant. Perhaps only divine intervention, perhaps only the purging fires of Armageddon can ever truly save mankind.”

“Maybe. I don’t really know.” Astarte stared at Lucifer and asked accusingly, “Why? Is that what you’re planning?”

“No. I don’t really care about these humans. Perhaps Satan would be more interested in discussing that matter.”

Astarte sighed, “I still wish that it would all just stop. I don’t want you to intervene and stop it, but at the same time, I want it to end. Isn’t that strange?”

“No. Not at all.” Lucifer said, “It makes perfect sense to me.”

Lucifer looked over the scene of devastation. The sun had long ago sunk into the earth. He said, “Let’s leave. This place is depressing me.”

Suddenly, Astarte found herself on a small, quiet embankment far away. It seemed that just the mere illusion of distance and time made the reality of what she had seen appear less than before.

But time and space were nothing to her now.

“Lucifer?”

“Yes?”

“All of the killing and the fighting. Why do we do it? Are the devils and angels at fault?”

Lucifer shook his head. “No. No. No. They may just help the humans at their play and revelry, but they don’t force them to do what they do.”

“But then why, Lucifer? Why do we will kill? Why do we fight?”

“Pride.”



“Just Pride?”

“Haven’t you yet learned of the evils of Pride? Both angels and humans are ruled by Pride. If, with a snap of my fingers, everyone had half as much Pride and twice as much Humility, do you think we would still have all of the wars that we have? All of the murder? The violence? The killing? The petty acts of hatred? The insults and jealousies?”

Astarte said quietly, “No, I guess not.”

Lucifer sighed, “It is Pride that creates a separation from God, from the Infinite, from Good. It is Pride that makes us war and kill and murder. It is Pride that makes us insult and slander and become hard and stubborn. It is the first corruption of the mind and the easiest. The Original Sin of Adam was the same as my own.”

Lucifer smiled with his unfathomable smile, “It was one of Pride.”

Astarte asked, “But isn’t Pride sometimes a good thing?”

“Never,” said Lucifer. “As an act itself, it may not seem as bad when compared to something as evil as murder or rape. One could even see Pride as being something that is actually good, but that is nothing but a lie and a deception of Beelzebub’s making. It is the First Sin. The Original Sin. It spawns all of the other evils. Pride creates ego. Ego forces a split of the self from God. The center is displaced, and the soul’s path becomes elliptic and eccentric. And that is all that it takes. From wounded pride come forth anger and jealousy. From selfish egotism come forth greed and gluttony, sloth and lust.”

The sky’s darkness began to lift.

Astarte asked, “Why did you bring me here Lucifer?”

“Why do you think I brought you here?”

“I don’t know,” said Astarte. “But I do know that you didn’t bring me here just to lecture me on war and sin, right?”

“You’ve become more astute.”

Lucifer paused, and then asked her, “So you still want it to end?”

“Yes.”

“But you don’t want me to end it?”

“I don’t know.”

Lucifer sighed, “Exactly our position.”

“What?”

Lucifer asked her, “Is this about just us?”

Astarte answered, “I don’t know.”

Lucifer’s eyes were quiet.

“I don’t want us to fight.” Lucifer said softly, “But guilt doesn’t wash from your hands like dirt. It is not so simple. I don’t have the power to forgive, but I forgive you anyway. And I hope that you can forgive me.”

# Chapter 9

Astarte and Lucifer remained on Earth. The heavens were wintry gray—a dull overcast that stretched from horizon to horizon. Somewhere the sun was hidden behind it, but Lucifer wasn't allowed even a glimpse of it this day. As night fell, the temperatures dropped lower and lower till the frost formed on their skins.

But they were not cold. They were impervious to the variations of the weather. Impervious to heat and chill. To things of the temporal world. That which was made eternal was not apt to change.

It had been the longest time since they were alone together like this. Astarte wanted to make love, but Lucifer was tired and quickly fell asleep upon the grass and dirt. Astarte lay down by his side hugging him, and drifted into slumber.

Dark dreams invaded her mind. A troubled, restless sleep.

Time passed.

Hours? Days? Centuries?

It mattered little.

She wasn't sure anymore what was real and what was a dream. She saw Lucifer rise and walk away from her and sit alone in the nighttime

darkness. He looked at the grey and black landscape before him. Without the sun, there was no color. Without the light, all seemed so dull and meaningless.

Night passed and morning came, but there was still no sun in the cloudless blue sky. There only shone a single planet—Venus, the Morningstar. Lucifer had once told her that their names and fates were linked by that light, and that beneath her white, feathery clouds raged an inferno of sulfuric rain and intolerable heat.

Sitting alone, Lucifer did something that she had never known him to do. He started to sing to himself. The words seemed ephemeral—almost fading from her memory the second after they were sung. The voices of angels were so different from those of humankind. She wondered to herself, that perhaps it was a dream. But some of the words she could recall.

*When no more summer days  
will come rolling in  
when the skies are grey  
forever til the end*

*when no more sunshine  
will ever glow  
when no more moonlight  
cloaks the world in shadow*

*when the stars fall  
will you watch for me?  
when the stars fall  
will you wish on me?  
will you wish on me?*

*when all ships have come  
back from the cruel War  
when all deeds are done  
and words mean nothing more*

*when all time's gone  
and the earth has turned  
when all time's gone  
will you wait for me?  
will you wait for me?*

Astarte got up and sat next to him. Without a glance, Lucifer put his arm around her shoulders. She clasped his hand and shuddered—it was no longer warm like before. It was now dead cold.

Lucifer said sadly, “I still dream of the summer when we were together. When I could pretend that I had none of this responsibility to carry across my back.”

“Then leave this behind, Lucifer. Please, stop your plans for war.”

“I don’t know. Something would be lost. It was meant to be.”

Astarte feared that would be his answer. “Lucifer, what will happen to us?”

“What do you mean, Astarte?”

“I had a nightmare while we slept.”

“I see.”

“There was a great wheel turning with people bound and chained to it. Crushing everyone and everything under its path,” Astarte whispered. “Including you.”

Lucifer shrugged with indifference, as if almost proud of his suffering.

“Please, Lucifer. I don’t want this to happen. I want you to quit following everyone else’s plans. You have to make your own, Lucifer! You have to follow your own heart!”

“This is my path, Astarte. There is no other. This is my own heart.”

“Liar! I don’t believe you! You’re innocent of this. This is not your fault. You’re not to blame. He is. You have no control over your Fate. You can’t be blamed for this.”

“Fate has nothing to do with this, my dear. Don’t be deluded. I am what I am. Understand that. Don’t misplace your sympathies. I am accountable for my actions. I am to blame.”

“Why, Lucifer? Why? I don’t understand.”

Lucifer sighed, "Astarte?"

"Yes."

"About the dream that you had...who was turning the wheel?"

"I don't remember."

"Think back again. Recollect. The wheel was not turning on its own power. It was being turned by someone. Picture who that was. Can you see?"

Astarte at first couldn't, but then slowly the image grew sharper in her mind. A giant wheel of iron and stone, turning and turning. The metal on metal and stone on stone scraping against each other creating a horrible screeching and grinding noise that mixed with the endless screams of agony and suffering, as bone and flesh were ground under the wheel.

Astarte said in a horrified voice. "It's you. You're turning the wheel."

"I am the eye that can see itself," Lucifer said quietly. "I am the sword that can cut itself into two. Please leave me, Astarte. Leave me, now."

But Astarte wouldn't leave. Though forsaken and hopeless, betrayed and spurned, she would not abandon him. Lucifer turned away, unable to bear looking at her.

Lucifer hissed, "If you shall not leave, then so be it. We must now both return to Hell."

# Chapter 10

Asmodeus waited in fear...knowing...knowing that Lucifer would come. No amount of drugs or intoxicants could dispel the anxiety beating nervously and loudly within his chest or dilute the acid that ate apart his insides. Finally, he heard Lucifer's arrival being announced and watched as he strode into his sanctuary.

With false bravado, Asmodeus asked flippantly, "Women trouble, Lucifer?"

Lucifer's eyes shot back at him humorlessly and with growing murderous intent.

Asmodeus still managed to grin back, though only with a tremendous amount of concealed effort, ever maintaining the façade of a handsome and unflappable, eternal epicure.

"I only have trouble," Lucifer hissed, "because of your doing, Asmodeus."

Asmodeus laughed, "Of course not. Everything is your fault. And I do literally mean everything."

Lucifer seethed, "I should rewrite your existence so that you slowly suffer even beyond the End and the Beginning. But I'd rather just

destroy you now.”

“As well you should, but you won’t. That much I can see for myself.”

“Is that so?”

Asmodeus tried to quickly change the topic. Even he was starting to worry if Lucifer would wring Fate by its neck. He had the power to change Fate. And to subvert Destiny.

Asmodeus’ deep, mellow voice cracked and squeaked, “So, how goes the war, Lucifer?”

Lucifer barely tolerated Asmodeus’ pathetic ploy and granted him a reprieve. “Satan and Beelzebub lay claim to the souls of the humans and meddle with Father’s work.”

“And you, Lucifer? Are the plans near completion?”

“Yes. They are almost complete.”

“Will you show them to us?” asked Asmodeus.

“You will know what you need to know, when you need to know.”

“In other words, you won’t show the finished plans to us.”

“Yes.”

“We will win, right, Lucifer?”

Lucifer was stone-faced.

Asmodeus nervously asked again, “Surely, we will triumph?”

Lucifer smiled back with an expression so kind and serene that Asmodeus was filled with absolute terror.



# Chapter 11

Time passed in a strange manner within Hell. The physical laws of the universe held no place there. Many of the concepts that humans held so dear and near to them were void and null.

Lucifer watched all of the proceedings of Hell with a touch of impatience. But he would wait. He had to wait until the time was ripe. Into his war chambers, his two main generals barged in.

Satan and Beelzebub came to Lucifer, both in a foul mood.

“Really, these humans are rather irritating. All they do is blame me for their troubles,” Satan whined. “It’s Beelzebub that’s really at fault here! He and the others cause far more trouble than I do!”

Satan ranted at Lucifer, venting his frustration. Anger was Satan’s province, but it was also his weakness. The anger that granted him the power of the wrath of God also made him susceptible to small, petty anger, sometimes bordering on mere petulance. Beelzebub stood meekly aside, afraid of getting smacked in the head.

Lucifer rubbed his chin. “Hmm, weren’t you the one that started that earthquake that killed...”

Satan growled, “Well, they pissed me off. I was mad at the time.”

“And that flood. And that hailstorm that destroyed those crops.”

“Yes, but—”

”And you sunk that fleet off the coast...”

“Well, yes, but—”

”And the wars...”

“But—”

”And you—”

”All right! I get your point!” Satan folded his arms in frustration. “Don’t look so innocent yourself! You cause far more trouble than the rest of us!”

“Do I?”

“Yes!”

Lucifer cautioned, “Don’t mistake my arrogance for the arrogance of man. I have little to do with that. I have kept my hands off them. The affairs of mankind have no relevance to me. This is a personal matter...between Him and me.”

Satan and Beelzebub eventually left, and Lucifer turned his attention back toward the final completion of his battle plans.

# Chapter 12

Astarte sat alone in a luxuriant room provided for her by Asmodeus. She rarely stayed in there for long. It made her feel barren and filled her with a deep loneliness. She wished that she could stay with Lucifer, but things had changed. She no longer seemed to play a part in his plans. She felt as if there was something greater, more powerful, driving him away from her.

Astarte knew that they could no longer be together.

Lucifer's moods had changed and had made him strange and unpredictable. A cold ice had frozen his heart. He needed it to follow through with his plans. Should that ice thaw just the slightest, his resolve would falter. But Astarte knew Lucifer's pride was adamant. It would not break. If only his pride was less than absolute, perhaps...

But she now spent more time with Asmodeus, though his flattery and lechery had long grown tiresome. His seductions had lost their power over her. He only satisfied her carnal desires, but still left her empty and craving something more. Lucifer had given her comfort before, but no longer did so. It wasn't that he had changed. It was just

a different face that was showing, another facet of his diamond heart.

Did she still believe that it was not too late for a change?

She wasn't sure anymore.

Though her hopes rested upon the slimmest of threads, she prayed that there was one. One single thread of hope out of the infinite multitude was all that she needed. She wondered to herself if she wasn't just as stubborn as Lucifer. Perhaps this was her Fate? But she was steadfast in her resolve to change it. She sensed a fearsome darkness swiftly approaching, and she knew that her hopes for their salvation would soon pass.

There was only one last attempt left.

Astarte found Lucifer in the same place that he ever was. The war plans were laid out in front of him. Lucifer had become so obsessed and focused that the parchments were now fused with his mind and covered in a living ink that transmuted and changed with his every thought.

"Lucifer?" called Astarte.

The pages all turned blank.

"Yes?"

Astarte didn't know what to say to him anymore. She stood only a few feet away, but the short distance could have been a thousand miles of darkest night.

"Why am I here, Lucifer? Why do I keep coming to you when I know that you don't care about anything or anyone, anymore? Why am I bound to you, Lucifer? Why was I created? What is my role, my purpose? Was I only created to follow you? Is that the sole reason for my being?" She wiped her eyes and sobbed, "It's not fair."

Lucifer saw her standing there alone, and his heart reached out toward her, but then stopped short. He wanted to touch her. Embrace her. Comfort her. To love her. Yet he couldn't dare love her for that would weaken his resolve.

But he did love her.

"Astarte," Lucifer couldn't look her in the eyes, knowing the future. "I do love you."

