

## THUS SAITH THE MOST HIGH!

2291 ""Yea! Though atrocities come by conspiracies and powers and authorities of governments and religions to inflict and defile the tribes, the peoples and the nations, the responsibility for one's own soul is upon their own head! And though atrocities come by conspiracies and powers and authorities of governments and religions, all are of instigations by individuals, and the whole of all the iniquities thereof shall I account upon those same individuals' heads!

2292 ""Nay! None shall escape their own responsibilities, and none who refuse their own responsibilities shall escape My Wrath and My Own Damnation! For they have brought My Wrath and My Own Damnation upon their own head!""

## CHAPTER NINETEEN THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR THE DEATH OF AESHMODEVA

2293 Saturday, November 27th, 1976 GCAD, 6 Kislev 5737, just before daybreak. We had spent the night feasting. It being a Sabbath, and The Akurians were looking forward to a day of pleasant relaxation, unlike the present day practice of going to 'church' with all its empty ritual, hypocrisy, and vague generalizations about spiritual matters – and that being on a Sunday, a pagan Sabbath day! The Akurians had observed the correct, true and established Sabbath, from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, according to the Hebrew calendar – the one and only calendar where the correct days were established by The Most High, Himself, during the forty years of wandering in the desert under Moshe's ever-watching eye. The manna did not fall haphazardly, but upon the correct Days of Preparation for the observance of the correct Sabbath. That calendar has been kept accurate ever since, mostly by Judah since the Diaspora!

2294 Now, instead of singing a hymn and passing the plate, The Akurians were going to get a few hours of rest and enjoy their families for the remainder of the day. It appeared to be a beautiful day coming on as the sky was clear. In the darkness just before dawn, the stars were in full brilliance down to the horizon. There was just enough drifting breeze to perfect the temperature, and in the tropical warmth of a Florida fall, it was most comfortable.

2295 Aku lay on his front-yard swing, looking at the stars, trying to guess their real distance in light years. He wondered if there were really any accurate measures for such questionings and doubted there was really any effective triangulation from the 7,000-plus miles of earth's diameter, even if calculated from opposite sides of orbit. Perhaps, since the United States had landed some scientific instruments on the moon and on the planet Mars, there could be some better calculations. Aku correctly doubted if anyone in government would spend the money to inform the general populace who paid for all of it, even if the-powers-that-be knew any answers to these things about which men have pondered since the restoration of surface life and culture.

2296 Because of his experiences, both on the earth and in the Planes of Heaven, Aku knew this earth had often been visited by peoples and beings from distant worlds, and that they had settled here on occasion. Mankind, Adama, was the result of such a visitation and homesteading by the Nefilim. Obviously, these cultures had many answers, in addition to countless others that have since been lost to, or suppressed from, the public at large. Either by political or religious fervor, but always by deliberate design.

2297 Aku held his breath for a moment and listened, just to see what he could hear in the early morning stillness. It is amazing how far away from the source of noise one can hear, and the some one hundred (100) square miles one can monitor by this process. He could hear a train whistle over in the next County, which is several miles across Tampa Bay! The airplanes were quiet, and listen though he might, he could not hear any ship signals, even though he knew there were probably one or two moving in or out of the Port of Tampa.

2298 There were the inevitable night birds, arguing about something that to them was important. They reminded him of people. He had seen people who, in the very midst of approaching death and total destruction, would be whining about whether their hair was properly groomed, their shoes polished, or some other equally unimportant idiocy that had no effect whatever on the impending disaster. And which would in all probability (unless someone got their priorities in gear) be taken care of by the morticians or burial detail.

2299 Then Aku felt the touch of a heavenly finger on his forehead, and knew he was about to be taken up into the spirit. Having no advance information as to the nature of the excursion, he prepared himself mentally for an easy transfiguration up into the spirit. Once out of body, he could consciously see his physical body lying in the swing, as if

asleep. Instantly he was dressed in his armor, with full battle trim; and as was routine, checked his armament.

2300 His spiritual dress armor is far more impressive than the fatigues of his PATHFINDERS in which his physical body now lay sleeping. He wore all the formal trappings and that was the first indication that this was not to be a pleasure trip, but one of great importance. Or at the very least, he was to be presented to someone of great importance.

2301 His escort, who had touched his forehead, was the Seraphim Warrior Amatraelonael, an immensely fierce and capable warrior – one who worshipped before the Great Veil with his other six-winged counterparts. Seraphim Amatraelonael is one of those who can do more damage in one minute with one hand than all of earth's fully-equipped armies could in all the years of their existence! And he has as many hands as he wants or needs for any given scrap or fire fight. Yet he is amazingly gentle, as are all other beings who are moral and possess great destructive ability. He is always a patient teacher and never seems to tire of endless questioning, even when the subject seems to be of no great importance. Even so, everyone who has seen him in action knows for a certainty: one of the biggest mistakes in creation is to judge his capability by his easygoing manner! All true servants of The Most High have that same trait.

2302 "Come Aku, your father awaits!"

2303 Aku hadn't seen his father, Vegah, for some time, and certainly didn't need full formal dress and combat equipment to visit him! Seraphim Amatraelonael kept his stolid silence as they moved upwards through the Planes of Heaven. It took only a few minutes at most, as Seraphim Amatraelonael, like his counterparts, travel at what would be unthinkable speeds if measured by earth standards: several million warps (not multiples, but squares of the speed of light)! And that, even when they are not in any particular hurry. Earth has no idea how fast they can actually achieve, but rest assured it is a lot faster than our thought.

2304 They gently settled on the forelawn of Lord Vegah's sprawling retreat, its Angelic name unpronounceable in earth languages, but almost translates into the English language as close to stargate, a one-word term for entrance into a Realm of Great Knowledge and Understanding (light, enlightenment). A reception was in full swing. Seraphim Seraphiel, Seraphim Jehoel, Seraphim Kemuel, Seraphim Nethanael, Seraphim Ophaniel and Seraphim Zophiel were already there, and greeted them with a Holy Salute. Archangel Raphael, Archangel Michael, Archangel Gabriel, Archangel Uriel, Archangel Remiel, Archangel Raguel and Archangel Zerachiel were there too, as were hundreds of other angels, messengers, cherubim, and equally prestigious personalities.

2305 Aku's clarion was sounded and Vegah and his sher (wife), Valiea, came forth to greet him. Valiea is not Aku's heavenly mother, but you'd not know it to see her in his presence. She was beautiful, dressed in a silver-white gown and silver appointments. Vegah was in his massive formal armor, with full battle regalia, as was everyone else except the soulmates.

2306 [INSERT: Soulmate wives are not like wives on earth, but are the opposites that are perfection, and more accurately a twin sister, being the balance factor of pure creation. When a consciousness is 'created' or born, there is usually a pair! What we would normally call a male and female. But because in the Planes of Heaven there really is no such thing as 'male' or 'female' as such, it becomes a bit difficult to accurately describe. The gender is used more toward the understandable personality and does not actually identify a specific sex. However, it is often a common thing to see beings as men and women, especially if there are spirits present that are in incarnations as such on earth. And this was the case at this reception.]

2307 Vegah's Chief Steward, Ahmandal, brought out Aku's battle bandoleer, a scarlet velvet sort of sling with awards of his many past exploits attached. Aku hadn't worn it in ages, and at this time and stage of his high awakening, he didn't even remember what all the medals, badges, emblems, ribbon, tassels, bands, and insignia were all about. He draped the bandoleer over his left shoulder and fastened it at his right hip. There are dozens of ribbons, from the epaulet (also an award) downward. He had no idea that it was going to be so heavy! Evidently he was about to either get another award or lose some of those he had!

