

In April of '42 word arrived of Lt. Col Doolittle's bold air raid on Tokyo after months of steady bad news. To celebrate, Migdalel College Conservatory held a recital of patriotic John Philip Sousa marches at the Academy's music hall out on Tin Pan Alley, attended by half of the town. The band opened with *Hands Across The Sea* and followed with *SemperFidelis*, the official march of the US Marine Corps. *The Liberty Bell* was light and playful, while *El Capitan* was flashy, a chance for the class to show off. The class followed *Fairest of the Fair* with a majestic version of *King Cotton* evoking a rising America. *The Thunderer* was bold and declarative. For the finale the class wrapped things up with *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. It was a joyous high point. The crowd of attendees came to their feet as though it were the national anthem.

Remiel Zinter, twirling a majorette's baton, danced near her brother Samael busy on the drum set. He said, "I don't see Mom or Dad out there."

It was true. Remy searched the faces in the audience and she didn't see them either.

For an encore the class tore into a Duke Ellington standard, *It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing*. Ehawee Wicasa, who was just fourteen, delivered the song in a dusky voice that belied her youth. Wiiya Wiiya "Coyote Cub" Shybear had his moment to shine on the saxophone.

Some of the attendees were noisy about the intrusion of the 'Devil's own race music' and got up to leave but the show was already over. Professor Anael told her class they had closed the evening with a perfect flourish. But Sammy and Remy thought it didn't mean a damn thing if their own parents weren't there. Cubby's sister Nahimana Shybear, who played the double bass, said, "The crowd didn't much like that last bit, Professor."

Anael said, "Let's just call it a tiny act of cultural rebellion disguised as entertainment. Even Havilah isn't immune to the rhythms of Harlem and wartime radio. What the Stiffnecks are calling race music shares the very same brass and beat with Sousa."

Havilah was small enough that most of the attendees had simply walked to the recital. By nine PM it was clear the parents of Remiel and Samael were never going to show up, so they left with their friends. It was cold, but not nearly as cold as it should have been.

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| In 1871 Dr. Reginald Dole rolled into Havilah pitching |
| geological salvation. Armed with a brass theodolite, Dole |
| cheerfully informed the inhabitants their mystical home was |
| a meteor crater, with Migdalel Butte a splashback central |
| peak. He said the ancient impact opened fractures in the |
| crust, giving rise to geothermal features similar to those |
| found at Yellowstone. |
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| There were many fumaroles, hot springs, and mud pots within |
| the crater, but the most striking feature was a persistent |
| geothermal fog similar to what is found at the Gunnuhver |
| site in Iceland. The rim of the central crater served to |
| confine this fog. This results in a climate where the mean |
| daily minimum from December through February hovered near |
| the freezing mark rather than sharply below. Summers in the |
| crater were sticky, almost tropical, but not unbearably so. |
| Dole estimated the crater was a million years old. |
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| One of the Stiffnecks scoffed at Dr. Dole's remarks, |
| claiming he had carefully tallied the lifespans of the kings |
| and patriarchs in scripture and pegged Creation Week at |
| 4,163 BC. Dole spoke no words to the objecting believer. |
| Instead he sank a test shaft and tapped a massive natural |
| gas reserve lying under the town. With his characteristic |
| theatrical flair, he flicked a match into the hole, birthing |
| a permanent flaming geyser. Dr. Dole said the gas was |
| capable of running heavy pumps to draw limitless water from |
| the Ogallala aquifer. |
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| Dumah, wryly amused as perpetually as he was silent, seemed |
| entirely immune to the searing heat. He used the pillar of |
| flame to light a Cuban clenched in his teeth. |
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Jump Street was only four blocks east of the Academy music hall, which doubled as a place for the citizens of Havilah to air their grievances. The nighttime sky over Havilah was the usual streetlamp-underlit gray. Sammy and Dory were happily chatting up how the show had gone but Remiel was stone quiet. She seemed to be distracted.

To the north Jump Street wound halfway up Treehouse Hill to the Shybear home and there at the foot of the hill they split up. But splitting up took a little time. All four of them were firmly on smooching terms.

