

FALLEN ANGELS 5!

The background of the cover features two muscular, winged figures. On the left, a figure with vibrant red wings and short, wavy purple hair is shown from the waist up, wearing black shorts. On the right, a figure with large, feathered blue wings and short, wavy blonde hair is shown from the waist up, also wearing black shorts. They are both shirtless and are embracing each other in a close, intimate pose. The figure with red wings has their arms around the figure with blue wings, who is looking towards the viewer.

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Lords of Deception

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Fallen Angels 5: Lords of Deception

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Fallen Angels 5

Lords of Deception

By Auburnimp

Fallen Angels 5 — Lords of Deception

Raphael, Archangel of Air, paced the large living room of Samael's New York City apartment like a caged tiger, waiting impatiently for the Angel of Death to return from his meeting with his brother, Nathaniel.

He was still uneasy about the whole situation and kept checking on Daniel, their still sleeping mortal lover. The auburn-haired boy seemed fine so he resumed his pacing until the sound of the elevator arriving sent him in the direction of the hallway.

Samael stepped out of the elevator, expression grim, black eyes flashing with anger. "Is Daniel all right?"

Raphael nodded. "I keep checking on him but he's still fast asleep. What did Nathaniel want, Sam?"

Samael brushed past him without answering and headed for the kitchen. Raphael trailed behind, disturbed by Samael's bottled up rage. Samael started a pot of coffee and lit a cigarette

before answering. "I'd rather wait for Lucifer, Raph. I only want to discuss this once."

Not at all reassured by these words, Raphael nodded and returned to the living room to open the patio doors for Lucifer.

The Son of the Morning appeared almost immediately and the blond angel looked just as grim as Samael.

Seriously alarmed, Raphael closed the door behind him and indicated the kitchen with an inclination of his head. Lucifer nodded and made his way across the room to the door with Raphael trailing behind him.

Samael filled three mugs with freshly brewed coffee and leaned against the breakfast bar his dark gaze distant.

"So?" Raphael was going to go mad if one of them didn't tell him what had happened in Central Park.

Lucifer answered him. "Nathaniel wants to play divide and conquer by turning Sam against me and he knows about Daniel."

Raphael fled the kitchen and raced to the

bedroom to find Daniel still sleeping soundly. That's when it sank in. If the mortal meant so much to him already how much more he must mean to Samael after three years together? No wonder the Angel of Death was so enraged. He returned to the kitchen and picked up his coffee. "What did he say, Sam?"

Samael turned eyes filled with fury on him. "He asked how my little mortal was. Then, at the end, he warned me to keep him close. If he so much as touches Daniel..."

Lucifer held up a hand to silence Samael. "I'm not sure that he was threatening Daniel as much as warning you, Sam. It makes me wonder if he was being watched by someone other than me."

Raphael thought that through and decided that he didn't like the idea. "If he was, then he gave away Daniel's existence to them."

Lucifer shook his head. "I very much doubt that, Raph. Daniel's lived here for three years now. Do you honestly think Satan doesn't know about him?"

Samael glowered at the Lightbringer. “What has Satan to do with this?”

Lucifer took a sip of his coffee and studied Samael. “All you really heard was what Nathaniel said about Daniel. Perfectly understandable but it does mean you missed some other, more important parts of what Nathaniel had to say.” He turned to look at Raphael. “Let’s hope we can figure this out between us.”

Raphael nodded but frowned. “What exactly did Nathaniel say?”

Before answering, Lucifer carried his coffee into the sitting room and sat down. Raphael followed after him realising that this was likely to be a long conversation. He sat on the couch and waited expectantly.

Samael joined them after a moment and sat down next to Raphael, taking hold of one of his hands. “Let’s hope you can think us through this, Raph, because I’m too angry to make any sense of it right now.”

Raphael gave Samael’s hand an encouraging squeeze and waited for Lucifer to repeat the conversation with Nathaniel.

Lucifer took a deep breath. He seemed pensive and uneasy to Raphael and he wondered what it was about the conversation that had the Son of the Morning so uncomfortable. Finally Lucifer spoke.

“He started the conversation by asking after Daniel. It wasn’t done in a nice way, so it could be taken as either a threat or a warning. After that he went on to tell Samael about Andriel.”

When Lucifer stopped to light a cigarette, Raphael frowned and looked from Lucifer to Samael for answers. Nobody spoke so he asked the question anyway. “Andriel?”

Lucifer nodded. “Yes. Troilus was in reality one of the cherubim called Andriel.”

Things started making sense to Raphael with that revelation. “Then my guess was right.”