2308 Formal Presentation sounded, and all snapped to order and attention. The assembly had joined in such position as to leave Aku standing front, before his father, Vegah. Aku saluted, Vegah returned, and somewhere in the distance a voice called, "Stand to!"

2309 "Aku," said Vegah, "I would that I could take this issue, but the fight is yours, and yours alone."

2310 "Fight?" Aku questioned.

2311 "Yes! You have been challenged and must stand the test on the Field of Honor. It is to determine the Right of your Anointing." Lord Vegah was concerned, but not fearful.

2312 "Who's the victim?" Aku was beginning to anger. He had work to do on earth for The Elect Remnant, and was in no mood to play silly games with some idiot.

2313 "Aeshmodeva." Vegah's voice was level.

2314 "Well, well! The Raging Fiend and I finally get a go at each other!" Aku had been wanting to take this vicious bastard to task for centuries!

2315 Aeshmodeva (Asmodeus) is no small matter in a scrap, for he once beat Archangel Raphael, and it took both Archangel Gabriel and Archangel Michael to overcome him. Aeshmodeva is the Angel of Persia, and one of the Chiefs of the Council of Lucifer. Old Splithoof had chosen his chevalier (horseman) well. Well, nobody in his right mind has ever accused Satan of being stupid!

2316 "Where is the forty-horned son-of-a-bitch?" Aku asked.

2317 "He awaits at Star Plain," ("Great Place of Beautiful Light and Enlightenment" in Angelic; The Field of Honor (arena) named after Aku's own heavenly holdings which it is near!) Valiea replied softly. She was obviously in great anxiety over the matter. She was always so gentle and considerate. Aku took her by the shoulders.

2318 "Valiea, when I get through with that so-and-so, the fastest way out of there will be too god-damned slow!" Aku was ready for the fight.

2319 His confidence didn't seem to comfort her in the least. She handed a glass of clear wine to him from the tray of a passing servant. Without anything more than a long, loving look, she departed. Aku knew that within her was the same worry any mother had for a dear child, especially one who is bound for war. Vegah waited for her to get some distance and waved the reception to continue. The voices and music started again, just like a cocktail party at some world premier!

2320 "Aku, I want you to talk to some of those who have fought Aeshmodeva, and see if you can find a weak spot. It would be nice if you could defeat him by yourself without the intervention of The Most High. And let's face it, he is no small potato punk!

2321 "That bastard is a Past Grand Master at warfare, and his experience is all firsthand!" Vegah was beginning to show his concern.

2322 "Vegah, I wasn't around when he was created along with Lucifer and the others, but I think when The Most High created me as a neutral, he knew someday this would have to happen!

2323 "I too, have a few days in war, and even though he has more years in combat than I have alive, I think he just might have bitten off more than he can chew!"

2324 "That may well be, but I want you to get some firsthand information about this character. He knows his business, and he wouldn't be here at all if there weren't a great deal at stake!" With that, he waved for Archangels Raphael and Gabriel to join them. They, in their normally huge forms, seated themselves on the endless, purple-colored lawn.

2325 With typical good humor, Archangel Raphael spoke, "Well, little one! It looks like your reputation has finally caught up with you! What can we do to help?"

2326 Archangel Gabriel laughed, "What we could do to help him could get him slaughtered! That's why he's in this mess now!"

2327 It is not common knowledge but even angels can enjoy a given situation. They do not spend all their time shouting praises to a nonexistent 'Jesus', fighting demons or in weak-kneed, namby-pamby, soap-operatic heavenly pursuits! They were obviously in a humorous state over the impending joust, and obviously unafraid of the eventual outcome.

2328 Archangel Gabriel spoke again, "We've fought Aeshmodeva before, and he's no amateur! He is bound by his chosen form, though, and that may or may not be an advantage to you! He has chosen a four-armed, semi-human shape with four eyes, and is mounted on the most hugendous griffin I ever saw! His size is yours times four, and he is very agile in that configuration!"

2329 Archangel Raphael injected, "He also has all forty horns, spurs from his joints, and I don't know how much fire he can spit! He's fast, extremely so, unbelievably strong, and thoroughly treacherous!

2330 "But, one fact to keep in mind, he is neither right- nor left-handed: so don't let him feint you!

2331 "His griffin is war-trained and fully armored, so watch out for it too!"

2332 They were both more serious now. Archangel Gabriel continued, "When we fought him in Chaldea, he had a similar form, and it's probably his most effective! He could change form in that fight, but he's bound for this one! Even so, beware: he'll cheat if he gets the chance!

2333 "Don't look him in the eyes! He'll inject visions, and they'll distract you to your instant death!

2334 "He'll spit fire and brimstone at every chance, so get prepared to be burned a few hundred times!

2335 "Avoid letting him get a grip on you, if it gets down to a hand-to-hand fight!

2336 "And should you get the upper hand, kill him then and there! This is not a fight with many rules, except

victory! And since only one of you will come off the field alive, we'd prefer it to be you!"

2337 Archangel Raphael continued, "That's true, but if you get in trouble, we can't help you in any manner! You're on your own! There is nothing that can be done until one or the other of you are dead!

2338 "This is a fight to the finish, so should you get the chance to finish it, do it! Then and there! No heroics, no grand gestures! Kill him, and kill him with as little fanfare as possible!

2339 "Don't even think of fair play! If he gets the upper hand, you'll be dead so fast we'll have to recheck the Akashic Records to find out if you ever existed!"

2340 Archangel Raphael began to show some serious concern. He continued, "Since you are the challenged, you have the choice of weapons! I suggest you grant field arms with firelances for the first strike!

2341 "He's a bit wobbly when someone throws fire in his face like a dose of his own medicine! And though his griffin spits fire too, they are by nature afraid of it on the receiving end!"

2342 Archangel Gabriel took over, "Don't play games with him!

2343 "Strike! Strike fast and as hard as you can! Be as swift as possible, and never give any quarter whatsoever!

2344 "Be the eternal aggressor, and show no mercy!

2345 "Go in fighting and don't stop until he is dead!

2346 "Anything less and we'll be doing mourning chants over your pieces!"

2347 "Well, son, what do you think?" Vegah was a bit more relaxed. They both took a long pull on the wine. Aku thought quietly for a minute while someone brought them all fresh goblets.

2348 It always helps to know as much about a person as possible, especially when you have to fight him. A good Field Commander studies other Field Commanders just in case they ever have to square off. Aku thought it a good idea to find out as much as possible about this damnable demon.

2349 "How long has this bastard been around?" Aku asked Archangel Raphael.

2350 "He was there in the beginning, the First Creation! And became one of the Council of Lucifer! He was one of Lucifer's top Generals during the fight of the fall, and still holds the position as one of the top five Lords of Satan!

2351 "He is the Angel of Persia, from the Syrdarya (SER-DAR-YA) River Southward, from the Euphrates River and the Arabian Gulf Coast to the Indus River! His influence overlaps considerably due to his rank and position!

2352 "He once had what was known as a 'potent throne', or Commander's Chair, so he could, and did, throw his weight around! He is an expert at anticipating future moves and has a supreme ability of prophecy by reading energy patterns! So it might be good if you can fight with a blank or near-blank mind!

2353 "He often appears as a bull, ram, or as a man, but can also make himself or others invisible! He may still have that ability during the fight, so watch yourself! He may not be able to change forms during the fight, but you'll still have to see him to hit him!"

2354 "No doubt about that!" Archangel Gabriel injected. "He is totally without fear and equally without ethics, so watch yourself for every dirty trick in the book, and all those that aren't!

2355 "He is a demon of punishment, and can deliver it with the best of them! If he hits you, he's going to hurt you, and I mean a great deal! He is the earthly God of Pain, and can make it exceedingly worse!