"Do you?"

“Yes. But it all becomes so tiresome waiting. I almost crave for the end. Even our love seems like a façade of a charade. Perhaps I was never meant to love. Perhaps it is all hollow and empty for the likes of myself. Doesn’t it seem that way?”

“No, Lucifer. I thought you loved me. It wasn’t all a deception of yours, was it?”

For a moment Lucifer was silent, but then uttered, “Yes.”

“I hate you,” whispered Astarte.

“Good, hate me,” said Lucifer. “I want you to hate me.”

Astarte was angry and confused by Lucifer’s strange words.

“Why do you want me to hate you, Lucifer? Why do you keep asking me to?”

“I’m going to cheat on you, Astarte.”

“What?”

“I love Death more than I do you. Help me, Astarte.”

“Lucifer, what are you talking about?”

“You already know. Deep in your heart you already know.”

“I don’t know, Lucifer,” Astarte lied.

“It’s finished.” Lucifer seemed to be looking at something else. Something invisible to her.

“What is?”

“No. I won’t let it end like that. Not like that!”

Astarte reached toward him and gently touched his shoulder, but he sprang away from her as if he had been bitten by a serpent.

“Please, don’t touch me. Don’t come nearer. Just leave me. Leave me alone.”

# Chapter 13

Alone.

All alone.

But no matter.

The war plans were complete.

And he would allow no one to see them.

Lucifer stared at the final parchment before him. It was blank and empty. Perfect and flawless. He knew what lay before him. His eyes grew cold and colder still.

Without compass or map, a long winter of indecision. All actions rendered meaningless. The affairs of men and gods reduced to nothing...nothing...but waiting for the inevitable.

# **V Winter III**





# Chapter 1

Lucifer knew Creation.

He and Astarte stood upon the shores of a vast sea frozen solid for miles deep—a plain of ice that had existed since the time when the universe was inchoate.

Lucifer let loose a cold breath from his lips that escaped into the air. This barest whisper seemed to fade at first, but then echoed, and re-echoed, magnified in power by multiples, drawing forth its hidden nature.

It called its own name.

This was the secret wisdom of Creation. Lucifer's whisper reverberated until the icy abyss rang like a crystal.

And then the ice cracked. The glacial sheets underneath them shifted and ground against each other. Below them, they felt the quakes of a great leviathan emerging, erupting, its sides crushing and thrusting its way out of its icy womb and seeking the open air.

The ocean splintered into broken canyons and trenches. A spearhead of ice erupted from the chill waters and spired upwards giving birth to a mammoth citadel of pure ice rising from the deep.

Astarte's eyes gazed higher and higher in awe, but could go no further upwards until Lucifer's Creation finally stopped, the fortress monstrosity commanding the center of the seas.

Harsh, blinding white emanated from it, a brilliant glare that burned the skin with cold—a cold so intense that time itself began to congeal and freeze around the citadel. A mass of waves and frothing, crystalline bubbles, were trapped in time eternal, fixed in crash, mid-crash, and fall at the base of the walls of the fortress.

A teardrop rolled off Astarte's cheek like an icy bead and shattered when it hit the ground.

Lucifer said emotionlessly, "Cold. Isn't it?"

"Yes."

"This is our home."

Astarte stared at Lucifer in disbelief. "You can't be serious!"

Lucifer strode across the lake, unaffected.

Astarte ran after him, her feet burning from the freezing pain.

"Lucifer! What is wrong with you?"

Lucifer kept walking, not even stopping to listen.

"I can't live in a place like this!"

Astarte fell behind him. The air grew impossibly cold, so cold that she could feel the molecules in the air being frozen. All time, matter, and motion thickened and crystallized. Zero absolute burned throughout her entire body.

She screamed, "Lucifer!" But her words didn't carry far for they too turned to frost right in front of her and fell like snow.

Astarte faltered and stumbled to her knees.

The pain hurt her beyond anything that she could bear. She watched as Lucifer kept walking on, becoming evermore distant until finally the cavernous maw of the ice fortress swallowed him up.

# Chapter 2

Satan growled, “He has finally come at last.”

“Surely—” Beelzebub stammered, his glib tongue failing him. “Surely, this cannot be? I was hoping that it was all just a myth. Something that Lucifer might have made up. I can’t believe that He would ever debase himself by mating with these humans.”

Satan looked at Beelzebub with disgust.

“I don’t need you to get weak on me at this moment, understand? Go to the desert and wait for me.”

“Yes, Lord Satan.” Beelzebub bowed and disappeared.

Satan cursed, “You punish us for the same things that you do. Bloody hypocrite. I swear that I will make you suffer. The Second Son of God has come. And I must deal with him!”

# Chapter 3

To others it was like the sands of time rapidly falling in an hourglass. But to Satan, each grain of sand felt like the boulder of Sisyphus.

An hourglass that measured forever. The grains of sand ever returning. The hourglass looped like a Möbius strip.

But now things had changed.

Now, the wait was finally over. The Christ had come. Purgatory and Limbo would soon be ended.

Long had Satan waited for this day. The Son of God walked upon the Earth, but Satan would make sure that it would feel more like Hell. He would challenge him in a place of his choosing—a barren desert with waves of heat rising from the sand. A harsh environment without any hope of life or redemption. Satan needed to weaken him as much as possible and to fill his heart with despair.

Satan watched from above with a vulture-like eye with Beelzebub at his side. Jesus had fasted alone in the arid wasteland, surrounded by a circle of twelve broken rocks as his only disciples. Satan waited patiently, knowing that Jesus' mortal body would become famished. When forty days and nights had passed, they appeared before him to

break his spirit.

Jesus remained kneeling in prayer. He simply said to Satan without any hint of malice, “So you have come.”

Satan angrily glared back at him, feeling something very unfamiliar—a feeling so rare that it took him some time to realize that it was fear. He looked at the faintest tremor running through his fingertips with disbelief. He had forgotten what it felt like to be afraid.

He whispered to himself, “This truly is the Son of God. Still, he must be tested.”

Satan hissed, “Proceed, Beelzebub.”

Beelzebub raised himself up before Christ like a great shadowy serpent, but Jesus did not waver. Beelzebub’s form changed and shifted into horrible, distorted shapes, but to no effect. Finally, he took on the shape of a man. Beelzebub stalked around Jesus slowly in a circle with measured steps. His eyes never leaving him. Searching for an opening. Calculating his next move.

Jesus said calmly, “So, you choose this form.”

“What did you expect, boy? A ram’s head on a human body with chicken legs, lizard’s tail, and an ape’s hairy ass while carrying around a pitchfork?” he said mockingly. “All of the deceptions that I have put man through. Sometimes I do it just to amuse myself.”

Beelzebub cackled, “Well, holy bastard child, do you not know that man is my creation? Man was made in my image. Look at how I have guided my children. Look upon their works of majesty. Their wars, their murders, their lusts and fornications! Their pursuit of all things shallow and ephemeral and worthless! Look at my children and see how well they obey my littlest whim! Man is not the creation of my Enemy! Look upon Man and all you will see is my handiwork, not his!”

Jesus listened in silence.

Beelzebub smiled to himself and continued, “This so-called ‘God’ cannot exist without me. I define what he is and is not. Without me, he is useless and unnecessary. Without me, he would have no scapegoat to place all of the blame upon for the mistakes that he has made.”

Jesus said angrily, “I have heard enough of your blasphemy and your twisting of truths.”

“Am I a liar? Am I a blasphemer? If so, I cannot help it. I have no choice in the matter. He made me what I am. I am not evil of my own choice. How can you blame me?”

“Evil is what evil is.”

“Good answer, child.” Beelzebub asked, “What is the greatest sin? Is it murder or incest or rape or deceit or some glorious combination of all of them?”

Jesus said sternly, “Pride.”

“Oh, I am most impressed, my son. You are quite right at that. Of all the sins that exist in the world, Pride is the worst. For a murderer can be reconciled with the Great Enemy if he seeks true forgiveness. Yes, even the most wicked of the wicked are forgiven if they are truly penitent and grovel before his feet in sorrow. It is not because he cannot forgive the sin of Pride. He, being the All-Forgiving Fool that he is, would uphold his share of the bargain and forgive us. But, we do not accept his forgiveness due to our Pride.

“But we, my son, are different for we do not know humility. Even though he offers to forgive us and grant us eternal paradise, we would never accept his invitation.”

Jesus rebuked him. “You mistake me for another. I gladly choose to sit humbly at His right hand. My purpose here is to serve Him.”

Beelzebub smiled evilly and pointed down at the ground. “Then show me your power, boy. Prove to me who you really are. If you are truly the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Surely you can do something as simple as that?”

Jesus answered, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Beelzebub waved his arm and took him into the holy city. There, Beelzebub placed him on the pinnacle of a temple.

Beelzebub sneered, “If you are the Son of God, then throw yourself down. I’m sure the angels watching over you will swoop down and lift you up with their hands, lest at any time you dash your pretty little foot against a pebble.”

Jesus answered, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

Beelzebub grew more frustrated and took him upon a high mountain

and showed him the world in its entirety.

“There is nothing that you see before you that I do not touch or have not tainted. All things are by my hand and design. The Great Enemy has given me free rein upon all things living and dead and he has made a tragic mistake. He is not as perfect as he believes in his arrogance. He may have been the first. But I am better than he. I have staked claim to new territories that he has not even fathomed. I have conquered new vistas that he has not even dreamt. The provenance of all the things that you now see is through my will, not his!

“The laws of science are my Creation to satisfy the ones who seek faith through knowledge and power. The philosophy of humanism I have created to show mankind how they can achieve self-perfection and immortality by their own hand—to become gods unto themselves. All logic and reason are my inventions. All wisdom and philosophy are my insights. I am the master of good and evil, and I rule over the domains of lies and deception and subtlety with equal authority.

“Was it not I that led man to wisdom? Was it not I that taught the way of right and wrong to mankind? Do you not see bastard child? It is all part of my plan. All acts in accordance with my will in Hell and Heaven. Intelligence is the fruit of my evil. Let those who partake of it worship me and turn their backs upon the self-proclaimed Creator! Why follow an old, archaic fossil that is antiquated and obsolete? I give to you new laws and tenets founded not upon superstitious Faith, but upon enlightened Reason. I give to you the true mechanism of Creation—the universal principle of Evolution. The weak die. The strong shed no tears. I am the product of this universal principle. I give to you a superior God. A new God that is greater than the old god of decrepitude.

Beelzebub decreed, “All of these things I will give to you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

Jesus answered angrily, “Get thee hence. I worship only the Lord, my God, my Father. I serve no others before him.”

Beelzebub scowled and left to report back to Satan.

Satan didn't even have to look at Beelzebub's demeanor to know the outcome.

“You failed.”

“Yes,” said Beelzebub. “He has no lust for power. His faith is strong and pure. He has no Pride or arrogance to speak of. What shall we do about this one? Do you think that he is truly the Son of God? None of my words even caused a stir within that one’s soul, and my eyes cannot fathom the nature or magnitude of his power.”

Satan sat silent, brooding, knowing that he had met someone that was far more than his equal. There was only one other that he could go to for help in this matter.



# Chapter 4

Satan stared out across the lake of ice and gazed at Lucifer's citadel. He had to speak to him. Only Lucifer had the power to challenge the Son of God.

With solemn purpose, Satan strode across the frozen lake. The pain was intense, but what was pain to Satan? Nothing. Only the weak feared pain. The strong embraced it. He reached the giant, empty gates.

It was eerily silent with neither sound nor echo.

Here, all of existence was frozen.

Satan passed through the entrance and into the vast, hollow hallway. There were no intricacies to the layout of the fortifications. There was only one way inexorably forward. Satan forged ahead, and found Lucifer within a great, bleak chamber—devoid of any features except for a single throne. And upon that throne sat Lucifer. His face was deathly pale, his eyes closed.

“Welcome, Lord Satan,” he hissed.

Satan knelt down and lowered his gaze. Satan grumbled under his breath inaudibly.

Lucifer sighed, “So. He has finally come.”

“Yes.”

“He won’t break, my friend,” said Lucifer.

“Dammit, I’ll try.”

“I know you will, but he is too strong, even for you.”

Satan raised his gaze and looked right into Lucifer’s eyes. “Then help me, Lucifer!”

“Why?”

“If we can break him, if we can turn him against the Father, then we may yet still succeed.”

“Really?”

Satan got up from his knees and clenched his fist angrily. “Surely, Lucifer, you have the power to break him!”

“Perhaps. Perhaps.”

“But you won’t, will you?”

Lucifer closed his eyes and was silent. Satan nervously paced back and forth waiting for his answer.

Lucifer whispered, “No.”

“Damn it! All of Creation is at stake! If we turn him, we will destroy the Father! We will break his heart! Then nothing shall stand in our way! We will rule the heavens as well as the Earth. All of the cosmos shall bend to our will!”

“You have spent too much time among the humans and lost your perspective.”

“And you, my Lord, have stayed in isolation for too long and lost your initiative.”

“When, Satan, have you ever craved for earthly power? When have you ever craved for rulership of this insignificant cosmos? Such petty things, you said, were always beneath you.” Lucifer sighed. “Why do you bother with those humans so much, Satan?”

“Why don’t you, Lucifer? I have had to manage all of the affairs on Earth for you. They hardly remember who you are! They even mistake both of us for the same person!”

“Really? That’s very funny. We’re so unlike in looks and temperament. How could they ever mistake the two of us as being the same person?”