Lucifer sighed and nodded. “Yes, but there’s much more to it than that and you should know Andriel left Heaven last night. He’s now in my domain and that’s where he’s staying. But I digress. Nathaniel used both him and you, of course, as reasons for Sam to stop trusting me.”

Raphael sent a startled look at his lover who merely nodded, obviously still furious. "Did you stop trusting, Sam?"

Samael shrugged. "As I told Nathaniel, I almost did over you until I realised it would never have happened if we'd continued seeing each other. That was my fault, my stupid pride."

Raphael closed his eyes for a second in relief before asking, "So what happened next?"

Lucifer managed a short, humourless laugh. "Sam told Nathaniel that Troilus was entirely his own fault for not visiting me more often."

Samael sneered. "That's when he started talking about his duty so I told him he could do it just as well from here. He said something about not accepting recriminations from one of the Fallen so I called him a hypocrite."

Raphael winced. Nathaniel would not have taken that well. "You lost your temper with him?"

Samael shook his head. "Not quite. I took a deep breath and told him we didn't know each other anymore. Then I asked him again what he wanted. That's when he..."

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Samael clenched his fists obviously fighting for control so Raphael raised an eyebrow at Lucifer who sighed. “He referred to me as the Evil One.”

Raphael frowned at that. “So he really seems to believe it.”

Lucifer snorted in derision. “It was Nathaniel who first saddled me with that. Andriel told me so earlier.”

Raphael took a sip of his coffee with a calmness he was far from feeling. “I can see I spent too much time away from Heaven after all. I had no idea Nathaniel would be that petty. I would have thought it was Metatron that started all that nonsense.”

Lucifer shook his head and raised a hand. “Hold on a moment, Raph, it gets worse. Samael told him he was confusing me with Satan but he just said that Satan didn’t hide behind a veneer of goodness like I do. Then with a last warning to keep Daniel close, he left.”

Raphael stared at Lucifer in shock. “He defended Satan yet refers to you as the Evil One?”

But Satan doesn't have the strength to sway Nathaniel anymore than I do."

"Not by force, no," Lucifer said.

Raphael was silent while he thought all of this through. Michael and Gabriel seemingly had been swayed over the centuries to think of the fallen as demons and it had come as a shock to both of them to find they'd been lied to. Or had they been? Had it been more insidious a change than that? "Either Satan, or more probably, Asmodeus could slowly sway thought. If they swayed Nathaniel then the effect would snowball quicker."

Lucifer actually smiled. "I really did miss you, Raph. You always were able to get straight to the heart of a problem."

Raphael waved that aside. "That's all very well, Luke, but how was Nathaniel swayed in the first place and what was he doing when he wasn't in Heaven?"

Lucifer nodded, his expression grim. "And his disappearances were happening for a lot longer than I expected. Andriel was sent to seduce

me by Metatron who believed I was the reason Nathaniel spent so much time away.”

Samael growled, “Interfering bastard,” causing Raphael to chuckle for a moment before becoming serious once more. “So it looks as if Metatron is being led by the nose as much as the rest of Heaven. And that means Satan wants Heaven at our throats so he can attack from the rear.”

“Yes,” Lucifer agreed, “and this has been going on for centuries. The big question is how long do we have before Metatron decides he can get rid of us?”

Raphael nodded absently as he thought over all that he’d been told. “This was set in motion centuries ago and progressed very slowly, so slowly that nobody really noticed. Now, suddenly, everything is happening very rapidly. My trial, Ariel’s defection, Andriel turning up and Nathaniel wanting to talk, all happened within the space of days. We’re left playing catch up. I need to speak to my brothers, Luke, and soon.”

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Lucifer nodded. "I agree. Until we know whether they will back Metatron in any stupidity, our hands are pretty much tied."

Raphael frowned as he thought about his Heavenly brothers. "I take it as a good sign that Gabriel went to see Uriel and saw the truth about Beliel while he was there. And Michael's reaction to seeing you and Sam unchanged means it knocked some cobwebs loose in his head."

Samael stirred and sat up, brushing his black hair out of his eyes. "Luke, have you spoken to Ariel since he asked to stay?"

Lucifer buried his head in his hands. "To my shame, Sam, I have not. Too much has been happening. I'll rectify that omission today while Raphael talks to his brothers."

Raphael nodded his agreement. "I'll call them at first light. At least we know that Uriel will fight Satan. I wish someone could get through to Metatron that he's being led by the nose."

Samael's eyes widened and his hand tightened on Raphael's. "Think carefully, Raph, was Sandalphon at your trial?"

