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Gilgamesh Immortal

Chronicles of the Nephilim
Book Three

By Brian Godawa

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Dedicated to
the memory of
Sinleqiunninni of Babylonia.

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Chronicles of the Nephilim Series

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This is what *really* happened to Gilgamesh.

PROLOGUE

In the time before the Great Flood, the War of Gods and Men raged in the desert of Dudael. Methuselah ben Enoch had led the armies of man, undefiled by genetic miscegenation and idol worship, to gloriously defend a last stand of righteousness against the rebel Sons of God called *Watchers* and their demonic minions of hybrid soldiers and giants called *Nephilim*. And then the Deluge came and washed the land clean of the corruption that had infested it.

Noah ben Lamech and his family of eight were spared by Elohim in a large box of a boat, along with a multitude of animals, to repopulate the land. Everyone else and every land animal perished. This floating barge carried Noah and his wife Emzara, and their sons, Shem, Japheth, and Ham. Shem's wife was named Sedeq, Japheth's wife was Adatanes, and Ham's wife was Neela. Neela had been pregnant on the ark and had given birth to the first child of the postdiluvian generation. They named him Cush.

The Nephilim were giant preternatural hybrid offspring of the Sons of God and the daughters of men. Though they died as mortal flesh in the Deluge, their divine element remained as demonic spirits that now roamed the earth with an insatiable hunger to inhabit human flesh.

The lead Watchers, Semjaza and Azazel, and their two hundred defiant Watchers had taken upon themselves the identities of a pantheon of gods to accomplish their scheme. Semjaza became Anu, the high god, and Azazel was Inanna, his consort, the goddess of sex and war.

During the War of Gods and Men, Anu and Inanna, and many of their fellow immortal Watchers were bound by archangels and imprisoned in the heart of the earth until judgment.

But not all of them.

Seventy leaders of the Watchers avoided capture, along with a contingent of their subordinate *mal'akim* insurgent angels. Just how many, no one was sure.

•••••

The ark had come to rest on Mount Nimush near the river Tigris in the mountains of Aratta that are now called Ararat. After the flood waters receded, Noah left the boat and offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to Elohim known by his covenant name of Yahweh. Yahweh made a covenant with Noah and his descendants to never again kill all life on the land with water as he had done. The rainbow in the sky was his signature of that covenant promise.

Yahweh commissioned Noah with the original calling of Adam, to multiply and fill the land. Yahweh had started all over with a new creation and new human race. Humanity was created in God's image and as such was a holy representation of that ruler over creation. The first murderer, Cain, had violated that sacred image by slaying his own brother, and thus starting an evil spiral of violence that dragged the original creation into the very depths of Sheol. Now Yahweh gave Noah the charge to uphold the sacred image of God in man through just recompense. *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*

After some time, Noah and his family descended from the mountainous region into the Mesopotamian plains to start anew. It was a horrible sight to behold. The waters had washed over everything, burying the once beautiful alluvial terrain in layers of mud and silt. The land was wiped away, leaving a vision of barren ugliness and death. The cities were piles of flooded rubble. The thought of so many people drowned to death was sickening to the

stomach. Noah would often say that all of humanity had been turned to clay.

But even so, life had already begun to break through the graveyard before them, as vegetation quickly sprouted from the seedlings buried in the soil. Elohim had created a resilient earth.

The family of Noah began to multiply and fill the earth and to rebuild civilization by passing on their acquired knowledge to their descendants. It would take some time before cities, culture, and technology were reconstructed to the level they were before the Flood, but just like the vegetation, it would return speedily because the seeds of such knowledge lay in their accumulated experience in the world before. City building, irrigation, agriculture, metallurgy, writing, shepherding, would only be temporarily set back as the growing population pushed forward with a hunger to pick up where it had left off.

Noah had been a warrior before the Deluge. But now he started anew and became a tiller of the soil. He felt weaker, and he wasn't getting any younger. He set his mind to develop agricultural growth that Emzara his wife had explained to him from her time at Erech. His crowning achievement was a vineyard that sported a vast array of grapes for the fermentation of wine.

But in his heart, Noah was not at peace. He felt the depression of despair over him like the shadow of an Anzu thunderbird. He couldn't shake it. He had been the Chosen One to end the reign of the gods, bring rest to the land, and bear the Seed that would war with the Seed of the Serpent. He had faced death too many times to count, fought with gods, survived torture, and even looked into the Abyss of Sheol. It was terrifying to experience such frightful extremes, but it was also invigorating. It had charged through his veins like a drug that fueled intense awareness of every living moment. It made him know he was truly alive.

