

+-----+ "Dory, did you notice?" said
| 101: But many mocked the | Remiel. "They have their very
| counsel of the Red Dragon, | own set of Roy and Bill and Bob
| and derided the people of | in this place."
| Adan, laughing them to |
| scorn and calling their | "What do you think it means?"
| labor foolishness; and their |
| laughter was loud in those | "Beshert," said Remy. "It was
| days, filling the land. And | written in the stars."
| so it was, in an hour |
| when no man looked for it, | The gas came to exactly nine
| that the Lake of Fire was | dollars. Dory gave Roy a
| diminished; its radiance | sawbuck and said, "Keep the
| waned and became dim and | change. I need you fellas to
| sullen, so that it gave | give us a little push, so we
| neither light to dazzle the | can get out from under that
| eye, nor heat to warm the | roof."
| flesh. |
+-----+ Roy said, "Sure thing!" He took
the money. Then Dory reached up and pulled her Plexiglas bubble
down. The locking latches snapped into place.

Through the transparent canopy, both women pulled polarized
goggles down over their eyes. Dory gave Roy a grin and a sharp,
two-fingered salute.

Inside the belly of the machine, something spun up. The two
internal combustion engines sounded wholly inadequate for what
happened next. The attendants saw the vehicle seemed to shimmer
or waver, as though from a column of hot air, although they felt
no change in temperature.

+-----+ Without rolling forward an
| 102: And thus there fell a | inch, Remiel's Dizzy Lizzy
| winter upon all Kemen, a | lifted straight up into the
| night of bitter, boundless | morning air. Ten feet. Twenty
| cold; and it seemed to the | feet. It paused for a moment
| hearts of men that no dawn | level with the plaster teeth of
| would ever follow. Then the | the green Tyrannosaurus rex, as
| people of Adan shut fast the | though the two occupants were
| gates of their strongholds, | offering one final nod to the
| making them secure against | monarch of Route 68. Then the
| all that might come upon | craft tilted thirty degrees on
| them. And on the morrow, a | its axis and shot southwest
| great multitude of those who | toward the blue-gray wall of
| had scoffed came up against | the Jemez Mountains, climbing
| them, their hearts turned to | at an angle so steep it seemed
| terror; and they surrounded | to tear right through the azure
| the walls, assailing them in | sky.
| their desperation. |

+-----+ On the gravel apron below,
Bill Hatcher slowly lowered his sponge. Bob Whitaker took off
his green service cap and scratched his head. Bud McCall stood
with his mouth open, staring at the empty sky above his
dinosaur. Roy McCall stood completely still. In his shirt pocket
rested nine orange OPA stamps, physical proof that the strange
craft had been there, that it had purchased nine dollars of
standard commercial motor fuel, and the whole affair had been
completely, undeniably real.

When they were well south of Taos, Remiel said, "I think I know
how to whip this thing around in the air, but I have no idea how
to land it."

+-----+ Dory replied, "That's not
| 103: Nevertheless, the | something I can teach you until
| defenders stood upon the | you can call up a halo of your
| ramparts and held against | own.
| them with steadfastness; and |
| they did not break through | "Well, even so, for this next
| the walls. And before the | part I need to take the
| second day was ended, the | controls. This is where what I
| strength of the attackers | call the Dance of Life comes
| failed; and they were | in."
| overcome by the frost and |
| perished. And their bodies | "Dance of Life? What is that?"
| were laid low beneath the |
| new-fallen snow; and with | Remiel said, "Sometimes I can
| them perished the greater | see what's about to happen to
| part of all who lived in | me. That's my Mercy. Or, at
| Kemen. | least, it's the Mercy I'm being
+-----+ asked to accept. The only way I
can describe it is as a very vivid daydream. But Joshua keeps
turning it on and off."

Dory was genuinely curious. "Why does he do that?"

Remiel said, "You probably think seeing the future is a wonderful Mercy to have, but really, it's like watching a house of cards that collapses every time I do something different from what I saw. Then it rebuilds itself, and maybe collapses again. It's not like a daydream that I can just quit. It's unbidden. Sometimes it can be real distraction, you know?"

"It makes sense that Joshua is letting you try it out first."

+-----+ "Well, honestly, sometimes the
| 104: A great silence spread | talent is a pretty good thing
| through the land, the | to have. If someone is trying
| silence of death, covering | to hurt me I just don't show up
| its face. And when Ayot | where they're gonna do it. In
| beheld these things, her | an actual tussle such avoidance
| anger flared within her like | gets pretty intricate and
| a sudden flame; and she | fine-grained, but it works. You
| turned upon Azul, and the | should see it. Well, for that
| air around them trembled | matter, you're about to see it,
| with the force of her voice. | very very soon, and it's going
| And she said: "Have you | to save our necks. The Dance
| broken the covenant, and | of Life. But already, from
| brought our trial in Kemen | just the try-outs, this Mercy
| to its end? Look, all that | seems like something that would
| walks upon two legs, and all | quickly drive me crazy. I think
| that goes upon four, lies | Josh keeps turning it off so I
| dead beyond the walls; for | don't run away screaming 'no'
| all is silent beneath the | right off the bat."
| frost!" And Azul answered |
| her, saying: "The purpose | Los Alamos seemed to be
| stands revealed." | well-watered and in places
+-----+ it was more heavily forested
than what was typical in New Mexico, lying as it did at a fairly
high elevation on four fingers of the mountains. The ridges had
been eroded into flat-topped mesas. The core of the original
settlement was completely swamped by a thick cluster of new
construction, as though a ready-made small city had somehow
sprung right out of the soil. Remiel could peer two years up the
timeline and gather tidbits of what the excitement down there
was all about.

+-----+ Yes, Joshua had planned this
| 105: "You have seen how the | Prank well. The government was
| faith of the world-dwellers | taking great pains to keep this
| burns bright for a short | place and its ultimate purpose
| season, like dry tinder | completely hidden. Already, the
| newly kindled, and then is | flyover was being received like
| spent, falling away swiftly | dropping a boot in an anthill.
| into unbelief." There was |
| iron in the voice of Ayat, | They took no pictures, nothing
| and she said: "Why must | to incriminate them later.
| humankind bow to the errant | Remiel was keeping her Dizzy
| wills of those who appoint | Lizzy at four hundred feet.
| themselves gods, if they are | Any lower and some guard with
| to prove themselves just? | a rifle might get lucky. But
| What righteousness is there | even from that height Dory and
| in such a trial?" | Remiel could see human ants
+-----+ scurrying about down there.

"So you got your birthday wish," said Dory as the strange new installation slipped behind them. "You made your rude appearance. The US Army was caught flat-footed. We got in, we got out, and no one took any pot-shots at us. What's next?"

Remiel didn't tell her about the upcoming pot-shots. Instead she said, "I always wanted to see the Grand Canyon." She said this knowing damn well they weren't going to get anywhere near it.

Dory said, "Then hang a right." Remy tilted the stick, and they were on their way.

They flew up the walls of a large chasm for some ten minutes.

+-----+ They stayed lower than the
| 106: And Azul turned at | rim as the river went higher
| last, and his face was | and higher, until the canyon
| stern; and he said: "If you | petered out into eroded
| cannot see how far above | rivulets carved into a rock
| these creatures we stand | wall. Up and over, and they
| in the order of being, | they drifted out into the
| just as they stand above | vast bowl of Valles Caldera,
| the beasts they raise for | a larger version of Havilah's
| food, then it was in vain | Dole crater. But this was
| that speech was granted you | volcanic in origin, a homegrown
| among the Elohim!" And Ayot | scar rather than the mark of an
| spoke again, more softly; | impacting intruder.
| nevertheless her words did |
| not waver. And she said: | When they were near the
| "A day shall come when | southern reaches of the
| even the City of Stars | crater a sudden, sharp shadow
| shall be surpassed by the | swept across the cockpit,
| world-dwellers." | accompanied by the ferocious,
+-----+ vibrating scream of two pairs
of turbocharged Allison V-12 engines.

The flight leader pulled his P-38 Lightning into a tight, parallel formation just fifty feet off their port wing. Dory could plainly see the pilot clad in a shearling flight jacket and an olive-drab leather helmet, oxygen mask strapped tight over his face. The pilot tilted his head, staring in open, bug-eyed disbelief at the wingless, buzzing aluminum polygon flying alongside him without a visible propeller or jet exhaust. For five eternal seconds, the fighter pilot simply stared, memorizing the impossible geometry.