"That's not something for any of the Stiffnecks to see," said Dory, but this only made big Sammy roll his eyes.

"Who's gonna tell me no?"

The Zinter place was another two blocks south. From a block away the kids could see the cars of strangers parked at their house and how the front door was propped open. Remiel began to cry before she even got home.

Jashen Shybear was there with an older Kuwapi fellow the kids recognized as the father of their classmate Ehawee. Jashen was the Seer of the Root of Jesse Fellowship. He held the highest office in the church that the Zinters attended.

Clara Zinter paced the room and when Samael saw her even he started crying. It took a long time before Clara could look directly at her children and blurt it out: "Your father is gone!"

Then they all cried until there was nothing more to give. Jashen and Wawokiya respectfully commiserated, for that was why they had come. Even when the eyes of the children were bone dry they were still wracked by sobs that trailed off at great length to a quieter grief.

Wawokiya took the pause as an opportunity to tell the children Erik was taken from them by an accident.

Remiel raised her head and said, "Father never told us his work was so dangerous." Jashen replied, "Even the Kuwapi men I sent to retrieve his body are doing so at great risk."

"Coal mining always means deadly gases." Wawokiya said. "I carried a pole with a small cage on one end and a living canary. That was for the White Damp. If the canary died we quit digging and tried to get back out the way we came in. But your father was taken by the Black Damp. It displaced all the breathable air in the pit. I can tell you he did not feel any pain. And I can also tell you there was nothing I could do to save him without joining him in eternity."

"I will always praise his memory," Jashen added. "What he and Wawokiyah labored to do allowed all the people of Havilah to thrive for years through a very dark time."

But Wawokiyah said, "The Kuwapi retrieving Erik's body are also trusted men, and they will most certainly return Sha'ar ha-Ruah to you, but the secret will get out. There is simply no avoiding that."

Jashen said, "I know. And some in the Church will say lending the artifact was more than I had the authority to grant." The Seer turned to face Erik's widow. "Clara, I will not ask you to accept on my simple word that the Windgate is real and the Green Book is true in every sense. When you bid your husband farewell at the Temple you will see the wisdom of the Final Rite. But for now I ask that you and your children be strong. In the days to follow some will say to your face that God punished your husband for putting his holy gift to profane use. They will dare to tell you this though they themselves received the benefit of his labors."

Dory and Cubby came to the Zinter house just then, completely out of breath. They had started running over as soon as they heard the terrible news from their mother. When they embraced their friends Clara saw how their arrival elevated her children from their grief a tiny bit, and she told Jashen she wanted his children to be with Remiel and Samael for Erik's funeral.

But Dory had caught her breath by then. "My father says the Last Rite actually destroys faith," she said. "You believe because you see it, and it is a great comfort and blessing. But the Lord said more blessed are those who believe without having seen."

Cubby nodded in agreement with his sister. He said, "Faith isn't just a list of things you agree with and check off, it's about who you trust, and why."

But Clara said, "We have no family here in Havilah. All my people are back east, and my in-laws..." She chuckled ruefully. "They are Stiffneck Incarnate. They always held me at arm's length and I never knew why. Remy and Sammy are taking the death of Erik very hard. Then you kids came over just now and they both brightened a little. I could see it. I know you saw it too. You're a family to them!"

After Clara said her piece it became a gentle negotiation. In the end, Jashen persuaded Clara to have the children wait in Temple cafeteria in the basement while Erik was sent to his eternal destiny.

Samael and Remiel were not Erik's children by blood, but they had loved him nonetheless. Erik Zinter was one of the merry but homesick American doughboys who went into battle in September 1918 whooping with all the enthusiasm of a football team pouring out onto the field just before kickoff.

Joining Erik's team was six hundred aircraft and one hundred forty-four tanks led by Col. George S. Patton Jr. Three thousand pieces of field artillery unleashed by the Entente side and countless bombs dropped from the air tore the landscape at St.-Mihiel into a pock-marked pigsty filled with mud.