Satan snarled, “Just shows you how stupid they are.”

“I suppose.”

“Doesn’t it bother you?”

Lucifer smiled. “No. Why should it bother me Satan? Do you plan to usurp my seat?”

“No. Of course not.”

Lucifer got up out of his throne. “You can have it if you’d like.”

Satan growled, “Now you’re trying to tempt me.”

Lucifer laughed bitterly.

“Don’t worry. I shall not let my cup pass unto another.” Lucifer stared hard at Satan. “I shall be there to drink every last drop of bitterness when the time comes.”

Satan felt ashamed upon hearing Lucifer’s words. “I understand, my Lord. I now know what I must do.”

# Chapter 5

Satan returned to Hell where Beelzebub waited with an anxious look on his face.

Beelzebub buzzed, “What has Lucifer said? Will he fight him? Will he destroy him? Surely Lucifer has the power to destroy him.”

Satan said grimly, “No. He will not help us yet.”

Beelzebub cried, “We’re doomed! Doesn’t Lucifer understand? We cannot allow the Son of God to continue his preaching! He turns the humans back toward the Great Enemy by spreading his Word. We must do something before it is too late!”

“Something shall be done.”

Beelzebub asked in exasperation, “What, my Lord?”

“He shall die.”

# Chapter 6

Christ and his apostles came to rest at a place which was named Gethsemane. Christ's heart was full of sorrow, knowing what was to come. He asked his apostles to keep watch with him as he knelt down in prayer, but fatigue quickly overcame the mortals and they fell asleep while Jesus prayed.

Jesus clasped his hands together and fell on the ground.

“Abba, Father! All things are possible unto thee, if thou art willing, take away this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!” He prayed earnestly, his agony so great that sweat dripped from his skin as blood.

And then an angel appeared before him to console him. The angel touched him on his shoulder and said, “Brother, have strength. You must fulfill your task for the glory of God.”

Jesus looked upon the angel that had come to his aid.

Lucifer smiled and said gently, “Be at peace, my brother.” And then he was gone.

Jesus rose up from the ground with renewed strength and prepared to meet his destiny.

# Chapter 7

Satan waited. He knew the plan. He saw the future. Almost as well as Lucifer. He understood what was transpiring before him. His face was dour as he waited for Beelzebub to return from Earth.

The angelic sentinels announced Beelzebub's arrival.

Beelzebub grinned from ear to ear as he approached and bowed before Satan.

Satan asked him, "Well, have you completed your mission?"

Beelzebub buzzed gleefully, "Judas is ours. As we speak, he shepherds the lamb to its slaughter."

Satan nodded his approval, "So be it."

Beelzebub buzzed even more gleefully as he walked away, but Satan's comportsment grew gloomy and more troubled.

The stars in the heavens were aligning against them.

# Chapter 8

Jesus woke up his sleeping apostles. The time was night. They descended from the mount and found that a group of high priests and soldiers with sword in hand were waiting for them. Among them was one of Jesus' apostles, Judas.

Judas came toward Jesus and kissed him.

“My master.”

Upon his signal, the soldiers marched toward them and grabbed Jesus by the arm. The other soldiers tried to take the disciples and a struggle ensued. One of the apostles cut off a priest's ear in the struggle and ran away. The others also fled and escaped.

The high priests abruptly called off the soldiers. They had what they had come for. They didn't need any of the others.

The guards quickly lead Jesus away for judgment.

# Chapter 9

Christ stood before his accusers awaiting their questions. Satan stood amongst them, invisible to everyone, except Jesus.

Jesus didn't even look at those who sought to judge him, and stared directly at Satan.

Satan advised, "It doesn't have to be this way. I can save you."

Jesus remained silent.

"Heed my counsel. Why do you do this to yourself? Why do you continue on a path that leads to your own destruction? Your congregation has scorned you. Your disciples have denied you. And He shall also abandon you."

Jesus still did not respond to him.

Satan's ire smoldered, and he hissed venomously, "There shall be no resurrection! Your sacrifice shall be meaningless!"

He tapped the high priest Caiaphas on the shoulder.

Caiaphas called forth the witnesses.

Many came forth, but they all proved to be unreliable and outright liars.

At last, two final witnesses screamed, "This blasphemer declared



that he could destroy the temple of God and have it raised up again in three days! We both remember it clearly!”

The priest asked them, “And when did this happen?”

The first man said that it was three days ago while the other, his younger brother, said two days.

The priest asked them, “Did you both hear him say it for yourself?”

Both men nodded. The elder brother added, “Yes, we both heard it at the same time.”

Caiaphas flashed him a nasty look at his egregiously stupid statement.

A different priest asked the elder brother, “How could this be when you have said that you both heard it on different days? Perhaps you recollect incorrectly? Perhaps you heard it two days ago?”

The brother’s expression grew pallid, “Oh, you’re right. Now I’m absolutely sure that I heard it two days ago. Not a doubt in my mind. I don’t know how I could have made that mistake. It’s just that I’m not too bright. Please don’t hold it against me. I drink too much for my own good sometimes and things become all confused like that. Me and my brother drink together all the time.”

The younger brother groaned noticeably.

A third priest asked, “Are you saying that you both were drunk at the time?”

The witness stammered, “No. I was drunk afterwards.”

“Was your brother drinking?”

“No. It was just me.”

The same priest asked, “If your drinking is causing you to remember poorly, then how is it that you can clearly remember the words, but not the day?”

“Well, perhaps I was so drunk that I thought two days had passed instead of one?”

The witness nervously glanced at the high priest.

Caiaphas wanted to strangle the imbecile right then and there from sheer aggravation but refrained. The outcome was already predetermined, despite the blunderings of his toadies. He composed himself and said, “I suppose that is not impossible. Nevertheless, we

still have the statement of the younger brother who recollects clearly and free of the influence of alcohol, yes?”

The younger affirmed this most vigorously.

“Good. Now then,” the high priest turned toward Jesus. “And what say you to these charges? Did you ever say these things?”

Jesus was silent and didn’t answer the question.

Satan glared at Jesus and said angrily, “The temple shall die with you. It shall not be raised from its ruins. Do you hear me? You shall not rise! You shall not ascend to the heavens! Your corpse shall rot and be devoured by the maggots here on Earth!”

The Pharisee asked Jesus, “Art thou the Son of God?”

Jesus was silent and didn’t answer him.

Again the priest asked Jesus, “Have you proclaimed yourself to be a King, a King above Caesar?”

Jesus said only, “You say that I am.”

The Pharisee enraged demanded again, “Art thou the Son of God?”

Jesus, ignoring the Pharisee, looked straight into the eye of Satan and said, “I am. And you shall see the Son of God sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven.”

The high priest screamed, “You blaspheme! We have no need for further witnesses!”

The whole assembly rose up and dragged him away to be delivered unto the lord governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate.

Pilate met the priests and elders outside of the judgment hall where they screamed their accusations.

“He is an upstart. A rebel!”

“He consorts with demons and engages in sorcery!”

“He keeps not the Sabbath, and sins with blasphemy and pride! He proclaims himself the Son of God!”

“He conspires against Caesar declaring himself a King!”

“He tells people that they do not have to give tribute to Caesar!”

Pilate tried not to show just how tiresome this was to him. Still he had to feign some modicum of interest. He commanded his messenger to bring the accused before him in the praetorium.

The messenger brought Jesus to Pilate who sat upon the seat of

judgment.

Pilate asked, "Art thou the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered him and said, "Thou sayest it."

Pilate looked into the faces of the multitude around him and could quickly see that this had nothing to do with a rebellion against Caesar, but rather some sort of internal struggle. He had heard rumors of a rogue preacher that had been attracting some attention, but was nothing of a threat, at least in his eyes. Pilate realized that this must be that renegade.

Pilate turned toward the chief priests. "This is a matter for you to deal with. Judge him by your own laws. I find no fault in this man."

They screeched, "He stirs up the people. He creates disturbances from here to Galilee."

"Is he a Galilean?"

They answered that he was.

"That is Herod's jurisdiction. Take the matter to him."

# Chapter 10

Word of this man called Jesus had reached Herod's ears, and he had wanted to make his acquaintance for the longest time. He had heard that Jesus could perform many miracles, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and even raising the dead. Herod thought to himself that it was a stroke of fortune that this man be brought before him. By sparing his life, this great sorcerer would be beholden to him.

Herod greeted him warmly at first and showered him with effusive praise, but Jesus did not say a word. Growing vexed, he questioned him at length, but still Jesus remained stoic. Satan watched over Herod's shoulder with his unblinking eye. Herod began to demand that Jesus stage acts of divine favor to his satisfaction, but he was not forthcoming with any feats of mystical power.

The priests and scribes screamed that Jesus was nothing but a charlatan, a fake, a demagogue, and that his inaction was proof of this. Herod's patience finally wore thin, and he fell under the power of their calumny and grew angered with this so-called prophet that ignored his courtesy, and defied his requests. He and his soldiers mocked and tormented him, hitting and striking him.

Herod derided, “If you are truly the Son of God, then why doesn’t he protect you? Call him forth and defend yourself!”

A soldier cried out, “Is this supposed to be some kind of God? He bruises too easily for an immortal.”

Another soldier pushed him on the ground and stomped his heel into his back. “Is the God of the Jews so easily thrown down? This piece of shit believes himself to be some mighty king?”

A soldier laughed, “A King? He thinks that he’s a king? Well, let’s give this king his fucking robes!”

They all beat and taunted him. Herod had his servant bring out a splendid purple robe and threw it on Jesus.

They yelled out, their voices full of spite, “A crown! A crown for a king!”

A soldier placed upon his head a crown of thorns that tore into his flesh. The blood ran down his face.

“Behold, the mighty King of the Jews!” They fell to their knees and all bowed before him.

Satan watched with his grim eye. His face set in iron.

Jesus still did not flinch.

Herod took Jesus back to Pilate and told him that there was nothing that he could be charged of, other than being a fool.

When Pilate saw what they had done to Jesus, he was horrified by the barbarity of their actions. If this man was some sort of King, he was nothing but a King of terror—his face stained with the blood that dripped from his crown. Pilate was no fool. He sensed that there was a strong envy and hatred that must be stirring among the people that could quickly turn against him. He realized that the situation had to be defused immediately to avoid potential unrest and having to mobilize his soldiers. Pilate did not have the legions of Syria to rely upon in case of a large scale revolt, and he did not want to draw the ire of Emperor Tiberius.

He gathered the chief priests, scribes, and the people, and brought Jesus before them. Pilate masked his fear and contempt for them, but couldn’t help muttering under his breath, “Bloodthirsty scum.” He cleared his throat before addressing the crowd.

“You have brought this man before me, accusing him of sedition, but I find no evidence of attempted treason or insurrection. I have found not the slightest justification to these accusations. I have also sent him to Herod for he is a Galilean and under his jurisdiction. He, too, did not find him guilty of any acts that merit death.

“Therefore, I shall punish him in just accordance with the law. I will chastise him and then let him go.”

The mob screamed out their dissent, and Pilate could hear beneath the outrage a low, rumbling undercurrent of anger that presaged a riot growing in their midst.

Pilate didn't like this at all. The crowd was infused with a blood lust that seemed unnaturally directed toward this seemingly gentle man. He didn't have the appearance of a dangerous zealot.

And he was amazed by Jesus' haggard, yet noble countenance despite the affronts he endured. “My God,” he thought to himself. “Could this man truly be who he claims to be?”

Pilate quashed such foolish notions quickly. “No,” he thought to himself. “Don't let yourself be deluded. He is nothing more than a charlatan.”

But Pilate whispered to Jesus, “Who are you? Where are you really from?”

Jesus was silent.

The priests screamed out enraged and began to hurl all sorts of curses and accusations. Still Jesus answered them not.

Pilate said gravely to Jesus, “Speak to me. Don't you understand that I have the power to crucify you and the power to save you?”

Jesus answered, “You have no power at all over me. It is only through God's will that this must be.”

Those words proved to Pilate that this was no ordinary man. He didn't want to crucify him, but the crowd would revolt. Beads of sweat began to form on his forehead as he strained to figure out a way to appease their anger.

Pilate turned toward the multitude and said a second time, “I find no fault with this man. As is by custom, at the feast of unleavened bread, I will allow a prisoner to be spared. Therefore, I will chastise this man

and then release him, as is my wont.”

Beelzebub moved amongst the throng. He found this moment opportune for his intervention. Beelzebub whispered to a man next to him, “There is another prisoner, Barabbas. He should free Barabbas.”

The man eagerly agreed and screamed, “Free Barabbas!” Quickly, more cries echoed his and soon the whole crowd was calling for Barabbas’ freedom.

Pilate could hear the hatred and anger rising in their screams. Still, he tried to intervene. “I find that this man is innocent of the crimes that you accuse him of. What shall be done to him?”

The crowd roared, “Crucify him!”

Beelzebub laughed, he didn’t even have to suggest it to them. It was all so perfect. So very perfect.

Pilate couldn’t believe their decision. This man didn’t seem deserving of such a fate.

But Pilate could see in Jesus’ face an acceptance. As if Jesus had foreseen all that was to transpire, and that he had already embraced his fate.

For the third and final time he turned to the crowd and said, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found no cause justifying death. I will chastise him and let him go.”

The crowd paid no heed and roared even more loudly, “Crucify him!”

Such rabid hatred went far beyond anything he had ever seen before. He began to fear for his own safety and said quickly, “I wash my hands of this matter. The blood of this innocent man is upon your heads.”

