

The drums  
of  
Andramelech  
Andromael

*Summoned the Naphal; summoned the Nephilim; summoned  
the Nephilim Tzevaot  
Drum one score thrice  
Three score twice  
Come Samyaza, come Urakabameel, Akibeel and Tamiel  
Come Ramuel, Danel, come Azkeel and Saraknyal  
Come Asael, come Armers, Batraal, Anane, Zavebe and  
Samsaveel  
Come Ertael, Turel, Yomyael and Azazyel  
To dwell within  
The Baryoz'vitmael  
And come Andramelech Andromael  
To dwell. . .to dwell. . .*

*Cabbalistic invocation of The Fallen*

**A**rvi watched the flower arrangers as they laid the bouquets,  
his eyes narrowing with irritation as he noticed the forgotten

Bromeliad and Nasturtium tabletop arrangements the sales representative had agreed to.

He had been quite specific, ignoring their nonsense off-season and ridiculous-at-any-rate excuses and complaints. He bit down on the momentary stab of anger he felt and thought about other things: his son, the evening that was soon to begin, the special event he and his wife had organised at tremendous expense, despite the fact that he couldn't really afford it.

A Bar Mitzvah wasn't something one skimped on, though, not if one could help it. It was his precious boy's coming of age, the light of his life's moment – possibly the boy's *only* moment – in the sun.

Arvi had long since decided to spare no expense to give his darling boy everything possible.

He always did. He always had.

The lead up had been frenetic, his son learning his Torah for the call to sing, the family preparing for the most important day in his darling boy's life – joining the community, coming of age – and the boy had worked hard. Tentative and uncertain at first, he'd studied, learning the Hebrew passages he had to read with confidence, the ceremony they would both follow as they carried, father and son together, the Torah around the Schule.

It was a magnificent time, worthy of celebration and reflection, of revelation and recognition.

*I am that I am. . .*

Then Arvi invited the *Alohim Tzevaot*.



The Rabbi dropped the blue-and-red prayer and scripture books he had been carrying when Arvi had first told him what he was intending to do. It was an uncomfortable moment, the Rabbi pausing theatrically as he stared at the scattered volumes at his feet.

“They are not for you, Arvi,” he said, “not for the Bar Mitsvah.” The Rabbi hovered over the scattered pile, clearly shocked and visibly shaken. “They – are not for any of us.”

“I don't understand,” Arvi said as he began to gather up the

books, placing them carefully back into the Rabbi's arms. The man's reaction was bizarre. What on earth could be wrong?

"They are the *drummers*, Arvi," the Rabbi said, as though no other explanation was required. "The *Alohim Tzevaot* are not *Ehretz'elohim*." The Rabbi paused a moment, struggling for the words to make the impact he clearly wanted to make. "The place they walk is not ours," he said, lifting a free finger to wag from beneath the books once again stacked in his arms. "We do not walk the same path."

If Arvi had been superstitious, he might almost have thought that the Rabbi was afraid. But of a musical troupe? It didn't make any sense.

"You do not like the drummers?" he asked innocently.

The Rabbi slowly shook his head.

"No, Arvi," he said, his eyes glittering, "the drummers – the *Alohim* – do not like us."



**P**arty time had approached quickly, the weeks passing in a wink as Arvi and his wife made their preparations. But the weekend Hebrew school Arvi had been attending with his son had been strained, the Rabbi treating both he and the boy distantly, as though the pair of them had made a decision to depart from the congregation. He wondered whether, on some level at least, the Rabbi thought precisely that.

They had only one more exchange about it, several weeks before the Bar Mitzvah itself, when the Rabbi had finally told Arvi he would not be coming to the party afterwards.

Arvi was dumbfounded and deeply disappointed. "But why on earth not?" he said, his tone hurt.

"You know why, Arvi." The two of them squared off, Arvi's expression intended to convey the pretence of knowing no such thing. "You have not withdrawn your request, I know." The Rabbi nodded at Arvi's continued expression of vague surprise. "It's not a big community, Arvi. Did you really think that I wouldn't?" The man's expression softened for the first time in weeks. "I do not mean to be unkind, but you do not understand

what you are meddling with.”