+-----+ "He's looking right at us,"
| 107: And Azul answered | Dory said. "He doesn't like
| her again; and there was | what he sees. And now he's
| a hardness in his voice, | breaking!"
| though he did not raise it. |
| "Here, at the least, they | The lead P-38 pulled vertical,
| shall not overtake us. I | climbing into the sun with
| will give no warning when | savage acceleration, while his
| next Imran brings the frost | wingman rolled hard to the
| upon Kemen; for even the | right to establish a textbook
| Adanites, whether faithful | high-low scissors.
| or not, shall perish." |

+-----+ "They're not going to try to
escort us down," Remy said, her knuckles whitening where she
gripped the structural bracing of her seat. "They're setting up
to attack."

"Hold on!" Dory reached down to the throttles. "I can bump us to
twenty thousand feet before they finish their turn."

"No!" Remy snapped. "We talked about this. Let me keep her for a
little bit more."

Dory spayed her fingers in the air, trying to resist grabbing
the stick.

The noses of the fighters erupted in orange fire. Four heavy
Browning .50-caliber machine guns and a 20mm Hispano cannon
hammered in unison. Streamers of white smoke and blinding tracer
rounds tore through the sky, stitching an envelope of supersonic
lead across their flight path.

+-----+ Remiel twisted and rolled
| 108: And Ayat answered him | the DL seemingly at random,
| immediately, as one who had | scooting out of the strings
| already weighed his words: | of points in space and time
| "Yet forty storehouses in | shared by the bullets and the
| Adan stand as a witness | skin of her aircraft. But there
| that the world-dwellers can | were too many rounds and she
| remain faithful to your | couldn't do it for every one.
| decrees, even under your | In the Dance of Life a sniper
| caprice. This I will record | couldn't touch her but an
| at your tribunal, which | attacker with a Tommy gun would
| surely shall come." | probably win through.

+-----+
A sharp impact violently shuddered the Dizzy Lizzy. It wasn't an explosive blast, but the deafening, ringing crack of a single armor-piercing half-inch steel slug punching clean through the lower port fairing. The round ripped through the non-critical structural skin, ricocheted wildly off the interior titanium keel with the violent screech of an angry hornet, and bounced around inside the mechanical bay before rattling to a stop somewhere near the lower radiator housing. The cockpit filled with the pungent, metallic tang of sheared aluminum.

"We took a round!" Dory yelled. "One hit! It's rattling around the guts!"

"Dory, I'm giving the stick back to you. Get us down as fast as can, but get us down in one piece."

Dory looked at her cousin, locked eyes for a split second, and understood. "Okay, but you're not gonna like this next bit."

+-----+	The bottom	dropped out	of the
109: And Azul's gaze did not	world.		
waver, and he said: "The			
Adanites alone remain loyal	The aircraft	ceased to	fly;
to me, and this only because	it became a	six-ton	chunk of
I speak to them face to	contoured	metal,	falling under
face. For were I to turn	the unforgiving	tug of	the
from them for even a short	Earth's natural	gravitational	
season, they would dwindle	pull.		
swiftly into unbelief." And			
Ayat said to him, with	Remy gasped	as	negative
sharpness and clarity in her	G-forces	lifted	her off her
voice: "Then it is your own	seat, the	safety	harnesses
doing that they have come to	biting into	her	collarbones.
reckon you not as a god, but	Her stomach	lurched	up into
as a chieftain among them."	her throat,	a	pure, sickening
And Azul turned fully toward	drop that	made	her vision swim.
her, and said: "Will you	Down below,	the	reddish-brown
prove this saying, or leave	floor of the	caldera,	scarred
it as a naked boast?"	by dry	washouts	and patches
+-----+	of caliche,	rushed	upward at
	terrifying	pace.	

To the P-38 pilots watching from above, the unidentified craft had suffered a catastrophic engine failure or pilot kill from their .50-caliber burst. It was tumbling, nose down, dead in the air.

"Dory... pull out!" Remy shouted over the wind whistling violently through the fresh bullet puncture below their feet.
 "Dory, the ground!"

+-----+ The violent deceleration
| 110: And when Ayot spoke | slammed both jen deep into
| again, her voice was more | their cushions. The Dizzy Lizzy
| steady, yet her resolve was | leveled off mere yards above
| not diminished. And she | the dirt. The port landing gear
| said: "Your hour has come, | skid into the loose volcanic
| my father. For as I have | till. The machine carved a
| labored to establish your | violent, twenty-yard furrow
| dominions in Kemen, even | through the gravel, throwing
| so must you now lend your | up a colossal plume of red
| strength to the trial which | dust and dried lake mud. The
| I shall set in motion upon | craft canted sharply to the
| the Earth." | left, coming to rest tilted
+-----+ forty-five degrees on an
embankment of loose volcanic beads. The dust cloud billowed
around them, settling like a red fog over the polished aluminum
hull.

The two Army pilots swept low across the lip of the caldera.
Looking down through the swirling red dust, they observed the
strange, wingless craft lying motionless, tilted brokenly on the
embankment and half buried by disturbed gravel.

The Lightnings banked in a wide circle for a battle damage
assessment. They observed no movement. No engine sound. Visible
hull penetration. The target was down, smashed, and static on
the desert floor.

In the cockpit of the lead P-38, the pilot glanced at his
instrument cluster. The fuel needle on his main tank was
hovering dangerously near reserve.

+-----+ With the target downed
| 111: And Azul's brow | and immobilized in Sandoval
| darkened, and there was in | County, Mercer clicked his
| him a measure of curiosity; | radio, signaled his wingman,
| and he said: "What would you | and turned their twin booms
| have me do?" And Ayot said, | southeast, banking low over the
| her gaze still fixed beyond | ridges toward the auxiliary
| the frozen reaches of Kemen: | airfield at Santa Fe to report
| "Grant to me one of the | the kill.
| Adanite high kindred, one of |
| a bold and daring spirit." | Down on the dry slope of loose
| And Azul made answer, with | beads, the roar of the Allison
| scorn in his voice: "What | engines faded into the vast,
| high kindred? For even | empty high-desert sky.
| before the frost, the race |
| of Men was ordered little | Inside the Dizzy Lizzy, Dory
| beyond their scattered | unlatched her forward canopy.
| households." | The glass canopy popped open
+-----+ with a dry hiss, letting in
the smell of hot stone, scorched scrub, and caliche dust. She
unbuckled her harness, worked her way around the canted hull,
and looked across the center console.

Remy had popped her bubble canopy too, but she hadn't moved an
inch. She remained seated, staring straight ahead into the dust.

Dory worked her way up to the other side. She was worried.
Remiel was well enough to open her canopy but didn't even start
to come out of her seat. When Dory got to her, Remiel said,
"Don't worry, I'm all right. I've gotta stay right here in my
seat. The ruse starts right now."

+-----+ Dory was happy to hear Remy was
| 112: And Ayot said: "This | fine, but this was tempered by
| shall not endure. For upon | the knowledge she'd soon be
| the Earth, dominion passes | parted from her cousin for a
| in lines of blood; one house | very long time. She said, "Good
| falls, and another rises to | thing you didn't fight me for
| take its place, yet the | the stick."
| pattern remains." And Azul |
| said to her: "Why must your | Remiel said, "I lost my stomach
| chosen be of such a line?" | big time, that's for sure. Now,
| Ayot answered: "Because such | please get me wheelchair out
| a one is instructed in | and leave it down at the bottom
| rule and in bearing, and | of the slope so it looks like
| is made ready to lead; for | it's ready for me to climb down
| a following begun by the | there and jump in."
| unlettered is soon broken." |
+-----+ Dory said, "Sure thing, but
why?"

Remy said, "I'm going to be captured and kept in custody. If they think I can walk, they'll bury me in the deepest hole they can find and I'll never get out. But if they think I'm crippled, maybe they'll get careless."

Dory nodded, understanding now, and worked to carry out what Remiel asked her to do. She wrestled the custom wooden chair from the rear equipment compartment, dragged it down through the shifting beads, and set it carefully on the flat floor of the dry lakebed, angling it toward the canted craft as though waiting for a disabled occupant to pull herself down the embankment.

+-----+ When she was done Dory returned
| 113: And Azul watched her | to the rim of the right
| for a moment, and said: "And | cockpit. She said, "You won't
| this following, what will | be alone, at least not for
| you make of it?" And Ayot | long. Not after your wings come
| said: "I will set apart a | in."
| people to myself upon the |
| Earth." | "What do you mean?"

+-----+
"I mean I have a Mercy too," Dory said softly. "Everyone calls
it Doryphone. I keep insisting it is for emergencies only, but
having you in the hands of the authorities certainly constitutes
an emergency, don't you think?"

She leaned into the open cockpit to kiss Remy goodbye.