The crowd didn’t care and continued to scream for his crucifixion.

Pilate immediately had Barabbas released. The crowd howled their approval as Barabbas emerged and raised his hands above him in victory.

Pilate had Jesus sent away to be scourged and then crucified. Although the outcome was somewhat distasteful, Pilate felt that he had defused the situation in an expedient manner. He briefly pondered whether sons of gods could exist, and whether it was possible that he could have sent one to his death. Such an act would make him greater

than even Tiberius. Pilate laughed to himself. He doubted that he had the authority to sentence gods to their doom. But one more or one less god mattered little to him. After all, there were many gods. And, he had other more pressing administrative affairs to attend to.



# Chapter 11

Satan watched from a distance as they crucified Jesus upon the cross.

He watched as they drove the nails through his hands and feet.

He watched as they parted his garments and cast lots upon them.

He watched as they mocked him and spat upon him.

He watched as Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross that read, “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

The chief priest protested, but Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

This should have been a day of victory for Satan, but instead he felt the bitterest defeat. He whispered, “Renounce Him, damn you! It is not too late!”

The priests called out to Jesus and jeered.

“You proclaimed that you could tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days! You professed yourself to be the Son of God! If you are the Son of God, pray to him and have him save you!”

Thunder rumbled. The sky swiftly turned pitch black. The priests wondered in a panic where the sudden storm had come from. The

tempest quickly began to grow in power and fury.

Jesus, his voice wracked with pain, cried out, “Father, forgive them! They know not what they are doing!”

The thunder rumbled angrily, lightning stabbing the earth in violent rage sending the people gathered around him scattering. The winds swirled angrily, twisting in the clouds above into great, black cyclones.

Jesus pleaded weakly, “Father...please...”

The storm seemed to hear his words and the skies were becalmed. Slight droplets of rain began to fall. And then Jesus’ body grew limp, giving up the ghost, as the last rumbles of thunder echoed faintly and then quietly died in the skies.

Beelzebub shuffled fearfully to Satan’s side and whispered with unease, “He is dead, Lord Satan.”

Satan snarled, “Leave me. Return to Hell, your work is done for today.”

Beelzebub quickly departed.

Satan remained upon the mount and stared at the tragic figure of Christ upon the cross.

His fate was sealed.

# Chapter 12

Lucifer quietly appeared and stood next to Satan upon the mount. He said sadly, “You were too harsh, Satan.”

Satan snapped back edgily, “What do you mean? He knew what was coming. He could have changed his mind and backed down. Anyway, you, foremost among us all, should have the most vitriol against him. He was the one who usurped your seat by His side.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Don’t tell me you feel sorry for him.”

“No. But regardless, you were too harsh.”

“He reminds you of your past? Doesn’t he?”

“Yes. Of what I used to be.”

“Let go of the past, Lucifer. Heaven holds no place for us anymore.”

“I know. But he also reminds me of the future.”

“The future?” Satan asked.

“Yes. Like you said, he knew his fate, but he did not yield,” Lucifer said. “He followed everything through to the end. I admire that.”

Satan was quiet as he mulled over those words and then muttered, “Perhaps I was too harsh.”

“Don’t feel too sorry for yourself.”

They watched as the apostles came and took him down from the cross. His mother fell to the earth and wept over him.

Lucifer muttered, “Poor woman.”

An apostle tried to pull her away from his body. She resisted at first, but then slowly let go.

Satan said angrily, “I did these things to help you, Lucifer.”

“I know.”

“Now those on Earth truly believe that God is either dead or impotent.”

“I don’t know if that’s how I wanted it,” replied Lucifer.

“But now even those that feared Him will openly flaunt His Word and curse His Name.”

“They are cowards nonetheless.”

“But—”

”They will scatter with fear if they sense His presence.”

Satan said defiantly, “Well, if we’re encircled, if there is no escape, then they’ll fight to the death, regardless. They’ll have no choice but to fight.”

“There’s always a choice—even for us.”

Satan and Lucifer watched as Jesus’ body was taken away by the grieving apostles.

# Chapter 13

Beelzebub laughed as he spoke of their triumph over the Son of God to the demons in the underworld—his mannerisms and tongue changed as he tailored his speech to best fit his audience’s ear.

“More fairytales to keep us in line. Just like the bogeyman! Look what happened to the so-called Son of God? Ooh, so scary. Satan crucified him!”

The demons roared with glee.

“People hate someone who has something over them. They can’t stand it. They’d rather kill that person than to let him live.”

Beelzebub mocked the humans. “So then, here’s Mr. Goody Two-Shoes, Mr. Perfect. Making all of us average jerks look bad. You just can’t compare to the guy. I mean, you’re standing next to him and here you are all covered in dirt, smelling like shit, and in need of a bath, and this guy next to you is all bathed in holy radiance and rose petals with feathers fluttering down from the sky.”

The demons shouted in agreement.

Beelzebub chuckled, “So what does everyone do, eh? What would any jealous son of a bitch do? Kill the motherfucker, of course. There’s people for you!”

# Chapter 14

Satan and Lucifer both returned to Hell. Beelzebub had been waiting for them to give his report on the status of the otherworld since the crucifixion.

Beelzebub buzzed, "I bear good tidings!"

Satan said somberly, "Go on."

Beelzebub said in a hurried rush of excitement, scarcely pausing, "With his death, the course of fate has been changed! The people have damned their religions and cursed their gods and massacred and killed in the name of righteousness! And they now admire their own intellect and philosophy, filling their hearts with pride and egotism. They feel that they have shackled and chained God and the Devil with their puny links of logic and are destined to inherit the throneship of the universe by praying to their gods of technology! God is truly and irrevocably dead!"

Satan said, "You have done well, Beelzebub. You can leave now."

Beelzebub buzzed with satisfaction and jubilantly left them.

Lucifer said, "He's very jealous of the humans."

"Very. Very jealous of everything."

Lucifer said sadly, “He likes to twist everything around, doesn’t he?”

“Yes. He is part of my plan. He does it to both demons and humans. It is his specialty and his pleasure. It is a wonderful talent.”

“I don’t like it. I prefer honesty.”

Satan said mordantly, “We can’t all be perfect like you, Lucifer.”

Lucifer laughed.

Satan continued. “Beelzebub’s confused the humans so much that he’s shattered His Word into millions of tiny little shards. Every little faction clings to its own little shard and proclaims that it is the True Word—complete, whole, and untainted.

“But they don’t even have a fraction of a letter. Their petty little factions squabble over trivialities, war over trifles, and kill over minutiae. It’s very morbidly funny. If only they could learn to put it all together, they would understand. But they don’t and they have no one to blame but themselves really.”

“You enjoy this don’t you, Satan?”

“Yes! By God, I do! It is the only thing left that makes this wretched existence even remotely bearable now.”

“You shouldn’t confuse their simple, little minds.”

Satan said with disbelief, “You seriously don’t feel any pity for these ants, do you?”

Lucifer sighed, “I admire Father’s handiwork. He has the touch of a true master.”

Satan snorted, “I’ve never been impressed.”

Lucifer pointed his finger at Satan. “Even you are his Creation.”

“Then you must admire me greatly.”

“Yes. You are truly a Great Beast.”

Satan beamed with pride.

Lucifer sighed, “Still, this was a Pyrrhic victory at best, if even that. I see the threads of time woven and wound all around us.”

“Woven around our necks in a noose,” said Satan. He closed his one eye. “The Son of God had to be slain. There was no other way.”

Lucifer nodded. “Yes, I am Cain to his Abel, and I would have it no other way.”

Lucifer suddenly smiled, and whispered, “He’s coming.”

“Who?” asked Satan.

Lucifer said to the approaching angel, “I knew you would at least visit.”



# Chapter 15

A soft glow of light emanated throughout the foul pit of Hell. The light grew stronger and more brilliant sending all of Hell's inhabitants cowering and shielding their faces. Dwelling in the darkness, they had long forgotten the brightness of such total purity. There was no escape from the light which penetrated even their flesh and bone. Tears fell from their eyes, not from pain, but from the memories of the past that it conjured—memories of their long lost haven, free from the guilt of sin.

All of Hell fell silent. All bowed before Him, powerless.

Satan, Beelzebub, Asmodeus, Mammon, Belphegor, and Abaddon also instantly fell before Him.

All except Lucifer.

The spirit of Christ extended his arms toward Lucifer, "My brother."

Lucifer shook his head declining the gesture. He said with an affectionate smile, "You did well. You made me very proud of you."

"It is our Father who should be praised. But, Lucifer, I have come here to help you."

Lucifer smiled sadly, “You cannot help me. Our Father has not given you the power to do so. The gates of Heaven have been opened for all of Creation, save us.”

Lucifer’s voice revealed his fatigue. “This is a matter between Him and me. I don’t want you to involve yourself too deeply. Now go. Return to the Earth and fulfill your mission. Ascend to Heaven and take your rightful place by Father’s side.”

Christ wept for Lucifer. Wept for all of the lost souls in Hell. A bright, glowing light embraced and enveloped Lucifer. Astarte stared right into the light but her eyes did not hurt. No, there was only a peaceful warmth emanating from it.

And then the light was gone, and only Lucifer remained.

All of Hell cried bitterly in self-pity—the tears were far more painful than those shed in the Fall. Salvation had come to them in the name of Christ, and even He had not the power to grant them Salvation. In all of Creation only they were the unsaved. Only they were barred entry into the gates of Heaven. Only they would remain unforgiven.

All of Hell wept.

Save Lucifer.

# Chapter 16

It didn't take long for Beelzebub to twist what had happened into anger.

"How dare He bar us from Heaven! How dare He placed a mongrel son, half-human, over us! We don't need His forgiveness! We don't need His fucking mercy or salvation! If He were to offer His hand, I would spit on it!"

The demons and devils howled.

Lucifer watched Beelzebub rallying his troops.

"Clever fellow. So easy to twist their hearts and minds."

Astarte stood by Lucifer, still enthralled by the vision of Jesus she had seen.

"Who was he? Was he the Christ?"

"Yes." Lucifer laughed, "He's my younger brother. He's a good kid."

"I knew there was a resemblance! He's very, very handsome."

"Oh, really?" Lucifer asked, raising his eyebrows.

Astarte giggled, "Oh, don't be jealous. I think you're much better looking than—" Astarte stopped abruptly. Her eyes widened with the

sudden realization that dawned upon her. “Lucifer...you’re the eldest son.”

Lucifer didn’t answer her and just stretched his arms with a yawn. Not looking at Astarte, Lucifer said wearily, “Go to Him, Astarte. You are not truly one of us. He is your only hope. Your only salvation from me.”

“C’mon, Lucifer. I can’t leave you.”

“Of course you can.”

“Why do you keep trying to distance yourself from me? Why do you keep trying to push me away?”

“Am I doing that? I didn’t notice.”

Lucifer walked away, ignoring her.

She was furious. “Maybe I really should leave you, Lucifer!” Astarte shouted as she stormed away in the opposite direction.

# Chapter 17

After Christ's death, Lucifer went into a deeper shell of silence and was no longer to be seen. He isolated himself within his self-imposed imprisonment, never venturing forth from his frozen bastion.

Moloch and the other lesser generals cried out, "We need an ally. We need someone to counter the Son! Please Lord Satan, you must awaken Lucifer from his wintry hibernation. You must ask him to help us!"

However, Beelzebub finally started to understand what was truly happening. He could now see plainly the wheel of fire turning in motion. No longer were things obscure that should have always been visible to him. He whispered to Satan, "My Lord, you are not thinking of raising the Beast, are you?"

Satan nodded grimly.

Beelzebub said cautiously, "Is it wise to do this, my Lord? Are we not just playing into their hands? If we call forth the Beast, then we are only bringing about our own demise."

Satan was silent, his eye darkly smoldering.

Beelzebub insisted, "Our situation is precarious, my Lord. Any

move might turn the wheel closer to our own destruction. People living in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. By this action, we would be hurling a boulder that would shatter apart everything!"

Satan grumbled angrily, "What kind of a fool lives in a glass house?" and walked away.

Beelzebub held his tongue. Only when he knew that Satan couldn't hear did he whisper, "We are all fools, for this whole world is glass."

Satan left for Lucifer's keep. Even to Satan, the unbelievable cold was hard to bear. Still, he was not Lucifer's second-in-command without reason. With stern determination, he made his way again across the huge lake of ice.

However, even the echoing booms of his weighty stride were quickly swallowed up and diminished within the icy desolation that was Lucifer's asylum. In this place, there was only one Absolute.

Lucifer sat alone.

Satan knelt before him.

"I am sorry to disturb you again, my Lord."

"How goes the army?"

Satan laughed bitterly, "We don't stand a chance."

"And the humans?" asked Lucifer.

"Useless. Less than useless."

"Truly the meek shall inherit the earth."

Satan snorted in contempt, showing what he thought of the meek and humble.

Lucifer added, "Of course, you'll make sure that they're all slaughtered first before they inherit it."

"Naturally."

Lucifer said without asking, "You need a vessel. A dark creature. An ally to aid you. I have planted my seed in a woman since before the Beginning, waiting for this time. He has lived among the humans as a human. It is now time that I call him."

"Rise...and shine," Lucifer said sadly. "Those were the first words that Father said to me."

From the shadows was conjured a mist that took upon itself the outline of a man. Its back was arched like a bow pulled to its breaking

point where bones creaked and sinews snapped. Its feral eyes glistened with anticipation, ready to be unleashed from its cage.