“Meddling?” Arvi said, incredulous. “A *drumming* troupe? A bunch of musicians?”

The Rabbi nodded. “They are more than that, Arvi. They make their music for the Temple.” He paused then for emphasis, and Arvi could have sworn that the Universe paused with him. “The music,” the Rabbi went on, “is not to be played until the Temple is rebuilt. The *Alohim Tzevaot*, though, would rebuild it using other means.” His eyes flashed, the word ‘other’ carefully inflected for significance and weightiness. All at once, the Rabbi’s voice dropped. “The Sefer Yetzirah claims that the creation of the world was achieved by the manipulation of the sacred cacophony, Arvi, and like the authors of the Yetzirah, the *Alohim Tzevaot* are cabbalists. They try to manipulate the cacophony in other ways, though, and for other ends. All that we need know is that it is blasphemy, Arvi – make no mistake.”

Arvi took a long, mental breath, and thought of the characters featured on the front of the group’s glossy brochure: the wildly grinning, gangling, cavorting caricatures out of some cut scene from Fiddler on the Roof. Their fringes and side-locks flying, they had instantly fired his imagination. As figures of fun and frivolity, and with strong cultural roots, they had been perfect for his boy’s party – ideal.

What was he to make of them now?



**T**he first of three portents came the moment Arvi and his son left the Schule. It was innocuous enough at first: a black dog standing at the Schule’s gate, quietly looking in at them. Try as he might, he couldn’t recollect what breed it was, or even what it looked like in any great detail, other than the simple description that always sprang to mind – that and the deathly stillness of its pose as it watched them fixedly, its black eyes gleaming in the dim winter light.

But a series of strange realisations had dawned on Arvi by then.

The first strangeness came with the certain knowledge that

while the beast would not willingly cross the threshold, nothing said or done by them – or anyone for that matter – would or could move the creature, either. It was the original immovable object; an adamantine sculpture of impersonal malevolence.

The second strangeness came with the equally certain knowledge that it was waiting there for them. . .

At that, the dog abruptly left – just as though it had read his mind – sharply turning away from the gate in one elegantly fluid and frighteningly fast motion, after which it trotted out of sight.

It took them both several moments to gather themselves.

Arvi ran to the gate to catch a final glimpse of the dog. A fruitless mission, as he knew from the moment he tried to look for it, it would be gone – and so it had, vanishing so completely that for a moment he wondered whether they had actually seen it at all.

It was a sign of some kind, of that he had no doubt, though paradoxically he had no idea of what. For a moment he considered heading back inside to ask the Rabbi, but almost as quickly discounted that for a particularly bad idea. The man was clearly suffering from considerable strain. To burden him with a thing like this would be an unnecessary cruelty.



The second sign came the very next day, while Arvi was waiting for his morning train. The sky was leaden, threatening yet another day of heavy snow. As he stood on the platform in his usual place, feeling the chill wind at his back and the familiar peppering sensation of not-quite-cold-enough snow, something made him pause: an odd pricking sensation, like the onset of heavy lightning.

He looked up.

Directly across from the platform where he was standing grew a snow-laden tree. It sprang thickly from the ground, a low, twisted trunk peppered with gnarls and whorls that rapidly broke into a sequence of strangely twisting branches that snaked upwards, entwined about each other in the oddest illusion of slow, waving, weaving motion.

Two things struck him about the tree that morning.

The first was an overwhelming sense of Pareidolia: the seeing of patterns in the random or meaningless. Like the images of human faces, animals or objects in clouds. He remembered reading about the phenomena as he watched the tree. Angels seen in the cumulus over battle fields; the English Longbow men seen over the cloud-covered trenches during World War One; the famous images within the gaseous clouds of the Eagle Nebula, where, among a variety of other things, people even thought they saw the face of Christ. Of course, they had seen none of those things.

Only, the thing peering out at him now was no animal, and it was most certainly not Jesus.