Remy said, "Thanks for everything, Dory, but now you need to fly
away before someone sees you."

Dory said, "I can keep you informed about what's going on with
your mom and your other mom and Sammy and Cubby, and when you've
done everything Josh wants you to do, let me know and we'll
stage a big rescue."

The scrape of a flat margin trowel was the only steady sound in
the vast silence of the Valles Caldera.

Dr. James C. Harlan knelt at the edge of Unit 4, a fine
camel-hair brush in his right hand and a wooden depth gauge
balanced between two calloused fingers. Arthur Jenkins was
hunched over a screen sifter.

+-----+ He was shaking pulverized
| 114: And he said: "Have I | volcanic tuff into a gray
| not sought to do the same in | cloud; Eleanor Vance sketched
| Kemen, through many years?" | obsidian flake debitage
| Nevertheless Ayot answered | onto gridded ledger paper.
| him, saying: "Upon the Earth | Young Pete Morales carefully
| I will not speak to them | catalogued ancestral Pueblo
| as you have done. My voice | potsherds into brown kraft
| shall not guide them from | bags.
| day to day; once in each |
| year I will answer a priest | To Harlan, this caldera was an
| among them, and make my will | open cathedral of deep time.
| known by a sign seen openly, | A million years of volcanic
| whether for a blessing or a | ash and basalt rested beneath
| curse." | the dry June grama grass,
+-----+ undisturbed except for the mule
deer and the wind sighing down from the Valle Grande rim. Then
came the vibration. It didn't begin as a sound, but as an uneasy
tremor through the earth, shuddering through Harlan's kneepads
and up into his shins.

"You feel that, Dr. Harlan?" Arthur paused, the wooden sifting
box balanced midway through a shake.

"Hold up, everyone," Harlan said, straightening his back with a
soft grunt. He took off his fedora, wiping his brow with the
sleeve of his khaki field shirt.

From somewhere over the southern volcanic dome, a deep, resonant
snarling erupted, a double-throated mechanical howl unlike
anything native to the mountains.

+-----+ It grew with alarming speed,
| 115: And Azul held his peace | echoing off the basalt cliffs
| for a time. Thus was the | until the entire valley basin
| covenant established between | seemed to hum. "Aircraft,"
| them. And Ayot knew that, | Pete said, shading his eyes.
| for a season at least, | "High speed." "Too low for a
| there would be no sudden, | transport," Harlan muttered. As
| unheralded destruction of | a volunteer aircraft spotter
| frost unleashed again upon | for the Fourth Interceptor
| Kemen, until the time that | Command's Aircraft Warning
| her priest should be raised | Service, Harlan had spent
| up. | long hours studying silhouette
+-----+ flashcards and engine acoustic
profiles. This wasn't the droning churn of a twin-engine DC-3 or
the heavy bass thrum of a B-24 Liberator. These were Allison
V-12s out of Kirtland, pushed wide open under full boost.

Suddenly, bursting over the ridgeline like a polished silver
coin skimming across a tabletop, came the stranger. Harlan
scrambled to his feet, grabbing his heavy brass Bausch & Lomb
field binoculars from the wooden folding crate beside his
trench. He whipped them to his eyes and spun the center focus
wheel. "Good God almighty," he breathed.

"What is it?" Eleanor asked, dropping her charcoal pencil.

"I don't know," Harlan whispered.

Through the coated lenses, the object defied every aerodynamic
silhouette in his civil defense manual. It had no fuselage boom,
no radial cowling, no propeller disc, and no visible wings.

+-----+
| 116: Angel Academy season x episode xx, month day, year: |
| |
| Long before the Academy came into existence Mikaela and |
| Gabriela went to Earth on "Haivri family business", meeting |
| the chief priest Levi, son of Ya'akov Haivri in the fenced |
| city of Beit-El. |
| |
| Gabriela said, "Rehearse in my hearing the Way of |
| Righteousness observed by your fathers." |
| |
| And Levi said, "Serve no God but El Elyon. Make no images. |
| Break no vows. Countenance no injustice. Harm no neighbor. |
| Eat no blood. Eat no swine. Eat no shellfish. No man of you |
| shall be uncircumcised. Afflict yourself on the Day of |
| Atonement." |
| |
| And Mikaela said, "Well spoken, beloved kinsman. The same is |
| inscribed on this green ball in gold letters. This is the |
| Arrim, the sign of Curses and Blessings." |
| |
| And Gabriela said, "On the day of atonement alone you shall |
| make inquiry of God Most High, who shall answer yea when the |
| artifact becomes black in your hand, and nay if it turns |
| white. Only take great care not to frame your questions with |
| contempt for our Holy God, lest the Arrim should turn red, |
| and you be struck down." |
| |
| And Mikaela said, "Yea, Levi, don't say anything to get |
| redballed." |
+-----+

+-----+
| 117: The Kohanim who did not hold the office of chief priest |
| were tired of farming and pressured Bukki to ask God to let |
| them do something more suited to the priesthood. They |
| suggested making a bureau of official 'blood-free' meat |
| certifiers. |
| |
| On the Day of Atonement God "gave Urim" (made the Arrim |
| white) meaning no. |
| |
| They pressured Bukki to ask God the same thing again the |
| next year and he got redballed. They had to pull Bukki's |
| body out by a safety lanyard. |
| |
| Bukki's young son Uzzi was made Chief Priest. The Kohanim |
| told him, "Say to the LORD, if the priests shall offer a |
| bull, give Urim. If the priests shall offer a ram give |
| Tumim." Uzzi got duly redballed. |
| |
| The priests pulled his body out of the Holy of Holies, but |
| Uzzi had no son to retrieve the Arrim from Uzzi's hand, and |
| it stayed red for anyone else who tried to get it. |
| |
| Mikaela intercepted Bukki's second son Lael while he was |
| tending his flocks in the field, and told him to go scoop up |
| the Arrim when his uncles weren't looking, and gather all |
| his kin for a very, very long road trip. |
| |
| Monsignor Kendall stands at his pulpit, looking thoroughly |
| amused at the episode he had just watched. |
+-----+

+-----+
| 118: He was holding a green billiard ball in one hand and |
| an electrical extension cord in the other. "My friends, |
| tonight, the writers of Angel Academy brought us a tale from |
| the book of Leviticus that should strike terror into the |
| heart of every bureaucrat on earth!" |
| |
| He tosses the green billiard ball from hand to hand. |
| |
| "The Urim and Thummim! Depicted tonight as a high-voltage |
| green terminal called the 'Arrim'! Black for yes, white for |
| no, and if you ask a foolish or dishonest question... you |
| get 'redballed'!" |
| |
| He laughs, shaking the extension cord at the camera. |
| |
| "And those poor Kohanim! They didn't want to work the |
| fields; they didn't want to get their hands dirty! They |
| wanted to set up an official 'meat-inspection committee' |
| with municipal salaries and pension plans! And they badgered |
| the High Priest into asking the Almighty for a labor |
| exemption until he got zapped right through his vestments! |
| They had to pull him out by the rope, my friends! |
| |
| "St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us that prayer is the raising of |
| the mind to God in humility, not an attempt to force the |
| Divine Will into a legal corner! You cannot lobby the |
| Almighty like a state legislature! When we try to manipulate |
| God into rubber-stamping our own selfish career goals, we |
| shouldn't be surprised when the line goes dead!" |
+-----+

+-----+
| 119: "Credo, my boy, if you ever try to ask for an exemption |
| from polishing the sanctuary brass by telling me you |
| received a 'special vision,' I will tie a safety lanyard |
| around your waist and have you pulled straight into the |
| rectory scullery! Maranatha!" |
+-----+

It was a gleaming six-sided geometry of polished metal and wrap-around glass, humming with an eerie, harmonic vibration that Harlan could feel in the enamel of his teeth. Sunlight flared off its rounded cockpit canopy as it banked with impossible, fluid grace over the caldera floor.

Before Harlan could process the impossible shape, two dark raptors plummeted from the sun. Twin booms. Central nacelle. Twin rudders slicing the thin mountain air with surgical precision. "P-38 Lightnings!" Harlan shouted over the mounting crescendo. "Army fighters!"

The fighters closed the distance in seconds, their olive-drab airframes dark against the pale turquoise sky. The lead Lightning tucked itself immediately onto the port quarter of the silver craft, matching its speed. "They're shadowing it!" he yelled. "The Army's not playing!"

High above, the lead P-38 snapped its nose upward in a climbing roll, while the wingman broke wide to the starboard side. They were splitting high and wide in a classic textbook bracket maneuver. The lead Lightning inverted at the apex of its climb, nose plunging downward like a hawk diving on a hare.