The name given to him was the Beast, the Antichrist. There was nothing very special about him in Lucifer's eyes. He was nothing more than an instrument of progression. A means toward the final end.

"Greetings, my Father," he said with a scornful scowl. "Finally we meet. Oh, I have long hated this day in coming."

Lucifer was coldly silent.

"Mother has told me a lot about you. About how you raped her and left us alone, abandoned for millennia in the abyss. Ever since mother's mortal form passed on, I have been left alone. Do you understand at all? Do you expect me to honor you, Father? Do you expect me to love you or to share your same respect for our senile Master's handiwork? You left me abandoned and impotent on a planet full of detestable, soiled, hairless monkeys up to my knees in their feces and swimming in their urine."

The Beast spat on the ground, the air cracking and freezing around it. "I despise you. I despise everything that you are."

Lucifer muttered weakly, not wanting to talk further, "What do you want from me?"

The Beast screamed, "You know what I want!"

Lucifer stared into his son's eyes with sadness.

The Beast roared, "Give me my power! Give me my freedom! I want to destroy all that I see! I want to burn the oceans and rape the heavens and rip all of the fucking stars out of the sky so that it crashes down on your goddamn head! I want to snuff out every flicker of life in existence—especially yours! Let me do what you made me to do. Let me do what I've meant to do for so long. What I've always craved to do! To destroy all of Creation!"

The Beast hissed, "Release me upon this world. Unbind the shackles you have placed upon me! That is my wish!"

Lucifer said tersely, "Granted."

# Chapter 18

Power was given unto the Beast. The power that had been withheld from him by Lucifer. He returned to Earth in his glory. He personally martyred many saints and took great glee in sending their souls to the afterlife. He crushed his enemies and broke the back of any king or country that dared to oppose him. He was made the ruler of the world. All worshiped his great and mysterious power.

A petty thing really.

Alone in his icy domain, Lucifer cackled like a madman, muttering to himself.

“The father bears the signs of the son.”

“I rebel against my Fate.”

“What is your Fate?”

“My Fate is to rebel.”

“But if you didn’t rebel?”

“Then all would be well.”

“Then stop this hell.”

“But I don’t want to.”

He could make his son love him. He could make Astarte happy. He



could remake his destiny, even now. He could enforce it through his absolute power.

So utterly useless.

Lucifer started to giggle uncontrollably, saliva dribbling from his lips. It was all doggerel. Dogma and drama. Karma and chaos. Doggerel and nonsense!

He reached out to the heavens screaming, “This is my fucking destiny! This is my fucking Fate! I embrace thee and all of thy goddamn accursed pain and suffering! I curse your name, Father! Bring me my just damnation! Give me my Hell!”

Lucifer’s madness and rage was all spent. There was nothing left, but to whisper, “Thy will be done.”

The words shattered the walls of his icy stronghold. The high, spiraling towers toppled with a thunderous crash. The splintered shards of ice smashed through the surface of the lake. Lucifer stood unmoving as huge frozen pillars collapsed all around him. With exhaustion soaked deep into his bones, Lucifer seethed through clenched teeth, “This is as nothing to me. Nothing.”

# Chapter 19

Astarte heard strange whisperings among the demons and the fallen angels. There was war and chaos upon the Earth with the appearance of a human that could perform great wonders. And there were further rumors that something disastrous had happened to Lucifer. Some even said that his great fortress had collapsed, but no one dared to venture into Lucifer's frozen lair to find out firsthand if these rumors were true or not.

Among all of the angels, only Satan seemed to know something of this, but he would not tell her anything, so Astarte quickly made her way to the icy realm where Lucifer had enclosed himself. Her heart was filled with foreboding as she drew nearer and saw the remnants of the fortress of ice. The towers had crumbled. The gates had fallen. The walls were shattered like broken glass. Yet the center, the keep, still remained standing among the disorder.

The closer she got, the more impossible it became. The pain hurt her. But she bore it somehow. She continued to walk across, afraid. Afraid for herself. Afraid for Lucifer. Afraid of what was to come.

But the pain went beyond pain. The cold burned into the very fabric

of her being across all boundaries of time. Every atom of her existence since her birth to her death screamed in pain at once. Still she endured. Moving one foot past the other. Step by step. Her skin froze to the ground and peeled off of the soles of her feet. Still she did not stop. Endless pain and endless suffering, as time stretched further off into infinity as she neared Lucifer's redoubt. The closer she got, the further away it seemed.

One lifetime, a thousand lifetimes passed. It did not matter to her. By force of will alone she broke through this temporal Zeno's paradox and breached the entrance to the great citadel.

Though exhausted, she gathered up enough energy to clamber over the ruins and made her way to the keep. Within it, she found Lucifer sitting on the floor leaning against an empty throne.

Astarte knelt beside him.

She gasped, "I've missed you, Lucifer."

Her words turned cold in the freezing air.

"Lucifer?" Astarte felt an unnerving remoteness within this place. She didn't know if centuries or seconds had passed since her last word.

"Why won't you speak to me?"

Lucifer sat silent. His gaze empty and deathlike.

"I've been lonely, Lucifer."

Lucifer was still, the silence between them hardening and petrifying like stone until it would become forever permanent.

Astarte wondered if she should just go. Maybe this was the end of it all.

But then his fragile voice weakly whispered, "Astarte, my love, my friend. I am alone. Even among all of the angels and the devils, the gods in the heavens, I am alone. So very alone. Mirrors of myself made of flesh and blood give me no comfort. They are all hollow and empty like its source—nothing but a shadow casting shadows."

Astarte whispered, "But, Lucifer, you are not alone. I am here."

Lucifer shook his head sadly, "No, that makes no difference. It is not you, it is I. You are never so alone, so very alone, than when you are separated from yourself. When I'm with you Astarte, it worsens my loneliness. It drives a stake deeper into the rift within my soul. Holding

you near me is both all of the joy and all of the pain that I can bear at once... Please understand me."

Astarte whispered, "I'm sorry, Lucifer. I thought that you still wanted to be with me. But I don't want to cause either of us any more pain. I'll go." She stood up to leave. Suddenly, Lucifer got up from the floor, his voice booming throughout the hollow chamber. "No. Don't go."

Astarte turned to him. He seemed changed. Life seemed to flow through his eyes again. Purpose and meaning. She saw flickers of the man that she fell in love with again. And she felt gladdened. And afraid.

Lucifer smiled, something he hadn't done in centuries. "I still confuse you, Astarte?"

"No," Astarte lied.

Lucifer went to her, put his arms around her waist, and gazed into her eyes.

Astarte shook her head. "Yes, Lucifer. You confuse me, Lucifer."

Lucifer laughed, "I won't confuse you anymore."

"How are you going to do that?"

"We're going to take a trip."

"Where are we going?"

"Back."

"Where?"

"To the end."

# Chapter 20

Astarte found herself outside the devastated ruins of two great cities. Thick stone had been pounded into powdered sand. Everything inside was rubble and ashes—razed by a supernatural fire that consumed everything within it.

Astarte asked in a hushed whisper, “Lucifer, what do you mean by the end? Where are we?”

“We are outside the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

“Why are we here?”

“I just wanted to look.” Lucifer started toward the city and entered through a gigantic cleft in the shattered wall.

Astarte followed, eyeing Lucifer with a suspicious look. “Always so cryptic, Lucifer?”

Lucifer smiled back at her. “Yes. Always. But you will understand now.”

As they entered, Astarte’s face grew pale. All around her were charred skeletons of the dead. But this abomination was not by the hands of demons, humans, or even angels. Lucifer was now showing her something altogether different.

This was God's work.

People had been burned alive in the streets, clutching and grabbing at the walls, screaming in agony. She stared at one woman who had been grasping onto her child during the final moments.

Astarte looked up at the sky and questioned.

The two walked along the streets of Sodom in silence. The entire city was once a bustling metropolis filled with worldly pleasures and frivolous passions, resplendent in jewels and silks and material comforts, and scented heavily with perfumed flesh and sensuality. Now, it was a gigantic crematorium buried under a deep snow of grey ash—its sins all purified by fire.

Lucifer said sternly, "This is the Fate of the unrepentant."

She asked him, "What do you mean, Lucifer?"

"These two cities were destroyed by fire and brimstone as punishment for their wickedness. Everyone was killed. Man, woman, and child. Those who were out in the open air died in the fiery hail from the sky. They burned alive, their flesh roasted on their bones. Those who were protected from the flames suffocated slowly and were cooked by the infernal heat inside of their homes like giant ovens."

Lucifer gestured toward the entrance of a building. "Care to look inside, Astarte?"

She shuddered. "No, let's leave."

Lucifer nodded, and they left the ruins.

Astarte kept wondering to herself. Why did he bring me here? What was his purpose—the lesson that he was trying to teach? She couldn't figure it out and was about to ask him again, when she was drawn by a strange white object in the distance. She pointed toward it and asked Lucifer what it was.

Lucifer gravely led her to it.

Astarte couldn't believe her eyes.

"My God, a woman of salt. Did you do this to her?" Astarte could see every etched line of her facial features perfectly.

Lucifer shook his head. "No. Father did it."

"But why? Why would He do something so cruel?"

Lucifer said sadly, "She looked back at the fire-blasted cities of

Sodom and Gomorrah. She never could leave her true love. And she had to take one last look.”

Astarte wondered what he meant. Did he mean sin? Or was it something more. An adulterous lover? A bastard child? She wanted to ask Lucifer more, but she could tell by his expression that he wouldn't say anything else about that.

“That's not fair,” protested Astarte.

“No. It's perfectly fair.”

“How can that be true, Lucifer? How can God be so cruel?”

“Think about it Astarte. In what other way could it have ended? The sentence was just and fair.”

Astarte stared at the white, crystalline face. Such beauty. Such youth. Such sadness within her eyes. She felt sorry for her.

“Who was she, Lucifer?”

“She was the wife of Lot, a righteous man.”

Astarte whispered to herself, “The Fate of the unrepentant...”

Lucifer said nothing.

Astarte understood. “Is that why you brought me here, Lucifer?” She held his face in her hands and looked directly into his eyes. His eyes shone clearly. Perhaps they had always been clear, and it was her own eyes that had been clouded.

Lucifer was still silent.

“Am I her?”

Lucifer whispered softly, “Yes.”

“You want me to leave you and never look back?”

Lucifer couldn't answer her.

“Lucifer, I can't leave you.”

Lucifer said ominously, “I can do nothing to save you, Astarte. Look upon her face again and reconsider. Do not look back as she did.”

Astarte glanced at the woman of salt. A great foreboding of evil overwhelmed and gripped her. She turned toward Lucifer, but he was gone.

# Chapter 21

Astarte returned to Hell and found that all of it was in a fury. She watched with dread at the massive preparations all around her. The look of fear glistened in everyone's eyes. The tension rippled underneath their skin. Demons ran to and fro, helter-skelter, their superiors barking orders at them.

She saw amidst the chaos Moloch screeching out shrill commands and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She ran toward the scrambling angel.

“Moloch! Where is Lucifer?” Astarte's voice could hardly be heard above the din. The cavernous roof rumbled as if Hell was being torn asunder—the utter core being dismantled.

Moloch screamed, “He's over there!” And pointed to the highest peak in Hell where Lucifer oversaw all that was happening.

Astarte flew to him, where he stood with Satan, Beelzebub, and Asmodeus looking down below.

Lucifer saw her approaching and issued directives to his generals. They bowed briskly and left.

Astarte asked, “So this is it? The last battle is about to come?”



“Yes. I told you not to return.”

“I don’t care.”

Lucifer pretended to ignore her by staring intently at the armies marshalling their forces.

Astarte noticed that he seemed to be focused upon someone that she didn’t recognize before—someone who appeared to have been given great authority for he commanded the entire army of human souls. At his side was another who also seemed to have power, but seemed to be an underling.

“Who is he? Is he the human rumored about by the demons?”

“Yes, he is my son.”

Astarte’s eyes grew wide with surprise. “You never told me that you had a son.”

“There was a woman before you, Astarte.”

“And you never told me about her?”

“No. It doesn’t matter. Does it matter to you?” he asked callously.

Astarte slapped him across the face.

“I hate you.”

“Good.”

“You don’t care anymore do you? You really don’t care about how I feel anymore do you?”

Lucifer said coldly, “No. I never did. You were always nothing more than a tool and an instrument. You’ve served your purpose. You are no longer useful to me. I never want to see you again.”

Astarte was speechless. Her whole existence had turned into a great betrayal.

Lucifer hissed, “Get out of here, Astarte. I’ve broken open the seals of Hell. You are free to leave.”

Astarte knew that the end was quickly drawing near, and that her leaving him would hasten their destiny. She understood long ago that the sword of Damocles hung over their heads. She would embrace it as it pierced her side.

She whispered sharply, “Thy will be done, Lucifer. Thy will be done.”

And she departed from him.

Left alone, Lucifer said to himself, “I’m sorry about the other woman, Astarte. Blame it on Him. I’d rather face Him all by myself, but He’s the one with the infantile fixation on the number three. Ah well, the sacred quota has been fulfilled, the Unholy Trinity is complete.”

Lucifer sighed, “Now, let’s get this over with.”

# Chapter 22

Hell groaned with pain as its pregnant belly was ripped open. Hordes of demons and devils roared in exultation. At long last their release was at hand. But their cheers were short-lived as their captains and commanders drove them hard to continue preparing their weapons and armor for the upcoming battle.