Staring at him from the branches was a huge and strangely leering, cat-like face. Evil, upward-sloping eyes set in a wedge-shaped head and face, the thing perfectly framed by a complex of creases, wrinkles, furrows and folds that ran into a hideously be-fanged mouth. The imagery created by the tree's branches was picture perfect with not a line out of place, just like the product of some charcoal artist's expert strokes, only with the wintry-white train station backdrop as the canvas.

Adding powerfully to the illusion, the wind among the branches and the first swirling of snow were giving the impression of motion, as though the face was flexing and grimacing at him, and even as he watched, the mouth appeared to move, opening and closing, mouthing silent obscenities at him from the other side of the tracks.

That was when the second thing struck Arvi about the tree. After he had got over his initial shock, he finally recognised what had been bothering him so much – something that deeply bewildered and frightened him.

He could not recall ever seeing the tree before. . .

He watched it fixedly, appalled and fascinated by the impossible spectacle of a vast, perfectly drawn, cat-like visage pulling faces at him from a place that had, as far as he was concerned, been completely empty ground only the day before.

The arrival of his train startled him badly, the tree abruptly disappearing as, with a clattering roar, train carriages streamed

across his field of view and rapidly pulled to a stop. Stepping into the crowded carriage as soon as the doors sighed open, he quickly eased himself past the other passengers, moving over to the far windows so that he could watch the tree for a little longer.

Clearing condensation from a window with broad sweeps of his mitten glove, he could see the tree was still out there, still grimacing and flexing at him. And it stayed that way, as the train pulled out of the station, leering and smirking, until distance and the gathering snow finally hid it from sight.



The third sign came a week later, in a dream. It was a spectacularly normal dream, really, Arvi seated in his favourite chair in front of the television. Only, far from a favourite program, it was a twilight-zone-like, black-and-white image of his long dead father's face peering out at him from the tube, and, of course, there was also the fact that he had never, ever dreamed about his father before.

He was giving Arvi one of his long, reproachful looks.

"Is there a reason in particular you do not listen to the Raby?" his father said. Arvi noticed immediately that he had said Raby (pronounced 'ra-bee'), not Rabbi. And it struck him that his father knew very well the difference. It had been no slip of the tongue, either.

His father's image morphed suddenly, blurring and contorting as he moved, then returning to sharp focus. "It is said that *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, I am that I am, first taught the secrets of existence to the highest archangels – the inner council at the Almighty's Celestial Court. He gave them the Law of Creation, which came from the ten Sefirot, the Divine Attributes - the Manifestations of the Absolute." His father sighed. "*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* gave us simpler teachings. He is there to help you, Libling," he went on, using his favourite diminutive for his baby boy. "He knows what he's talking about." He was talking about the Rabi now, Arvi knew.

"It's ridiculous, Papa," Arvi said.

“What he tells you about the *Alohim Tzevaot* is not ridiculous, Libling. We hear things, you know. We *know* things now, where we are. You should listen.” He shook his head. “You *never* could listen.”

“They make music, Papa. They play tunes. What can be dangerous about music? It just doesn’t make sense for everyone to be getting so worked up about musicians.”

“You think the *Alohim* are mere musicians, Arvi? Is that what you think?” His father’s face grew abruptly larger, as he drew closer to whatever impossible camera was filming him now. “You listen to me now, Libling, like you never listened before. Musicians? Are you *mad*? The *Alohim* perform the sacred cacophony, boy.” His glowing, glycerine-bright eyes bored from the screen. “But more importantly, Arvi,” he said, wagging his head for emphasis, “they do not *like* us.”

Again with the ‘they do not like us’, Arvi thought. But his father’s words had given him pause for thought.

*What did it mean?*

“That’s what the Rabbi said.”

*Then again, this was only a dream. . .*

“Of course it is,” his father returned abruptly, turning his face at the same time so that his eye all but filled the screen.

“What the Rabbi said?” Arvi asked.