During the battle Erik took two agonizing rounds from a Bergmann Maschinenpistole 18/1 that shattered the bone in his upper left arm. Army doctors removed the bullets but the surgery was performed in less-than-ideal conditions. He developed gas gangrene while recuperating in the field hospital so his arm had to come off.

Afterward Erik rode a train to Paris with a hundred other men, many in worse shape than he. The same train carried fresh soldiers to the Western Front, which had become an efficient shredder of men. Erik met a Red Cross nurse with a surname he recognized. While she changed his dressings Erik learned that Clara's family, the Hursts, had stayed behind in Maryland while his own Zinters wintered over at Big Blue in Missouri and migrated further west. But after talking about their respective family trees for a while they discovered they shared the same great-grandmother. So they were second cousins.

That and her all American girl-next-door good looks interested Erik. His unrelenting good cheer even after losing an arm interested Clara. They could not talk for long but after he told her he wanted to stay in touch Clara passed along the address of her parents in Hagerstown. Their pen pal relationship blossomed into something they both thought was love.

Erik came home from the war with a bonus of sixty dollars and took a job in Havilah painting houses using his remaining arm. He laid his extra money aside for a wedding. In 1920 Erik took to the Yellowstone Auto Trail in a Model T and drove halfway across the country.

Maryland had no law against cousins getting hitched. Both of Clara's parents thought Erik was a great kid so they wholeheartedly gave their blessing. But Erik's own parents in Havilah were a much harder sell. Back home Erik instantly became the black sheep of the extended Zinter family. He had passed over a perfectly good (but horsefaced) local first cousin for an admittedly beautiful second cousin from back east. One of his aunts said, "Why, any heathen could do as much!"

In the frothy decade that followed even Clara found work. But by 1932 what builders there still remained found new applicants with two good arms suddenly willing to paint and Erik just wasn't able to compete with that. Clara worked as a nurse in the town's tiny hospital, but Erik's job was a lot less open and airy.

There are rich pockets of subbituminous coal under the low hills encircling Havilah but the geology of the area was so jumbled and the seams so fractured there was no way to profitably reach them by drilling straight shafts. Prospectors had settled for extracting only natural gas, used to pump irrigation water from the aquifer.

But for years Erik and a colorful Kuwapi fixturer named Wawokiya made twisting tunnels through the hills around Havilah. No one knew how they managed the feat and the two men said nothing. After Erik and Wawokiya pulled their overnight shift other men followed in their wake to reinforce the new tunnels with timber and remove the exposed coal.

At the nadir of the Great Depression Havilah experienced an economic boom. Havilah black gold was piled in great heaps on piers in Chicago and San Francisco. By 1935 the unemployed, unemployable Erik Zinter had a brand new brick red Ford Model 40 and he also completely paid off his modest home on the eastern edge of town. But after fifteen years he had no fortune with children of his own.

With Erik and Clara eager and fully willing, the Academy placed two young orphans in their care, a girl named Remiel who was five years of age, and Samael her twin brother. Among the Stiffnecks it was murmured these children were adopted twice, that Seer Joshua Lange and his wife Ariel had brought the children to Havilah from an overseas mission and raised them from a very early age before they inexplicably departed, leaving Jashen Shy Bear at the head of the Fellowship and the children as wards of the faculty.

It would have been unseemly to run around playing while the body of their father was sent to his long home, so Remiel and Samael sat with Dory in the Temple basement, feeling very bored, while volunteers prepared supper for the families of the dead. Coyote Cub joined them after breaking away from his group of Kuwapi boys smoking outside and pulled out a set of keys. "Benefits of being the preacher's kid." With these keys he unlocked the door to a supply room. His sister and the Zinter kids tagged along because there was nothing else to do.

There was no electric light in the room, only a window with blinds and it was a typical gloomy Havilah day outside. There was an old piano which was probably broken. Remiel avoided the urge to play it. No need to call the Deacon down on them. There was a map of Havilah and the usual church odds and ends. They found unused hymnals, stacks of old temple bulletins, empty mason jars, and dozens of stacked folding chairs.

Cubby suddenly froze and looked worried. "Shhh! What's that?"