2356 "He is also a gambler, even though he prefers a sure bet! However, he will take a calculated risk, especially if he can do so as a diversion!

2357 "He can also get under a person's headgear, and once there, he can inject every sort of hallucination! But he must get there with the headgear in place! He'll try for your helmet the first chance he gets, and if he makes it, you're at a decided disadvantage! Watch out for that!

2358 "He is notorious for making things spin, or go around in circles! He used that method often to confuse and make an opponent dizzy! That's why he's the instigator of all politics, and the Master of All Politicians!"

2359 "No doubt about that either!" Archangel Raphael laughed.

2360 "His earthly incursions are nothing to ignore either, as he used them to promote all manner of evil!

2361 "First he induced Lilith to get pregnant by Adam, blamed it on Samael, and started the rumor that eventually caused Ish (Adam's right name, meaning first) to make a mess of the whole affair between himself and Isha (Eve)!

2362 "Then, he took the time to stir up the emotions of Tubal-Cain and his sister Naamah, and had a demon incarnated of that incest!

2363 "Believe me, this guy is capable of anything, so make sure that you go in there with one mind only: and that is to kill him as soon as possible and without fail!"

2364 "What hasn't this bastard done?" Aku asked.

2365 "He hasn't admitted it all yet!" laughed Archangel Gabriel, "I'd hate to listen to most of it! I'm sure there's more, but we don't have the time to discuss it all!"

2366 "Speaking of time, how much longer before the fight?" Aku wanted to know.

2367 "When you're ready to accept. You'll have a little while to make ready, but for now, you still have time," Vegah answered. "Is there anything else you'd like to know before we go before the Tabernacle?"

2368 "Yes. Who is his second?" This seemed important, but proved to be of no real value.

2369 "Paimonel!" Archangel Gabriel answered. "He's a devious too, and serves only Lucifer in all things! He's apt to turn on Aeshmodeva if the going gets rough, unless Lucifer gave him specific orders! He has two cohorts, Abalam and Bebal, and it's a tossup which of the two is the lowest! It would be a good idea to have some trusted officer to keep an eye on them, as they will stoop to anything to see Paimonel admired in the eye of Lucifer! Those two are the scum of all infernal creation without question!"

2370 "Who is the Master of Honor?" Aku wished he hadn't asked.

2371 "I am," Vegah was well aware of the possible implications.

2372 "The bastard has the right to choose, and he knew very well what he was doing. If for any reason I am not exactly fair, he'll be screaming foul from now till doomsday. He also knows that if you foul, I'll have to kill you, and he'd love to get that across! If I slap him down, there will always be the question of my prejudice, and I'm sure they already have the wording down pat. You can bet your laces that he'll do his damndest to get you to foul, so watch out for him!"

2373 "He has you coming and going, especially if I make a mistake prior to the charge!" Aku was now certain that he was in for one hell of an abusing before they were to go out to lock horns. The Raging Fiend would suggest all manner of vicious things, most of which Aku would have to explain after the scrap, if he won.

2374 "I don't know how you'll keep from it, with your temper. But for your sake, I hope you do. You know I'll do my job either way it goes!" Vegah was in a bad position of maybe having to kill his own son. But he would do it if he had to, and that's one reason Aeshmodeva chose him. You will have to admit, it was one hell of a piece of treachery designed to cause as much misery and agony as possible! In attempts of deviousness, this was a masterpiece.

2375 "Will The Most High be there?" It was Aku's final question before they departed.

2376 "The Tabernacle will be! We've already installed it, complete with Moshe's presence!" Archangel Raphael answered. "I supposed you'll be charged from the Tabernacle before the fight, so just take it as it comes!"

2377 "If you can, watch Aeshmodeva during the speaking of The Most High! It will be the first time he's heard The Voice of The Most High directly to him since the Great Fall! You might learn a thing or two that may decide the outcome in your favor!"

2378 "Well, let's get on with it." Aku was ready as he'd ever be.

2379 The crowd parted as they walked through towards the staging area, many giving their wishes of good luck and their Blessings of power and strength.

2380 Vegah, mounted upon his black steed, Domeray, lead the way, with Aku close behind to Vegah's left upon the Mighty Pegasus. The Archangels made up the first full rank, followed by Aku's Honor Guard: twelve thousand (12,000) legions of twelve thousand (12,000) warriors each.

2381 Aku's Guard Commander (Second in Command), Sargasus, resplendent in his golden armor and mounted on his gleaming gold horse, rode in front of the troop alone behind the Archangels.

2382 Pegasus, the ancient representative now inaccurately portrayed as the Flying Red Horse of Marathon, is a two-headed, horselike steed, with the two necks rising up out of his massive shoulders, bright scarlet, with huge wings; he also spits fire and lightning from either head. His hooves can cut through virtually anything with one swipe, and he is the fastest steed in all creation. He is also the most obnoxious and will settle himself in the most sacred pool for a cool rest. He is notorious for chewing prize flower beds and prize fruit trees, and has no qualms at all about entering one's house and lounging on their finest divan.

2383 With all his mischievousness, he is also the best war steed ever entered into battle – exceptionally efficient at taking opponents' mounts out from under them, or delivering them to Aku, so that he can! Except for his ears being about half again as long as an ordinary horse's ears, having two necks and heads, wings, and being the brightest scarlet you can imagine, he is a typical, spoiled, everyday pet – at least up in these Realms. Even though he is one of a kind, he's not exceptionally unusual, for there are many strange and wonderful creatures in the Planes of Heaven that are one of a kind.

2384 The Seraphim went on ahead, disappearing instantly, along with a lot of the other angels, but the majority of the crowd followed Aku's famed Akurian Legions once they had passed through.

2385 Star Plain is immense in size, a valley between elongated ridges. There have been tournaments here for untold ages. Observation boxes have been installed along the full length of the ridges. The ridges are actually one, encircling

the whole arena with an opening about halfway up on one end with a grade to the valley floor, an extended oval with a break at the bottom. The floor is level the entire length, but often fights have spilled over and up onto the sides, so the boxes are all at least halfway up the rise. It's not exactly a tea and crumpets situation when you are suddenly underneath a few hundred charging, fire breathing, fighting, mounted warriors and their mounts!

2386 There is only one rule here for spectators: stay out of the way! Once a fight starts, anyone who gets involved, regardless of the reason, is paid for. No exceptions whatsoever.

2387 Vegah, Aku, Sargasus, and the seven Archangels all took up stations as Aku's Akurian legions passed in review, Aku taking the Holy Salute from the unit Commanders.

2388 The Akurian Honor Escort Legions took up stations around the lower regions of the ridge, an open dare to Aeshmodeva and his cohorts to spill the fray into their reach. They were all spoiling for a fight, and boiling mad because of the situation into which Lord Vegah had been forced. One spark of provocation, and someone would be on the receiving end of one hundred forty-four million (144,000,000) of Heaven's most elite mounted strike commandos!

2389 The Tabernacle was on the very top of the ridge to Aku's right, halfway to the end of the great valley. Moshe could be seen standing before it, watching the procession below. The ridges were becoming filled with spectators as Aku's honor legions moved into position around the edge of the Field of Honor. His main forces not assigned to specific posts scattered themselves among the spectators as if off duty. It wouldn't be long now.

2390 At the far end of the field, Aeshmodeva and his escort stood before their battle standards. They had provided themselves with a gorgeous tent, with trappings of purest white, set in the far left corner of the field. They were being uncommonly formal! Aku's tent, of scarlet with purple-trimmed scarlet banners, stood at the other end of the arena, in the rounded corner to the right just off the entrance ramp.