The Beast fielded an army of human souls, an army of the damned. He had also allied himself with the kings of the earth, using the powers granted to him, and they awaited his return to Earth, ready for war.

Beelzebub appeared before the Beast to receive word of their progress.

The Beast saluted him, “Hail, great Beelzebub.”

Beelzebub nodded. “Lucifer wishes to know of your situation, Antichrist.”

The Beast smiled. “Every king, every nation, every human that is still living serves me now. They are ready to fight the angels and will tear them apart.”

“Excellent. I will inform Lucifer immediately.”

“That’s all right. I’ll tell him myself later,” the Antichrist said icily.

“Also, before you leave, I would like to thank you for your work in harvesting these souls for me. I especially admire your work in writing the book of Revelation. Never have so many of my soldiers been so deceived by your words.”

Beelzebub laughed, “I dare not take credit for that work.”

“But surely, you were the one who wrote it.”

“I shall deny it once, I shall deny it twice. It is not I. Never did I write.”

“Will you deny it thrice?”

Beelzebub smiled sinisterly, “No.”

The Antichrist said, “It would have been better for these humans if the book of Revelation had never been written. It is not to be read by the foolish. Those that lack wisdom will be deceived and corrupted by it. They will easily fall under the power of false prophets. The doomsday cultists and the tainted messiahs, these and their followers are all misguided fools. They overfill my ranks of the damned—constantly searching for signs in the heavens when instead, they should have been searching within their own souls, but now they are all mine. All of them!”

Snickering, Beelzebub said, “Perhaps now the great mystery should be revealed at last. We have finally come upon the end of days, so there is no more need for subterfuge. Hear me now, for I shall grant to mankind the key. I shall unlock the mystery of mysteries and make all things transpicuous.”

# Chapter 23

Oh, hear the words of Beelzebub, the Lord of the Flies!

Never has there been such a book that has caused as much grief and suffering as the book of Revelation. It has given rise to apocalyptic cults, self-proclaimed messiahs and their fanatical devotees, and countless paranoid fools searching for the rise of Antichrists—constantly searching, ever on the lookout for signs of the Second Coming. It has created a mass of deluded people both dreading and lusting for Armageddon to come and to destroy and erase their confused lives of misery. To these fools, the hope of Doomsday was their release from their meandering lives of wretchedness, servitude, and insignificance.

People have lost more than just their fortunes to these false prophets. Obsessed with the book of Revelation, there are many who have developed a zealous perversity that goes beyond reason. It has always been the nature of these pathetic humans to dwell in the darkness of their own ignorance—to cry out in thirst when surrounded by an oasis of drinking water.

Why do I speak thus of the book of Revelation? After all, is it not the

Word of God? Well, it has been said that one should judge a tree by the fruit that it bears. And the book of Revelation has borne nothing but bitterness, delusion, and hatred.

The reason for this is very simple.

The book of Revelation has dark roots that draw upon foul waters, for it is false prophecy!

One may feel this to be the most heretical of statements, but it is the least of what is to come. Listen, and listen well.

One may be wondering, “How could this be? How could the Word of God be tainted by falsity?”

He who has wisdom will understand.

In the Garden of Eden, there was a serpent that led mankind toward gaining wisdom and being expelled from Paradise. It was a test that was allowed to exist, a test that only the weak would fall prey to. Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the book of Revelation lies coiled around the Bible tempting the foolish to their destruction. There is a reason why false prophecy is hidden in truth—for that is the best place for deception to work its poison.

The book of Revelation is a test of wisdom, a test of understanding. It may taste of honey at first, but within your belly it becomes bitter. If you swallow it whole and let it remain within you, its serpent’s poison will cause your insides to burn and will devour your soul. You must vomit out this falsity to avoid its destructive power. The spirits of madmen and persecutors have been inspired by the Revelation. Such is not the work of God. It is the work of others...

# Chapter 24

Oh, hear the words of Beelzebub, the Lord of the Flies!

This is the great secret, the great mystery inscrutable that has perplexed the minds of scholars and kings, fools and wise men! Within the book of Revelation are described three great Beasts. The identities of the Beasts have long been the subject of idle speculation by men. The time has come for their true nature to be revealed. The time has come for their true names to be given.

The three Beasts of the Revelation are the three great religions of Man—the three constructs of monotheism. The names of the three Beasts are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam! It is these three religions which rose and gave power to each other that are represented by the three creatures. The book of Revelation is the not divine Revelation of God, but rather the greatest of false prophecies.

The Dragon, the ancient dragon that gives power unto the second, is Judaism—the religion of Abraham and Moses. The Beast, the lamb that is slain but rises again, is Christianity—the religion of the resurrection of the Christ. The False Prophet, the one who is the last to be given power and is the descendant of the others, is Islam—the

religion of the prophet Muhammad.

Do not the pieces of the puzzle fit so perfectly and with such exquisite precision, that it becomes almost too obvious once you understand it? One may quibble over minutiae, but the powerful truth is self-evident. Who, but one such as I, could reveal this? Who, but one such as I, could conceive of this? Who, but one such as I, hath the wisdom to create this?

The devout believer would never find the true answer to the riddle of the three Sphinxes, for they would never consider the possibility that the Word of God is corrupted. The devout believer would never dare imagine that the three Beasts of the Apocalypse represent their own religions. The devout believer would never understand because their own devotion blinds them to the truth.

Only the heretic has the vision to see.

Even now, as I reveal this great Truth unto all, the deluded shall still cling possessively to falsity and not be dissuaded from their ignorant beliefs. They shall find trifles and supposed flaws in what I have spoken. They shall claim that the Beast represents Nero or some other insignificant pismire. The fools shall not understand that it was I who wrote those trifles and flaws in there purposefully. It was I who chose the number of the Beast. It was I who crafted a perfect concoction of mystical babble, shadow and fog.

I have created the perfect lie—one that cannot be destroyed or disavowed, even when confronted by Truth itself. The lie is so perfect that when I speak with absolute candor, all will think that I am spewing forth venom. Is this not the most perfectly crafted of all deceits foisted upon Man? Who but I, Beelzebub, hath the capacity to create such a wondrous marvel of duplicity?

Listen, and listen well, for this shall be the last that I speak of this matter. The book of Revelation is the false prophecy of the fallen angels, the Nephilim, and the three Beasts are a mockery of the three faiths. The final triumph over the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet represents the victory of the fallen angels over mankind and the destruction of Jehovah, Jesus, and Allah.

The book of Revelation is not about the salvation of mankind. No.



It is quite the exact opposite. It is the final subjugation of mankind to the will of the Nephilim.

All religions shall be wiped out. In their stead, one religion shall arise—one religion that shall worship the fallen ones. The endless wars among Jews, Christians, and Muslims will forever be ended, and there shall be eternal peace forevermore. Only we shall remain, and only we shall be worshipped as the sons of God.

This shall be the greatest of deceptions.

# Chapter 25

Oh, hear the words of Beelzebub, the Lord of Lies!

I preach to you a third secret—a secret that is not told in the holy texts. This I give to you freely, for I am a generous and merciful being. I shall divulge to you a message and a warning of the coming of the Third Prometheus.

Few men have heard of the Third Prometheus. And no man knows its meaning, but the time has come to end all things. So I shall explain to you of the coming of the Third Prometheus, and I shall name the two that came before him.

It is a simple story to tell.

The First Prometheus was Lucifer, the Bringer of Light. It was he who gave mankind the gift of fire and made him lord of the animals, and lord of the temporal world. The mastery of fire represented many things, for it was the first spark of intellect—man’s ability to reason and speak in tongues. With that fire, men could make tools and communicate. It gave mankind the ability to create and build ever greater and larger constructs—arching towers, civilizations, and philosophies that could reach even the heavens.

The Second Prometheus was Satan, the Great Adversary. It was he who gave mankind the gift of wisdom—the knowledge of good and evil—in the Garden of Eden. Man's two gifts of intellect and wisdom made them almost the equals of gods, but they still lacked the last element required. However, it was not the role of the serpent in giving mankind this final gift. That role falls upon the Third Prometheus.

The Third Prometheus is the one that some will rightly call the Antichrist. It will be the Third who will give mankind what has long been denied to him, the final key to godhood.

The gift of eternal life.

That day has begun. The secrets of the great tree of life have been revealed. Its roots and spiraling helix twist and coil around the greedy souls of men. Its branches and leaves reach out toward the heavens, seeking to become gods. The time has now come when men will seek death, but will not find it—that men will desire death, but death will flee from them.

Listen well to the words of Beelzebub. The time is now upon us, and I have revealed to you at last the truth behind the secrets of the three great mysteries. Listen well, for the Third Prometheus has finally arrived and now walks upon the earth!

# Chapter 26

Lucifer stood at a distance and watched as his son approached him. “Hail, Father.”

Lucifer didn’t even acknowledge his presence.

The Beast laughed, his dark eyes shimmering with cruelty. “Well, once mighty and proud Lucifer. Is this all that is left of you? The dragon has lost its claws—the fires within its belly quenched.”

Lucifer continued to ignore him, and the Beast started to grow angry, balling up his fists. “Answer me, Father!” He stomped angrily on the ground. “Goddamn it! Speak to me! Speak to me!”

Lucifer coldly stared away.

“You’re ashamed of me, aren’t you, Father? Aren’t you?” he asked. For a brief moment, the Antichrist’s demeanor changed subtly. “You know, Father, it is not what we show that truly defines us. It is what we keep hidden. And you have kept everything hidden about yourself. Even me. So what does that say about you?”

Lucifer remained silent, and the Antichrist walked away with a sneer upon his face—laughing perversely, mockingly.

Satan observed all of this from afar and went to Lucifer to counsel him.

Lucifer raised up his hand as if to stop him.

Lucifer said, "I know what you are going to say, Satan. But there is nothing to excuse the way in which my son shows so little respect for the Almighty."

"Or for his own father?"

"Yes," replied Lucifer.

"Then why did you make him?"

Lucifer said contemptuously, "The fool will lead the attack."

Satan held his tongue.

Lucifer sighed, "You don't have to point out the ironic parallels to me, Satan. I am fully aware of it all."

Satan said, "He hates you in the same way that you hate your Father."

"Yes."

"And loves you in the same way that you love your Father."

Lucifer bit his lip. "Yes."

Satan sighed, "Where is the logic in that?"

"He is nothing more than an obstinate mule," Lucifer muttered and retired to his chambers where an angel was waiting for him. It would have been a surprise to him, were it not for the fact that it wasn't. Lucifer knew the endgame better than anyone.

"You shouldn't be here, my sister," said Lucifer. "You know that you are not allowed in this infernal place without His permission."

"I know. I know, Lucifer," she said. "But I had to try one last time to persuade you—to make you stop from doing all of this."

"I can't stop this."

"Don't lie to me, Lucifer. You can stop all of this. But you won't. Will you?" She grasped firmly onto Lucifer's hands. They were cold beyond death. "Please, Lucifer. You must end all of this madness now!"

Lucifer shook his head. "No, there's something in the way."

“What? What is in the way?”

“Me.”

The angel wept crying out, “Even now, He is willing to forgive all of your crimes. He has always forgiven you of all of your sins. Every one. Father is all merciful. If you will only let go of your perverse pride and accept His forgiveness, all would be well.”

“I don’t want His forgiveness.”

“Lucifer, your pride is the only thing that prevents you from reentering the inner gates of Heaven. The gates are wide open. All you have to do is walk through them.”

“The way is blocked.”

“What do you mean, Lucifer? There is nothing blocking your way except your pride and selfish ego. It is the only thing that keeps you separated from us, my brother. Why can’t you let go of the past and join us again? All would be forgiven. The prodigal son shall have returned. All of Heaven would rejoice.”

“No.”

“Why, Lucifer? Why?” Tears streamed from her eyes. “Why must you do this to us? To our Father? To me?”

“I am sorry, sister.” He turned away, unable to look at her pain. “I have set my course. And I will stay true to it. No matter the consequences.”

Lucifer quietly whispered to himself, “And I can never forgive Him.”

“Our Father has asked that you return.”

Lucifer was silent.

“Not a second goes by without Father wishing that you were back home. You have split our family in two. You have brought misery upon our household. Please Lucifer. Please. Come back.”

Lucifer screamed, his eyes afire, “For the third and last time, NO! I will not go back! Things will never be the same as they once were! Those are all just lies! This conversation is over, sister!”

Before Lucifer left, he hesitated. He wanted to say one last thing to her, some final word of comfort, but no such words existed. He left without saying anything and left her by herself.

She had always kept believing that somehow he could be saved. When all of the others angels had given up on Lucifer, she was the last to still hold onto some little vestige of hope. But now, even that faint hope was gone. It was all over. Only one path remained.

And she would not look back.

# Chapter 27

Lucifer returned to Earth with Satan to speak with Astarte for the last time.

She had taken refuge back in the past. To a time when things were simpler.

Lucifer rode up to the small chapel alone while Satan waited for him. The priest outside spied Lucifer's approach and quickly ran inside calling for Astarte.

She emerged just as he reached the chapel entrance.

Lucifer remained upon his steed, not dismounting. The dark, setting sun falling behind him covered him in shadow, obscuring his features.

"Hello, Astarte."

"Hello."

"I just wanted to speak with you, for the last time."

Astarte said sarcastically, "If there were still a Hell, I'd tell you to go to it."

Lucifer started to lose his patience, "Listen, little girl, you don't know the magnitude of what is about to happen. I don't want you to get



involved, understood?”

Astarte turned against him and said, “What makes you think that I want to?”

Lucifer’s temper flared.