Raphael reached back in his mind and

mentally surveyed the host assembled for his trial. “No.”

“Then I think one of us needs to contact him. He is Metatron’s twin after all, and should be able to talk some sense into him. If he’s prepared to listen to me, that is, he might not.”

Raphael considered that for a moment. “Sandalphon was always the more reasonable of the two and, as far as I know, has always referred to you as the Fallen, not the Damned, or Evil Ones. He should listen, at least.”

Samael sighed and shook his head. “I hope you’re right, Raph. And having listened, let’s hope he takes it in and restrains his idiot brother.”

Raphael squeezed Samael’s hand again, wondering if they had the time to get the truth as they saw it across to the Heavenly angels.



Satan picked his way through the fiery abyss that was the Pit, listening to the screams of tormented souls. As the one-time judge of Heaven, the noise soothed some deep, almost

forgotten part of him. Another part had the sense to realise that the punishment was being meted out by demons and, so far, he had very little control over them. Asmodeus was the only creature in the pit who answered to him; the rest came under their Demon Prince, Arioch. That would have to change.

It was Arioch that he was on his way to see, having just received the letter from Lucifer. There was absolutely no point in the fool disguising his demons as mortal politicians and destroying the human race in a nuclear Armageddon. Without the humans, there was nobody to rule over. Besides, Satan still had a certain amount of respect for Samael, who would have his hide if he allowed any interference in the dark angel's jurisdiction over life and death. If he could just get Arioch to see that for himself they might get all that they wanted and more.

He came to a halt in front of a heavy iron door and used the attached knocker to announce his presence. A melodious voice called for him to enter and he opened the door onto a cavern like room with no windows and flaming torches in

the walls providing the only light. “Greetings, Lord Ariocho.”

Ariocho was a large demon, towering head and shoulders above Satan, who was not short. The demon also had almost twice his bulk. He could be taken for a very handsome man if it were not for his cherry red skin and the dark, leathery wings that sprouted from his shoulders. Add to that horns and a tail and he was very obviously a demon.

The main difference between Ariocho and the rest of his kind, apart from his size was his natural leadership and undoubted intelligence.

He looked up from whatever it was he was doing, which appeared to involve a dark crystal, and gave Satan a look. “What do *you* want? I’m busy.”

Satan twitched at the contempt in the demon’s tone. One day he would get rid of this obstruction. One day he, Satan, would rule the Pit. “Lucifer has discovered the demons disguised as politicians and has threatened to destroy any that we send to Earth. He wrote me a damned officious note about it!”

And that had rankled. Lucifer might treat him as if he was responsible for all that happened in the Pit, but he wasn't. The creature in front of him had all the power and should be the one to deal with Lucifer. To his surprise, Arioch laughed. "Did he now? Well much good it will do him. I've set my secret weapon in motion and it should cause even more confusion in the ranks of the Fallen."

Satan frowned at that news. He knew nothing of any secret weapons and felt that he should. "Your secret weapon?"

Arioch chuckled, a sound so evil it made the hair on the back of Satan's neck stand on end. "Yes, and he seems to be relishing his task. Keep Heaven and the Fallen at each others' throats and we can defeat both sides easily."

Satan wasn't so certain such a thing could be accomplished, much as he might wish it to be. "I did explain the Heavenly hierarchy to you and the divisions of power. Lucifer was the First and Samael is also one of the Three."

Arioch made a dismissive gesture. "Yes, yes, I

know all that. But they're not as strong as you seem to think they are. They're too weighed down with emotions and morals and Metatron's games to be as powerful as I am."

Satan wondered about that, not for the first time. If the angels had simply come into being with the Universe, where had the demons come from? Had they simply willed themselves into existence too? If they had, then Arioch was just as powerful as Lucifer but with none of the Morningstar's hang-ups. It was a terrifying thought.

Yet again, if I want to take over the running of the Pit, I can have no room for fear.

He frowned as he recognized what Arioch had said. "He? You said he."

Arioch smirked. "Yes, I did, didn't I? You're bright, Satan, you should be able to work it out for yourself."

Satan's frown deepened as he wondered who Arioch was using to get at Lucifer and his allies. Then he smiled as he realised who the demon must mean. "Of course," he said, "the perfect spy, trusted by them all."

Arioch's smirk grew until it was a singularly unpleasant expression. "You think so? Excellent! He'll work very well then."

Satan nodded but he was frowning. "As long as you're sure *you* can trust him."