Everyone froze. But the only thing they heard was organ music and the choir bleeding through the ceiling from the main sanctuary upstairs. "Very funny." Samael gave Cubby a friendly shove.

"I have a very odd feeling," said Remiel staring at the back wall. "I've been here before." The paint on that wall was unfinished. Cubby moved aside a square slab of plywood that concealed a hole and another dark space beyond. It was so black inside it drank their vision like a sponge.

He asked Dory, "Do we show them now, sis?" She nodded her head. "They had to find out sooner or later." Cubby nodded in return and led the way.

After ducking to enter the hole Remiel found she could stand straight up. Dory hit an electrical switch by muscle memory and a string of lights came on in a twisting passage that seemed to be carved with rough strokes in solid rock. It was tall enough to walk upright but very narrow.

"We're under the mountain now," Cubby said. "We're inside Migdalel Butte."

"Now I'm entirely sure I've been here before," Remiel said. "Don't you remember, Sammy?"

He shook his head, but slowly, as though he wasn't quite sure.

"We were very little but we walked through here every day with our real Mom and Pop."

"Every day?" Samael said. "That must be why I don't remember. I only keep the really special things, like our trip to Mt. Rushmore."

So they walked on until the tunnel flared out into a cave with a pool of warm water that was the source of the brook Kidron. The stream poured out through a blue daylit hole. Somewhere down the hill and west of the temple it went over a cataract and flowed into Lake Taijitu behind the dam. The Pison River flowed on from there.

Cubby stood on a ledge over the pool. "Here, exactly here, ladies and gentleman," he said, "is where Dimai and Hava first went to Kemen. Straight out of Second Covenants in the Green Book."

Samael was incredulous. "That's what you wanted to show us?" "Isn't it enough? There's two worlds, you know, and this is the only way to go between them!"

"In a museum in Havana are two skulls of Christopher Columbus," said Remiel, quoting Mark Twain, "one when he was a boy and one when he was a man."

"Brother mine," said Dory, "it really sounds like we have a pair of unbelievers on our hands. And fellow students of Angel Academy no less!"

Remiel objected to this. "Why can't people be amazed at the world for the wonderful way it really is?"

Dory threw up her hands in mock despair at her heathen friends and muttered something about White Wingers under her breath.

"So where does that tunnel go?" Samael asked, pointing to a second passage that seemed to lead back the way they came. "It goes to the Temple storeroom upstairs," Cubby said, "but it also goes six days up the timeline."

"What do you mean six days up the timeline?" "I mean on the other end of that tunnel it is next Tuesday."

Samael stared at Dory for a moment, then decided to play along. "So if we came down here through that tunnel we'd be six days *down* the timeline, right? I could warn my dad and keep him from dying in the coal mine."

"The door's locked at the top," said Cubby, jangling his carabiner. "I would need orders from Mikaela to open it. I don't think the orders will come because they haven't already come. And that's why we're here at Erik's funeral."

"Why wouldn't the Dean let us do it?" demanded Samael. "Isn't Davar good? Don't they tell us every Sunday how Ayat and Avrah and Davar are so good?"

"Davar is good," said Dory, "so if he lets Erik remain dead for the time being, there must be a good reason why."

"For the time being?" Now Remiel was getting annoyed. "You sound just like my daddy's kin who came to the house telling us his passing was all part of God's plan, as though that would make me feel better about it."

Cubby decided it was time for extreme measures. So he stripped out of all of his clothes and waded out into the pool. He felt no body modesty at all. They were all good friends but the Zinter kids could hardly believe their eyes.

"Am I really seeing this, Sammy? Is my Kuwapi friend really skinny-dipping during our foster-father's funeral?" Cubby said, "I'm about to prove to you what we already know and you refuse to believe. Everything in the Green Book is absolutely true."

Answered that way, Remiel and Samael both fell silent. They were unprepared and unwilling to actually call their friends liars.