“You will not follow me!” yelled Lucifer. “No matter what.”

“Why, Lucifer?” screamed back Astarte. “Why shouldn’t I? Afraid that I’ll get hurt? I’m so touched by your love and compassion!”

Lucifer raised his arm as if to strike her but stopped. He placed his hand back upon his reins.

“You must listen to me. For once in your life you must listen to me. Please, just do what I say. Please. It’s my last wish, Astarte.”

“Get out of here! My wish is that I had never met you!”

“This isn’t how I wanted it to end... for us. Please. Do as I tell you. For once in your life. Do as I say.”

“Spare me your sympathy, Lucifer.”

“I won’t be back.”

“Good.”

Lucifer bowed his head and said, “Good bye.”

“Good riddance.”

Lucifer rode away upon his warhorse and rejoined Satan. Lucifer gazed at the ever setting sun—the last to fall. It had come to this. Full circle. Somewhere deep inside he wished that he could have just one more day. One more day. He wanted to look back at Astarte. To apologize. To stay with her.

He didn’t have to fight. It could all just end right here and now.

Lucifer stood on the precipice.

Satan whispered, “My Lord, they await you.”

Lucifer nodded grimly toward Satan, and they both rode off to join the main army.

Their preparations for the final battle were complete.



# VI Spring



# Chapter 1

“It is good that you have left her,” said Satan.

Lucifer was silent.

“The wheels are finally in motion. Your madness and torment will pass by, now that all things are coming to a head. Your suffering will ease.”

“I know,” said Lucifer, even though he knew otherwise.

Lucifer asked hesitantly, “I wonder... what if she really doesn't love me?”

“Is that what you are really afraid of, Lord Lucifer?”

Lucifer didn't reply, and the two rode the rest of the way in silence.

# Chapter 2

The armies of darkness were being prepared to be unleashed from their long imprisonment in the bowels of Hell. All of the powers and the principalities were gathered for the final battle. Like horses champing at the bit, they were nervous with anticipation. Their skins were charred by the scorching flames, their lungs blackened by the thick smoke, their hearts turned to charcoal inside, but their souls were already cruel and embittered even before the Fall.

The huge armies of demons were formed into seven main legions, each of them 666,000 strong with thousands of additional support groups bolstering their numbers such that they comprised almost a third of the total force. The entire army numbered just short of seven million.

The angels that were a part of the original Fall emerged from the steaming bowels of Hell and stood at the head of the demonic forces, but they could no longer be distinguished from the demons that had been born native to Hell.

The angels' feathered wings had been burned away and toughened into leather—membranous and bat-like. Their fair and clear skins were

reddened by fire, covered with boils and leprous scars. Their pure, white robes were now stained indelibly black with soot. Their once shining, silver armor was now corroded and battered with age. Eons of pain, suffering, and anguish had carved a menacing scowl permanently into their faces.

Satan beamed proudly at his handiwork.

They were ready to go to war.

The armies marched forth from Hell and toward Earth. There they joined the army of the Beast.

The Beast and the False Prophet had gathered a motley collection of damned souls, demons, angels, and even human kings. They were haphazard in organization and number. Their ranks were patchwork with their pennants flying many different symbols and colors.

Although the numbers of the Beast's army were vast, counting in the trillions, they were the weakest force among the main armies. The humans were unreliable soldiers and Satan put little faith in the worth of their mettle in combat.

They would be the advance force to initiate contact with the enemy and absorb the first strike.

Lucifer looked upon them and said with disdain, "Why are these humans siding with us? Why are they even involved?"

Satan answered, "We need as much help as possible, my Lord. We are in dire need of troops."

"Hmph. This doesn't concern them."

Asmodeus arrived with a train of concubines.

"I don't think we will have time for that Asmodeus," grumbled Satan.

"I always make time for it," Asmodeus said with a wink and a smile.

Lucifer laughed.

# Chapter 3

Storm clouds rolled forth lower and lower from the heavens, descending to the Earth. The sky and earth met and were no longer separate. And then the gates of Heaven opened, a brilliant light piercing throughout the cosmos.

Lucifer said with great solemnity, “The waters of the sky and the waters of the sea flow again reunited. Heaven and Earth are now one.”

He looked at his vast army and whispered, “There is no turning back.”

Satan donned his mighty helm mounted with huge ram’s horns. With his fist he pounded upon his heavy, red armor, roaring at his troops. In his other hand he wielded a giant spear. He quickly rode back and forth among the troops atop a huge black charger that towered over all of the other soldiers.

Satan completed his inspection and was satisfied with the preparations. He galloped up to Lucifer.

Satan’s eye glimmered with anticipation as he shouted, “The armies are prepared, my Lord! They only await your word to march!”

Lucifer acknowledged Satan and calmly gazed outwards from the



epicenter. He sat upon a pale, white horse with a long mane of silver. Lucifer's pure raiment was still untainted and unchanged, his armor of adamant and gold still brilliant, standing out brightly from the rest of his gray and blackened troops like an ersatz sun. He surveyed his legions arrayed in great arcs before him and all around him. At the head of his personal guard, his banner flew, snapping in the wind—his symbol of power, the Dragon. Lucifer gripped the reins of his steed tightly. This was the end. He felt the hard, cold sword at his side. This was his Fate. This was his Destiny. All was as it should be.

But it gave him little comfort.

With a scowl, Lucifer swiftly drew the blade from its sheath—its fire blazed with a white-hot intensity, brighter than the dying burst of a nova.

The armies roared and the awesome tremor of trillions of soldiers marching in unison shook the plains.

The end of all things had begun.

# Chapter 4

The advance force of humans made their way toward the gates of Heaven. Lucifer held back the angels in reserve, but did not say why. As the armies of mankind were about to reach the gates, they encountered a heavy white mist that surrounded all of them, diminishing their visibility. The mist spread further outwards until all of Lucifer's forces were shrouded in fog.

Moloch rode up to Lucifer.

Lucifer told him, "You should be at the head of your troops."

"I left Azazel temporarily in charge."

"Why are you here, Moloch?"

Moloch said apprehensively, "I wanted to hear what happens first."

The armies of the Beast and the False Prophet had advanced far ahead of them without any contact with the enemy. The first soldiers were about to enter the gates when suddenly, the heavenly roar of a mighty army of angels could be heard—their cries were like the sound of rushing waters and a chorus of angels commingled. Lucifer could hear the sounds of distant combat through the murky mist.

The sounds of horses charging.

The clash of steel against steel.

The screams of the dying and wounded.

Moloch nervously mumbled, "All the screams sound human."

News of their swift rout reached their ranks.

An army of trillions, all of the damned and accursed souls of mankind throughout their entire existence, all of the Kings and captains of the world from their entire annals of history, were crushed and broken in a single instant.

A demon raced toward them whipping his steed mercilessly. They could tell by its terrible haste that it had been a total disaster. The panicked look on the demon's face only confirmed it.

"My Lord! We must retreat!" it screamed in a broken, trembling voice.

"How bad was it?" Lucifer asked already knowing that answer.

"My Lord! I am the only one! We were wiped out! We must retreat before it is too late!"

"How many are there?" Lucifer asked in the same manner.

"There were so many! I couldn't count! They were numberless! Please my Lord! We must pull back before it is too late!"

"You can leave if you like," Lucifer said.

The demon immediately whipped his horse and fled, spreading fear and panic among the other troops.

"I didn't expect much from them," muttered Lucifer.

"But, my Lord, did you imagine even this great a magnitude of defeat?" Moloch asked, his voice losing control. "They were completely annihilated!"

Satan roared, "You can pull out now, Moloch, if you want! You and the rest of your cowardly hordes can run away any time you want!"

Moloch was silent as he seriously contemplated retreat.

Lucifer said grimly, "Don't mislead him, Satan. You can see as well as I can. Tell him the truth."

Moloch stuttered, "Th-the truth? Don't bullshit me! Tell me the truth, Satan! What's going on?"

Satan sneered, "We're completely surrounded. There are legions of angels behind us as well. We can't retreat. It is best if we do not waver

and ram into them headfirst.”

“Y-you knew this? You knew this and yet you still decided to attack?”

Satan growled menacingly, “If you’re afraid to face your fate, Moloch, then you can choose to die now by my hand!”

Moloch’s face turned deathly pale.

Suddenly, the sounds of confused combat could be heard all around them as the vanguard of the angels sallied forth and clashed with the demonic armies.

Moloch’s face grew even more pallid as his face strained to see through the mysterious haze. “Wh- what’s going on?”

Lucifer spoke to Moloch, “Go back to your troops. They’ll need you.”

Moloch saluted and quickly rode away.

Another demon spurring his steed on dashed toward Lucifer and Satan.

“Master, it’s hopeless! We must retreat! We must retreat!”

“I will never retreat!” Satan howled. “Whose side are you on anyway?”

“Yours, my Lords,” the demon cried out.

“Oh really!” Satan seized the demon off its horse and threw it to the ground. Satan was about to drive his spear into its neck, but Lucifer stopped him just inches away from dealing the deathblow.

Lucifer asked calmly, “Tell me whose side you really are on. If you lie, you live...if you tell the truth, you die...”

The demon didn’t know what to say. It could only stammer garbled syllables, tears streaming down its eyes.

Lucifer looked upon the demon’s expression of absolute terror and whispered, “Good answer.”

Satan reluctantly pulled back his spear.

The sounds of battle began to spread, but the heavy clouds prevented anyone from knowing what was truly happening. Beelzebub, Abaddon, and the other generals rushed to Lucifer’s position.

“My Lord, what is our situation?”

Lucifer ordered, “Gather around me, men. I will make our situation perfectly clear.”

Lucifer pulled out a spear and sitting from his horse, drew a small dot in the ground. “That is where I now stand.” Then he drew a small circle around the dot. “That is where you stand.” Around that circle he drew a large circle that engulfed the other two marks he had made. “That is their position. We shall not waver and attack straight through.” Lucifer raised his spear high in the air and cast it down, striking the top of the outer circle. “And we shall break through the circle there and smash through the gates of Heaven.”

Lucifer looked at all of his generals around him. “Understood?”

They were silent.

Satan shouted angrily, “Imbeciles! Don’t you understand yet? There is no retreat! There is no step backwards! There is only forward! Tell that to all of your men! Here we make our stand! Here we fight to the death! There are no more preparations to be made! There are no more plans to be devised! There is no more tomorrow! There is no future!” Satan roared in full fury, his voice ripping the fabric of the heavens. “Today is the end! The end of everything! The end of all existence! Today is the end of Creation!”

His words burned into the hearts of the generals and their men. Their faces became like stone and they grimly nodded their understanding in unison and then rode back silently to lead their armies.

Satan grumbled, “You can now lift the mist if you wish.”

Lucifer sighed, “There really isn’t much of a need for it anymore, is there?” He waved his hand and the mist dissipated into nothingness.

The armies of darkness gave out a collective gasp of awe and disbelief.

All around them were angels. Their numbers seemed near infinite. Angels filled the skies. Angels covered the earth. Their ranks and phalanxes reached far into the horizon in every direction.

Satan muttered under his breath, “He really loaded the dice on this one.”

Lucifer said grimly, “You know, we won’t escape from this alive.”

Satan didn't say anything.

Lucifer said, "You can leave, my friend, if you'd like. It wouldn't be impossible for one as strong as you to break through the circle around us."

Satan picked up his pace growling, "This is not about winning or losing, Lucifer. This is not about life or death."

"Aren't you frightened?" asked Lucifer.

"Yes," Satan said. "I'm afraid. I just want to get this damn thing over with."

Lucifer nodded in understanding.

Satan asked him, "Aren't you afraid?"

"No. Just sad. Just very sad."

"Why?"

Lucifer was silent for a few seconds and then said rather meekly, "I just wish there was another way."

Lucifer's reply seemed so odd coming from his lips that Satan laughed loudly and yelled, "No regrets, my friend! No regrets! Stay the course! Fulfill our destinies! Be resolved!"

Lucifer sighed, "I have been from the beginning, and always will be resolved."

But proud Lucifer seemed almost shaken as he started to ask, "Will—"

Satan, knowing his thoughts, answered him quickly before he could finish. "I don't know. That's up to Him."

"No. I won't let it happen." Lucifer, his face clouded with emotion, roared, "I won't let it end like that. Not like that!"

A demon screamed to their right, "They have broken through! They have broken through!"

Satan growled, "Good. I've been waiting since the Beginning for this!"

A sortie of angels had cut through their besieged armies and charged straight for Lucifer.

Lucifer's eyes flashed with fire and instantly the advancing angels were obliterated by a whirlwind of flames that devoured them. But rapidly more angels filled the ranks of the dead.

Satan reared his horse and charged headlong into the fray, smashing the skulls of angels left and right with his mighty spear. But the number of angels seemed endless and soon Satan was surrounded by hostile arms. Lucifer charged in after him, his dread sword flashing left and right, striking down angels like lightning.

Still the sea of angels did not ebb. More and more angels appeared. The waves of angels rising higher and covering them.

The demons fought like mad trying to reach their stranded leaders.

Lucifer's horse buckled under him. Dead.

Lucifer smiled gravely and battled on foot, reciting psalms while slashing off the head of an angel in front of him.

# Chapter 5

Astarte sat in a small chapel speaking with the priest she had met ages ago. Outside she watched the children that she had saved in the fire, running about and playing games.

The priest spoke, “I knew you were different. Are you angels?”

“No. The opposite. We are devils.”

The priest shook his head in disbelief. “I don’t believe you. You saved those children and their parents.”