Arioch lost the smirk and became thoughtful for a moment before smirking again. "Oh, yes, he's broken and cowed enough to be completely trustworthy."

Satan's frown deepened. "Ariel is cowed and broken? He doesn't look it."

Arioch shook his head, a gesture that conveyed both disbelief and sorrow at Satan's stupidity and he found it infuriating. "You see, Satan, this is why I rule the Pit and you do not. Not the pathetic messenger boy, fool. I've cowed someone far more powerful and useful, one of your vaunted Three, in fact."

Satan stared at the demon lord. "Nathaniel? He would never turn against Heaven!"

Arioch chuckled again. "But he would and

did turn against the Fallen and will thus turn the rest of Heaven against them.”

Satan thought about that and decided it made perfect sense as a plan, but how had Arioch brought one of the Three to heel? What inducements had he used? “How did you manage that?”

Arioch’s chuckle got louder. “I used you my dear Satan, I used you. Nathaniel has a lot of admiration for your honesty and lack of hypocrisy. He listens to your beguiling words.”

It finally sank in and Satan was not amused. “You disguised yourself as me?”

Arioch nodded and stretched. “Yes, Nathaniel and I had some long and interesting chats.” The demon’s demeanour changed in an instant. “So stay away from Nathaniel. I don’t want all that work undone by one of your slip ups.”

Almost spitting in silent fury, Satan left the demon lord to his dark crystal. He wanted the Pit, wanted the power but he still remembered the angels, Fallen or Heavenly, as his friends, his brethren. It had never been his intention to harm any of them.



Raphael walked swiftly through Central Park, looking for a spot where his two Heavenly brothers would be prepared to meet him. He had thought of going to Hades so all four of them could be together, but he doubted if Michael would agree to going there.

He finally found a promising copse of trees and pushed his way into the centre of them, the skirts of his trench coat brushing the undergrowth as he passed. He reached a small clearing in the centre and opened his mind. Then he called his brothers' names. *Michael, Gabriel.*

Raphael? Michael's mental voice sounded relieved.

Yes, it's me. Will you and Gabriel meet with me? I'm on neutral ground in Central Park, New York.

There was a shimmer in the air around him and his brothers stood before him. Michael with his warm honey eyes and violet hair stood head and shoulders taller than tiny Gabriel, whose blond curls were caught by the wind. The two were hand in hand, a sign of affection between

them that Raphael hadn't seen in centuries. Even more surprising was the fact that both of them were smiling at him.

Raphael took a step forward and hugged them both in turn. It was gratifying when they returned his hugs.

"We need to go elsewhere," Michael said quietly. "Earth is under a lot of scrutiny right now."

Raphael grimaced, it was hardly surprising. "Where do you suggest we go?"

Gabriel giggled. "The one place that everyone seems to overlook, Hades. Uriel is expecting us."

Raphael could have jumped for joy at the idea of the four of them being reunited for a short while, even under these circumstances, but contented himself with giving Michael and Gabriel another quick hug before all three of them translocated to Uriel's domain.

They arrived to find Uriel's gloomy Great Hall empty. Gabriel smiled and led them through some corridors until he reached Uriel's much more homey living room. Uriel and Beliel were waiting for them there. The Earth Archangel rose

to his feet to greet them and the usually reticent angel hugged each of them in turn. "It's good to see you all."

Beliel kept his distance, not leaving his seat. His green eyes were wary, distrustful. Raphael couldn't really blame the small green angel. For ten millennia Raphael had been the most frequent Heavenly visitor to Hades and those visits had only taken place every century or so.

They arranged themselves around the room, Beliel on Uriel's right, Raphael to his left and Michael and Gabriel across from him on the couch.

Uriel sat back in his chair, dark complexion serious. "You all know where I stand on any possible wars so I'll let the three of you do most of the talking."

Michael nodded his acknowledgement of the words and turned his attention to Raphael. "Until your trial, I would have taken up arms against any of the Fallen. I think you know this."

Raphael nodded. "With the belief that they'd all become demons that's hardly surprising. But

you know differently now.” He said no more, content for the moment to listen to whatever his brothers might have to say.

Gabriel smiled across at Beliel. “You were the clincher for me, Beliel. You may have left Heaven but you are still angels, still our kindred.”

Michael sighed and shook his head. “I just wish someone could convince Metatron and Nathaniel of that fact.”

Raphael closed his eyes on the mental anguish he was feeling, loathe to give his upright and loyal brother even more pain. “Nathaniel knows the truth. He was the one who named Lucifer the Evil One, yet he spoke to Samael last night.”