"We are cousins, you know," Dory told them. "The two of you and the two of us. You are both cherished members of House Haivri but circumstances put you in the hands of the Stiffnecks, and what we're dealing with now says more about the Stiffnecks than it does about you. We all have the same great-grandmother: Lailah. And before you ask, yes, she is the same Lailah from the Green Book. I'm talking about Sarah from the Bible."

"I know we were adopted," said Remiel. "Twice! But Sar Lailah lived four thousand years ago."

"Sister mine," said Cubby, "I really think they need one more push."

Dory said, "I agree." She began slipping out of her own clothing to follow her brother. They descended the immersed marble stairs until they were up to their necks, turned turtle, and drove themselves out of view.

"I'll give them less than one minute," said Samael. But when that minute passed he started to worry and at three minutes he was stripping off his own clothes to go after them. But for her part Remiel made no move to follow, nor was she startled when

But for her part Remiel made no move to follow, nor was she startled when a younger girl joined her. The girl appeared to be twelve. She stood at the edge of the water wearing a white crop top and white shorts that looked like a skirt. On her feet were brown riding boots and around her neck she wore a silver leaf pendant. Catching Remiel's eye she asked, "You're not going after them?"

Remy shook her head. "There's air down there, I guess. They'll be back in ten minutes. Who are you?"

"I like that: 'who are you?' The next time we meet your kin will already know who I am and they will act so strange. I like this better. I'm Hope Haivri."

"Cassiel says Hope is one of the ophanim, one of the mechanical avatars of the elohim walking among us. You in particular, if Cassiel is not pulling my leg, are Davar."

"In House Haivri we do not go around pulling people's legs," Hope said. "There would be no point to a messenger corps capable of doing that. By the time you graduate you'll know exactly what I mean."

"I'm standing right next to you and I'd never guess you were not a living girl."

"That wouldn't be possible without another two hundred years and a great deal of money."

"Why go to such an extreme? Wasn't Uriel proof you could have a living avatar?"

"Oh, no, from the beginning my mother thought it best to have only one go around as a human. Uriel was a new being. My mother printed herself on Avram to form Uriel, but Avram printed himself back on my mother too. Do that too many times and we risk dilution. We tried to warn Imran and Azul about this, but they wouldn't listen, and now there's a whole taxonomy of demons stringing out from them and not much left of the original elohim for us to have our final vengeance upon."

"Pranks for Finals, and back in ten minutes?"

Hope winked and said, "Dory has her blue wings now. Your brother calls himself Hunky. Everyone is a year older. It's confusing, I get it. Dory calls it Nunya Time, from one of her favorite books."

"Hunky and Dory," Remiel said. "Cute, but everyone saw that coming a mile away, even without a special talent."

"Now there only remains the question of what to do with you. So I'm making you a Teachers Aide. The Dean will reach out. I've been giving you little tastes of what I'm trying to delegate. But you need to use the Mercy in its full awful power before I ask you to accept it for a lifetime."

Remiel said, "So I need to learn the how."

"You also need to learn what it can cost. If you already had this Mercy you would have known your father would have a fatal accident. You would have faced a stark choice between saving him or sticking to the plan. You see, Angel Academy really is the School of Hard Knocks, just like the alumni always say."

"Nothing about the Family is even remotely normal, is it, Hope?"

She nodded. "Remiel, we try to clasp to strands of normalcy but House Haivri is never going to win Family of the Year, to my great sorrow." They were interrupted by the sound of churning water. The water in the carved cistern began to foam. Hope took this as her cue to quietly depart the cavern by the same way she came in, through the tunnel leading upstairs.

Ten minutes after Cubby had gone into the mikvah, and seven minutes after Hunky went in after him, Hunky rose to the surface alone. Remiel greeted her brother by his new name, which made him relieved to avoid explanations, but also left him confused. "Who let you know I'm using Hunky now?"

She said, "A little bird told me." Cubby's head broke free of the water and he drew breath. Remiel said, "Welcome back."

Hunky asked, "Did your little bird tell you to meet us here?"

She shook her head. "Maranatha! It's only been a few minutes."

"Bolshevik!" Cubby said,

"It's not Bolshevik. Dory must have told you about Nunya Time."