But now, he had been relegated to an old patriarch in the background as his children spread out and built cities and history. Grandpa Noah, Great-Grandpa Noah, Great-Great-Grandpa Noah, and so on seemed now his only identity. He wondered if anyone would even remember his great journey and exploits in the hands of Elohim. And what of the adventures of his Grandfather Methuselah and Enoch the giant killers? Already fading into the mists of legend. He would have to write down what he remembered if he could only get around to it. In the meantime, he kept telling his stories to the little grandchildren and great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren at his feet. In these were the future.

Emzara was not so sadly disposed. She had been a slave of the priest-king of Erech and had been so long without her husband, that she was just happy as a pomegranate to have the rascal finally settled down and with her every day. She determined to make up for the lost years. And that making up was not merely friendly companionship and functional interaction, it was oneness.

Noah was a physically passionate man, but unfortunately, his current melancholy had become an impediment to their union. He had pulled away from her physically and verbally and her heart was breaking. She had led a palace staff, raised a family, defied the gods, but she still found her sense of identity and personal security in being loved by the greatest and truest man she had ever met. If he was in pain, she was in pain. If he was unsettled, she was unsettled.

The thing that concerned her most was his drinking. Noah had begun to imbibe too much of the fruit of the vine to wash away his sorrow. He would get drunk and stumble into their bedroom weeping and fall asleep. At least he never got violent. He was too morally upright for that. She knew he had to wrestle with Elohim in his own way, and she trusted he would find his way as he always did. Noah was not a sinless man, but he was a faithful man, a man who had

stood righteous in a wicked generation. And now he was wrestling with his feelings of unworthiness of such a privilege, and inadequacy as patriarch of the new creation.

What concerned her as much as Noah's drunkenness was her grandson Cush's oddity. He had been born to Neela and Ham. The firstborn of the new world. He had come out normal and healthy enough. But as he grew up, she sensed a difference in him. He was not like all the other grandchildren or great-grandchildren that were multiplying. He was a bit tall for his age, and had sparkling blue eyes. He was a little rascal who always seemed to get into trouble with his curiosity. But it was not the curiosity of a naïve child. It seemed cold, detached, and calculating. One time Cush sat on the edge of a river bank watching with intense interest as another child was drowning not a few cubits off the bank. He didn't run for help, he didn't yell for help. He simply watched the child gasping and flailing as the other children were screaming for someone who could swim to help the poor thing.

As he got older, Cush became more distant from the family. He was the first to leave the greater tribe and start a new people of his own. The first of his cities was called Kish as a self-tribute alteration of his own name. It was called "the first kingship that came down from heaven" after the Flood.

But Cush was ambitious and travelled to the south to help rebuild the other cities wiped away by the Flood, including Erech. When one of his children had been born a giant he secreted him off to protect Cush's own identity as a Nephilim born of the union of the god Anu with Neela. Neela had never told a soul that she had been raped by Anu and that the child in her womb on the ark was its diabolical seed. She was too afraid.

Since Cush was not a giant, the thought had not occurred to anyone that he was anything other than Ham's offspring. Only

Emzara had asked digging questions that Neela barely escaped with her half-truth answers. The Watcher gods had achieved their goal of suppressing the gigantism as a recessive gene that would only articulate in succeeding generations. Their plans of conquest were not over yet. Neela knew none of this. She was simply a violated and damaged woman who hid her shame from her tribe.

But the dishonor of Cush was surpassed by the horror of Emzara's own son, Ham.

Before the Flood, Ham was born and raised within the pagan world of Erech because Emzara had been captured and enslaved when she was pregnant from Noah. Ham had been taken from her, renamed Canaanu, and bred to be a priest of Inanna. His head was elongated according to royal custom under the pressure of wooden slats; he was shorn of all hair from special herbal concoctions; and he had been tattooed with the mark of Inanna that would prove a regret the rest of his life. He looked strangely unlike his own brethren and felt even less like them. He never truly fit in.

Though he repented and embraced his true father in Noah when he was rescued from the city, Ham had always harbored a grudge against the man that was not there to protect him from the corruption of evil. Ham had converted to Noah's god Elohim, a god who saved him and his immediate family, but had drowned every other living thing in the land to accomplish that elective purpose. How was this any different from Anu's wrath, Inanna's capriciousness, or the oppressive tyranny of the other gods of the pantheon? He had lost more than a dozen close friends and confidants from the palace and temple. These were not cruel or evil people to him. They were innocent. They were born into their position just as he had been. And now they too were gone, and he felt all alone in a family that sought to care for him, but ultimately did not understand him. He wished his

mother had never taught him about his past. He wished he had just been completely separated from her to spare him the tension of two opposing worlds in his soul. He wished he had just been drowned with all his friends.