2391 There were all sorts of beings there, most of which are indescribable in their normal form. The demons were well represented; they were the ones of great beauty, everyone dressed in silvery white. It is not unusual for demons to be in and around the Heavens, as they are spiritual, and they often come before the Very Throne of The Most High. They were sure here today, with all manner of pleasantries, courtesies, and indescribable beauty. Beauty is really their normal appearance, until they have some victim they are about to torture, then they will appear in any given shape that will cause the most anguish and terror. After they have snared a victim, they can, and often do, appear like members of the family, or close friends, enemies, et cetera, and will perform any given act that will cause a greater misery for the victim.

2392 To the chagrin of Lucifer, Aku's main army had security for the day, as they are the most violent troops in all creation! And today of all days, they were spoiling to go on a rampage. If the demons lost this fight, it was all but certain they'd get their chance, for demons are the poorest losers.

2393 The Honor Guard was now in full station, their firelances with unit banners of red and silver standing like needle columns, light flickering from the complex points here and there. Their scarlet attire with black trim made a spectacular sight of military precision. An attire is a cape, but with a flange collar, button-down front and epaulets. Junior officers' uniforms have silver trim to designate rank. Field Grade officers' uniforms are trimmed in gold.

2394 However, Sargasus' uniform, like himself, is all gold, including his attire, scabbard, sword, side arm, dirk, laces, and even his helmet plumes! He is gold from one end to the other, and worth a thousand times his weight in it when in combat! He is stronger than the reputed strength of Samson (who is a spiritual-strength instructor in the Upper Depths, forever to teach those in repose as eternal punishment for his own racemixing, but his name is pronounced Z-ZIM), nearly as fast as the Seraphim in close combat, at least a dozen times more unpredictable than the twistings of an injured snake, and totally without fear. He is as calm as a rock, even when he is boiling over with fury, and totally nondistractable. He received the muster and security report, and turned to meet with a Holy Salute, he bellowed so that all could hear.

2395 "Aku! Holy One of Israel, Avenger of The Most High!" Bedlam broke out among the demons! Some of them hadn't known about that Title! Sargasus continued after a short pause to ensure his words were striking home.

2396 "King of Kings in all the Planes of All the Heavens and in All the Earths, First Lord of The Elect Remnant of Abraham: your guard is on station!"

2397 "Account!" yelled Numakas (NEW-MAK-US); the Akurian's Chief of Valor. It's a formality of which there are but two formal replies, "accounted for", or as Sargasus bellowed, "To a man!"

2398 Aku returned his salute. Sargasus pivoted one hundred eighty (180) degrees, and bellowed, "Stand!"

2399 The troop officers echoed his command, and again he bellowed, "Down!" And the entire troop relaxed, their lances falling forward to a very precision fifty degrees. They began to take up stations, columns of tens behind the unit Commanders spearheading into the field; the rest securing the borders, making squares with open ends toward the field. The remaining units stationed themselves a bit higher up the slope, both as a defensive position and a better

view of the impending fight. Sargasmus returned the salutes as he escorted Aku to his tent. Once inside, Vegah, Sargasmus, and armor bearers took up the glasses of clear wine, placed there for sacrament, and turning toward the Tabernacle, with glasses outreached, spoke in unison, "El Elohim ALIHA ASUR HIGH!" and drank the contents. 2400 Lord Vegah's first daughter, Lisha, actually the twin to his firstborn Lishman, entered the tent; tears in her eyes, she bowed slightly as is the courtesy. She placed a tray of wine and food on the table, then ran into Aku's arms, crying uncontrollably. He let her cry for a minute or two, while Vegah did the honors with the wine and glasses. She managed to compose herself a bit, and Aku pulled her back and shook her gently. He began to attempt to calm her fears, "Listen, little bug, everything is going to be all right! I'll stomp the pants off this character in short order and then we'll spend the rest of my stay celebrating."

2401 Brother Lishman entered, carrying Aku's victory cape. It is solid white with two golden lightning bolts emblazoned in the center of the back and trimmed with golden clouds emitting bolts to each other in precision tangle. Lishman too was worried. Lisha was back on Aku's shoulder now, but quiet, her arms still around his neck. Lishman asked, "Brother Aku, who is to be your second?" It was an honor Aku wished he could have given to Lishman, as that was the nature of his question.

2402 "For this fight, someone who is a proven warrior with great skill. This is no summer spectacle, but a fight with eternal consequences! But you may join my armor bearers with Vegah's permission." They too would be slain along with Aku's second if he should lose. Lishman looked at Vegah with much want in his eyes. Vegah knew the consequences, and his responsibilities should one of them violate the honor. It was no easy decision.

2403 It was bad enough that Vegah might have to kill one son, but this would make it two! Vegah was silent for a minute, then calmly injected, "Do you know the Code of the Field of Honor, and that I am the Master of Honor?"

2404 "Yes," Lishman replied, "and I'll abide by your decision, on or off the field." He was dead calm, the first mark of a ready warrior.

2405 Vegah nodded.

2406 Lishman smiled and went out the door in a rush to inform his friends and prepare himself in battle dress. Lisha was herself again, a tiny bit of beauty in the midst of impending destruction. She let herself from Aku's arms and began to refill the glasses. Aku motioned for her to provide a glass for Lishman too, for he too was now to be a part of the coming violence and death. He returned in full dress and was a bit surprised at his being offered a glass of wine with the other warriors. He made the salute toward the Tabernacle and drank it straight down.

2407 Sargasmus and Vegah both nodded and grinned their acknowledgment that he was indeed a warrior. There was still humor in this camp of death.

2408 "Sargasmus, you will be my second," Aku informed the party. Sargasmus merely slapped a salute across his chest in acceptance and took another long pull on his wine with his left hand, handing the empty glass to Lisha for a refill.

2409 They checked their armor and weapons, and with Lishman holding open the tent flap, they in turn hugged Lisha goodbye. She marked each with a Holy Mark as they went out to their mounts. Lishman being last, held his soulmate for what might be the last time. She touched her finger to his nose in disapproval and closing her eyes, let him go. She was alone in the huge tent.

2410 Outside, the seven of them mounted, and taking the lead, Aku headed for the center of the arena amid cheers and catcalls.

2411 At midpoint they met Aeshmodeva and his escort, neither side showing honor or recognition to the other. The demons were resplendent in their yellow gold drapery, the only unit of Lucifer's Squadrons to wear the shimmering morning sun color. Lucifer's other units were decked to the limit in whites, blues, pinks, tans and grays. Those in escort or attendance, other than with Aeshmodeva, wore white as previously noted.

2412 Vegah took the lead and the two units – the Demons on the right and Aku's on the left – paralleled toward the Holy Tabernacle for a quarter of the distance across the field. Aeshmodeva had about twenty in escort to Aku's six, five not counting Vegah's armor bearer, but when halted, Vegah nodded him into Aku's ranks before he raised the battle ensign of The Most High.

2413 It had been placed there previously, a pure purple standard with Angelic inscription on an extended purple lance, solid gold lettering, trim, and lanyards twisting down its length, with golden tassels on the ends. It was a beautiful object.

2414 Vegah announced, "Hear, All the Heavens and All the Earths of Creation! A Challenge of Honor has been given and accepted before the Mighty Throne of The Most High Lord God of All Creation! A battle to the death to determine the Honor and Righteousness of the Holy Anointing upon El Aku;

2415 "Establishing forever the right of El Aku to carry the Eternal Flame of the Spirit of the House of Israel and the House of Ishmael of the House of Abraham upon Freedom's Holy Star! (one of the names of planet earth);

2416 "Establishing the worthiness of Lord El Aku to carry The Holy Name of The Most High Lord God of All Creation in his forehead;

2417 "Establishing the holiness of El Aku to be entitled 'Holy One of Abraham', 'Holy One of Ishmael', 'Holy One of Israel', 'Avenger of The Most High', and 'First Lord of The Elect of All the Heavens and All the Earths'!