Speak of the devil. Dory came to the surface then too, as naked as when she first went in.

She covered herself in a cloak of blue feathers, long bony wings wrapped close about her, because now she could. Dory seemed to dare Remiel to say something about the wings, anything at all. The sight of the wings startled Remiel, forewarned or not, but said only, "Nice rack."

For Dory that broke the ice she imagined would chill this moment, and this brought a warm smile to her face.

Cubby directed Hunky's attention to a rack of clean linen towels that was kept fully stocked for any travelers between Earth and Kemen. It was, after all, one of the reasons his father had given him the key to the storeroom.

When the kids were fully dressed they backtracked through the tunnel and scrambled out of the supply room. They sat together in the temple basement speaking no words. Remiel wanted answers but her brother didn't even know where to begin.

And during the shared meal Remiel thought her foster mother seemed very different too. The faithful had seen Sha'ar ha-Ruah in action. Even the Stiffnecks were assured God did not smite Erik for using it. Her grief was gone, but something else, something good was gone too.

Clara said, "Remy! Sammy! It's all true. Everything in the Green Book is really true!"

"I know, Momma," said Hunky. He had come to the very same place after a round trip dalliance in another world. Dory had been justified when she warned against this. Hunky didn't believe anymore, he knew. There was a dull melancholy lurking behind everything now.

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| Dr. Reginald Dole attempts to measure the depth of the |
| fissures created by the impact that formed Dole crater by |
| lowering a phonograph cylinder to record sound echoes. He |
| discovers he has inadvertently recorded voices speaking in |
| an unknown language.                                     |
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| Professor Mikaela takes Dr. Dole to an underground prison |
 | where thirty Watchers are still bound in chains that once |
 | held over two hundred of them. They are imprisoned until the |
 | Elohim who still possess them against their will depart |
 | to the Pleroma. Foremost among them, says Mikaela, is |
 | Shemhazai, who despises that name and insists on being |
 | called Ouza. |

| Mikaela says, "Our beloved Ouza is who we want back. But |
 | we're very patient. It's been forty centuries now, and so |
 | many of your followers have already been swayed. But |
 | Shemhazai, I know you and your inner circle were always the |
 | stubborn ones." |

| After the underground encounter Dr. Dole, proud evangelist |
 | of all things rational, departs Havilah with all haste and |
 | never returns. |

| Father Kendall stands at his pulpit, looking thoroughly |
 | energized, holding a fossilized shell in one hand and an |
 | open Bible in the other. |

| "My friends...tonight, the writers of Angel Academy gave us |
 | a collision between modern Victorian science and the deep, |
 | terrifying roots of biblical history!" |

| He sets the fossil on his desk. |

| "Dr. Reginald Dole! The great evangelist of rationalism! |
 | Rolling into Havilah with his brass theodolite, telling the |
 | faithful that creation is 1.3 million years old, while |
 | the poor Stiffneck farmer insists it began on a Tuesday |

| afternoon in 4,163 BC!" |
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| He smiles warmly, shaking his head. |
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| "St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that truth cannot contradict |
| truth! If the rocks are old, then the rocks are old! The |
| Church does not fear geology! But Dr. Dole made the ultimate |
| mistake of the secularist: he thought that because he could |
| measure the depth of the hole, there was nothing living in |
| the dark!" |
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| His voice drops to a solemn whisper. |
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| "And then... the phonograph cylinder. The subterranean |
| prison of the Watchers. The thirty fallen angels still bound |
| in chains, waiting for the pride of their possession to burn |
| away so they can return home. St. Jude wrote of them: 'And |
| the angels which kept not their first estate... he hath |
| reserved in everlasting chains under darkness.' To see |
| Mikaela standing there, not with hatred, but with forty |
| centuries of infinite patience, waiting for Shemhazai to let |
| go of his stubbornness... it was a profound picture of |
| purgation. Sometimes, the chains we wear are forged by our |
| own refusal to surrender to grace. Dr. Dole ran away, my |
| friends. He wanted a world of simple gas pipes and water |
| pumps. He couldn't stomach a universe with real depths." |
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