But he wasn't drowned. And his contempt for his pathetic father and doting mother grew with each passing year. He saw Noah's increasing drunkenness and weak resignation to be the worst form of cowardice. Ham considered his father unworthy to lead their growing clan as patriarch. Whatever heroic deeds Noah may have done before the Deluge were now but distant memories, phantoms of legend that meant nothing to a new generation that had to move forward into a progressive future of change. Their task was a monumental one. They had to carve, hack, and dig their way through a harsh new world sprouting from the clay and mud of the old. Noah was a symbol of that old clay world, but he would not abdicate his leadership to make way for change and bolder visions.

In order for the collective to advance, Ham thought, *Noah must be deposed*. Who else would have the forward looking vision of hope to carry them into the future? Who else would have the courage and the power to bring change? He remembered Anu's intent of fundamentally transforming humankind. That was what they still needed: Hope, change, transformation. Not the old ways of thinking.

Emzara determined to help shake Noah out of his depression. It crushed her to see him so sad and dispirited of late. She knew it was bad because he had even lost his sexual drive. He was a hearty man who worked hard, fought hard, and played hard. He often said that his favorite place to be in the whole world was wrapped in her legs on their marriage bed. Of course increasing age had brought with it diminished capacity, but he still hungered for her, just a little less as his body became less responsive. He would often tell her she was

lucky he wasn't a young two hundred-year-old anymore, and that it must be Elohim's way of protecting her from exhaustion. But of late, he had not advanced upon her. She felt as if his wine was another woman stealing his vitality and smirking at her.

So she resolved that tonight, she was going to surprise him with an offer that was too delicious to ignore. She never forgot that his favorite dress had always been a bright red dye linen dress from Egypt she had procured when they were younger. It would drive him wild with desire the way the folds fell across her curves. It was long gone now, so she set about carefully recreating it from the cloth supplies they had accumulated. She used red dye made from a madder plant and stitched together a very flimsy garment that she was sure would please his starving eyes with titillation. A little heavier make up and some bold jewelry would make him putty in her hands. But she would not manipulate him. She would fulfill his every desire.

She made his favorite meal: Steak from a steer's flank, fresh bread, onions and fruit, topped off with a gourd of wine. He was a simple man with simple needs and easily pleased.

When Noah stumbled into their tent from a day in the fields, her spirit deflated. He had been drinking, and more heavily than usual. He could barely stand up and almost took down the whole table of food when he caught himself from falling to the ground.

He saw the food, looked up at Emzara, and blurted out, "You are so — gorgia — gorgiaya — gorge..." He was trying to say the word *gorgeous*.

Emzara started to cry. She didn't know what else she could do, what else she could be for him.

Noah noticed her tears and gurgled, "Oh, don't worry, I may be junk, but I can still get it... I can still get it, uh, get it going. Don't you worry, you little love angel, you."

Noah started to tear off his clothes, which made him stumble more. He finished off his gourd of wine and threw it to the ground.

Emzara walked over to the bed and sat down with deep sadness.

Noah's garments ripped as he struggled to get them off. At last he stepped out of this last tunic, stumbled and fell to the ground completely naked and mumbling incoherently.

And then he passed out.

Emzara broke down weeping and cried out to Elohim, "Lord, bring me back my hero. Give him back his hope."

A rustling sound drew her attention to the entrance of the tent. She looked up to see Ham step inside and close the flap.

"Ham ben Noah, your father is naked in shame. Leave this moment."

But Ham did not leave. He walked over to Noah and looked down on him with disgust.

"Is this my father?" he said.

"I told you to leave this moment. You shame his name," she barked.

"*I shame him?*" he responded. "No, mother, he shames himself. He shames the family name. He shames the clan, the future. He shames his god."

"How dare you!" she said, standing angrily, ready to throw him out with her own hands.

Ham slithered over to her and stood inches away from her face. She tried to stand up to him, to counter his defiance with her own. But he was too powerful. She shrunk inside and sat down on the bed, defeated. She couldn't look him in the face any longer.

"What have I birthed? Have I so completely failed Elohim?"

He kneeled down to her level. "No. You did the best you could. Maybe it was Elohim who failed you."

She looked at him with shock and slapped him hard across the face without hesitation. “How dare you question Elohim’s purpose. I do not understand his ways, but he is true to his promise.”

Ham smirked and stood back up, glaring at her. He gestured to Noah, still on the floor unconscious. “I find *that* a promise unworthy of praise. And I, for one, will no longer sit back and let a floundering drunkard lead the only lot of humanity into the waters of the Abyss.” Ham gestured again toward Noah, “If *that* is Elohim’s promise, then I will not submit to such deplorable petulance. I will make my own promises. I will take the reins of power. I will be the new patriarch.”

Emzara looked up in terror at Ham. His eyes had become like a predator’s on prey. She knew exactly what he intended to do next and it was an abomination.

Ham grabbed her dress in his hands and ripped it from her body.

Shem and Japheth had been looking for their brother Ham. He had not worked the herds all day and they were a bit angry with his increasing irresponsibility. It seemed that he was acting more like an entitled king than a servant leader of the people of Elohim. Unable to find him, they decided to go to their father’s tent and see if their parents knew his whereabouts. When they approached Noah’s tent, they saw Ham exiting and fixing his clothes. He gave them a leering look and walked right up to them.

“Ham, we’ve been looking for you,” said Shem, always the elder brother with a tendency to chastise.

“Well, you have found me,” said Ham. But his countenance was disturbing to both Shem and Japheth.

Then they heard the weeping inside the tent.

“Is that mother crying?” asked Japheth.

“Where is father?” added Shem without pause.

“Drunk on the ground, where else?” said Ham.

Shem knew that there was something deadly wrong. “What have you done, brother?” he said.

Ham responded with a diabolical casualness, “I have uncovered father’s nakedness. The child’s name shall be Canaan.”

The words ripped into Shem and Japheth like a dagger. The meaning of the cultural idiom “uncovering a man’s nakedness” was the sexual violation of his wife. In a patriarchal society it was the ultimate humiliation and usurpation of his authority. Ham had engaged in maternal incest and had therefore contested his father’s tribal power.

Without delay, Shem and Japheth raced to the tent and tore back the flap. Noah was passed out on the ground as Ham had said, and Emzara was naked and brutally battered on the bed, weeping into the pillow.

Before they could see her nakedness, the brothers averted their eyes and grabbed one of Noah’s cloaks laying on the floor where he dropped it. They walked backwards with the garment on their shoulders toward their mother and covered her — they covered their father’s nakedness.

When Noah had become sober and learned what Ham had done to him, he called for the elders of the community. As defrauded patriarch, Noah no longer had the authority he once wielded. But the crime could never take away his election by Elohim. And so he stood before the tribe and pronounced a curse. But it was not a curse on Ham, it was a curse on his offspring. Noah had discovered that what Ham had done to Emzara included unspeakable unnatural acts that could only find their origin in the demonic revelations of the Watchers.

“Cursed be Canaan,” said Noah. “A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. Blessed be Yahweh, the god of Shem; and let Canaan

be his slave. May Elohim enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his slave.”

It was a shock to the elders. Noah had used the covenant name of Elohim in his curse: Yahweh. As Patriarch he had the authority to do so, but it was rarely engaged. And why did he curse the son instead of the father? Canaan was not the offender, Ham was. Should a son suffer the wages of a father’s sin? Does Elohim visit the iniquity of a man upon his succeeding generations?

What Noah had done was not personal vendetta. It was an act of protection for the sacred and social identity of the family and the community. Without moral taboo, civilization would fall faster than it would rise.

The community’s response illustrated the power of internal evil to divide and conquer a people. Ham’s heinous act caused a rift in the clans. The sons of Shem supported the call for judgment upon Ham, nothing less than his life for the violation of his parents’ sacred honor. Japheth and his tribes considered it wicked, but not worthy of the penalty of death. Banishment or exile, but not death. Yahweh’s covenant with Noah after the Flood included the justice of a life for a life. If any man would shed another man’s blood, by man should his blood be shed. The desecration of man as the image of God marked the rejection of the Creator and the beginning of the end of civilization. But did this crime rise to the level of shedding blood? They could not agree.

Ham prepared his sons to leave for the south and west with future hopes of sea exploration of distant lands. In a sense, he was already exiling himself and perhaps the issue was moot. He had made claim to tribal patriarch and then planned to leave the tribe. What drove a man to such levels of depravity? It seemed more an act of ultimate defiance of authority than of claiming it.

Ham's actions started an avalanche of reactions with far reaching repercussions. The elders conferred at length and came to the conclusion that it was time for all of them to spread out over the Land of the Two Rivers. This event was the catalyst for something they should have done to begin with. Only fear had kept them from fulfilling Elohim's command to be fruitful and multiply *and fill the earth*.

The sons of Shem settled the central and eastern region of Mesopotamia and the sons of Japheth migrated to the northern reaches. They rebuilt the new cities on the ruins of the old, changing names as language changed. Erech became known as Uruk and the land of Shinar became Sumer.

Noah and Emzara waited until Canaan was born before they left him in the hands of his brothers. They then travelled down the Euphrates to the Lower Sea and departed for the magical island of Dilmun. It was known as the Land of the Living that resided where the sun rises at the mouth of the rivers and it soon inspired a host of legends about the gateway to the underworld. For Noah and Emzara it was their attempt to start a new life away from the shame. Since their family had spread to cover the known lands, the only place they would be untouched by their painful memory would be a distant unknown location. He became known as Utnapishtim the Distant or Noah the Faraway.

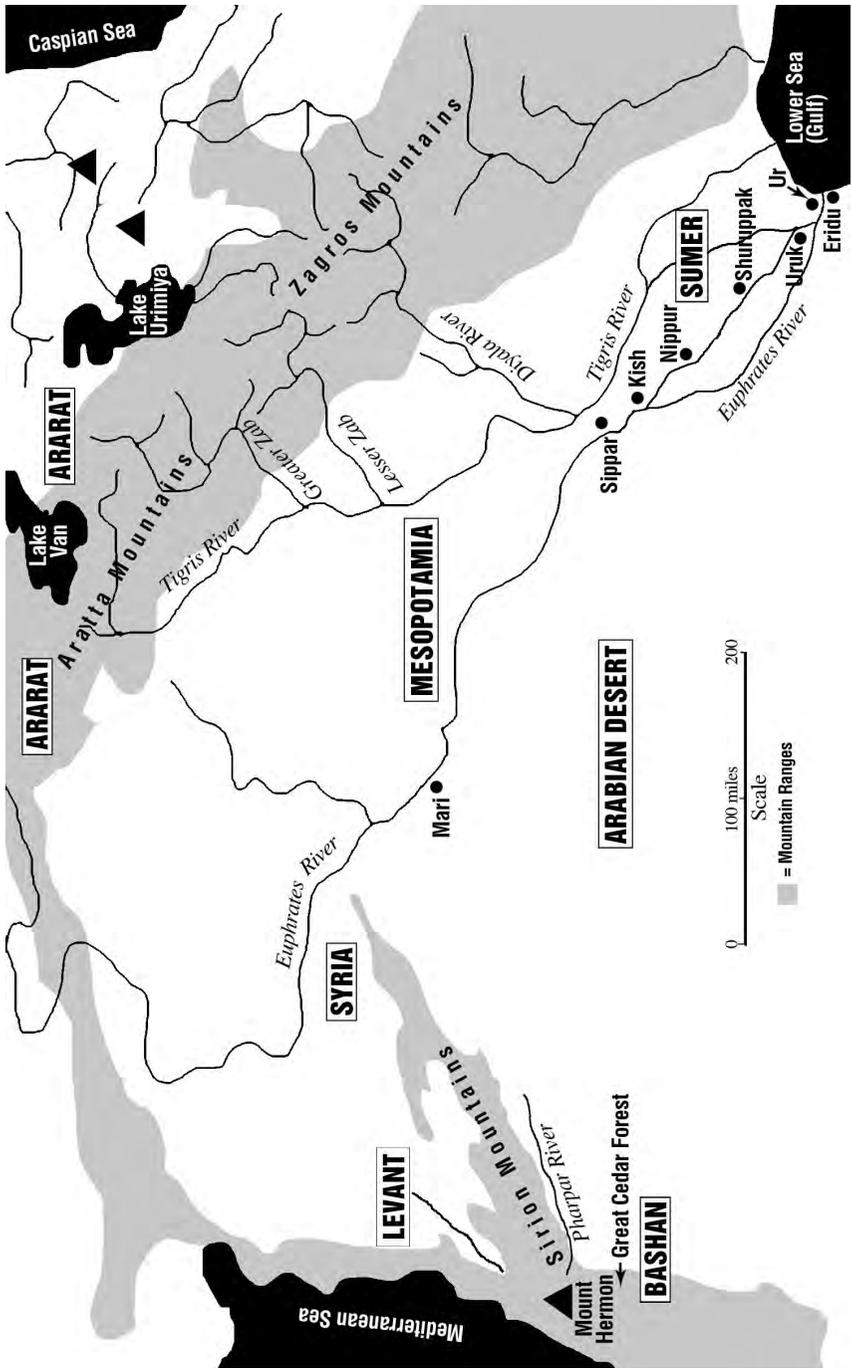
And so the sons of Noah spread out along the river basin and multiplied. But the diffusion would only serve to delay the inevitable, for what is in the heart of man goes with him wherever he goes.

As generations passed, the memory of Noah faded into legend and lore, and the rightful lordship of Elohim over the earth was too soon replaced again by the old gods of the pantheon. Everyone had forgotten the past. Everyone had forgotten who they were. Everyone had forgotten Elohim. They had become futile in their thinking and

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their foolish hearts were darkened. They exchanged the truth of Elohim for a lie. They worshipped and served the creature and creation in place of the Creator.

And Elohim gave them over to their depravity.



CHAPTER 1

The great feline moved through the brush of the plain. It crouched low, muscles tensed and senses alert to every sound and smell. Unusually large, the size of seven men, it inched forward in the stealth of predatorial approach through the wavy grassland. This uncanny skill in the kill had already brought long life to the wily hunter. Its mane was kingly, its musculature lean and taught, its claws and teeth, protracted and sharp.

And it smelled blood.

At the end of the grassy area near the river's edge the daunting cat froze. It saw a group of several humans in a clearing cleaning the carcasses of animal prey hanging from the trees. Twenty gazelles, some wild boar, and a dozen ibexes dangled enticingly from the low limbs. A feast for the king of beasts.

But the great lion was not looking at the fresh meat. It stared at the large figure laying the animals onto a cart for transportation. He was clearly the alpha male, towering above the others. He was mighty, picking up the bodies of the animals with muscular ease. He sported a full but manicured beard of dark hair and wore a chignon cloth band around his head that kept his long locks from obstructing his view. A long tunic draped his waist, with a naked torso and an animal skin draped on his shoulders like a small cape. If the predator had been human it would have been struck by the charisma and handsomeness of the Hunter.

But the predator was not human. What it saw was a challenging guardian keeping the lion from its meal.

Strangely, the lion had no fear of the Hunter. Though this one was extraordinarily large, the lion had killed many men which

accounted for its ability to stay alive for so long. Fear would not stop it from seeking prey, but it was a necessary element that produced increased strength and heightened awareness for battle with such a foe. But this time, it was as if it had a spell on the beast. It was preparing to kill, but with the lack of fear that might accompany the killing of an animal on the plain.

The soft breeze carried the musk of the sweaty Hunter's scent to the lion's nostrils. It licked its lips with hunger. It crouched low to the ground waiting for its moment to pounce.

The Hunter threw a gazelle on the pile of others in the cart. The four other men with him were servants. All the animals they were cleaning and preparing were victims of the Hunter's skills. He was a mighty hunter whose sport was a way of distracting his restless spirit.

He also had preternatural senses. Those senses kicked in and he stopped what he was doing. He sensed that he was being watched. No, that he was being preyed upon.

The Hunter looked and saw the men cleaning the animals from the trees, oblivious to their impending doom. He looked at the brush mere cubits away from him. But then he glanced behind him. He set his spear beside the cart and pulled his dagger and axe. In front, and behind, *there were two of them.*

No, wait. Three. It was an ambush.

He was about to yell out a warning, but he never had the chance.

The lions attacked.

The lion that was watching the Hunter leaped out of its hiding and covered the short distance in a mere couple of strides. The other two lions, one, an equally large male, the other a smaller but meaner female, surprised the men in the rear. They ripped them to shreds with relative ease.

But the Hunter was ready. And he was very good. His fear had spiked his strength and he caught the giant beast in the belly with his blade as it pounced on him. His other arm caught the fangs and claws of the monster in his copper forearm band. He pulled the dagger upward and sliced open the lion's underside, spilling its intestines on the ground. The lion howled in pain and released its grip. The Hunter rolled on top of the lion, raising his axe high. It would take a few more moments before the lion would be dead so he was not taking any chances. He swung down and buried the axe head in the lion's brain. It went limp.

The other lions had finished off the four servants and turned to face the Hunter. Their mouths and claws dripped blood. The big one stayed back, sizing up its prey. The smaller female was not so inclined. She moved forward, eyes mad with rage. She was smaller than her male companions but she was clearly more vicious and experienced. Without a bulky mane to get in her way, she was streamlined for killing. And her mate was dead. She was going to maul this large human and lick its bones.

But the Hunter was not merely a human. He was also part god. And he had been wanting to rid the land of these menaces that had killed too many people of his city for too long.

The lioness spared no moment for reflection on the Hunter's heritage. It jumped at him. The Hunter ducked and the lioness rolled on the ground in a pile of fangs, claws, and dust, hitting its head on a tree. The Hunter only had his dagger, so he moved over to the cart and grabbed his spear.

Dizzy from the head injury, the lioness tried to shake off unconsciousness. A patch of skin and hair above the eyebrow had been ripped off by the harsh bark of the tree. Blood dripped down into its blinking eye.

The Hunter raised his spear to lance it, but he felt the approach of the other lion from his rear.

He turned. The lion was already in the air.

The Hunter barely got the spear point up as the lion came crashing down upon him.

The spear ran right through its jaw and up through its brain, skewering the great beast's skull and killing it instantly. The shaft broke under the weight of the monster and the Hunter was thrown to the ground.

He got up as quickly as he had fallen because he knew that the worst of the fight was yet to come. Once the female had gotten back its senses, it was more ferocious than its companions.

But as he glanced around, he saw the lioness escaping into the brush. The head wound must have been bad after all. This lioness was a vicious killer, but it was also an intelligent killer. It would not fight with the disadvantage of a bleeding, dizzying wound against so mighty a hunter. So it left to live another day. And to kill another day.

The Hunter dusted himself off and sighed at the death of his servants. It wasn't sentiment for their lives that moved him. He would have to bury them, finish the cleaning, and bring everything back to the city himself. He checked the animal skins draped on his shoulders. They had been a special gift from his mother, a goddess who had assured him they bore the magical property of removing the natural fear of animals toward the wearer. It allowed him to get closer to his prey for easier kill before they bounded away. And they also threw off the senses of predators like lions.

He was a mighty Hunter, a powerful warrior, but he was not stupid. Victory was superior to honor. If wearing a magic pelt gave him advantage, then so be it. Glory would only be increased by survival, not defeat. He was victor and that is what mattered most.

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The Hunter approached the entrance of his city. He led the cart alone through the seven-fold gate before entering the city. He even helped the donkeys to pull their overloaded cargo of animal flesh with his mighty strength. On the top of that load were the bodies of two immense lions. The sound of trumpets announced his presence, and he was heralded in the streets by a cheering crowd.

He approached his palace entrance and was welcomed by a smiling queen mother and high-priestess of Shamash, the goddess Ninsun.

She crowed with pride to the Hunter, “Welcome back, Scion of Uruk, Wild Bull on the Rampage, one third mortal and two thirds divine!”

The crowd cheered again.

The Hunter smiled at the grandiose exaltation. It was formal, but it was appropriate. He was Gilgamesh, Lord and King of Uruk.



CHAPTER 2

The new city of Uruk was rebuilt upon the ruins of the old that had been destroyed in the Deluge. All the cities of the area had likewise been rebuilt: Eridu, Ur, Shuruppak and the others, but Uruk had grown quickly to become once again the largest city-state in Sumer, boasting over sixty thousand residents. Its territory covered three and a half square miles of land. One square mile of city, one square mile of orchards, one square mile of clay pits, and one half square mile for the temple mount.

Following his predecessors, Gilgamesh had restored the cult centers along with their religious worship of deity. Inanna's and Anu's temples were rehabilitated with that extra flourish that Gilgamesh added to all his ventures in an attempt to establish his unsurpassed greatness. His own Great Palace was in the same district and included a temple, *Egalmah*, for his mother, the goddess Ninsun.

After the Deluge, most of the gods no longer showed their presence to mankind as they used to. They seemed strangely distant. But the religious cult continued with images of the gods made from stone and wood. They still performed their "opening of the mouth" ceremony to bring the breath of the god into the statue and make it a living representation of the deity's presence in its absence. The rumors were that the pantheon was hidden away in its holy cosmic mountain, Hermon, in the west, because the devastation of the flood waters had sent shock waves through their ranks. But no one really knew why.

It wasn't long before scribes in their tablet schools began spinning their own yarns to suit their purposes. It was said that Enlil, the god of the air, was angry at the clamor of humanity and proposed

to send a flood to wipe them all out, but that Enki, the crafty god of the waters of the Abyss, warned Noah, a leader of Shuruppak, called “Ziusudra” by some, to build a boat and escape the wrath. So Enki had thwarted the plans of Enlil, just when Enlil was trying to take charge of the pantheon. Anu, the high god of the pantheon had faded into the background as a more distant deity.

What the scribes did not know was the reality behind their myths. Anu was actually the Watcher Semjaza. He had faded in his historical presence because he had been bound into the heart of the earth by Uriel the archangel during the War of Gods and Men at the time of the Flood. All the seven high gods “who decree the fates” had been imprisoned in that battle because they too were rebel Watchers of Elohim’s heavenly host with revolutionary intent. The only one of the high gods not bound in the earth was Utu the sun god who escaped in a fit of cowardice during the battle. He had also run away in the Titanomachy and the War on Eden which made him a particular nuisance to the plans of the divine pantheon. Utu had changed his name to Shamash, but remained a sun god. Other surviving Watchers had taken over the identities of the other high gods so as to insure the continuity of their rule over mankind. There was a new Enlil, and a new Anu, and Ninhursag and the others.

The only deity whose identity was not taken over was Inanna. She had been seized in the mouth of Rahab the sea dragon and buried under tons of sediment in the Flood. Her reputation for self-aggrandizement and violence was so notorious that no Watcher wanted to carry that stigma with them into the new world. But what the humans didn’t know would not hurt them, as they continued to venerate Inanna throughout the land.