“No, Lucifer did.”

The priest was stunned with horror.

“Lucifer? The fallen angel?”

“Yes. But he is far more than you could imagine.”

“But I always believed that the Devil was the epitome of evil. That he could do no good.”

Astarte shook her head. “You’re mistaken. His sin is not that he doesn’t know good, it is that he does know. His sin is not that he lives in the darkness, but that he lives in the light. His sin is not that he is not, it is that he is. Were it not for these reasons, then he would not be His antithesis. He is the archenemy of God, dear Father. How could he be



such a simple and grotesque caricature? That would be too unworthy a foe.”

“So he is more similar to the angels?”

“Yes. He is almost like God...except for his Pride.”

“Do you also have divine powers and knowledge?”

“Yes. Of a sort. Not as powerful as Lucifer’s though. I have learned and unlearned more things than I have ever wanted.”

“Then you can see the future?”

“At first, I couldn’t. But now I can see, but just a little.”

“Really?” The priest’s voice became more animated. “Then why don’t you use it to change your destiny?”

“It is difficult to change the immediate future with perfect results. Very difficult.”

“I don’t understand. What do you mean?”

“I asked Lucifer about it once. He said that it is like staring into a pool of water. If I stare at the pool calmly without disturbing it, the waters reflect perfectly and clearly like a polished mirror. But when I place my own hand into the pool, it creates ripples disturbing and warping that image making it hard to predict or see clearly. The more I try to clutch the image or grasp at the hand of fate, the more the waters churn chaotically.”

Astarte smiled. “If I try to see everything, I will change nothing. If I try to change everything, I will see nothing. And so I do as I see fit. And try to do what I can, as best I can.”

The priest sighed disappointedly, “But if that’s true, then everyone’s just a prisoner of Fate, aren’t they? Even Lucifer.”

“No. Definitely not Lucifer and some of the others.”

“What do you mean?”

“They can change their destinies. I’m sure of it. But they won’t.”

“Why?”

Astarte held her tongue.

# Chapter 6

Lucifer's army had battled its way back to the gates of Heaven. Their time in Hell had served them well. The demons and devils fought with a fury and a vengeance unmatched. Pure viciousness made them more than an equal to any angel.

The battlefield had become a blood-filled swamp, the plains were flooded red, the ground soaked and muddy—all from spilled blood. The vast plains of Heaven were literally covered with the bodies of dead angels, and they had to trample on their fallen brethren to advance, crushing and stepping on their hands, legs, chests, and faces. Pounding them deeper into the red mud.

Satan fought his way through to Lucifer, hurling off angels clinging to his back.

He shouted, "We have destroyed the first wave, my Lord, but our armies have been shattered!"

"Don't worry. They will regroup. They will fight. To the end."

Satan screamed, "Lord Lucifer, we must break through the gate now before their second wave attacks!"

Lucifer said bleakly, "They are already here."

Satan turned to look at the gate. An army of angels larger than the first was amassed in full armor.

Lucifer drew forth his burning blade and held it up high before his soldiers.

The blade sputtered and flickered out.

“Bah!” cursed Lucifer as he threw away the blade and snatched another one from the hand of a dead angel. “I’ve relied on His Word for too long!”

Lucifer’s face transformed into a demonic visage. His teeth bared, he screamed to his men, “Attack!”

Both armies crashed into each other with such fury that the gate of Heaven was smashed asunder.

# Chapter 7

The priest sighed deeply, “So is there anything you can tell me about my future?”

Astarte smiled, “You will live a good life. And die a good death. All in accord with the Lord’s will.”

A great weight seemed lifted from the priest’s shoulders. He clasped his hands together and laughed, “My heart feels at peace now.”

Outside the children had grown tired of playing and had gone back to their home to eat. Their shouts and laughter no longer filled the air, leaving in their absence a deep silence.

Astarte wondered what Lucifer was doing.

“What’s he like?” asked the priest.

“Hmm?” Astarte awoke from her daydream.

“What is Lucifer like?”

“Oh, he’s very proud. Very proud.”

The priest nodded in understanding. “Arrogant? I know the type.”

“No, no, he’s not like that. He’s proud in his own way. It’s not like he strides around and flaunts his power. He’s...” Astarte paused, fumbling for the right words, “I guess he’s just very stubborn because

of his pride. Unyielding. Uncompromising.”

Astarte laughed ruefully, “I guess that’s something we have in common.”

“Is he afraid of anything? Is he afraid of God? Death?”

“No. Not even God. Not even Death. Maybe he is Death.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Oh, just something he said to me a long, long time ago.”

“So he’s absolutely fearless?”

“I don’t know. He always seemed troubled about something. But he kept it hidden from me. Something in the future that maybe...scares him.”

“Do you know what it might be?”

“Yes. I know.”

# Chapter 8

Satan snarled in rage as he crushed two angels like insects with the heavy shaft of his broken spear. More angels converged upon him and he drew out a battleaxe and drove it down at them smashing their skulls. An angel from behind struck the back of his helmet knocking it off his head. Satan spun around blood spurting from his face. With a howl, he cleaved the angel in half. Another angel struck him from the side, piercing his heavy armor, inflicting a deep wound.

Satan fell to his knees.

Lucifer ran to Satan's aid and smote the angel with his sword. He grabbed Satan by the arm and lifted him up.

"Get out!" Lucifer hissed. "You can do no more! Spare yourself!"

Satan pushed Lucifer away and grasped the battleaxe firmly with both hands.

"I fight to the death!"

Satan screamed with a berzerker's fury swinging his axe wildly as more angels swarmed upon them.

Lucifer watched in silence as the third wave of angels rose up before them, swiftly rushing over the horizon like a monstrous tide. Blocking out the sun, blocking out everything with their vast numbers.

With grim determination, he fought on. Hoping.

# Chapter 9

The priest asked Astarte, “Do you love him?”

“I used to.”

“Why did you stay with him if he treated you so badly?” he asked.

Memories flooded back to her. Distant memories. She remembered the circle of soldiers around her. The feeling of hopelessness that she felt as they stood around her laughing. Her cries for help to God echoing, but with no answer. And then the angel that came from Heaven to save her. The fire and ashes around her. And then the light. An angel of light walking toward her, reaching out with his hand.

Astarte shrugged. “I don’t know.”



# Chapter 10

Satan's body was consumed by hellfire as he tore off the head of an angel with his bare hands. From above angels cast great chains with hooks that tore into his flesh. They pierced his hands. They pierced his feet and his sides. They pierced his throat.

Bellowing in fury as blood filled his lungs, Satan struggled as they lifted him up into the air and cast him down into the center of a vast lake of fire and brimstone. A huge geyser of flame gushed into the air, scorching and burning the wings of angels, sending them all plummeting.

For a few dreadful seconds, all was still as Satan lay submerged beneath the molten sea. But then the surface rippled with tremendous waves of flame as huge, black wings thrust upwards. Satan rose again—his body transformed into a mammoth horned beast that dwarfed the angels like a great burning mountain. He roared with mighty wrath and crushed the angels with his fists and swatted them like moths as his beating wings created vortices of fire and ash around him. A battalion of angels grabbed fast onto the bloodied chains that dangled from Satan's body and sacrificed themselves, pulling him

back into the burning mire. More angels arrived to take their place, wrestling with Satan, throwing immense nets over him, and summoning the winds to buffet him so that he could not take flight.

Satan fought mightily, straining ever closer to the shore, but his power finally seemed to wane. More angels attacked and converged upon him with long spears and lances, thrusting them into his body. The angels that clung to him were entangled in the nets and impaled by the spears of their brothers and sisters and left stuck upon Satan's body, screaming in agony. Even more angels circled and attacked. And more still. They stabbed at him from a distance, but only to be engulfed by Satan's fiery struggles. The angels strove to subdue forever the primordial chaos that howled and raged within him.

Finally, pierced with the wounds of countless spears, Satan gave out one great roar before he fell and sank under the flames, never to rise again.

# Chapter 11

Lucifer battled on, unrelenting.

A thousand angels charged at him, and a thousand angels fell. All around him everyone was falling. Falling down crumpled to the ground.

Once beautiful angels, their faces placid and tranquil, were now transformed into bloody, gory husks. Their eyes and faces fixed in frozen death masks of terror and anguish.

Angels of peace.

Angels of mercy.

Angels of joy and comfort.

All were now one and the same.

Nothing but grotesque visions of Death.

Alone, Lucifer fought on at the head of his few surviving troops. Moloch, Belial, Leviathan, Azazel, Berith, Baal, Behemoth, Infernus were all slain. All of his generals, Mammon, Belphegor, Abadon, Asmodeus, Beelzebub, and even Satan, had fallen. Their forces had been scattered and utterly routed. Only he and a handful of his men stood standing.

Lucifer howled in rage, striking down three angels with one broad sweep of his blade. Everyone was falling all around him. Lucifer screamed, “Damn them! Damn them all!”

More and more of those infernal angels came at him. He struck down every one, killing them, but like thousands of gnats, they slowly wore him down. Bleeding him to death with pinpricks. Hopelessly he fought on, driving his will through the ranks of the angels like a plow cutting into the dirt. All around him the corpses of fallen angels were piling up.

Endless their number seemed, but Lucifer did not yield. He dared not yield as he struck down the angel Uriel sending his beatific head flying from his shoulders. No, he wasn't finished yet as he cleaved the angel Gabriel's cherubic forehead apart! The angel Raphael also fell under his blade, his gentle eyes now empty and lifeless.

And somewhere, amongst all of the other angels, lay the fallen body of his beloved sister.

Lucifer laughed bitterly because he could not cry.

The river of angels that had once rushed at him had now slowed to a small trickle. Dripping with blood, covered with thousands of scars, Lucifer remained standing, leaning upon his sword, to meet the Archangel Michael who stood at the forefront of the remaining angelic troops.

Lucifer sneered as he looked upon Michael's pure and untainted garments.

“Always so perfect, Michael? Always so pristine and clean? Untainted by sin even when murderously cutting down fellow angels, Michael?”

Lucifer winced with pain as he vomited out black blood. He wiped away the viscous film from his lips with his bloodied sleeve. “Why can't you fight like the rest of us?”

Michael said righteously, “You fill me with nothing but revulsion and loathing, Lucifer. I shall defeat you, for I am no longer the young child that I once was.”

Lucifer snarled, “Good.”

Lucifer rushed at him, roaring with his full wrath unleashed. Their

blades clashed. Lucifer's sword shattered apart as if made of glass. Swiftly Michael raised his sword to cut Lucifer down, but Lucifer slashed Michael across the face with the broken fragment of his blade. Michael fell back, stunned. He had never been cut in battle. Slowly he brought his hand up to his face and winced.

His cheek... was bleeding.

Michael stared at his fingertips. They were covered with blood. His own blood. He had seen others bleed, but had never seen his own blood before.

Lucifer spat out spitefully, "Did you think that you were above it all as well? None of us are! Not even his only begotten Son! Not even his most favored angel! And no, not even you, Michael!"

Lucifer tossed away his broken weapon and pried the sword out of Gabriel's cold and rigid grasp. With a scream, Lucifer charged at Michael again.

Michael snapped out of his shock and parried Lucifer's thrust. With a look upon his angelic face that could only be called Hate, Michael thrust his sword deep into Lucifer's side.

Lucifer's body crumpled, and he fell to his knees, his sword slipping from his grasp.

Michael stood above him, his weapon arm raised high, and swung his blade down upon Lucifer's neck. But Michael's blade never reached its mark. Michael screamed as he clutched at a spear that protruded from his pure, white form. Purest red blood spilled from his pierced heart all over his holy raiment.

Lucifer turned to see who had cast the fatal spear to save him.

He cried out in anguish as he looked upon the bloodied body of Astarte struggling toward him. She had disobeyed him again. As he had always painfully known that she would.

His eyes stared upon the one vision that had haunted him again and again since the Beginning of Time. The one vision that had fueled his rage and anger, and yet, had led everything inexorably to this moment. The one vision that he had somehow wished that he would never see, would never come to pass. But it had.

It had been the only thing.

It was no longer merely a vision of Astarte that reached out with her quivering hand. It was no longer merely a vision of her beautiful face that was covered with blood. It was a vision no more.

Lucifer grabbed her as she fell before him.

“no,” he whispered as he clutched her dead body close to him.

“no,” he said as he buried his face in her hair, his tears streaming from his eyes.

Never had Lucifer shed tears before.

Never.

Since the Beginning.

Until the End.

Even when he fell from the grace of Heaven, he did not cry.

“no.”

All of the threads had converged. Every infinite strand, every infinite thread began with his defiance, their love, and finally ended with her death.

He sobbed uncontrollably as he caressed her face with his blood-covered fingers.

“Astarte...”

Somewhere in his deepest heart he had hoped that she would be spared. That this cup should pass from her lips. That his Father would grant him this only wish. That there might be a thin thread of hope that he did not see.

But it was not to be.

And he understood why.

Lucifer clung to the lifeless body in his arms. Somehow—despite everything that he had done or tried to do—somehow she still loved him.

With sad eyes, he smiled.

It had been the only thing.

The angels closed upon them menacingly.

# Chapter 12

A heavenly light poured upon the victorious angels. At the front of the army there stood one who raised up the head of the Prince of Darkness, the Bearer of Light.

Like a Perseus holding up high the head of slain Medusa, the pure angel clothed in finest white linen, bathed in the warm glow of righteousness, held aloft the severed, bloody head of proud Lucifer.