

Horde

part 1



a.p.king



Ark House
PO Box 1321, Mona Vale NSW 1660
Australia
Telephone: +61 2 9007 5376
PO Box 47212, Ponsonby, Auckland
New Zealand
Telephone: +64 9 416 8400
www.arkhousepress.com

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ONE

The frigid steel beam shot slivers of pain through Samuel's back. He leaned up on an elbow and flexed his well-muscled forearms.

The sun was crowning now, splashing crimson tips onto each of the sharp shell points of the Opera House jutting out of Sydney Harbour. *Spear tips*, Samuel thought as he watched the sunlight melt fiery gold across the structure. The bridge's superstructure began to creak and pop as warm air bathed over it.

Samuel's war-weary eyes expertly scanned the bland buildings that stood in striking contrast to the famed opera venue across the harbour. He did not look forward to the great battle that lay ahead. But there was no choice. It would continue as it had for generations.

Favouring his back, he stood and carefully adjusted his footing on the steel beam running the length of the monumental Harbour Bridge that joined Northern Sydney to the South. He surveyed the harbour, bustling with early morning ships, ferries and helicopters, shuttling the humans to and fro, scurrying about like efficient little robots to the steady hum of industry.

"Honey bees," Samuel murmured to himself with an amused smile, "reproducing and consuming. Over and over."

The stream of speeding cars thumping over the bridge shook the girders and roughly vibrated the beam Samuel was balanced on. At that moment, a gust of wind suddenly slammed the bridge, causing him to involuntarily reach out to steady himself on a crossbar. A flock of pigeons darted to flight, winging past their hulking visitor without a glance as the wind swept them out into the warm glow of the rising sun.

Samuel reached a long arm across to the nearest tie bar, grasped it with a hand the size of a car's hubcap, and slowly stretched, twisted and contorted his frame, testing his raw power against the strength of the old bridge. He drew in a lungful of fresh, salty air, savouring its sting and taste. The emerald ocean stretched out endlessly beyond the harbour, all the way to a diminishing horizon that was but a thin line kissing the blue of the new day. He turned his rugged, friendly face toward the golden orb that had just broken free of the waterline, closed his eyes, and with a reverent smile murmured something in a language not of this world.

After a moment, his eyes opened and he admonished himself in a rumbling, gravelly voice. “Shake a leg, Samuel. There’s a call to answer and a war to win.” He had left the boy a couple of hours ago to fly out and survey the realm in which the warring would be taking place—the constant fighting that had gone on for centuries over the lives of these little ones whom he’d been assigned to protect.

He dropped smoothly down from the beam, his wings unfurling and stretching out a full ten feet on each side. The wind immediately caught him and thrust him forward in a rush toward the cityscape ahead. He never tired of the feel of his powerful wings in the Earth’s atmosphere. Wings were useless in the nether regions between the blue planet and the higher heavens. His mode of travel from here to there was by a process the humans wouldn’t be able to detect for several more decades. But they were clever, these delicate beings. They’d measured the speed of sound—and flown past it. Then they calculated the speed of light—and were busily working on a way to move at light speed.

Wait until they discover the ultimate speed, Samuel thought as his shoulders gave his wings a mighty downward heave that shot him forward like a missile. *The power of thought!*

Samuel darted between the skyscrapers, peering down at the people as they hustled and bustled on their endless activities. Veering right, he soared along the streets and back toward the shore again, across Darling Harbour, and over the giant Anzac Bridge beyond. He dropped lightly onto a bridge pylon, careful to keep his wings outstretched as he scanned the far reaches of the city. *No cause for alarm just yet, he thought. Better get back to the boy—things will soon get bad enough.*

With a sudden *whoosh* another angel alighted next to him, retracting its wings to make room for them both. They greeted one another with the cheerful confidence of fearless warriors.

“My friend,” Samuel’s voice boomed in greeting.

“Samuel,” Gideon nodded.

Gideon, who was a bit smaller than Samuel, had a face that glowed a brilliant golden hue that seemed to emanate a sense of peace. His voice was softer than Samuel’s, though his demeanor none the less intense. He stood eight feet tall, with broad shoulders, and muscled arms the thickness of tree branches. Gideon was under the tutelage of the older giant Samuel, who was teaching him the ropes of defending the humans during these times of increased volatility from the dark forces mustering against the world. Their violence was on the rise, threatening to consume every living creature for the wicked pleasure of the darkest

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lord.

“How is it going over there?” Samuel asked as he scanned the city below them.

“Fine—for now,” Gideon replied wearily. “But they are drawing near. His friend is tiring. Her energy level is very low.”

“The other one—Joshua—is he managing to fight off the snares of his captors?”

“Joshua is doing his best. But it is a challenging fight, this one, and he has never been involved this deeply.” He anticipated Samuel’s next question and added, “Goff is strong and well trained now. He has healed from the damage you inflicted and his tactics and agility have grown in the years since, not to mention his recruitment of thousands more dark lords to his side.” Then he added, with worry in his voice, “they are making things much worse for the humans, Samuel. This will be a bad one.”