Irrigation canals were redug to bring water from the Euphrates River into the fields surrounding the city that were tended by the farmers living within the city walls. The city walls were a new

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addition by Gilgamesh. The land of Sumer was a confederation of city-states with their own economies, governmental bureaucracy, and patron deities. Though they traded with one another and usually respected their boundaries, the nature of humankind is always to take more. Hostilities had grown between the cities and some engaged in battles over territory and passage rights on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The two rivers were still the lifeline of the land that brought water for crops and transportation for trade. It became evident to some that control of the waterway would lead to control of the land, so the cities on the edge of the river vied for that control by charging duties and transportation taxes. It was a seedling of trouble that would prove to grow into a tree of thorns.

Gilgamesh saw this growing aggression as a threat to the safety of Uruk, so he embarked upon a massive project to build a protective wall around his city like none had ever seen. It was a mighty wall worthy of a mighty king who was determined to make a name for himself in history. About fifty cubits or eighty feet high, the wall boasted a seven-fold gateway protecting the entrance into the city. A chariot could ride across its threshold with a full rig of horses. The brickwork was meticulous and made of kiln-fired bricks that could withstand weather, war, and even floodwaters, unlike the more common mud bricks that most building structures were made of. The amount of material needed for this glorious enterprise was so massive that the clay pits for brick making took up one third of the city and were going deeper into the earth with every day of building. The labor needed to accomplish this feat was so overwhelming that King Gilgamesh had to institute forced corvée labor upon the citizens for many years just to have any hope of actually finishing the massive brick snake that wound its way around the city.

“And therein lays your flaw, Gilgamesh,” whispered Ninsun.

Gilgamesh sat gloriously on his throne, washed up from the hunt. He was a majestic six cubits or nine feet tall. Ninsun stood intimately by his ear. He posed motionless so an artisan could carve an accurate likeness of his face into a clay tablet while another sculpted a statuette. They were commemorating his slaughter of the two great lions by crafting images of him as “Lord of the Animals,” savior of his people. His muscular likeness stood mightily in the center, hands stretched out to grasp the throat of a lion on either side of him. On his head was the horned hat of deity. Ironically, his throne also sported a carved stone lion on either side as a symbol of his royalty, so these were particularly symbolic animals that helped exalt his reputation and glory.

The huge lion skins were being stripped from their carcasses and cured by tanners to put on display in his palace later. Gilgamesh neglected to mention to anyone that a third lion got away. It wasn't flattering to his reputation. And who would believe him that the smaller female was more ferocious? He decided that was an extraneous detail that need not spoil the symmetry of his gallant story and artwork.

Gilgamesh responded to Ninsun in a whisper, so as not to be heard by the artists. “I have restored the cosmic rites of the gods, I opened up passes in the mountains for travel, dug many wells of water for my people, and I have brought much fame upon Uruk by building walls of strength and glory.”

“And you have done so at the expense of your own subjects,” Ninsun added. “You are working your own people into an early grave.” As a high-priestess of Shamash, Ninsun was in touch with the soul of the commoner. She heard their confessions and prayers to Shamash for deliverance from their king's oppressive demands.

“I ask nothing of them that I do not also ask of myself,” he hissed back.

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“True enough, my son,” she said. “But they are not part god as you are. The workers in the pits and on the wall are working day and night in rotating shifts with nary a rest for their labors. You must allow them some happiness or they may rise up in sheer desperation.”

“That is why they will not rise up. Because they fear their king,” he said.

“A healthy fear maintains authority, law, and order,” she said. “But a cruel fear breeds resentment, spite, and chaos. Leave them some time to tend to their families and their own gardens of produce. Then they will die for you if you need them to.”

Gilgamesh let her words sink in. His mother was his most respected counsel and he took her words to heart. A melancholy spirit came over him and he barely whispered, “Father created a healthy fear.”

“Yes, he did,” she said. “But he was a good king. Holy Lugalbanda.” Her eyes sparkled with reminiscence. “I was his child bride but he treated me with tender consideration on our wedding night. Like you, he had the divine right of kings. He could have taken me any way he wanted. But he was kind. And my loyalty was eternal.”

Gilgamesh looked at Ninsun. She had a wise way of saying several things in one metaphor. And this time she was not merely talking about treating subjects with goodness. There was another meaning that penetrated her words. For Gilgamesh’s slave-driving impatience was not his only weakness. He was a giant born of the union of god and human. He was a *Gibbor*, a mighty warrior with a mighty appetite for two things: Combat and women.