“No,” his dead father replied, “only a dream. And don’t you forget it.” His father paused then. He was making it obvious that he was thinking about something as he looked down, then away to his left, then back out at Arvi. “The *Alohim* have been waiting for you, Arvi. They’ve been waiting for you to ask them to perform. They’ve been waiting for a long, long time.”

“How do you know this, Papa?”

“The dead know *everything*, Libling,” he said, “now listen. The *Baal Shem Tov*, the First Drummer, will ask for more drummers – more drummers from among your chosen. Listen carefully!” he barked as Arvi’s attention started to wander. “He will ask you twice. The first time he asks, the drummers will strike the cacophony sixty times. The second time he asks, the drummers will strike one-hundred and twenty times. That is the time they will call The Fallen. The lesser lieutenants are always

summoned first,” his father said glumly, his gaze suddenly boring at Arvi from the screen. “The summoning is done. Then the *Alohim Tzevaot* and the *Baryoz* are one – and then *Andromael* goes free.”

Something dark touched at Arvi’s soul at the mention of that name: a cold pin-prick making lazy doodles deep within his viscera. He did not understand the sensation, but he certainly understood what had brought it on.

“Andromael?”

Even as he whispered the name, another dark thing flitted into his mind; extra little slivers of dread touching at the fringes of his soul as the thought winged its leathern way through his consciousness.

“What is the *Baryoz’vitmael*?” Arvi said.

His father glared at him, his features working furiously, the mere mention of the name producing a violent facial tick.

“An Earthly dwelling place, Libling,” his father said once he had regained control of himself, his eye all but filling the screen now. “For The Fallen.”

“A place?”

“A person, Libling,” his father said.

*A person?* Arvi thought. *Which person? Who? Was it anyone he knew?*

But his father didn’t answer.

He could not.

He had already gone.

Static filled the screen.



When Arvi eventually awoke, he was sitting in his favourite chair and the television was on.

Static filled the screen.

He smiled sleepily at the rapidly fading recollection, his father’s face and voice, fond memories of mannerisms and his way of speaking.

He shook his head at the bizarre dream; such strangeness lately.

He vaguely wondered what it all could mean.



Arvi watched the flower arrangers. It wasn't right. A Bar Mitzvah wasn't something one cut corners on – not if one could help it. It was his precious boy's coming of age, the light of his life's moment – possibly the boy's *only* moment – *in the sun*.

*I am that I am. . .*

The ceremony had been everything he'd expected.

Then again, the boy had been studying Parsha and practising for the D'var Torah for months.

He paused for a moment, his annoyance forgotten, recalling the image of his boy standing at the Bimah, his Tallit looking magnificent as it rested across his broad young shoulders. He had performed the ritual of the Aliyah perfectly then, reciting the blessing out loud without a single mistake. He had touched the tzitzit to the words as he read, kissing the fringes at just the right moments.

He had even remembered to hold the Eitz Chayim, just so.

And he had read perfectly:

“BA-RE-CHU ET A-DO-NAI HA-ME-VO-RACH. . .BA-RUCH A-DO-NAI HA-ME-VO-RACH L'O-LAM VA-ED. BA-RUCH A-TA A-DO-NAI, E-LO-HAY-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM, A-SHER BA-CHAR BA-NU MI-KOL HA-A-MIM V'NA-TAN LA-NU ET TO-RA-TO. BA-RUCH A-TA A-DO-NAI NO-TAYN HA-TO-RA.”

Then the Aliyah was completed and his darling son had finished reading the Tsa Avot.

His mitzvah was fulfilled.

The two of them put away the Torah together.

It was a moment he knew would live with him until the end of his days. Joy, pride, satisfaction at the sight of his gorgeous, darling boy: strong, tall, confident. He had even taken the trouble to return to their seats via a longer route than the one he had taken to ascend to the Bimah, signifying his reluctance to leave the Torah.

His boy was a man. A *Jewish* man.

*Life was good. . .*

Then, later, as the hour drew near for the guests to start arriving, the *Alohim Tzevaot* arrived to set up their drums, and everything changed.