+-----+ Blinding orange flashes
| 120: And so it was, from | flickered from the nose of the
| the first day Ayot brought | lead fighter. A half-second
| the living things of the | later, the hammering of
| Earth into Kemen, Azul set | four synchronized .50-caliber
| his heart to study them, | Browning heavy machine guns
| and he did not cease from | rolled across the caldera,
| that labor. For he perceived | punctuated by the sharp,
| that the life of the | tearing rasp of a 20mm cannon.
| world-dwellers was worked | Gray smoke streaked back over
| according to a hidden order; | the Lightning's canopy.
| a subtle craft written in |
| chains too small for the eye | A sharp, metallic spang
| to see, by which the least | echoed across the valley
| of their working parts were | floor. "They hit it!" Arthur
| fashioned, and from these | shouted. "They're firing live
| the greater forms arose. | ammunition!"

+-----+
The silver craft shuddered violently. A second later, whatever invisible hand had been holding the hexagonal machine in the air seemed to vanish completely. Its nose dropped sharply. It didn't spin, and it didn't burn, but it dropped like a boulder hurled from a cliff face, tracing a steep, sickening parabolic plunge toward the southern flats. "She's going in!" Harlan yelled, watching through the binoculars as the silver machine plummeted toward the dry borrow pit near the old Brawley property boundary. "Brace!"

At the absolute last split-second, barely fifty feet off the ground, the craft seemed to jerk backward against the air, killing its vertical drop before dropping out of Harlan's sight.

+-----+	The two P-38s circled back.
121: And thus he	Banking in tight, disciplined
discerned also the manner	circles barely two hundred
of inheritance among the	feet above the lakebed, the
children of Men: that a	Lightnings made two passes
child receives from the	over the downed aircraft to
mother a chain mingled and	confirm it was down. The the
varied, but from the father	fighters leveled their wings,
a chain whole and unbroken;	tightened their formation, and
and this seemed to him of	accelerated southeast over the
great use. Therefore Azul	rim, heading low and fast
chose the father's portion	toward the auxiliary airfield
for the vessel of his	at Santa Fe. Silence slammed
design. And there he set the	back down over the caldera like
new workings he had devised,	a heavy wool blanket.
so that they might pass on	
unweakened from generation	Arthur, Eleanor, and Pete
to generation, and not be	slowly poked their heads up
scattered or diminished with	over the trench berm, their
time.	faces pale beneath layers of
+-----+	field dust.

"Did the pilot get out?" Eleanor asked, her voice trembling.
 "Did you see a chute?"

"No chute," Harlan said grimly, lowering his binoculars. His mind was racing, cataloging the immediate dangers with academic clarity. "And I didn't hear a crash. But maybe there's an acoustic shadow. There could dead bodies down there or people bleeding out," Harlan strapped a binocular case to his shoulder belt.

+-----+ "And look at that dry scrub
| 122: Nevertheless, in the | around the lakebed. If fuel
| course of his trials a | ignited, this entire caldera
| hindrance was made manifest. | could go up in a crown fire
| Of those thus altered, none | before dinner. The timber on
| survived to be born except | the eastern ridge is dry as
| the daughters of Men, with | tinder."
| the sons lost before they |
| could draw breath. And Azul | "Should we hike over there?"
| conceived a design to bring | Pete asked, pointing toward the
| forth a race of thralls, | dust plume.
| bound to him alone. And |
| he made them insensible to | "No," Harlan said firmly.
| pain, lest under torment | "That's at least three miles
| they should betray his | through rough lava flows
| secrets to his adversaries. | and deadfall. If there's
+-----+ an ammunition cook-off or
high-octane fuel, no one has business going near it. So you
three stay here. Secure the field notes, cover the open
excavation units with canvas, and keep watch. If you see smoke,
abandon the site and retreat west toward the Jemez Springs
trail."

"What about you, Dr. Harlan?" Arthur asked.

"I'm heading for my truck."

Harlan checked his canteen, pulled his hat down tight against the glare, and struck out down the dry wash heading southwest toward the unimproved wagon road where his weathered Dodge Power Wagon was parked.

+-----+ The terrain of the caldera was
| 123: But here was a ruin not | deceptive. What appeared from
| foreseen: for being without | above to be a gentle slope of
| fear of hurt, they paid no | grass was in reality a grueling
| heed to lesser wounds, and | obstacle course of knee-high
| the first generation of the | sage, hidden basalt boulders,
| Made often perished before | loose scree, and dry arroyos
| they had seen twenty years. | carved by spring flash floods.
| Therefore Azul altered them | Harlan pushed himself into a
| again, and worked upon their | steady, punishing jog-walk.
| flesh a swift restoring, so | Within ten minutes, the heat
| that their wounds closed | of the June midday sun had
| with speed, and bones were | soaked his khaki shirt in
| knit together within the | sweat. His boots slipped on
| space of a single day. | loose volcanic cinders, sending
+-----+ pebbles scattering down the
gullies.

His lungs burned in the thin air at eight thousand feet, each breath tasting of dry dust and hot pine needles. Forty minutes, he thought, if I don't break an ankle. And every few yards, his eyes flicked back toward the southern horizon, expecting to see a column of black fuel smoke rising into the pale sky. Nothing yet. Why isn't it burning? he wondered. Every military plane that hits the deck at two hundred miles an hour goes up like a Roman candle.

He forced the mystery out of his mind and focused on his footing. He scrambled down a six-foot dry creek bank, scrambled up the gravel on the opposite side, and pushed through a dense thicket of scrub oak that tore at his canvas trousers.

+-----+ At thirty-five minutes his
| 124: And he strengthened | legs were trembling from
| them also against venom and | the sustained exertion. The
| the great plagues which at | familiar faded green roof
| times passed through the | of his Dodge truck appeared
| land. Yet the Made might | through the ponderosa pines
| still be slain by the | at the edge of County Road
| severing of the head, or | 5. Harlan stumbled the last
| by fire, or by thirst, or | hundred yards, gasping for air.
| by long imprisonment without |
| sustenance. Nevertheless, in | He ripped open the heavy
| all lesser harms their | steel door, pulled his canteen
| bodies did not fail them; | from his belt, and took
| for their bleeding was | two deep swallows of warm
| stopped almost before it was | water before climbing into the
| noticed, and neither blade, | driver's seat. He yanked the
| nor bolt, nor arrow caused | choke, pumped the pedal, and
| them to falter. | stabbed the starter button. The
+-----+ straight-six engine turned over
with a hearty cough and roared to life. Harlan shoved the truck
into low gear, hauled the steering wheel around, and sent the
truck careening down the rutted, washboard track toward the
nearest telephone wire.

The radiator of the Jemez Springs brush truck hissed a dying
plume of steam against the red dirt. Two miles north of County
Road 5, the unimproved ranch track had simply given up,
swallowed by a deep, washed-out arroyo choked with tumbled
boulders. Walter J. Kincaid kicked the front tire of the
stranded 1938 Ford pumper, wiped a streak of grease from his jaw
with a soot-stained leather work glove.

+-----+ Behind him, two young volunteer
| 125: And it was said in | firemen were already hauling
| Kemen that even the rumor of | Indian hand-pump cans and heavy
| a single company of men sent | canvas water bags off the
| forth was enough to still | running boards.
| rebellion before it began. |
| Yet in the very perfection | "No good, Frank," Kincaid
| of these things there was a | shouted over the ticking engine
| hidden cost; for that which | block. "We take the Ford
| caused a man to mend swiftly | another fifty yards and we'll
| also rendered her barren. | rip the oil pan clean off the
| Thus the Made did not | crankcase. We walk it from
| multiply after their kind, | here."
| nor did they suffer the |
| passing of age. | Sheriff Frank Caldwell stepped
+-----+ down from the running board of
his dusty green county Plymouth sedan. He adjusted his gun belt
over his generous stomach, settled his straw cattleman's hat
firmly across his brow, and squinted across the blinding
sun-glare of the desert floor.

Beside him stood Dr. James C. Harlan. "It's just over that rise,
Sheriff," he urged, his voice raspy from dust and thin air. "A
long mile. Maybe two thousand yards through the scrub. But if
that fuel burns, you won't have time to walk."

"There ain't no smoke, Harlan," Caldwell said calmly, though his
hand rested with instinctive wariness on the bone grips of his
Colt .38 revolver. "If a machine hit the ground like you said,
she oughta be tossing up a pillar of black soot high enough to
see from Bernalillo."