2418 "For the challenger, defending the right and honor thereof; Aeshmodeva, of the High Council of Lucifer, God of the Worlds, First Lord of All Things Infernal!

2419 "For the challenged, defending the right and honor thereof, Lord of Lords, General of Generals, El Aku, First Neutral of all Creation, Destroyer of the Temple of the Sages, Anointed of The Most High, Holy Son of Abraham, Holy One of Ishmael, Holy One of Israel, Avenger of The Most High, First Lord of The Elect of All the Heavens and All the Earths!"

2420 "I, Vegah, First Chancellor of The Holy Host, Captain of The Holy Guard of The Holy Tabernacle, Chief of The Warriors of Creatae (CREE-TAY-EE), am The Master of Honor!

2421 "Hear All the Heavens and All the Earths of Creation!"

2422 A great cheer went up from the multitude. The ridges and slopes were filled now, not a bit of terrain could be seen for the spectators. They fell instantly silent when a bolt of fire and lightning licked out of the Tabernacle, over Moshe's head, striking the firelance point of The Most High's battle ensign. From above boomed the unmistakable voice of The Most High:

2423 ""Let the honor be proven!""

2424 Aeshmodeva shivered, as though a cold chill had overtaken him! He quickly recovered, and now that they were allowed to speak, he hissed like a viper at Aku – an obvious attempt to scare Aku, who ignored him. Vegah bellowed, "Lord El Aku, choose your weapons!"

2425 It was Aku's turn to bellow, "First strike . . . firelance . . . all other strikes . . . field arms of choice!"

2426 Aeshmodeva spit at him on the last word, and Pegasus shied under Aku. Aeshmodeva turned his griffin a one eighty (180). Aku raised his lance: a unit with four cutting edges ninety degrees to each other coming to a point, and a severing spike at forty-five degrees to the blades but extending only about a third of the length of the point. The pikes are actually longer than the point itself, having severing edges on both sides, and being mounted back along the firelance itself. The spikes also are wider in stance than the width of the blade.

2427 With Aeshmodeva looking the other way, as was his escort, Aku saw a chance to do the demon down. Guiding Pegasus slightly sideways he caught the knotting of Aeshmodeva's saddle thong underneath the griffin with the point of the lance, lunged, cutting the saddle girth. In the same instant Pegasus cartwheeled sideways to the left, and with both feet kicked the griffin broadside, sending it and Aeshmodeva sprawling unglamorously onto the field. The cheer from the crowd was all but deafening.

2428 Above, all could hear The Voice of The Most High's booming laughter.

2429 Aku's escort spun instantly, their lances making the standard crack as they fell to charge position. They held their ground, ready to finish things then and there. Lishman was a bit more forward than the rest, having now been on Aku's right as they had turned to their station. Abalam seeing that Lishman was a relative newcomer, gave the challenge, "Foul! Foul! Let the foul be settled first!" and braced as if to charge. Before Aku could respond, Lishman charged his acceptance, striking Abalam's shield head on and spilling him and his griffin in a yellow splash of color onto the field. Then turning his mount, stuck his firelance through Abalam's shield, pinning it to the ground! Now there were two of the demons dismounted, but Lishman had determined the challenge.

2430 He would have to fight Abalam before the match could continue. It was a turn of events that suited the demons to perfection. Lishman, no match whatever for a demon of Abalam's experience, was unafraid, and stood openly rather than behind the shield of lances. Lishman had enough fire in his eyes to make plain that he was ready for any of the rest who wanted a piece of the action.

2431 One of the lesser demons by the name of Balshat nudged his griffin to make a jolt toward Lishman, and though he only intended a one step challenge to test Lishman's courage, it was a fatal move.

2432 Lishman charged! He struck Balshat full in the chest with his sword drawn seeming from out of nowhere! As Balshat's griffin reared spewing fire and smoke into the air above, Balshat died on his back with Lishman's sword making a grotesque hump in the back of his cape. Balshat fell, and with a careless lunge, Lishman charged the panic-stricken griffin, knocking it down and trampling it under the steel hooves of his mount, the screaming griffin dying much slower than its former master.

2433 "Hold!" commanded Vegah, "I'll kill the next instigator!"

2434 He meant it too.

2435 A wild cheer went up from the spectators, mixed with boos and hisses from the angered demons. Everybody



restrained themselves. Aeshmodeva recovered his mount that had gained its feet but hadn't strayed from the station, and after cinching his saddle, remounted.

2436 Lishman, slung down in full reach of Aeshmodeva and Abalam and retrieved his sword, stepping on Balshat's stomach, and then wiping the blade on Balshat's cape. It was the perfect insult to wipe a blade on the victim's cape, and Lishman did it with polished ceremony. He was daring the demons to attempt him. It was courage in its purest form. They did not take the dare. Abalam was still to have a go at Lishman, so he bided his time.

2437 The demons rode off, leaving the dead Balshat lying there next to his now dead griffin. Lishman remounted, retrieved his firelance from Abalam's ruined shield, kicking it loose with his right foot, and rejoined Aku's formation.

2438 He was well satisfied with himself, and he well should be. He fought evil and demons in the only language they understand: no mercy, instant destruction of the man at hand, and clear delivery of more of the same to the authorities above!

2439 As Aku's company began their parade back to station, Aku motioned Lishman forward to ride beside him. The crowd cheered the obvious honor.

2440 "What are you trying to do, steal my thunder?" Aku was trying as hard to keep his pleasure from showing as he could, but it was beyond him.

2441 "The bastards had it coming! Suppose the Old Man will give me hell?"

2442 "If you survive, it's a sure thing!"

2443 "I'm not worried about surviving. That bastard Abalam isn't all that bad!"

2444 "I wouldn't take any chances. When you go to him, kill him outright! No messing around, or the score will be one dead on each side! I'd recommend firelances, and start throwing flame as soon as he gets in range!"

2445 "Are you sure?"

2446 "It's the way I'd fight him, but it's your scrap, so make certain within yourself."

2447 They rode the rest of the way to cheers they had been acknowledging along the parade. At Aku's tent, their mounts were taken. A junior took Lishman's firelance to clean it and replace the banner. Another took his sword for similar duty. Inside, Lisha had prepared a victory feast for them, but concern for her mate was obviously that of a parent who spanked with both instant anger and love.

2448 "Just what did you think you were doing out there?" she retorted.

2449 "Making sure there's no mistake about either our intentions or ability!" Lishman jested. He took a full glass of clear wine down in one effort. "I may have to take a sounding with Abalam, but there will be no dishonor in my death! Rest assured, when we leave this field, it will be with honor, whether we are aware of it or not!"

2450 Lisha was unimpressed. "What good will your honor be to me if you are lying in the hall of honor on your shield between a spray of torches?" She was firm.

2451 "None, I suppose, but what good would I be to you if I were to turn tail and be known forever as a coward?"

2452 "That isn't much of a choice, is it?" She was totally disgusted.

2453 "Well, there is the third alternative," Aku injected, "Lishman could just possibly win the fight! Stranger things have happened!"

2454 "They sure have!" Sargasus confirmed turning to Lishman. "Now, you too must have a second! Who is it going to be?"

2455 "How about Seregius?" Lishman asked levelly.

2456 That is Sargasus' firstborn, and a good friend of Lishman's, but like him, all but unproven in matters of war and honor.

2457 Sargasus' double take was massive. "What?" exploded Sargasus, "two amateurs against Abalam and Bebal!"

2458 "Think of the shock it'll have on the demons!" Lishman was ecstatic.