Aarato was the first drummer he met. An elongated, stick-insect of a creature, he introduced himself with a flourish, his side locks flying as he bowed deeply, presenting Arvi with a vision of the most unusual Yarmulke he had ever seen.

It was black as jet, like lamp black, but even blacker. A perfect matt, if that was possible. It was almost like the man had a hole in the top of his head; a portal to nowhere, limned by the most fantastic, brilliant-scarlet calligraphy he had ever seen.

As Aarato bowed low in greeting, one arm held across his midriff and the other held out to his side like some bizarre, Semitic cavalier, Arvi caught a few of the strange words circling the man's skull:

*Come Ertael, Turel, Yomyael and Azazyel  
To dwell. . .Baryoz'vitmael*

Arvi froze.

The words had broken his dream.

At the same instant, Aarato, the Lead Drummer, looked up. His smile was more of a leer. Arvi could have sworn that the man had read his mind. In his eyes burned a knowing, as though he saw something in Arvi that he knew well: kindred souls on a road less travelled. Only, Arvi knew nothing of the path, while Aarato knew it all too well. . .

Then the man glanced away and the illusion was broken.

"We have come to perform," he said, his bow still held low.

Arvi, still in mild shock from the illusion of communication he thought he had just shared, nodded dumbly.

Aarato nodded in return, smiled again and stood up.

"You understand our fee?" he said.

Arvi thought back to the brochure, the colourful images, the

tariffs written in fine print. Something told Arvi, though, that this was not the price he was talking about.

“I read your brochure,” he said.

Aarato suddenly laughed, throwing his head back as he did so, and roared his mirth.

He stopped laughing just as abruptly.

“You understand,” he said, his face expressionless.

It was not a question.

For perhaps the first time, something finally dawned on Arvi: a glimmer, a voice whispering from the dark, the faint light of realisation.

*Be careful – be very careful. . .*

Arvi shook his head.

Before he could say a thing, though, Aarato had abruptly turned, performing a bizarre kind of Cossack roll, his arms whirling, his head snapping around through each full circle of his body, his eyes locked on Arvi as he spun away.

“Behold,” he announced at the top of his lungs, his voice booming, “the Drummers! Behold the *Alohim Tzevaot!*”

On cue, the troupe started to appear from the foyer door, spindly variations on Aarato’s theme: all long legs and gangling arms. As each appeared, fringes and side-locks flying, Aarato announced them with a shout and a thunderous clap of his hands. “Akiby!” he shrieked, his arms cart-wheeling in time to the new drummer’s motions before he clapped for the next new arrival, “Daniel! Ertie! Azkiel! Samsy! Ananov! And Yomyie!”

With each new name, a drummer spun into the room, arms outstretched and whirling as, Dervish-like, he did a rapid circuit and then took his place beside the others.

When the last of the *Alohim* had arrived, spinning his way to take his place beside his comrades, they all suddenly fell still, standing there in a row, bent in a half bow, watching Arvi and smiling gently.

They just watched each other then, the eight drummers and Arvi.

No one moved.

No one spoke.

The air between them became strangely animated and close, as though a heat haze had sprung up, shimmering and twisting, coursing serpentine eddies through vertical space like a visible force field.

Then Aarato pointed upwards, his ludicrously long and bony finger executing a quick series of figure eights as he gestured.

“Do you know what they mean, Arvi?” His finger stopped moving and started hovering, fixed in space, immovable, the foci of an entire universe. . .

Arvi looked up.



He was pointing at the Schule’s old sanctuary panels, carved into great slabs of ancient mahogany at the Tabernacle’s consecration over a century ago. Engraved on those panels, high up on the wall above the hall’s main doors, were the words from Pirkei Avot: *“The world stands on three things: on Torah, on Avodah, and on Gemilut Hasadim.”* Arvi thought about Aarato’s question. ‘Torah’ implied learning; ‘avodah’ the deepening prayer and spiritual life; ‘gemilut hasadim’ translated as ‘acts of loving kindness’, repairing the world through deeds

and volunteerism, and through tzeddakah. . .