+-----+ "Which is precisely why we need
| 126: And great wealth was | to hustle," Harlan insisted. "A
| given to them, and long | plane that hits at two hundred
| continuance of life; yet | knots and doesn't explode is
| because of this, life itself | either carrying something worse
| became ever more precious | than gasoline, or there are
| in their sight, so that | folks pinned inside who need a
| even their endurance was a | hacksaw and a field dressing
| possession they would not | before they bleed out."
| willingly lay down. And so |
| it was that a change arose | "Grab the first-aid kit, boys,"
| in Kemen; and the Nephiloth, | Kincaid barked to his men.
| sometimes called the Made, | "Axes, pry bars, and the
| began to draw back from the | stretcher. Pick 'em up and put
| front ranks of war when Azul | 'em down."
| sent them into battle. |

+-----+ The six men struck out on foot
across the blistering expanse of the borrow pit flats. It was a
punishing, ankle-breaking march. The earth was covered in loose,
shifting volcanic scree that slid like ball bearings under heavy
work boots.

The heat radiated off the ground in wavy, nauseating shimmers,
smelling of baked pine needles, alkaline dust, and hot iron.
Every yard had to be negotiated through dense clusters of
prickly pear and stiff yucca bayonets that tore at canvas
trousers.

By the time they crested the low volcanic ridge overlooking
Brown's Lake, Harlan's shins were bleeding and the volunteer
firemen were gasping under the weight of the steel rescue gear.

+-----+ Down in the basin, waiting for
| 127:And they were no longer | them beside a weathered fence
| as thralls, but became a | post, was a solitary figure
| burden to those who ruled | in a faded blue denim jacket
| over them. For the greater | and a sweat-stained Stetson,
| part of the Made fled from | a scarred Winchester .30-30
| the fields of war and | carbine resting loosely in the
| gathered together in the | crook of his arm. William E.
| ringhouses of Elendal, which | "Red" Brawley had not waited
| were set far apart within a | for the law. "Took your sweet
| deep forest. And there they | time, Frank," Brawley drawled
| lived in scattered halls. | as Caldwell stumbled down the
| And so great was the cost | loose embankment. The old
| of pursuing them that the | rancher tilted his chin toward
| armies sent against them | the bottom of the gravel slope.
| consumed themselves in the | "Thought you boys might like to
| taking, and found but little | see what the Army dropped in my
| gain. | heifer pasture."

+-----+
The group stepped onto the rim of the depression and stopped dead in their tracks. "Mother of God," Kincaid muttered, letting the heavy steel pry bar slip in his leather grasp. Resting thirty yards below, canted hard on its port side on a bed of loose, pea-sized brownish-red volcanic beads, was the craft.

Up close, the machine was even more alien than it had appeared through Harlan's binoculars. It was broad and hexagonal, its seamless aluminum hull gleaming under the high desert sun without a single visible rivet, weld bead, or seam. Painted across the curved flank in fluid, hand-brushed lettering was a single name: Remiel.

+-----+ There was no propeller. No
| 128: And so it was, when | radial engine cowling. No
| Azul beheld these things, | trailing exhaust pipes or
| that he regretted he had | supercharger scoops. And most
| stretched out his hand to | unnerving of all, there was no
| meddle with the order of | stench of scorched metal, no
| the world-dwellers; and from | dripping puddle of high-octane
| that time on, he made no | avgas, and no airframe crumple.
| more of the Nephiloth. | Except for the left-side cant
+-----+ into the loose volcanic beads,
the craft sat on the desert floor like a jewel placed
deliberately on a velvet cushion.

"Look at the glass," Harlan breathed, stepping forward, his archaeologist's eye immediately dissecting the anomalies. The dual bubble canopies were unsealed. The left-side canopy was thrown completely open, resting wide against the fuselage. The right-side canopy had been popped up and latched open a few inches, catching the dry breeze.

"Sheriff," Kincaid said, dropping into an instinctive rescue crouch. "We've got movement in the right seat."

Inside the starboard cockpit sat a young woman. She was tall and broad-shouldered, with thick, dark reddish-brown hair tumbling in disarray over the collar of a plain canvas flight jacket. Her hands rested flat and relaxed across her lap. As the cluster of dusty, armed men emerged over the lip of the slope, she didn't flinch, scream, or reach for a weapon. She merely turned her head toward them, her icy green eyes cool, unblinking, and entirely devoid of fear.

+-----+ "Hold on, miss!" Kincaid
| 129: But Avyah also took | yelled, surging down the loose
| thought concerning this | gravel slope, his boots sending
| matter, and she would not | cascades of red beads rattling
| suffer the work to remain | against the polished hull.
| unfinished, and so she | "Don't move! We're the Jemez
| amended the works of Azul. | Springs Fire Crew! Help is
| Yet she did not grant them | here!"
| the endurance of unending |
| life, which had been given | Caldwell, Harlan, and Brawley
| in the first shaping of | followed closely behind,
| the Made. And in those | sliding down the loose
| days there arose in Shalem | embankment.
| Lailah, who was accounted |
| the last of the Made. | "Stay back until we check for
+-----+ electrical shorts!" Kincaid
ordered his crew.

When he reached the right side of the craft, his boots sank four inches into the odd volcanic gravel. He laid a bare hand tentatively against the aircraft's hull, expecting scorching heat or an electrical bite. It was cool to the touch. Cooler than the ambient air.

"Can you hear me, miss?" Kincaid asked, reaching up to the canopy sill.

"I hear you fine," she said. Her voice was remarkably steady, smooth, and delivered in unaccented, Midwestern American English that sounded as if she had grown up in an Ohio farmhouse. "You don't need your axes. I'm not trapped in here."

+-----+ "Then let's get you unbuckled
| 130: But Lailah was also | and down onto the ground
| the first of the jan, and | before something cooks off,"
| the forerunner of all the | Sheriff Caldwell said, stepping
| Elyonoth. And Lailah bore | up to the cockpit rim, his
| wings of black feathers, and | badge catching the glare.
| not of skin; yet neither | "I'm Sheriff Frank Caldwell,
| the wings of the len nor | Sandoval County. Who are you,
| of the jen in those days | young lady, and whose airplane
| were sufficient for flight, | is this?"
| but were as tokens of |
| their being, and not as | The girl offered a faint,
| instruments by which they | enigmatic half-smile but
| might ascend. | nothing in the way of answers.
+-----+ "What you see is what you get,
Sheriff."

"She's in shock," Kincaid declared, reaching in to release her shoulder harness. The heavy webbing snapped free. "Come on, miss. Swing your legs over the side. Lean on my shoulder."

But the girl didn't move. Her expression remained entirely neutral.

"I can't," she said plainly. Kincaid frowned. "What do you mean you can't?" Kincaid's demeanor shifted from cautious firefighter to gentle medic. "Did the crash break your back? Where does it hurt?"

"It doesn't hurt anywhere," she replied. "It didn't happen today."

+-----+ Kincaid leaned over the cockpit
| 131: Angel Academy season | rim, his thick fingers reaching
| x episode xx, month day, | down to her knees. He took
| year: Thronging within the | the heavy handle of his
| stone walls of Shalem, the | brass-tipped flashlight and
| people gave themselves to | sharply tapped the patellar
| rejoicing; for the harvest | tendon just below her right
| was great beyond memory, | kneecap. Nothing. Not a
| and the days of feasting | twitch. The quadriceps remained
| were named among them as | entirely soft and unresponsive.
| Hellberry Days. Yet even as | He struck the left knee with
| their celebration was lifted | identical precision. The leg
| up in fevered gladness, a | hung limp, completely dead to
| disturbance arose in the | the stimulus.
| heavens above the city; and |
| a white Husk, vast as an | Beside him, Harlan watched her
| engine of war, descended | eyes. As an academic who had
| into the midst of the | studied indigenous ceremonies
| central plaza. | and mental discipline, he knew
+-----+ that shock or trauma usually
caused involuntary flinching, dilated pupils, or a tightening of
the jaw. There was none of that.

"She's telling the truth, Frank," Kincaid said quietly, looking
back at the sheriff. "Zero motor response. No reflex arc at all.
She's completely paralyzed from the waist down."

"Look down there," Brawley interrupted, pointing his Winchester
toward the base of the gravel slope twenty paces away near a
clump of dry rabbitbrush. Sitting upright in the dirt was a
wheelchair.

+-----+ Harlan walked down to inspect
| 132: It was borne upon five | it. It was made of varnished
| flames of white fire; and | ash and bent oak, with heavy
| the sight of it struck dread | spoked wheels and leather
| into all who saw it. And | armrests. It looked sturdy,
| a roar went forth with | practical, but strangely
| its coming, such as rent | unused.
| the air and scattered the |
| multitude in terror, so that | "It came out of the rear
| none remained where they had | stowage bay," the girl said,
| stood before. | her voice carrying easily down
+-----+ the slope. "My friend took it
out before leaving so it would be ready for me."

Sheriff Caldwell's eyes snapped up from the wheelchair to the aircraft's cockpit. He lunged two steps around to the port side, his hand dropping straight to his revolver. The command pilot's seat was entirely empty. The harness straps lay splayed across the bucket cushion, unbuckled and cast aside in obvious haste.

But the physical evidence of an immediate departure was everywhere: On the left-side aluminum floorboard, a dropped flight-log pencil lay snapped in two. A leather sheepskin-lined flying helmet rested on the seat pan, its intercom wire dangling loose.

"Frank," Brawley said, his voice dropping an octave as he raised the muzzle of his carbine. "Someone took off on foot. Couldn't have been more than ten minutes ago." Caldwell looked at the footprints all around the downed vehicle.

+-----+ "Light frame. Small boots. But
| 133: And so it was, the | I don't see which way they
| first among the Shalemites | lead. He turned back toward the
| who returned to that place | cockpit, his face darkening.
| was not of the warrior | "Who was in that left seat with
| caste, nor of the elders | you, miss?" Remiel looked down
| of the judicial council, | at him from the high cockpit
| but Kar Melchizedek himself; | rim. Her pulse, visible at the
| for he was forced by the | hollow of her throat, didn't
| weight of kingship to bear | accelerate by a single beat,
| a semblance of fearlessness | and she said nothing.
| before his people. And the |
| blast of the descent had | Before Caldwell could press
| torn away the fabric of the | further, the sound of heavy
| great pavilion and cast it | combustion engines rumbled over
| far across the city; yet | the eastern mesa. It wasn't
| the king stood where he had | the sweet, whistling hum of
| halted, though at a prudent | Harlan's Power Wagon or the
| distance, and he drew no | sputter of Kincaid's water
| nearer. | truck. It was the crushing,
+-----+ low-gear roar of a military
convoy: six-by-six GMC troop transports and heavy Dodge command
cars churning up a cloud of dust along the ranch fence line.

"Army," Brawley spat, levering a round into the chamber of his Winchester with a sharp, oily clack. "They're cutting my wire."

"Put that rifle down, Red," Caldwell commanded, stepping between the rancher and the crest of the hill. "Walter, get that girl out of the cockpit right now. Put her in that wheelchair and we'll thrash out who gets her when company's all here."

+-----+ Kincaid nodded. He and two
| 134: And it was said that | volunteer firemen reached
| Melchizedek had curiosity | inside the open canopy, hooked
| concerning the thing which | their arms beneath Remiel's
| had come among them, yet | shoulders and knees, and gently
| not so much as to desire | lifted her from the cockpit
| burning. Therefore he held | of Remiel's Dizzy Lizzy. As
| his ground, neither fleeing | they carried her down the
| away nor drawing near. Then | slope toward the waiting wooden
| spoke the clear voice of | chair.
| Ayot, coming forth from |
| the white husk through | The dust plume rolled
| her avatar, saying: "Kar | across the dry lakebed
| Melchizedek, if you will, | like an advancing artillery
| draw near." | barrage. Three olive-drab Dodge
+-----+ WC54 three-quarter-ton command
trucks and a canvas-topped GMC six-by-six troop transport
skidded to a halt in a sweeping semicircle, boxing in the
stranded Plymouth sedan and Brawley's weathered flatbed.

Before the gravel had even stopped pinging against the fenders,
the tailgates dropped. A dozen armed military policemen in
olive-drab wool, white canvas leggings, and polished steel
helmets emblazoned with black MP stencils vaulted into the dirt,
their M1 carbines held at the low ready.

"Nobody moves!" an officer barked, striding through the cloud of
alkaline dust. He wore the gold oak leaves of an Army Air Forces
major on the collar of his sun-bleached service dress, coupled
with the crossed daggers of military intelligence. "I am Major
Caffrey, Army Air Forces Intelligence, Second Air Force."

+-----+ Behind him, two MPs racked the
| 135: And the king of the | bolts of their carbines with
| city obeyed her voice. And | a sharp, synchronized metallic
| as Kar Melchizedek drew | snap.
| close, he saw that the |
| white husk rested upon five | "Under War Department authority
| subordinate pillars. The | and the provisions of the
| underbelly of the center was | Western Defense Command, this
| lifted to the height of a | entire geographic zone is
| man's shoulder above the | declared an exclusion area. You
| ground. And beneath this | civilians are in unauthorized
| opened a round hatch, which | contact with classified
| fell outward upon a hinge; | military property."
| and upon its inner face |
| were carved narrow steps, as | Caldwell didn't flinch. He
| though prepared for climbing | didn't unholster his .38, but
| within. And the voice of | his thumb remained hooked
| Ayot came again, saying: | casually over the belt buckle,
| "If it seems good to you, | right beside the cylinder.
| Shalemite king, enter here." | "You're about ten miles outside
+-----+ your fence line, Major,"
Caldwell said. "And you just tore up forty rods of Red Brawley's
four-point barbed wire. In Sandoval County, that's criminal
trespass and destruction of private property."

"I don't give a damn about fence wire, Sheriff," Caffrey
snapped, his gaze darting nervously past the lawman toward the
hexagonal hull. Then his eyes locked onto the young woman
sitting in the varnished ash wheelchair. Caffrey's eyes widened.
"Sergeant! Secure that aircraft immediately! Put a guard detail
on the perimeter. And take custody of that prisoner!"

+-----+ Four MPs stepped forward,
| 136: Then Melchizedek | bayonets glinting in the
| pressed himself between the | mid-morning sun. Walter Kincaid
| smaller pillars, which were | stepped straight into their
| quite warm, and looked | path, brandishing a heavy steel
| within; and he saw that the | halligan tool like a battleaxe.
| central pillar was hollow | His soot-blackened face was
| and narrow, yet filled with | furrowed in defiance.
| a clear light. And along its |
| inner walls were set many | "Back off, son," Kincaid
| ribs, serving as handholds | growled, towering over the lead
| and footholds for climbing. | sergeant. "This girl has acute
| And he went upward, until | bilateral paralysis. Her spine
| the hollow widened at | could be cracked clean through.
| its summit into a larger | She hasn't been cleared by a
| chamber, where cushions | medical officer, and she sure
| were laid and windows set, | as hell isn't going into the
| through which could be seen | back of an un-sprung six-by-six
| the world below. | to have her spinal cord severed
+-----+ on a washboard road."

"She is an unlawful combatant and an enemy saboteur!" Caffrey shouted, his hand dropping straight onto the flap of his leather M1911 holster. "She breached restricted military airspace over a vital national defense installation! I have orders directly from Second Air Force to secure all materiel and personnel without exception!"

"And I have the medical responsibility for injured civilians on county soil," Kincaid shot back, planting his boots firmly into said county soil.

+-----+ He went on to say, "My
 | 137: And from that height | ambulance is arriving on County
 | he saw how few of the | Road 5. She goes to the
 | Shalemites dared draw near | hospital in Santa Fe. You touch
 | to the husk as he had done; | this chair, Major, and you'll
 | for fear held them fast, and | have to shoot through the
 | they did not stir from their | Jemez Springs Volunteer Fire
 | places. Then spoke the great | Department to do it."
 | voice again: "I am Ayot, |
 | co-eval with Avyah, and | In the center of the ring sat
 | Azul, and Imran." And she | Remiel. Her hands rested serene
 | spoke in the voice of a man, | and folded across the woolen
 | even as she had done before. | blanket Kincaid had tucked
 | For Kemen was filled with a | around her knees. Her dark
 | tradition that named Ayot as | reddish-brown curls stirred
 | the son of Azul rather than | in the dry wind. "Major,"
 | his daughter; and in the | she said mildly, her rich,
 | customs of Adan, wen were | unaccented Midwestern voice
 | set apart for the service | cutting cleanly through the
 | and pleasure of men. | shouts. "I think your men have
 +-----+ their safeties off. In this
 heat someone's finger is going to slip."

Caffrey stared at her, his face purpling. "You shut your mouth!
 You have no standing here!"

The crunch of speeding tires on gravel interrupted him. A
 solitary black 1941 Buick Century four-door sedan crested
 the rise, its engine roaring with the muscular punch of a
 high-compression straight-eight. It bottomed out once with a
 metallic screech.