2459 Sargasus snorted a disgust and blazed out the tent. He had to ask if Seregius would accept, knowing full well he would. Sargasus could have horsewhipped the both of them.

2460 Aku just shook his head and sat down. This had to be the most idiotic idea since the creation of politicians! Lishman's weapons were brought in by the juniors, followed by Sargasus and Seregius.

2461 Sargasus gave Aku a quick nod and handed him a glass. He took one for himself and sat down beside Aku shaking his head. There was nothing they could do. The die had been cast. For such it is on the Field of Honor. No wonder it is often called the Sands of Stupidity.

2462 The young lions slapped each other and laughed about their impending joust. But Lisha was stolid, and when Seregius' mate, Seres, came to the rear of the tent, Lisha went out to her and they left. They didn't want to see their brothers slain, but they wouldn't want to miss the fight between Aeshmodeva and El Aku. They had good positions just below the Tabernacle, in the booth of Vegah.

2463 "I gave them the choice of weapons, so it's all ready for the trumpet." Sargasus was both efficient and determined not to let this thing detract from the more necessary duty later on. This was an obvious attempt to demoralize, if possible, and the young lions had played right into the demon's hands. From somewhere came the trumpet call to battle.

2464 They arose, the seriousness of the fight to come uppermost in their mind. Aku nodded to the young lions, and they went out together and mounted. Aku and Sargasus took up stations at third points on either side of the field, Aku at two thirds, toward the demons but on the side near the Tabernacle and Sargasus one third and opposite.

Aeshmodeva was opposite Aku, and Phorniea opposite Sargasus. The challengers entered charge row, Lishman and Abalam in the center, Seregius and Bebal on their respective first's lefts. It would be harder for a second to hit his opposite because the firsts are in the way. But so it is on the Field of Honor.

2465 Vegah made the announcement from his station at the edge of the arena, directly below the Tabernacle, "Hear all the Heavens and all the Earths of creation! A challenge of honor has been given and accepted before the Mighty Throne of The Most High Lord God of All Creation! A battle to the death to determine the honor and righteousness of a claimed foul: establishing forever the right or wrong of it unto all creation.

2466 "For the challenger, defending the right and honor thereof: Abalam; escort to Aeshmodeva, of the High Council of Lucifer, God of the Worlds, First Lord of All Things Infernal!

2467 "For the challenged, defending the right and honor thereof: Lishman; Son of Vegah, of The Mighty, Most Righteous and Honorable House of Din, escort of Lord of Lords El Aku ALIHA ASUR HIGH.

2468 "I, Vegah, First Chancellor of The Holy Host, Captain of The Holy Guard of The Holy Tabernacle, Chief of The Warriors of Creatae, am The Master of Honor!

2469 "Hear all the Heavens and all the Earths of creation!"

2470 The thundering of drums sounded and upon their ending of the signal the fight would begin.

2471 Abalam's banner cracked like a whip as he slapped his firelance into charge. His griffin responded without further signal. Lishman bolted forward at the same time. Evidently Abalam hadn't caught him napping. Lishman's steed being faster than the half-flying griffin was covering the field at greater speed so impact would be between Aku's third station and center mark. Bebal mistook that for certain defeat of Abalam, and changed to target Lishman as the challengers were about one third of the way to impact.

2472 Aeshmodeva edged forward to take any advantage the lesser distance might give him. Aku nudged Pegasus forward a length upon seeing Seregius had taken the challenge of Bebal, holding Aeshmodeva in check. Sargasus bolted forward, stopping his opposite, Phorniea, from entering. Aeshmodeva simply held his ground.

2473 Lishman and Abalam were closing at tremendous speed, with their Seconds in close pursuit. Seregius hidden from Bebal's view behind Lishman, he checked his charge to intercept Lishman, obviously while still in contact with Abalam, or instantly thereafter.

2474 Lishman was well within range when his firelance began to shoot forth flame and lightning. It worked to perfection. Abalam's griffin shied, Abalam made an instantaneous pause, and Lishman hit him dead center, his firelance piercing Abalam's shield, and protruding through his cape on the far side. Abalam screamed terribly as he went down, his griffin now rearing in an uncontrollable spin and taking Lishman's steed full in the side, breaking Lishman's firelance and twisting him in the saddle. Lishman's steed began to rear, Bebal taking careful aim on him.

2475 Over both Lishman's rearing steed and the falling griffin, Seregius' steed leaped, clearing them by half a height! His firelance struck Bebal's griffin in the collision, spilling them both onto the field. Seregius turned a perfect somersault coming out of the saddle, landing on his feet. The injured griffin spewing flame and fire upward in a gasp of agony, it spun, throwing Bebal, losing his firelance as he fell. Seregius was on him in an instant. With one powerful stroke of his sword the fight was over, except for the dying griffin's screams. Abalam's griffin abandoned the field in panic.

2476 Lishman gained control of his steed, and retrieving Seregius' mount, led it to his friend who after wiping his blade on the cape of his now dead victim, remounted.

2477 The crowd was maddening. Demons were beginning to let up puffs of smoke over their stations. Two amateurs had totally demolished two of their finest! Sargasus sat with a satisfied look, never taking his eyes off his opposite, as the demons caught Abalam's griffin and returned to the demon tent.

2478 The young lions made their approach to the Place of Honor, just below the Tabernacle. Lord Vegah stood up from his mountings, and bellowed.

2479 "Honor accomplished!"

2480 The crowd remained silent for a long minute. There was no cry of foul! Then they erupted in wild cheering, drowning the boos of the demons. Lishman and Seregius rode back the parade route, waving to their heart's content at

the maddening crowd. The Seraphim and Archangels gave them a standing salute as they passed by their respective stations! Lishman and Seregius were no longer young lions, but men of proven valor and honor. They had earned their station before the witnessing eyes of countless millions and The Most High, Himself! There could never be any question about this matter forever.

2481 Back inside Aku's tent, the victory celebration began to get crowded. Both were justifiably jubilant over their astounding victory. As their sisters wiped the sweat and dirt from their armor, they laughed and slapped themselves and each other like schoolboys who had just won the homecoming game. Sargasus and Aku were both pleased, but Vegah was still to be reckoned with after Aku's fight, which was next on the agenda.

2482 Things began to get somber within the tent. Lishman, now a man to be respected, informed his gathering, "Gentlemen, the day is not over. Let us reserve celebration for the greater victory which is the real purpose of being here. This thing was but a diversion. It didn't work, but nevertheless, it is but a grain of sand compared to the consequences of the fight to come! Let us drink to the health and victory of my brother Aku, and then be about that greater business!"

2483 They responded by hailing their glasses toward the Tabernacle, then toward Aku, and drinking them down. Someone noticed the victory banners lying on an armor table, one for each of the victors. They proceeded to attach them in place on the firelances, just below the standards.

2484 Lishman had a new firelance to replace his now broken unit, made long before by Vegah himself, intended to be presented when Lishman had earned his colors. Today had to be that day, but Vegah could not make the presentation, and Lishman could not re-enter the field without a lance. Aku had to do the honors. It was simple and formal. A salute, and a smart slapping of the firelance from Aku's hands to his, a close salute, and it was over.

2485 The warriors and their ladies left, giving their Blessings, the ladies fingering a Holy Mark in Aku's forehead. The men clicking their heels in salute as their ladies bowed to Lishman, who stood at the door of the tent. Then they were gone. Lishman, Seregius, Sargasus, Lisha, Seres, and Aku were left alone in the cool quiet of the tent.

2486 Lishman, no longer a younger brother who often before had envied Aku's station, was now a warrior who had known slaughter, faced fear and overcome a formidable enemy. He was suddenly grown. From out of nowhere, he had emerged a man. He was serious, "Well, my brother, your position no longer seems as glamorous as it once did!"