Gabriel’s eyes widened and he smiled. “You and Samael have found each other again!”

Raphael returned the smile and nodded but the emotional joy had to be cut short for now. “What do the two of you intend to do if Metatron and Nathaniel decide to go to war with us?”

Michael frowned. “Us?”

Raphael gazed at his brother, a hint of annoyance creeping its way into his mind at

just how obtuse the Fire Archangel could be at times. “Actually, Michael, when you stop to think about it, I’m the only true Fallen Angel. The others walked away. I was tried and thrown out of Heaven.”

Michael shifted uncomfortably and stared at the floor while Gabriel elbowed him in the ribs and Beliel laughed outright and said, “Good to have you aboard, Raphael!”

Uriel threw his lover a look that effectively silenced him before he said, “Raphael asked a fair question, Michael.”

Michael appeared to have an epiphany as he raised his head and gazed at each of them in turn. “I can’t and won’t take up arms against my brothers, any of my brothers, Fallen or not.”

Raphael heaved a sigh of relief and saw the tiny Water Archangel do the same. “Finally,” Gabriel said and hugged Michael close.

Uriel visibly relaxed but his expression remained serious. “We are only four amongst millions. How do we prevent this war from happening at all?”

Raphael didn’t know whether to be amused or

annoyed when every face in the room turned to him as if he had the answer to Uriel's question. "We can't prevent a war but we can prevent it being angel against angel if we try. Samael is going to attempt to talk to Sandalphon in the hope that he can restrain his brother. The biggest problem is Nathaniel as none of us can be certain which side he's on."

The stares became confused and Gabriel voiced what they were obviously thinking. "Nathaniel will follow Metatron of course."

Raphael nodded even though he knew they'd missed the point entirely. "Yes he probably will. The question is why. Why did he name Lucifer the Evil One? Why did he threaten the mortal that Samael took under his wing? Why did he tell Samael that Satan was honest in what he'd become?"

Gabriel was the one nodding thoughtfully. "Add to all that the fact that he's away from Heaven for eons at a time and he becomes a real problem."

Beliel spoke up. "Will Sandalphon agree to speak to Samael?"

Uriel frowned. “He’s more reasonable than his brother but he does see Samael as one of the Fallen. If he does agree to a meeting he will listen at least.” He turned to study Michael. “So, if Metatron orders you to war against the Fallen, what will you do, Michael?”

Raphael shook his head. There was no point in Uriel putting their brother on the spot like that. “He will take up arms. We all will. We just need to make sure we’re all fighting the same enemy. If Sandalphon refuses to speak to Samael, we still need to persuade Metatron that the real threat comes from the Pit.”

Gabriel straightened up and took one of Michael’s hands between his. “If Sandalphon refuses to speak to Samael, I’ll speak to him. Those of us in Heaven have been blind to the situation for far too long. Certain truths need to be pointed out.”

Raphael felt even more tension leave his body. Even if Sandalphon refused Samael, he would listen to Gabriel. “Thank you, shrimp.”

Gabriel tried to look stern, failed and giggled instead. “Oh yes, I can see you’ve spent far too

much time with Lucifer. He can call me shrimp, you can't!"

Raphael chuckled. "Sorry, Gabriel, it was irresistible. I really am relieved that somebody will talk to Sandalphon."

Michael had been staring into space, a sure sign he was deep in thought, since Uriel had asked his question but now he answered it. "I will not take up arms against any of my brothers nor those they love." He gazed at Beliel as he spoke.

Raphael exchanged a surprised look with Uriel. Michael's answer had been deep and clever. It meant he couldn't raise arms against Beliel or Samael and as the Death Angel would be second in command of the Fallen in the event of a war it was a strong stand for Michael to take.

Michael was playing with Gabriel's hand and looking very uncomfortable. "I've been such a fool. I know you all consider me to be just a dumb warrior, but these last ten millennia I've been worse than dumb. Gabriel has tried to explain things to me and I've ignored him. I forced a trial that should never have happened

on Raphael and I've stayed away from Uriel. All this after pleading with you that the four of us should stay together. I'm so sorry." Tears were streaming down his cheeks by this time and Gabriel put his arms round his lover's neck and murmured soothingly into his ear.

Raphael rose to his feet and crossed the room to kneel by the side of the couch and put a hand out to his stricken brother. "We've all been fools, Michael, because we've all been very cleverly hoodwinked."

Every pair of eyes in the room focused on him again. He was about to tell them all that he didn't have all the answers when something occurred to him and his eyes widened. "Of course why didn't I see it?"

"See what, