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Episode Eleven: War of the Cabal

THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURES emerged from the shadows of the grotto one by one. Each removed their hood. They were a relatively young bunch. All different races, creeds and sizes. Some tall, some short. Some slim and some portly. Fourteen in all. A motley crew if ever there was one. Robert smiled. "The Cabal of David."

"What does that mean?" Grace asked.

"We are the last hope," Robert said. "For the survival of God. You understand God is here."

Deacon nodded. "Yes. We do."

A bearded man stepped from behind two others. "What's your name my friend?" he said. He was perhaps forty. Arabic with flowing black locks. His features were angular with the most piercing blue eyes. "I am David."

"I'm Deacon. This is Grace."

"This is your Cabal?" Grace asked timidly.

David laughed. "Yes, my name is David al-Sakhir. This is our home."

Since the moment this group revealed themselves, Deacon sensed something unsettling. An underlying aggression. An anger emanating from these people. Definitely elusive. And perhaps something to take note of.

"Tell me, are you looking for God?" David asked.

"Possibly," Deacon said. "Are you?"

David hesitated then said, "We have an idea of what happened here. Of where everyone is being taken."

"Really," Deacon replied. "Where?"

"Veonissus."

"What's that?" Grace said.

"It's a devil to end all devils." David's expression hardened. "Veonissus is the Queen. She showed up here not too long ago with her horde of demons. She was the one who forced God into hiding. And she's going to pay."

Grace sat up from the rock, "How?"

"We're going to destroy her army. The Veonissics."

::

Sand held onto Abigail trying to keep warm. They huddled against the north-facing rock wall of the fissure near the entrance. The wind roared above them, pushing snow and ice out of the cave's depths into open desert air.

Just outside, the swirling vortex strengthened. Lightning flashed off of the surrounding canyon. The vortex's mouth swung in dizzying circles like an unrestrained garden hose energized with a surge of water. Several dig workers were sucked into the vortex and thrust into the afterlife. Their corporeal bodies bursting at the sudden unnatural stress of crossing into an anti-matter realm before death. No time to even scream.

"It's so cold," Abigail stammered.

"I know," Sand said. "Keep close."

She began to stutter. "We're going to get frostbite."

"Not necessarily." He was looking across the passageway to the opposite wall. He saw something of interest. He let go of Abigail and crawled over and brought back a long stick.

"What's that?" she asked.

He broke off the end and it ignited into a flare. "I don't think we'll get frostbite." He looked across the passageway and saw several unlit flares littering the ground. They formed a path to a large snow-covered rucksack full of them.

"We aren't the first ones here," Sand said.

"Where are they all?"

"Perhaps we'll find out. We're going inside."

"I'll never make it."

"Yes you will. I'm going to help you."

Sand's obsessive search for this second psychic had motivated him to kill Gloria in cold blood and it seemed strange Sand would abandon this goal so easily. But it wasn't until they happened upon this dig that she could understand why. Abigail had sensed massive spiritual turbulence ever since she arrived in the canyon but had successfully kept it to herself. She suspected Sand knew the importance of this unusual fissure in the middle of desert far beyond his Leviathan's Splinter theory. She suspected Sand knew this discovery could achieve something much more important than simply opening a gateway to the other side. There was now something she had to know. Something she could only hear from Grace in her spiritual state. Abigail closed her eyes and tried to concentrate.

Sand made sure Abigail was wrapped as tight as possible in her clothes and was prepared to move.

"Now hold onto me," he said. "We're going to find God."

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"How do you think you're going to do that?" Deacon asked. "Destroy demons?"

"It isn't as difficult as one would lead you to believe," David said. "On this plane, demons may be psychic and immortal but they're not supernatural. They're flesh. And they can bleed." David nodded in satisfaction. "You can't kill them. But you can wound them. Destroy their ability to destroy others. There's a—"

Suddenly, Grace gripped her head in pain. Deacon responded, "Grace. Grace. What's the matter?"

The pain eased. "Like before. It's Abigail. She's trying to talk to me."

"Relax," Deacon said. "Open your mind. Let her in."

"I'm trying... it hurts."

Abigail's voice echoed through her mind; *Grace*.

"I hear her..."

Deacon leaned closer. He rested his hand on her shoulder.

Grace. Can you hear me, sweetie?

"Yes! I can hear you Nana."

David closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. He was trying to reach out and hear what Grace was hearing.

Grace. You must answer a very important question for me.

Grace's eyes were shut. Squinting at jabbing pulses of pain. "I'll try Nana."

Are you with God?

"Not yet Nana. We're trying to find Him."

Explain.

Grace's face contorted. She tried her best to withstand the barrage of pins and needles that came with bursting through veils of spectral ether.

"It's okay, Grace," Deacon said. "Try and bear with it. I'm with you. What's she saying?"

David couldn't reach out. For whatever reason. This voice was only meant to be heard by Grace.

Grace?

Grace's heart leapt. "I hear you. It's so cold here, Nana. You arrive alone. People found me. Brought me in. Dad's not here. Nobody's here. There is—" she squinted. She was losing the connection.

Grace. You must listen. God is there. He is hiding. Protecting Himself. He needs your help. You must find Him. Others also will be trying to find Him. You must be one of them. That is the most important thing. Do you hear me?

Grace wept. "Yes Nana I hear you. I miss you. I'm so sorry... tell my mom I'm so sorry. Please tell her I'm okay... Nana? Nana? Don't leave me..."

Grace? Can you hear me...

The connection was fading.

"Nanaaaa?"

Abigail was gone.

Grace cried. Deacon could do nothing. He put an arm about her and tried to comfort her.

David stepped forward. "I'm sorry. Sometimes the pain we experience when a loved one dies... pales in comparison to the pain the dead feel at being separated from them. I am sorry for your loss."

She looked up. "You said you knew what happened here. Of where everyone is. Of where my father is."

"We have an idea, yes."

Grace's voice was unbreakable. "Then we will go together. We'll find your Veonissus... and wipe her out."

::

Abigail slumped next to Sand. "Abigail," Sand said. "Are you all right? Can you move?"

"Mr. Sand, I want you to do something for me right now."

"What is it?"

"You will call John. The man you said is watching Penny. You will call him and tell him to leave her alone. To return to his home. His job is finished."

"I don't think I should do that."

"You don't have a choice. Whatever we have started here we must finish it. Too much is at stake now. You want my help you will do it. Without hesitation. It's not just us, or Grace, or Penny anymore... it's the fabric of our existence. God's Kingdom cannot join with ours... and I feel that is what's happening. You will call your man and tell him to leave my family alone. Or I will die here and you will be left to freeze to death with no guide. Without anyone knowing who you are. Do you understand? Everything you've worked for will mean nothing."

Sand regarded her for a moment. Quickly weighed the pros and cons of releasing the only form of insurance he had over her. But then again, he considered the current circumstances. Vortexes were opening up all over the world; they were inside what could be the mouth of heaven; Abigail couldn't go anywhere without his help. Sand concluded it would prudent to act. A solid gesture of trust. He knew he needed her more than she needed him. This may be a good move.

"All right," he said. "I'll do it for you." He rummaged through his robes and produced a cell phone. "Not sure this is going to even work," he said.

"It will work," she said. "Give it to me."

He did.

Abigail held the phone. Rubbed the surface with her thumb.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing," she said. "Here. Call."

She handed it back to him and he flipped it open.

::

It was raining in Baton Rouge. The kind of rain that pooled in the gutters and left an oily residue on your skin. It was night. A man slept in a small single bed in a run-down apartment. Cockroaches scurried about feasting on remains of takeout food left on a scuffed plywood coffee table designed in the seventies.

The rain beat down on the windowsill just outside. No curtains were hung. Moonlight shifted along the paisley wallpapered wall of the bedroom.

The phone rang.

A loud ringing that could only come from an old dial phone you would find in cheap motels.

The man stirred. Then woke suddenly.

He was overweight and unshaven. Clothed in a dirty white vest and red boxer shorts. He slept alone.

He rose out of bed, rubbed his eyes and uttered a few profanities. The man reached for the phone beside the bed and answered. "Hello?"

"John."

The man rubbed his eyes again and looked at the glaring digital clock. It blinked 12:00 over and over. There must have been a blackout.

"John. It's Jonathan Sand."

"Jonathan Sand?" John said. "Oh. Sand."

"I'm no longer going to call you with any codes."

"I can hardly hear you. Where the hell are you? Is that the wind?"

"Don't worry about that. Do you understand? This job is over."

"Over," John protested. "But I haven't even got her yet."

"You don't need to. This job is over."

"Does this mean I won't get paid?"

"You'll get paid, don't worry."

"This is bullshit. How will I get my money?"

"Have I ever not paid you before?"

John hesitated. "No."

"I will have the money wired to you."

"When?"

"As soon as I get back from my trip. You understand? Leave her alone."

"Yeah yeah I understand. Just get me my money."

“Very good.” And Sand hung up.

John slammed the phone down and sat there on the edge of the bed. He spotted a cockroach scurry across the sheet and squashed it with his palm. He grinned and nodded in oily satisfaction at its demise.

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David helped Grace and Deacon to their feet. “Welcome to the Cabal,” David said.

“Not so fast,” Grace said. “I’ll help you but I need you to answer a couple of questions first.”

“Of course,” David obliged.

“Do you know what this place is? Do you know where we are?”

Robert laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Deacon asked him.

“You guys are kidding right?” Robert said.

David raised his hand at Robert.

Robert walked around them. “Sorry.”

David turned his attention to the pair. “That’s not an easy question to answer. Many of us have debated it.”

“We found a plane out on the ice,” Grace said quickly. “If this is the afterlife, how can a plane be here?”

“Oh,” David said. “That’s nothing. This place has planes, old ships, cars.”

Grace implored, “How can that be?”

Robert circled around and faced them.

“Imagine a single plane of existence,” David said. “Not two separate planes like we all thought was the case. All of us, the living and the dead living on the same plane. The next dimension is merely a vaporous wall, a veil that exists only to separate the living and the dead from seeing each other. From interacting with each other. Sometimes that veil is breached accidentally when something produces a massive amount of energy. Like an electrical storm or solar flare from the sun causing people and things to pass through the veil. People and objects have been disappearing for centuries. All attributed to the unexplainable. Here I think we can explain it.”

Deacon frowned and walked closer to David. “That’s very interesting,” he said. “But it’s wrong.”

“I suppose your theory of an anti-matter world is more plausible,” David said to him, “considering matter and anti-matter cannot come into contact without annihilating each other.” David tapped his temple with his forefinger. “Everyone is psychic here. But you already know that.”

“Touché,” Deacon said. “Unless you consider that anything slipping across the ether is also changed into anti-matter. Just like our bodies.”

“It’s what we believe,” said a portly fellow with short, cropped hair and freckles.

“I’m sorry,” David said. “Where are my manners? This is Reginald.”

“Hello,” Reginald said.

David gestured around the group. “This is Barry, Taro, Vijay, and Calida in the corner there, Cameron and Nestor.” David turned to his right. “This is Daniel, Darrian, Naeem, Victor, Sabra, and Ellis over there. We arrived here relatively young.”

Deacon said, “You mean you died young.”

“Yes. We found each other on the ice. Some rescued others. Some we’re lost. We all agreed to help each other. To complete the mission.”

“What mission?” Grace asked.

“To rescue Allah. To rescue God.”

::

“C’mon,” Sand said. “We’ve got to move or we’ll freeze to death.”

“I can’t move,” Abigail said. “I’ll wait here. I’ll guide you, but you must go alone. I’m too old.”

“No. You’re coming with me. I need you.”

“I must rest.”

“Look, I’ll carry you if I have to but you’re coming with me.”

Frost clung to both of their faces. “We’re going to die,” she said.

Sand had to think fast. He spotted a discarded parka a little way down the tunnel and he leapt for it. Placing it on the ground next to Abigail he helped her roll on top of it. “Here,” he said. “I’ll drag you on this.”