2487 "I suppose not. I do wish Vegah could have given you your firelance. I know he was looking forward to it."

2488 "It's no lesser honor. I'm sure that of any other, he would have preferred you above all." Lishman was solid now, a proven warrior. "Let's get you ready for the fight."

2489 Aku helped himself to a last glass of wine while his armor was being given a final polish. Sargasus checked the weaponry, letting Aku's sword give out a loud scream when he removed it part way from the scabbard. It was a point of humor even though it caught most of them off guard.

2490 They were ready.

## THE DEATH OF AESHMODEVA

2491 Outside they mounted, adding Seregius to the ranks. Taking up formation they rode to charge row amid cheers and boos, and somewhere in the distance "Battle Call" sounded. Seregius and Lishman displayed their victory banners with great pride, but the chance they may get to bloody them again before this fray was over was far better than fifty-fifty. Standing at charge row they waited for Aeshmodeva and his escort to arrive at the opposite end of the field. The crowd continued to cheer. When Aeshmodeva's troop emerged from his tent, the roar changed as the gathering who had been cheering began to boo and hiss and vice versa.

2492 Aku's troop was outnumbered three to one, Aeshmodeva was about four times Aku's size, and his griffin near that many times the size of Pegasus. Even so, they were committed.

2493 Aku would have to leap to strike Aeshmodeva unless he could be dismounted in some manner or other. Pegasus took the measure of the griffin, and nodded with both heads. He had his strategy. He would take care of the griffin.

2494 The drums announced the main event. Following the formal announcement, the combatants awaited the signal. No sooner had they silenced than the war trumpets blared. At first note the combatants cracked their firelances to charge! Pegasus darted up the valley floor toward the oncoming Aeshmodeva, both antagonists throwing lightning and brimstone as they charged. They met just the other side of center point. Pegasus, lifting, gave Aku the right position to break Aeshmodeva's firelance through the hail they had both been throwing at each other.

2495 Aeshmodeva expertly spun his griffin to his right and Aku's left, drawing a firechain as Aku discarded his own firelance, having broken its tip. Aku's sword came out filling the air with its horrendous scream. Like ten thousand

(10,000) [a term meaning some huge number] banshees the sword buried the roar of the crowd. Aeshmodeva began throwing brimstone in huge showers from his firechain, swinging it in vertical circles like a slingshot, intending to blind Aku until he was within reach.

2496 It was his first and last mistake. Pegasus loved fire and he charged straight in, spewing lightning and fire of his own directly in the face of the griffin. It reared, bending its head to avoid the spurry. Aku struck it between the eyes with the flat side of his sword. The griffin went down in a forward flip as they passed, throwing Aeshmodeva spinning head over heels, all four arms flailing to break his fall and losing the firechain. Pegasus reeled to the right on his nearly vertical outflung wings and landed right beside the still stunned Aeshmodeva. With one step, Aku was standing with the other foot on Aeshmodeva's chest, his sword point finely stationed at the demon's throat held by both hands at the hilt.

2497 Just after Aku and Aeshmodeva clashed, Sargasus and Paimonel collided in the fray, breaking their firelances in the first pass, and now they had charged with swords. That too was Paimonel's first and last mistake: for Sargasus is the absolute undisputed Champion of Grand Masters of the Sword in all the High Realms of Creation! He struck Paimonel down through helmet, plumes and all, splitting him halfway down his chest. His dying scream had begun even before the blade tore its way, and still echoed up and down the vast arena, "Lucifer!"

2498 Aeshmodeva was still alive under Aku's sword, and Aku wanted revenge. Aeshmodeva was expected to shout abuses before the fight, but he had more deviously spread rumors with the assistance of his demonic supporters. Pegasus, behind Aku, zeroed in on the dazed griffin now getting to its feet, just in case it decided to re-enter the fray. It didn't.

2499 Aku's voice was loud and clear over the scream of his sword, "Now you demonic bastard, before I send you to permanent oblivion, name me your worst evil that The Most High can judge you!"

2500 Aeshmodeva knew his death was near and his chances of escaping were virtually nonexistent. He began to whine, pausing to think between confessions, hoping for an opportunity to extricate himself. His four eyes rolled from side to side as he sputtered, attempting to get a direct view into Aku's eyes, or get his spirit under Aku's helmet. He knew Aku would give him some time to confess, but certainly not forever. "I caused the first incest . . .

2501 "I caused the first racemixing . . .

2502 "I made the cross, the eternal symbol of death, to be a Christian emblem of life . . .

2503 "I am the one who influences all political ambitions!

2504 "It is me that inflicts undue pain . . .

2505 "I am the one who caused Noe's offspring to mock him . . .

2506 "It was I who gave Rome the power to change from a government to a church, that we might deceive all the nations and all the tribes and all the peoples on earth . . .

2507 "I have blown many earths apart and slain the inhabitants without mercy . . .

2508 "It was me, these are my sins!

2509 "It was I who conspired with Lucifer to rebel, and it was me who induced him into disfavor.

2510 "It was me that made Amnon rape his sister Tamar, and it was also me that made Absalom plot and deliver death upon Amnon for it . . .

2511 "It was I who stirred up the unholy emotion and aire of superiority in Dinah, and caused her to desire and tempt the Negroid, Sechem . . .

2512 "It was I who enlarged Sechem's overbearingness to have the fair daughter of the higher prince . . .

2513 "It was I who bade them to perform unholy sinning greatly in the eyes of The Most High and profane the Holy Spirit of Truth . . .

2514 "It was I who condemned them to endangerment of The Great Judgment . . .

2515 "It was I who have set the Lodges against you . . .

2516 "It is of me that you are persecuted in the earth by both the Lodges and the Courts of Power under their hand . . .

2517 "It was I who founded the Masons and the Knights of Columbus, even before the age of Rome . . .

2518 "It was I who induced Semiramis to desire her son, Nimrod, and made his days of seduction and vileness holy to the Council at Rome . . .

2519 "It was I who caused Bathsheba to seduce David . . . and I who caused David to murder Uriah . . .

2520 "It was I that made Solomon racemix with the Queen of Sheba . . . that their sin could inflict all Arabia . . .

2521 "It was I that made the covenant with the Queen of the Nile to change the Government of Rome and make it an unholy religion! For with her it was easy.

2522 "With the instigation of Sarah did I introduce and expand incest in Egypt!

2523 "And after them also did I perfect it in the Courts of the Land and scatter it abroad as a holy practice . . .

2524 "It was I that made the cause for wars . . . all the lies of governments . . . and all the concealed deceptions of the churches!

2525 "It was I who did all these things . . . and even profaned the name and person of my Creator! Oh, holy . . ."

2526 Aeshmodeva expected Aku to raise his sword to strike, giving him the chance to defend while the sword was in the air. But Aku had heard all he cared to hear and leaned on the blade with all his weight!

2527 Aeshmodeva's head was nearly severed. He grabbed the still screaming blade with all four hands, cutting them deeply, but Aku retained his weight. Aeshmodeva tried to scream but only a black froth and a gurgling came from him. His grip relaxed as he expired.

2528 Aku pulled forth the blade, wiped it on Aeshmodeva's soiled cape and replaced it in its scabbard to silence its constant scream.

2529 Aku was exhausted. Even so, the crowd roared. Demons screamed curses, spitting in Aku's direction. Fights broke out among the crowd, the demons receiving the worst of them.

2530 Sargasus gathered up Pegasus' reins and leaning over, offered his hand to help Aku mount. He needed the assistance. Being drained, beaten and burned like his armor, he could barely stay in the saddle. They turned to approach the Place of Honor, the crowd now standing in maddening cheering, shouting Aku's name in chants, the noise all but deafening.