Samuel threw a hard glance at his young apprentice. “We fight for their destiny, Gideon—no matter the cost to us.” His eyes went back to scanning the city. “Whatever our master has decreed, is to be carried out. What we think is immaterial. There is no debate.” He paused, sensing that something was on Gideon’s mind. Samuel instinctively tightened his grip on the jewelled handle of his sheathed broadsword stretching down the full length of his legs. “What is your stand?” The question was more of a demand than a query—his mind never far from the great insurrection many eons before that had claimed a full third of the angelic host.

Gideon looked sharply at Samuel and replied defensively. “I am here to help, Samuel—I do as I am told. You know that. It is He who made me. I serve Him.” He shifted his gaze down to the cars whizzing by beneath them. “And them,” he added, the edge gone from his voice. “Whatever you say, Samuel,” he said humbly, “I will gladly do. Whatever He has commanded, I will uphold, just as you always have. I am here to learn from you.”

Samuel smothered the urge to smile at his young liege. “You are learning well,” he said evenly.

Gideon smiled. The rugged old warrior rarely complimented soldiers of the angelic host. It was comforting to follow this mighty archangel, who had honed his craft in battles such as the one he’d once fought above Persia on his way to rescue Daniel nearly three thousand years before. For twenty one days Samuel had held off the prince of the Persian kingdom before another archangel, Michael, had been sent to

rescue him. If he could survive twenty one days alone against the prince of the power of the air himself—the darkest lord of them all—then he was indeed a warrior to be reckoned with.

“To one day fight like you and Michael,” Gideon began in a wistful tone—and was instantly cut off by the battle-hardened archangel—

“—Enough preening! Goff is going to try to strip the boy away from us by luring us out. We must be alert and stand strong against his ploys. Joshua will take a few blows—and it will be bad—which we need to be prepared for. But he will survive.” Samuel paused. His voice took on a pensive tone. “But the human will not. He will suffer badly. And then will come the decision which they each face in one way or another, I suppose.”

“Sacrifice for another,” Gideon stated. Samuel nodded. Gideon closed his eyes, pressed his fingers to his forehead and said in a halting voice, as if describing a scene in his mind’s eye, “Azariah is on the ground, guiding them now. She says Goff is hunting them down.” He looked up at Samuel. “It’s only a matter of time before he catches up with them.”

“Your seeing is a great gift to this army,” Samuel said to the young angel. “The ability to discern distant things is rare.” Gideon nodded in acknowledgement of the compliment. Samuel continued, a tone of graveness framing his words. “But I need to make sure you are fully aware of what is about to happen, Gideon. The boy’s future is under our protection. There will be pain.”

“I am ready,” Gideon replied resolutely.

“Then—to the call,” Samuel said and faced the city, preparing to leap.

“To the call!” Gideon repeated just as the big angel leapt from the bridge, his massive wings unfurling against the wind.

Gideon jumped. As the two angels left the pylon and hit the summer air, the sun shimmered off of their wings and the updraft from its warm rays launched them high above the buildings.

As he soared, Samuel’s thoughts riveted themselves to the battle he had fought years ago against Goff and Belshazaar. Samuel had swooped in, his sword slicing Belshazaar down the chest and piercing his arm with a fiery jab. But Goff, the dark master, suddenly appeared over the top of Belshazaar and with daggers and spikes, slashed open Samuel’s back and shoulder. Samuel managed to turn before the next blow connected and he buried his sword to the hilt into the filthy beast’s stomach, ripping a gash that had caused a release of the acrid stench of

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sulfur. Samuel instinctively pulled back from the sickening odour, and Goff escaped.

Goff disappeared for sometime after that, no doubt repairing himself and training his body to be faster, more agile and stronger. He then apparently took the opportunity to enlist the services of a select breed of men who had diabolical abilities and strengths beyond those of the normal humans. This special race of men were being bred to be his soldier pawns on the front lines of the war, dutiful and willing man-beasts who were pleased to do anything they were commanded by the dark lord.

Samuel shuddered as he recalled a time long before when similar such creatures had walked the earth, the so-called ‘men of renown’, the nephilim. Goff had been chosen by the darkest lord of them all, who had missioned Goff with building an army to destroy the humans. Thus, Goff would bring glory to his master—the self-worshipping angelic commander who had fallen from grace timeless eons before life had ever been breathed into a human’s nostrils. Goff enjoyed his evil, too. His attacks never were all-out assaults against the humans. Instead, like a thief in the night, he would steal their souls by trickery and cunning deceit being his weapon of choice, along with turning the selfish nature of the little creatures against their own selves.

Samuel shook off the memories and sniffed the air. *Sulphur!* He thought with alarm. It was time to get to the boy. The moment was near to fight anew for the family, to defend their destiny and to restore their lineage.

He glanced up as Gideon’s shadow passed overhead, and sent a prayer heavenward that his new young captain was up to the violent task ahead: To ensure the victory of the keeper of The Call against the vicious power of the horde.