Abigail looked up at him as if she could see right into his eyes. “Pull me closer to the heart of the cave. It’s warmer there, if you can make it there, we will live.”

“All right!”

::

The vortex had vanished. Dust from the canyon floor settled quickly.

“What the hell was that?” Kapen said, wiping sand from his face.

Hood was standing beside him. “That my friend was every religious belief on earth going kaput. It’s happening all over the world right now.”

Kapen, Grissom and Hood dashed across the canyon to the foot of the fissure. They saw Sand’s two thugs laying prone, soaking the snowdrift red. “Jesus,” Kapen said. “Sand got inside the cave with the woman in the wheelchair.” Kapen called out to two of his workmen to assist.

“What are you doing?” Hood asked.

“What do you think we’re doing?” he said. “We’re going in after them.”

::

Maru Bovair had climbed down the shallow embankment to the beach below. Others had quickly joined them. The group sauntered along the waterfront searching the waves. “I don’t see anything big enough to hold all of us,” said one of his followers.

“That one,” Maru said. “That piece of ice right there. It the only one that is thicker than the others.”

Billy looked worried. “It’s not big enough,” he pointed out. “There’s no way we can all fit on there.”

“Not all of us,” Maru said. “It’s just you and I. Everyone else will stay here and wait.”

“I’m not sure I want to go,” Billy answered.

Maru looked back at him. Billy looked at the distant mountain ranges. They loomed like a bank of jagged teeth half shrouded in a mysterious blue mist.

“You’re going,” Maru said and walked back to address his followers. “Everyone listen to me. I know you all want to see God. But there’s only room on these chunks of ice for myself and one other person.

“I want to go,” a woman said.

“You’re staying here,” Maru responded. “Billy will go with me. We will find God and tell him to mend this lake so all of you can cross and join us. This is a momentous event. I am so proud of all of you. We have made it.”

The crowd smiled. “Do you think God will answer our prayers?” the woman asked.

“Of course He will,” Maru said. “He will grant an audience with me; His messenger, and Billy; His disciple. He will answer all of our prayers. This is the last barrier. Billy and I will break it to carve a path to God’s door, which all of you will walk through. We have arrived. We will finally be able to speak to God. You should all spend this time preparing yourselves.”

One man spoke up, “But we need guidance. We need you.”

Maru’s face softened, “You need no more guidance my friend. You have all that you need. Let Billy and I prepare the way. Wait for us. You will see a sign when we’ve found God. Look to the mountains. And watch the sky.”

A man dropped to his knees and began praying. Then another. Soon all were bowing toward the mountain range.

Except Maru.

Billy approached him and Maru smiled. “Let’s go.”

::

Sand dragged Abigail across the icy floor on the tattered parka. They were headed into the cave. Sand looked ahead and saw nothing but heavy snow blowing at him from the dark abyss ahead. It seemed as if they were moving down the throat of some monstrous animal.

Frost-covered stalagmites and stalactites began to appear obstructing the path. Natural light was fading as they moved deeper. Sand glanced back and stretched his flare in front of him. He could no longer see the cave’s entrance. Pummeling snow and entrenched darkness surrounded them. Abigail was still, seemingly relaxed. Sand turned and squinted to see ahead.

They had progressed only several more feet before Sand heard a long, piercing scream. Loud and shrill as if someone was torturing a poor woman to death. Sand stopped dragging Abigail and covered his ears. It vanished as suddenly as it had begun. Panicked, he dropped to his knees and knelt beside Abigail and checked her. “Are you all right? Are you hurt?”

Abigail looked at him, puzzled. “No,” she said calmly. “Are you?”

“You didn’t scream?”

“Not that I know of. Have we reached the center of the cave yet?”

Sand held his head. “Am I going crazy?”

Abigail leaned close to him. “Hear a woman scream did you?”

“Yes! Did you hear it too?”

“No I didn’t. But she’s here. They’re all here.”

“Who are here?”

She hesitated, glanced over his shoulder, then back at him. “Angels... devils... wraiths... they’re all here,” she said. “Trying to slow our descent to protect him.”

Sand looked into the cave’s depths. He saw nothing but blowing snow and inky darkness. “To protect whom?”

“*Allah. Yebwah. Ishmael.* They are real. They are here. We are going to die.”

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The unmarked jet touched down at *King Abdulaziz International Airport* and taxied to a remote corner of the South Terminal. There was a sole passenger onboard: Father Elias Tobin. He was confident in his way as if he had been here a thousand times before. He didn’t even look out the window at the bright Saudi Arabian day. Upon halting on the tarmac, several white Mercedes Benz automobiles drove up to the plane. Four turbaned men exited the first car, all dressed in black suits. Father Tobin descended the steps from the hatch and was guided into the car. Inside, a white

gentleman of western European descent sat beside him. He was around fifty years old and was wearing a similar black suit and yarmulke.

“Praise Allah,” Tobin said.

The gentleman smiled and bowed his head, “Praise Allah.” He handed Tobin a scroll.

“The Quran,” Tobin said, taking the delicate object and laying it in his lap.

The gentleman nodded. “Pray with me.”

Tobin rested his hand gently on the parchment and closed his eyes for a few moments.

“Allah thanks you,” the gentleman whispered.

“How have you been, Aviel?” Tobin said.

“Things have been better, my friend,” he replied, removing a pair of white gloves.

“You know why I’m here.”

Aviel sighed. “I do.”

“Afaf,” Tobin said, “is she close?”

“She is.” Aviel inhaled deeply then exhaled. “My friend. I fear, as do others, that this hierarchy is no longer functioning as it was meant to.”

“That’s absurd,” Tobin said.

“We have lost focus. Lost our control. And now these new developments are raising questions that shine a light on who we are.”

“You have revealed yourself?”

“No. But an insurgent movement is growing in strength and influence. They are finding ways to infiltrate the inner circles. The last incursion... it was too close. Even if the world wasn’t going out of control, our organization is in grave danger. We are entering a new age. An age that no longer needs us to survive.”

“Oh it’s worse than that,” Tobin said. “The science is beyond me but the gate has fallen. People are seeing things they shouldn’t be seeing. I don’t know how to stop it. We don’t know.”

“I understand.”

“We must help each other. Now more than ever. You can lean upon our resources to bolster your positions... until we get a handle on this.”

“You can’t get a handle on this. This was foreseen ages ago. When Muhammad and Jehovah clasp hands in brotherhood, they will look toward Mekkah. And close the Eye of God themselves.”

Tobin’s neck stiffened as an icy current of apprehension shot up his spine. “The Eye of God is found. Isn’t it? Someone has found the cave.”

“The veil has been pulled back... and our dragon is awake.”

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Grace scoffed. “You think God needs rescuing, huh?”

David leaned into her. Stared her down, his face hardened. “In this place, there is no more fear of Allah,” he said. “No more wondering about a supreme being. Allah is real. He’s flesh. Like us. He’s a man.”

“Oh well,” Deacon said, clearly mocking surprise. “At least we agree on that.”

Vijay, an East Indian man about twenty-five years old, stepped forward. “It took a while but we had to come to terms with it. It was hardest for me.”

Deacon considered how other religions would tackle the great puzzle everyone here had been thrust into. “Are you Hindu?” he asked.

“Yes,” Vijay said. “For us, it is difficult to believe there is only one God. That there may be no Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. That there is no reincarnation. Just this.”

David raised his finger. "But that isn't to say your three Gods aren't somewhere out there, hiding like Allah and Muhammad. We may even find them first."

"You are Muslim," Deacon said.

David turned, "That's right. But once you have been here a while you learn that some doctrines are just that. But I am hoping Allah is out there, waiting with Muhammad."

"Praise Allah," someone said.

"Praise God," said another.

A young woman, Calida, spoke, "Jesus will save us also."

Deacon considered his next response. "So many religions. All of us ending up in the same place anyway. Irony is something I would've liked to have left behind."

"We all believe differently," Vijay said. "But we all accept our fates. We have to. The truth cannot be hidden any longer. This is what we become."

"The fact is none of us really know what or who is out there," said Taro, the young Taiwanese man. "We only know that this is where we go when we die and that God is nowhere to be found."

"So theoretically," Deacon continued, "All of you could be wrong. There could be no God."

An older woman with weathered skin and a slight limp stepped forward. Her name was Nestor. "You don't believe that Mr. Deacon," she said. "In a way, you're more psychic than any of us. You're a seer aren't you?"

Deacon didn't answer her. David snapped his eyes toward Deacon's. "You're a seer. Yes," he said nodding. "You can speak to God. Of course. You're very good at hiding it."

Grace stood back. Half cast in the shadows of the grotto. She thought of her father. About where he could be right now at this very moment. She thought about the fear and trepidation everyone must've felt when they first came to realize this was the afterlife. She remembered her own anger and resentment at the thought of being abandoned by God. But then, that wasn't for certain. There was still the dark side of the mountains. "Can you help us find everyone?" she uttered.

"Yes," David said resolutely. "Without question. First, we must get across the frozen lake."

"We saw someone," Grace yelled. "Someone out on the lake. They were... killed. I mean... eaten by something huge. A sea monster."

"Yes," said David. "The Arielite."

Deacon's attention was suddenly snagged. "What's the Arielite?"

"A God that must be satiated. So we can cross."

Grace shook her head. "What?"

Nestor replied, "She needs to feed. Only after she has consumed enough food will she sleep long enough so we can cross to the mountains to find God."

Grace scowled in confusion. "What does she eat?"

"Flesh," David said.

Deacon suddenly sensed something hidden. Something beneath the surface. Much like before. "How many of you are there?" he said flatly. "In the Cabal. How many?"

David answered, "We are fourteen. Now."

Grace frowned. "What do you mean 'now'?"

Nestor said, "Our Cabal was seventy seven. We remember the others. But now we are fourteen."

Deacon sighed. "Oh God."

::

Several Bedouin men hurried up the rope ladder into the mouth of the fissure. Kapen, Hood and Grissom stood watching from just beyond the massive snow drifts. "We must work to protect this discovery," Hood said. "After we find your renegade people, no one can be allowed to disturb it."

“This is the responsibility of the U.S. Government,” Grissom said. “Tertiary units are on their way. This site will be secured, Mr. Kapen, whether you like it or not.” Grissom walked away calling for two of his men to assist him.

Kapen looked at Hood. “I suppose I can blame you for all this?”

“It’s not me,” Hood replied. “It’s human destiny.”

Kapen rolled his eyes. “Oh please. You’re a geek like me. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that we got too big for our britches and fucked up. Messing with shit we shouldn’t have been messing with.”

“Excuse me but I believe it was you who unearthed the gateway to hell or whatever this is.”

“Look,” Kapen said. “Dr. Hood. I’m not going to argue with you. Can you stop these black holes or whatever they are? Can you stop the Collider?”

“The collider was destroyed by an explosion exactly seven seconds after the first dark matter incursion. Several minutes after that, the first vortex appeared in the chamber. Forty men lost their lives in that explosion. The rest managed to climb out of the wreckage critically burned or injured.”

Kapen backed down. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I figure all of us have about seven days left before the vortexes create such an imbalance in nature, it will cripple the earth’s natural magnetic fields.”

“And then what?”

Hood looked at him blankly. “I don’t know; it hasn’t happened before.”

One of the Bedouin workers rushed up to the mouth of the fissure from inside yelling that he’d found something. Kapen and Hood looked up in time to see the entire cave entrance explode violently within a fiery ball. Chunks of flaming rock rained down upon the canyon. It had been hit by a rocket launcher.

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“C’mon, Grace,” Deacon said. “We’re getting out of here.”

“Wait,” David said quickly. “We can help you.”

Grace was horrified. Perhaps she wouldn’t have felt so restrained if David had maintained his stature as a strong leader of a scared and confused group. But this sudden realization tightened her throat with the knowledge they were now dealing with a possible psychopath, and she couldn’t breathe. “You’re sacrificing your own people.”

David raised his palms in a calming gesture. “Calm down. This is the only way to find Allah. To protect Him.”

“How do you know?” she said. “*It’s insane.*”

“It’s all right,” Nestor said. “It’s our own choice. David had nothing to do with it. We decided we should do this to secure our path to God.”

“At what cost?” Grace replied. “What of the people who have already been sacrificed? How are they going to find God? And who chooses? You?”

Nestor shook her head rapidly. “You don’t understand. This is no different than our own congregation when we were alive.”

Grace was absolutely appalled. “My God, listen to yourselves. You’re no better than any murderer on the street.”

“Listen to me, Grace,” David said. “There’s no Bible here. No scrolls or divine doctrines. It’s just us. This is war. In war you must make certain sacrifices.”

“*Certain sacrifices?*” Grace spat. “Is there no peace... even in the afterlife?”

“C’mon Grace, let’s go,” Deacon beckoned, already backing away down a tertiary tunnel. “We’re just going to leave.”

David wanted to see them stay. Not to have them be the next sacrifice but to help them. He didn't like sacrificing people any more than Grace or Deacon did. "Please," he said. "We're not evil. We're just trying to make sense of all this. Like you. How else could we cross the water? The Arielite is stopping anyone from getting to those mountains!"

"So you just thought sacrificing yourselves was the answer?"

"Grace," Deacon said. "Let's go."

"Look," David said. "I know this sounds horrible. But if we can't get to those mountains we can't fight the Veonissics. Our position must be fought while we stand with Allah." David stepped toward Grace.

"Stay where you are!" she yelled. "Stay where you are."

David obeyed. "We need your help to fight the Veonissics."

"Why do you need our help?" Deacon said. "I think you have enough soldiers."

David said, "When we agreed to form a Cabal, seven of us volunteered to sacrifice themselves to get us across the water. They were the bravest souls I have ever met. They wanted to help the rest of us find Allah. And they wanted to end their own suffering."

Deacon snapped back, "*End it?* Do you realize what we are? We can't die. Odds are right now all sixty some odd of your patriots are suffering right now in the belly of that thing. Suffering a fate much worse than you or I standing here right now!"

David could take any more. He knew Deacon was telling the truth and he couldn't bear the burden anymore. "I know!" he screamed and dropped to his knees. His eyes expressed a deep regret. He looked upward toward the sky. The others gathered around and laid their hands on him. "If we've abandoned everything human... Allah forgives us. It is all for Him. We are to help Him regain His Kingdom. To take it back from these demons. "

Nestor wept for him. "It's okay," she whimpered. "David. It's okay. It's not your fault. Perhaps some of us may still find God. Then their sacrifice won't be in vain."

"Please understand," David said. "We're not evil. We're just trying to make sense of all this. We never wanted to sacrifice our friends. We had to make a choice. We all had to make a choice. Who would lead and who would suffer. It's the nature of where we are now. We never forced anything on anyone. Everyone who sacrificed themselves did so because they wanted it. In the name of Allah or Jesus or Vishnu or Buddha. We didn't ask for this war. What would you have done if God Himself came to you in a dream and asked you... begged you to save Him? What would you've done?"

Grace looked at David and exhaled. She looked back at Deacon who was shaking his head sadly. "All right, all right!" Deacon said. "The fact of the matter is we don't know how many more people are out there. As far as we know you're it. You want our help? Fine. Stop sending people out to be eaten by your demi-god."

David glanced up at him. "Agreed. No more sacrifice. We can do this. We can save God."

Deacon said, "I'm getting too tired for this. As far as I'm concerned, after we find God, or Allah, or Vishnu or Jim Morrison we're done trying. We unpack and settle in."

"What about my father?" Grace said.

"I hope we do find him, Grace, I really do. But at this point I really don't know."

"You're a seer," David said, raising himself up to his feet.

"I can hear a voice it's true," Deacon said. "Vibrations of thought and energy that guide me toward what could be God."

"It's more than what we have," David said.

"You know what, David, if you really try... you could probably hear just as well as I can."

"We hear echoes. Ghosts," David said. "We hear the screams of God. And we can't stand it."

Deacon shook his head. He was getting frustrated. "I can lead us into the right direction but I don't think I can fight a war. I don't think there—" Deacon cut himself off in mid sentence.

Immediately Grace sensed something as well.

Vijay also looked around the cave, puzzled.

Clicking.

“Oh no,” Grace said.

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Jonathan Sand toppled to the ground almost landing on Abigail. The explosion at the mouth of the cave shook the ground to such an extent that cracks opened up beneath them and ice-covered rock fell all around them. “Hang on Abigail!” Sand yelled. He wrapped his arms about her and tried to sustain the showering of ice pellets. The path that they had just travelled from was being blocked off by falling rock. The blustering snow suddenly ceased blowing as the cave was gradually getting cut off from the outside world. After several moments of earth shaking, the disturbance stopped and only remnants of rock and ice fell to the ground.

“What happened to the snow?” Abigail asked.

“I’m not sure,” Sand said. “It just stopped. Why would it stop?”

“It’s the oxygen,” she replied. “The oxygen has been cut off. The snowstorm is a chemical reaction with the oxygen from our world.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means it can’t really be snow can it?”

“It also means we have no air.”

“Get me to the center of the cave, Jonathan.”

He struggled to his feet and started down the passageway once more, dragging Abigail on the parka. He stretched the flare ahead of him. As he ambled, he observed the snow-covered walls of the cave and noticed something unusual.

“Writing,” he exclaimed.

“What writing?”

“There’s writing on the walls.” Clearly excited, he dragged Abigail close to the rocky wall. He rubbed some of the ice and snow away. Carved into the rock were symbols, pictures. He scanned the wall around him and found the writing surrounding the cave. It was carved into the wall, the ceiling, the floor, even the stalactites and stalagmites. “My God,” he said. “It covers everything. What does it all say? Abigail, can you feel anything? Do you know what it all says?”

She raised her head and appeared as if she could see everything that surrounded her. “I don’t recognize any of it. We should continue.”

“Do you think there’s another way out?”

“I don’t know. But we shouldn’t stay here. We need to keep moving.”

“Right. Right.” Sand dragged Abigail among stony outcroppings and boulders. Occasionally, rocks and pebbles fell to the ground. “I’m not sure how stable this cave is anymore,” he said. “We may get buried in here before we find anything. But it’s fantastic.”

“Have you come across any bodies?” she asked quizzically.

Sand hesitated. “No. No I haven’t. We know there were people in here before us. Where are they?”

“I guess we’re about to find out.”

Just moments later, the floor began to slope down an incline. Not steep, perhaps five or ten degrees. But enough for Sand to notice. He stretched the flare ahead of him illuminating the inky darkness.

“The ground is changing,” Abigail said.

“Yes. It’s sloping downward.”

“Be careful. Watch the ground in front of you.”

“Okay.”

The cave opened up before them just a few steps further. It was a stone chamber. The floor sloped down toward a circular opening ringed by a collection of stone tablets. Perhaps forty tablets that encompassed the perimeter of the pit. Upon each tablet was carved a dense collection of symbols. Sand let go of Abigail and walked twenty feet down the slope to the mouth of the pit. It was dark and foreboding. He peered over the edge.

“What are you doing?” Abigail asked. Her voice echoed throughout the chamber.

“There’s a pit. In the center of the room. I don’t know how deep it goes. Around the edge of the hole there are... stone plates. Each covered in writing. I don’t recognize the language.”

“It’s Ammonite. A Jordanian language spoken during the Iron Age. It’s a dialect of Hebrew.”

“Jordan?”

“There are also traces of Assan. It’s an extinct... native Siberian language.”

“I never realized you were so versed in ancient and extinct languages.”

“I’m not. Spiritual energy is powerful here. I can see the symbols being written as if these people were still alive.”

“Fantastic.”

“I also wouldn’t step too close to the edge right now.”

He backed away instinctively. “Somehow I don't think you would mind if I took a tumble.”

“I meant because there’s something coming up the side.”

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Coming Soon:
EPISODE TWELVE:
THE DARK MOUNTAINS