“Of course,” Arvi said.

Aarato smiled at him. It was an odd smile, knowing, as though its wearer knew Arvi’s thoughts and equally understood just how truly wrong they were. The memory of Arvi’s father, the dream he had had, returned to him then like a flooded sluice gate had suddenly been opened, and he struggled not to reel from the shock of it:

. . . *The Alohim. . . they do not like us. . .*

And at that moment, Arvi knew that it was true.

Aarato looked at him as though he knew precisely what was in Arvi’s mind. “I believe your guests are arriving,” he said, breaking the strangely hypnotic spell. An odd expression flickered across his face then: mischievous, almost playful. His long, bony finger drifted outwards and upwards, waving lazily over Arvi’s left shoulder and towards the reception room’s doors.

It was then that Arvi realised two things.

The drummers – the *Alohim Tsevaot* – frightened him badly.

And his father – *his dream* – had been telling truth.



It was after the band had finally stopped playing Hava Nagila that the drummers finally took their places. Arvi and his wife had originally intended to have the drummers play last, but the caterer had convinced them otherwise. ‘Get it over with,’ the man had argued. ‘Then we can just clear them away and get on with the night’. In the end, they saw his point of view.

So when the drummers filed out in front of the guests, they were well warmed up from dancing the Horah.

Aarato kicked things off, inviting the young ones to come forward, seating all the excited children from Arvi’s boy’s Schule, smiling and nodding as he arranged them, tapping each child’s head three times, and then another three times as he gazed into each child’s eyes.

Then Aarato unveiled the drums.

They struck everyone immediately. Tall, carved from wood as

though they had been graven directly from tree trunks, each one was a little monstrosity. Faces leered from the rough-hewn trunks: crude, grimacing hobgoblins – mocking, sneering, gibbering. As roughly represented as they were, though, it was as if they were alive, their malevolent little eyes like bottomless black pits, peering out at Arvi and his horrified guests.

Arvi suddenly noticed that the band had stopped playing. Everyone was staring at the drums. . .

Aarato clapped his hands and let out a mighty shout: “Yahov!”

Blinking eyes abruptly looked up.

The spell was broken.

The band leader nodded at Arvi then, and turned slightly and nodded to the band. They started to play again.

“Now children,” Aarato called out as he started to pace, his body held low as he took long, exaggerated steps. He held up his finger, the digit looking longer, and somehow bonier. “Each time *Tsevaot* holds nine,” he announced, wagging his fingers while he goggled his eyes, “then let them speak, the drums of Andramelech.” He nodded encouragingly. “With each rise of mine!” he added, his finger pointing to the sky, then stabbing the air for emphasis.

In reply, the children struck their drums. . .

The air seemed to stand still as – after a virtually imperceptible delay, a fraction of a second after dozens of small arms lifted high and came slamming down in unison – a loud boom finally split the air. It was an ominous note, a barely subdued thunderclap that seemed to grow and grow, the vibrations rippling through the room.

The children looked at each other as the sound slowly, almost reluctantly, ebbed away, surprised and slightly frightened by the thing they had unleashed.

Aarato broke into a wild grin and glanced quickly at the other drummers. He nodded to one in particular, his mask dropping for a just a moment, his expression becoming serious just long enough for Arvi to see it. In reply, the drummer started a steady, slow beat. Everyone was watching Aarato now as he held up a long finger, then grinned wildly as the children’s arms lifted on high once more and came down as one, splitting the air with

another clap of barely contained thunder.

Then Aarato began stroking the air with his finger, the children dutifully keeping time, their eyes fixed on his long, gangling strides as he loped between them, grinning his grin, winking his wink, stroking his chin with his fingers and feigning a frown in mock admonishment when one of them lost the beat and struck their drum out of time.

Then the beat began to build, Aarato's finger stroking the air faster and faster. At the same time, the *Alohim* suddenly began to strike a strange, discordant tempo, their side locks flying as they wildly beat their drumheads, the percussions rapidly building as they chased the children's simple beat, the two skeins of sound weaving through each other in a strangely hypnotic web of rhythm.