+-----+ The vehicle slid to a halt
| 138: And Ayot knew that to | directly between the military
| reveal herself as female | trucks and the fire crew. The
| among the Elohim would bring | driver's door swung open. A man
| confusion to the king's | stepped out into the blinding
| understanding. Moreover, the | sun. He wore a sharply creased
| difference of sex among the | gray fedora, a double-breasted
| living stars was of no | charcoal wool suit that looked
| account in a hollow world | utterly indifferent to the
| where no man could behold | ninety-degree desert heat, and
| the heavens above them. | polished wingtip oxfords. He
+-----+ was lean, square-jawed, and
moved with an economy of motion that instantly altered the
gravity of the standoff at the dry lakebed. In his left hand,
he held an open leather credential case displaying a gold
Department of Justice shield. In his right, he carried a crisp,
carbon-copied teletype flimsy.

"Stand down, Major," the man said. His voice was quiet, crisp,
and carried the unmistakable razor-edge of federal authority.

Caffrey whirled. "Who the hell are you?" "Special Agent John J.
Bolt, Federal Bureau of Investigation, El Paso Field Office,"
Bolt interrupted smoothly, not breaking stride until he was
standing two feet from Caffrey's chest.

Beside the Buick, a second man stepped out. He was
broad-shouldered and wearing a silver star pinned to his vest:
Deputy U.S. Marshal Frank McTeague, cradling a twelve-gauge
Remington riot gun. Bolt didn't raise his voice, but every man
on the dry lake fell silent.

+-----+ "As of one hour ago,
| 139: And it was that | Major, your tactical authority
| Melchizedek, finding himself | was superseded," Bolt said,
| seated upon the rim of the | extending the teletype paper.
| central shaft, saw there was | "Decrypted cable directly from
| no space within the chamber | the Director at Washington
| sufficient for him to throw | Headquarters, pursuant to an
| himself flat, nor grovel in | executive agreement concluded
| any manner; for the design | between Secretary of War
| of the hollow did not allow | Pennington and the Attorney
| it. The curve of the floor | General."
| and its narrowing ribs |
| restricted his movement, so | Caffrey snatched the paper,
| that he could only sit | his eyes scanning the lines
| or brace himself with his | of block capital letters.
| hands. | His face drained of color.
+-----+ "The Delimitations Agreement
of 1939," Bolt stated with cold precision. "The pilot, or
passenger, is subject to federal counterespionage statutes under
Title 50, United States Code. Matter Class Sixty-Five."

Bolt pointed toward the gleaming hexagonal hull of Remiel's Dizzy Lizzy. "But the hardware is yours, Major," he continued. "Air Materiel Command from Wright Field is already routing heavy cranes and C-54 transports into Kirtland to crate up your metal. You get the wings, the engines, the bolts, and the dirt underneath it."

Bolt turned his head, his sharp gray eyes fixing squarely on Remiel in the wooden wheelchair. "But the girl belongs solely to the Department of Justice."

+-----+ Caffrey crumpled the paper in
| 140: Nevertheless, despite | his fist. "She overflowed Site
| this, every instinct of | Y. No one is even supposed
| reverence pressed upon him | to know there is a Site Y!"
| like a tide that could | And he suddenly fell silent,
| not be withstood. And he | embarrassed to realize his
| said: "Let my Lord command | temper led him to overlook
| me." And Ayot answered him, | he was speaking loud enough
| saying: "Kar Melchizedek, | to be overheard by uncleared
| I tell you Kemen exists | civilians.
| because of a dispute between |
| myself and Azul. It is a | "If she has, and it wasn't
| field of proving, where the | just a case of getting
| Nephiloth are tested, and | lost, she will be tried in
| also the men and wen of the | a Federal District Court,"
| Earth." | Bolt said without blinking.
+-----+ "Not a military drumhead
court-martial. Now order your men to step back from the girl and
establish your security cordon around that hull."

Caffrey looked from Bolt's deadpan stare to McTeague's
twelve-gauge, and finally back to Caldwell's hand on his
revolver. The major's shoulders slumped in bitter defeat.
"Sergeant," Caffrey spat through gritted teeth. "Post sentries
at twenty paces around the aircraft. No one touches the wreckage
until the Wright Field team arrives." He glared at the Bureau
man. "You're making a catastrophic mistake, Special Agent Bolt."

"I rarely make mistakes, Major.
And when I do, they don't involve the Army Air Forces." Bolt
turned to Walter Kincaid. "Fire Chief?"

+-----+ "I'm lead firefighter Kincaid
| 141: And Melchizedek said: | out of Jemez Springs," Walter
| "What is the test, my Lord?" | answered, still holding the pry
| And Ayot replied: "The | bar.
| test of Azul is obedience, |
| without remainder. But I | "Where is your transport?"
| seek one you would count an |
| apostate, one who holds the | "A county ambulance is waiting
| carved images of the gods | up on County Road 5. We brought
| in contempt, and yet holds | a wicker basket stretcher to
| in greater contempt those | haul her over the wash. I had
| priests who speak in their | enough men to do it, and I
| stead." | didn't want to risk disabling
+-----+ the vehicle driving over that."
He waved around at the rocky arroyo.

"Good," Bolt said, nodding curtly. "Transport her immediately to
Bruns General Hospital in Santa Fe. Take her to the isolation
ward. Deputy Marshal McTeague and I will ride with her in the
back. But nobody else speaks to her, nobody handles her effects,
and nobody takes a photograph. Am I understood?"

"Understood," Caldwell grunted. Let's move her out, boys."

The rear compartment of the county ambulance smelled of camphor,
rubbing alcohol, and old oilcloth. The vehicle swayed violently
as it navigated the washboard ruts of State Road 4, descending
out of the high pine forests toward the sun-baked plains of the
Rio Grande Valley. Outside the frosted rear windows, the red
cliffs of the Jemez Mountains flickered past like frames of a
moving picture reel.

+-----+ Remiel lay propped against
| 142: And Melchizedek | the elevated canvas stretcher,
| said: "Let your servant | the rough wool blanket pulled
| understand, my Lord." And | securely to her waist. Her
| Ayot answered him: "It must | hands remained resting lightly
| be a man who feels himself | on her abdomen, her pulse slow
| estranged within this world, | and steady despite the jarring
| as though it were but a | vibration of the ambulance leaf
| shadow or a figment, for | springs. Directly across from
| in truth so it is. He | her sat Jack Bolt on a folding
| must hunger for another | jump seat. He had removed his
| world which is the true | fedora, revealing slicked-back
| source of all that is here | dark hair parted strictly down
| perceived. I seek one who | the center. A leather-bound
| yearns to serve the God who | stenographer's notebook was
| reigns alone over that other | open on his knee, a pencil
| realm." | balanced between two fingers.
+-----+ He studied her with the
relentless, dissecting scrutiny of a hunter who knew the quarry
was dangerous precisely because it made no sound.

"Your English is completely unaccented. Middle Western. Indiana,
maybe western Ohio."

"High plains," she offered. "We call it the Academy Patina,
Special Agent Bolt."

"Academy?"

"We left enough breadcrumbs that you'll eventually stumble onto
that," she said. "We had no choice, really."

+-----+ "What do you mean?"

| 143: And Melchizedek said: |

| "And if I find only wen | "It has to do with how far we

| or len that bear such a | had to go to do this...Prank.

| heart?" Then the voice of | Somewhere there's a gas station

| Ayot softened, though it was | owner with nine breadcrumbs in

| not diminished in authority, | his hand, in the form of gas

| and she said: "Alas, Kar | ration coupons. I know it won't

| Melchizedek, few in Kemen | take you very long to run that

| will listen to the voice | to ground."

| of a wan, even when she |

| speaks truth concerning what | "A Prank? Here's what

| I would have them come to | you're facing right now,

| know." And the king said few | miss. A civilian overflight

| would listen even to the | of restricted military

| voice of a man if no sign is | reservations during wartime

| given. | is a federal felony under

+-----+ Section Thirty-One of the

Espionage Act." His voice dropped into a rhythmic,

conversational cadence. "If you took photographs, it's twenty

years at Leavenworth. If you intended to communicate those

observations to a foreign government, your prank is a capital

offense. That means the electric chair at Sing Sing, or a firing

squad at Fort Leavenworth."

He waited. He watched her carotid artery. He watched the pupils

of her eyes. He watched the subtle musculature around her mouth.

Her respiration remained deep and rhythmic: twelve breaths per

minute. "You have very nice shoes, Agent Bolt," she murmured,

glancing down at his oxfords. "A bit formal for the desert,

don't you think?"