2531 Vegah stood up and raised his hand as they approached. The crowd ignored his request for silence. The demons were furious, and bedlam was still breaking out in the crowd. From above boomed the familiar voice of The Most High:

2532 ""Silence!""

2533 It was instantaneous. Even the demons obeyed. Vegah bellowed, "Honor accomplished!"

2534 The demon's silence confirmed it.

2535 Then before the crowd could take up another cheer, above The Most High spoke again:

2536 ""This is Aku, Mine Own Anointed in All the Heavens and in All the Earths, My Own Appointed Holy One of Israel, My Holy Son of Ishmael whom I have not forgotten; Mine Own appointed Avenger in All the Heavens and in All the Earths, Mine Own Chosen Chief of Mine Own Elect in All the Heavens and in All the Earths, Mine Own Standard Bearer in the Day of My Wrath upon all that is unholy, the First of My Commanders among men!

2537 ""In all the Heavens and in All the Earths his word is Mine Own Law, for his Judgment is true! Let any who deny these things Die the Death!

2538 ""I have spoken it; it is proven in All the Eternal Heavens and in All the Earths! And I, even I, will bring it to pass!

2539 ""Let it be inscribed upon all the Holy Trappings in all the Holy Places! Let it be done!""

2540 The crowd exploded. From somewhere music began to play. Sargasus and Aku turned their steeds to the crowd waiting only for Vegah to mount and join them.

2541 At the end of the field Aeshmodeva's escort and those of his fallen were being slaughtered, their griffins released to return no more to battle. The bodies were piled with all their trappings and equipment, and after being stacked, were removed to burn until That Great Final Judgment. For such is the penalty at death in All the Heavens above the Earths and in All the Earths and in All the Depths beneath All the Earths for all who defame or defile the name of The Anointed.

2542 Another great cheer went up from the crowd as the fire was lighted.

2543 It was over. Vegah, Aku, Sargasus and their escort rode the parade back to Aku's tent. By the time they arrived, the party was in full swing.

2544 As they entered the tent, for the first time Aku saw Sargasus had been injured just above his waist. He grinned his familiar grin at Aku's concern, sat down and permitted his armor to be removed and the minor wound dressed. His humor had not been injured in the slightest. Neither was his desire or capacity for good wine. He would heal according to the terms of challenge, and pain accordingly. Because Aeshmodeva had made the challenge, he could expect a lot of misery for a long time. His armor had been damaged, its golden sculpture smeared like warm butter. It had been a close call.

2545 They had hardly relaxed, the women untying laces, removing sandals and leg guards, when Valiea entered pushing past everyone else, including Vegah, to Aku. She pushed the others away unceremoniously, and untying his helmet thong, gently lifted the helmet from Aku's head. She was mad as a wet hen. "You're all right?" Her voice was like ice. "And I'm supposed to be a dutiful mother and let you get My Firstborn killed out there in that unholy brawl!" She was referring to the use of Lishman as escort.

2546 "He gave damned good account of himself in a fray with eternal consequences! It was his turn to take the stand and be counted among the men," Aku excused.

2547 She was unimpressed. "Is all you men think of, war, war, and more war?" She was boiling mad!

2548 "Until the time of the end of all things evil, it is so!" a gentle voice boomed into the tent. Silence fell instantly. It was Immanuel. He was suddenly standing just inside the tent's back door. He was dressed in gold wrap, short skirted, with sandals laced to his knees. On his head he wore a turban with the Hebrew letter lamed slightly to the left. The letter was also gold, mounted on purple velvet trimmed to perfection around the letter. His waist was girded by an equally beautiful golden sash, tied over his left hip. His left shoulder was bare, as is the norm with this particular dress, 'day formal'. He continued, "And how are you, Oh, Mighty Avenger?" He laughed, but did not mock.

2549 "A bit tired but unhurt except for a few burns," Aku replied.

2550 "He was an expert at throwing fire! What did you think of his initial attack, with his other three arms outstretched, leaving a trail of fire and smoke?" Someone gave Immanuel a glass of wine as he approached to sit beside Aku on a nearby hassock.

2551 Valiea was now at Aku's feet, his helmet in her lap. Vegah sat himself to Aku's left, behind Valiea.

2552 "To tell you the truth, I didn't even notice! If he was trying to scare or distract me, it didn't work!"

2553 "I don't think I've ever seen a griffin flipped like that before! How did you do it?"

2554 "A broadblade slap right between the eyes."

2555 "I guess that would do it! He sure didn't expect you to deck him that quickly, but why didn't you kill him right then?"

2556 "I knew he would spread as much filth as possible, so I wanted him to undo some of it before it grew into another debate and division. I'll admit though, I didn't expect him to confess all those things!"

2557 "At the last moment? He was trying to save himself! But I noticed you killed him before he could finish!"

2558 "I had no intentions of letting him get the chance to start this mess over again!"

2559 "It is nearly over, so I would agree that we don't want a new start! By the way, I saw Lishman gave a good account of himself on a couple of occasions!"

2560 Lishman and Seregius were both sitting behind and to Aku's right, off Immanuel's left, cleaning and repairing armor. The Master continued, "And just who was that I saw making a strafing run?"

2561 The young men were obviously pleased with themselves! Lishman answered, "I'll bet they didn't expect an airborne invasion!"

2562 "I'll venture they didn't expect me at all!" Seregius injected good-naturedly.

2563 "You couldn't get any odds from me on that! But, now that you're both cold-blooded killers, what do you intend to do with yourselves?"

2564 "Well, I'd like to be one of Aku's Honor Guard, and someday perhaps I will, but for now I think we will accept incarnations to become part of Aku's gathering of The Elect!" Seregius said, now a full-fledged entity in command of his own destiny. The die had been cast in favor of service to The Most High.

2565 "Is there time for that?" Lishman inquired.

2566 "Not much, if any! But suppose you two were assigned to assist the defenses of The Elect from here in the Planes of Heaven? Could you handle that without any real problems?"

2567 "Yes. But our knowledge of combat and tactics is virtually nonexistent!" Lishman was accurate.

2568 "Even so, you can 'peep' the heads of those who will plan and execute attacks, the deceptions, and the treacheries! It would give Aku some advance last-minute warnings!"

2569 "That would be a priceless assignment!" Seregius was beginning to think in terms of unpredictability, an excellent quality for a future Commander.

2570 "Well, first we must get The Most High's approval, as he alone determines anything with respect to The Elect and His Anointed!"

2571 Aku's dress and armor were dented and spotted with burn marks, just like he was, and the women needed to talk among themselves.

2572 "I must be about your armor!" Valiea exclaimed, taking the pile of broken and burned plumes, bent and dented junk, frayed lacings and all. She sprang to her feet and with much dispatch, she corralled the women and Aku's armor bearers like a bunch of panic-stricken chickens to gather the remainder of his regalia and to follow her. It resembled something out of a fast cartoon as warriors and visitors alike were spilled over in the rush.

2573 "Damn! Did they leave any beer?" Vegah was the first to ask after they left the tent.

2574 "There's plenty, Sire." spoke Vegah's Chief Steward, Ahmandal, as he began to pour fresh drinks. Immanuel took a second glass.

2575 There was still a great deal to do before Aku returned to his earthly incarnation.

THUS SAITH THE MOST HIGH!

2576 ""When I created all Creation I created Akasha – room to exist – and there is place in Akasha for all and for everything I have created. In all of Akasha there is no place where My Holy Law is exempt or nonexistent. Therefore, in all that you do, wheresoever you shall do it, know that My Holy Law prevails to determine whether that which is done or left undone is of Righteousness or of Evil.""