Arvi jumped as a hand closed over his upper arm. The caterer stood behind him, gently tugging him in the direction of the kitchens. Reluctantly, he followed, watching the increasingly wild scene with horrid fascination.

They had been in the kitchen only a matter of minutes, discussing the mundane matter of serving orders, when his wife appeared at the door.

She was a strange sight. Arvi knew she was frightened.

"What is it?" he said.

"Sweetie – that Aarato man – wanted *more* drummers."

Arvi just looked at her for a moment, feeling quite sure he'd misheard. "More?" She didn't try to correct him.

"He said they wouldn't keep playing if they didn't have more."

"But they've got more than twenty of the children playing now," Arvi said. It was bizarre. What difference would one more person make? Or one less? What the hell were they even asking for?

"I know sweet," his wife said after watching his expression and reading his thoughts. "But *he* said he needed more – what was I to do? He was *very* insistent – scary, actually. I don't like him at all."

From the other room, someone screamed.

A familiar whisper, gentle but insistent, drifted into Arvi's mind.

*. . .He will ask twice. . .*

*. . .The first time he asks, the drummers will strike sixty times. . .*

Arvi found himself counting as time stood still. How many times? He had no idea how many times the children had struck their drums!

He turned as fresh screams broke out, and started for the kitchen doors.

*. . .The second time he asks, the drummers will strike one-hundred and twenty times. . .*

The *second* time, Arvi thought, as the screams suddenly grew louder: blood-curdling, terrified.

How many times had they struck the drums?

How many times?

*. . .That is the time they will call The Fallen. . .*

Arvi burst through the doors and into the main room.

Transformed from the bright and colour-filled place he had just left, now it was pitch dark, lit only by the light spilling in from the kitchen. Directly ahead he could see the figures of his guests, hunkered down on the floor, cowering beneath upraised arms. A few glanced fearfully at him, the light from the kitchen reflected eerily in their eyes, like amber orbs captured by a flash bulb.

Terror was etched in their faces.

For a moment, he struggled to understand what they were all cowering from.

Then he saw them.

*. . .The lesser lieutenants are always summoned first. . .*

Buried in the gloom, a dozen or more columns of even deeper darkness towered over the room. Little more than outlines, the figures were gently swaying from side to side. Distinctly humanoid, each outline was also markedly different. One was a mass of sharp angles and points, the jagged silhouette surmounted by a beaked helmet. Another appeared skeleton-thin, a vast pair of wings slowly furling and unfurling at its back. Another seemed to be wearing armour, like an ancient Roman, only more elaborate.

A feeling of utter despair engulfed Arvi then, as he looked

from one towering figure to the next.

Of the drummers, the *Alohim Tesvaot*, he could see no sign.

The tickling whisper from back of mind, returned:

...*The summoning is done.*...

...*Then the Alohim Tzevaot and the Baryoz are one – and then Andromael goes free.*...

Arvi froze, terror gripping his chest with icy claws. In the same instant he remembered: the dog; the leering, grimacing face he'd seen in the tree; his father's warning from a dream.

In the same moment he realised they'd been signs. Warnings he'd failed to heed.

...*The Alohim have been waiting for you, Arvi. They've been waiting for you to ask them to perform.*...

His father's warning, clear and unmistakable. That was when Arvi finally realised what it had been leading to, what the portents had been saying.

What was it his father had said about it?

...*An Earthly dwelling place, Libling. for The Fallen.*...

The moment he recalled the words Arvi finally knew.

The earthly dwelling place for The Fallen was *him*.

Arvi was the *Baryoz'vitmael*...

"Hello, Arvi."

Arvi peered into the gloom, terrified, searching the cowering figures of his guests, then the towering columns of swaying darkness. Deep, gravely, rattling from lungs that sounded a century old, he heard laughter then – ugly, heartless, cold, like a rock slide of razor-edged flint.

"He was right, you know," the voice said. "We *have* been waiting for a long, long time."

"Are you...?"

"Andromael?" the voice finished the question for him.

A middling-sized figure stepped from the gloom.

The half-child's eyes glowed from the darkness, seemingly lit by the kitchen lights, but with a strange fire of their own, like a pair of star sapphires catching the light of far away torches guttering in a summer night breeze.

The blood froze in Arvi's veins.

*Wrong, wrong, wrong.*...

“Not *you*,” Arvi whispered, hoarse with horror.

His boy smiled back at him. “That’s right,” he said, as though recalling a fond memory of an old and harmless wickedness. “*He* warned you, didn’t he? That old *devil*.” The boy chuckled as he shook his head and grinned. “Or he tried to, at least,” he added as he wagged a finger at Arvi, and then winked conspiratorially. “And you didn’t listen. Don’t feel too bad, Arvi. No one *ever* listens. By then, no one can. The name has already been written, you see, in the book of the lake of fire, the inhabitants of the nameless void summoned as witness.” He shrugged grudgingly. “I suppose the old fool had to at least *try* –

“Where is my little boy!” Arvi screamed at it, incandescent fury blinding his terror.

His son lifted his arms, then let his hands travel down his front in two seeping arcs. “Here before you, Arvi,” he said innocently, eyes wide. “And,” he went on conversationally, taking a step closer, “for now, he remains quite unharmed.”

Arvi frowned. “How can he be *unharmed*? He is the *Baryoz’vitmael* – the *dwelling place*, for God’s sake!” he screamed at it. The *name* drifted into his mind unbidden then, like the first wafts of a truly bitter stench. “For *Andromael*,” he whispered.

The boy threw back his head and laughed. It was an ugly noise, barking, guttural. He abruptly dropped his head, eyes boring at Arvi as he peered darkly from beneath his eyebrows, blue fire lighting their depths. Then he made a face, puckering his chin and pursing his lips. “The fact is, you *didn’t* know what they meant, Arvi,” he said. “The words. The Pirkei Avot, man,” he said in reply to Arvi’s stunned silence. “Gemilut Hasadim? The tzeddakah?” He beamed when he saw recognition finally dawn in Arvi’s eyes.

The thing was talking about the old sanctuary panels that Aarato had pointed at and asked him about – the words: “*The world stands on three things: Torah, Avodah, and Gemilut Hasadim.*

*Acts of loving kindness?*

“What is kind or loving about *you*?” Arvi snarled.

“Now, now,” the thing now inhabiting his boy said reprovingly. “That is *precisely* what I mean.” The thing’s grin broadened, teeth gleaming in the light from the kitchen. Had they grown sharper? Sprouted points? He was seeing things – he *had* to be. . .

It ran a quick tongue over distinctly pointed teeth, peering at him with gleaming, fire-sapphire eyes. “You should have listened to the Rabi.”

Arvi started to shake his head as he tried to blot out what was happening, to reject this thing for the abomination it was. *Should he pray now, is that what he should do?*

“But you didn’t,” it gravelled at him. “Instead you *paid*, Arvi. *You* paid the *Alohim*, as you were written to do. And the *Alohim* bought me, as *they* were written to do.” It laughed again, almost hysterically this time. “When you think about it that way, it really *does* make us partners, Arvi.” It was taunting him now, openly revelling in his exquisite suffering, anguish and guilt. Then it shrugged. “Don’t take it personally, though. Not even the Fathers of your precious Talmud could talk their way out of this one. Well, think about it. *Think*, man. What are you going to do? Hurt your boy? *Hurt your loved ones?*”

A flash of light caught Arvi’s eye: a reflection from the kitchen, captured in the huge glass chiffonier against the far wall. Inside, he caught just the briefest of glimpses of his wife, cringing in terror as something huge, dark and horrible advanced on her, its wicked, flickering talons shining in the lights of the Bay Marie.

It started to laugh again as it watched Arvi slowly sink to his knees, its eyes glittering with delight.

“Now that I’m here, Arvi – what *are* you going to do?”

The drums of Andramelech Andromael