+-----+ "What is the name of your
| 144: In reply Ayot said: | pilot?" Bolt asked, ignoring
| "Upon the bulkhead you shall | the deflection.
| see a thing like a short |
| black staff. Take it into | "I flew the damn thing myself,"
| your hand." Then the king | she said.
| reached out within the |
| confined space and took the | Bolt narrowed his eyes. He
| thing shown to him; and | leaned in closer, his gaze
| it clung but lightly to | dropping to her legs beneath
| the inner surface of the | the heavy blanket. "The fire
| vessel, as though it had | chief says your spine is dead
| been set there for ease | from the lumbar down. Complete
| of removal. And Ayot said: | motor paralysis. No knee-jerk
| "This is Windgate, which in | reflex."
| your tongue is called Sha'ar |
| ha-Ruah. Think not that you | "The chief is an observant
| wield it alone; for you | man."
| shall but lift your hand, |
| and Azul and I shall bring | "So what did you do about the
| the work to pass." | foot pedals?"
+-----+

"My friend used the foot pedals."

"A girl with dead legs doesn't fly an unidentified high-performance aircraft into the most restricted airspace on the North American continent just to take in the mountain air."

"Very soon after we get to the hospital, Special Agent Bolt, your precious restricted airspace will slip way down the list of things you consider to be important about this whole matter."

+-----+ Bolt narrowed his eyes as he
| 145: "And Windgate shall | gazed at her.
| serve for your candidate, |
| just as this Husk has | She went on. "In fact, the
| served you; for it shall | Bureau is gonna spin off a
| give visible assurance that | new special investigative body
| the word you have heard is | just to figure out me and look
| no phantasm, but proceeds | for other folks just like me.
| from a true authority set | You're thinking I'm talking
| over Kemen, and over the | crazy right now, but when you
| matter of your proving." | see it you'll remember what I
| And Melchizedek said: "Lord, | said."
| shall I set aside my royal |
| duties to accomplish your | "I remember that somebody left
| will?" | that wheelchair sitting right
+-----+ at the base of the gravel slope
for you to get to it," he noted. "But you made no attempt to get
down to it. When I see something like that I smell a set piece."

Remiel met his gaze directly. The lightness completely left her voice now, replaced by a quiet, chilling authority that took the federal agent aback.

"If you already have all the answers, Agent Bolt, why do you keep asking me questions?"

The ambulance hit a sudden pothole, rattling the metal frame and throwing McTeague against the side panel. Outside, the first adobe houses of the Santa Fe outskirts began to appear. In the distance, the whitewashed military compound of Bruns General Hospital rose against the Sangre de Cristo foothills.

+-----+ Bolt closed his notebook with a
| 146: And Ayot said: "You | soft, decisive snap. "You're
| remain king of Shalem, as | going into an isolation ward
| ever. I did not command you | with an armed guard at the door
| to enter my Husk, nor do | and a federal marshal at the
| I command you to undertake | window. You won't breathe open
| this search. Yet I require | air until I know who built
| that the search be made. | that machine, who sent you, and
| Therefore delegate it to | where your friend in the left
| a trusted lieutenant, or | seat is running."
| to one of your household, |
| according to your wisdom." | Remiel looked out the frosted
| And he said: "Yes, Lord." | window toward the mountains,
+-----+ her reflection ghostly against
the glass. "Take your time, Special Agent Bolt," she whispered
softly, almost to herself. "I'm not going anywhere."

There was a people called the Kuwapi. They were not a small band
only, living from day to day upon the wide plains. They were of
more account than that, though no blood bound them together as a
tribe, nor even as a clan among the people. They stood apart.

In the beginning they came out from among the Oglala Lakota,
being those who had been cast away. It was for offenses of a
sacred kind, things not spoken of lightly. These were set apart
and sent out, not wholly cut off, but made to wander in the wake
of the greater tribe. In the language of the people, Kuwapi is
"they follow."

+-----+ So they were named, for they
 | 147: And Ayot spoke again, | went after the others upon the
 | and her voice bore the | hunting grounds, never before
 | weight of things not yet | them. They walked where the
 | unfolded: "The contention | tribe had walked and took what
 | between myself and Azul has | remained.
 | come to a moment of great |
 | import in the history of | The measure of displeasure was
 | Men. Therefore the search | not hidden. Each one bore it
 | requires the discernment of | upon his back. The scars of
 | one who is fit to rule | the whip were counted, and by
 | Shalem." And the king was | that counting it was known how
 | much pleased, and he said: | greatly he had offended These
 | "One worthy to rule Shalem, | marks were not forgotten, nor
 | do you say?" | did they fade from the memory
 +-----+ of the people.

The Dakota people held the Black Hills and all the wide plains that lie about them. These the Kuwapi called the northern raiders. Sometimes the Oglala Lakota would stand against them, but not for the sake of the Kuwapi. It was done so that the hunt might continue, and that the game should not be driven away.

To the east, where the grass was stronger and more plentiful, there were the Pawnee people. These were fierce in war, and the Kuwapi did not go there lightly. Many times they turned back before they had gone far.

To the south along the road the whites had made were the Arapaho people, who were strong in their own country. Also there were white settlers, and the soldiers who guarded them.

+-----+	These did not know the Kuwapi,
148: "O how Happenstance	nor did they make distinction
smiles upon us both, my	between one people and another.
Lord. For of late my	
daughter Lailah has been	To the west the land held
remiss in her duties as	little grass. There the
princess of this city; yet	Cheyenne people were to be
her spirit is indomitable,	feared. And beyond, toward the
of this I speak not falsely.	northwest, the thought of the
Even you, O Lord, were you	Crow people and the Blackfeet
to behold her, would marvel,	was enough to trouble the mind.
and confess that such a one	
as Sar Lailah is seldom	So it was that the Kuwapi had
found among the daughters of	little land that was easy to
men." And Ayot said to him:	them. Yet in the narrow strip
"Perhaps my chosen lies even	that remained, where the grass
now beneath your eyes, in	was poor and always changing as
the guise of your daughter.	the Oglala Lakota moved before
Nevertheless, in this season	them, the Kuwapi hunters rode.
the people will not listen	
to her voice."	
+-----+	

+-----+	
And Melchizedek said: "Then may I send Lailah forth	
across all Kemen in my stead, to seek this one who shall	
become a teacher?" And Ayot answered him: "You may give your	
daughter Sha'ar ha-Ruah, and lay upon her the charge of	
the quest." Only this is required: that the one she seeks be	
male.	
+-----+	

+-----+
| 149: "Moreover, I will set this same husk at her disposal, |
| so that she may pass between any two places in Kemen in less |
| than an hour." And the king said: "The Lord is gracious." |
+-----+

+-----+
| Angel Academy season x episode xx, month day, year: |
| There was a Kuwapi man called Takoda, and he led the hunters |
| of the People. He brought them downwind of a herd of bison, |
| which stood drinking at a ford where a great creek ran slow. |
| This place was the upper vale of a stream that in later days |
| the whites would name the Pison River. |
| |
| When Takoda made the sign to halt, the men stopped their |
| horses. They tied them to the roots of dead trees that stood |
| like old bones in the earth. Then they went forward on foot, |
| moving low through the brush, so that they might come near |
| without being seen. |
| |
| But the animals were not at ease. Some lifted their heads |
| and grew restless, though no man had shown himself to them. |
| The beasts cast no shadows upon the ground. The day had |
| become dark, as when a low sky presses down. The great bull |
| ceased from drinking. He stood and looked down the stream, |
| as if he knew of danger coming. |
| |
| Then Takoda judged the time. He rose up from behind a shrub |
| and sent forth his arrow. It struck a cow in the flank, but |
| the wound was not one that brings death at once. |
+-----+

+-----+
| 150: The cow cried out. At that cry the whole herd was taken |
| with fear and they broke into panic. |
| |
| The men loosed many arrows in haste, one after another, yet |
| their aim was troubled. Some shafts went wide, and others |
| struck but did not bring death. So the herd of bison fled |
| together, and passed upstream into a place ringed by low |
| hills where there were boiling springs and drifting mists. |
| |
| Then the hunters turned back to their horses and followed |
| after. As they rode, the men were embraced by a warm fog. |
| They held their bows ready in their hands, and looked to the |
| left and to the right, but they could not see the animals. |
| The world was closed about them and all things were hidden. |
| In the midst of that hollow the herd went upward. They |
| climbed a rise, and there the fog became thin. It broke |
| apart, and there were places where the blue of the sky |
| showed itself again. |
| |
| Then it was seen that three of the animals were apart from |
| the others. They stood exposed upon the slope. The hunters |
| made ready and loosed their arrows. This time the shafts |
| went true, and one of the beasts fell. But the two that |
| remained did not stand. They turned and ran down again into |
| the fog, seeking the many, where there is safety. |
| |
| Then Takoda spoke, and the young men set upon the fallen |
| bison and opened it with care. The flesh was cut and made |
| ready. |
+-----+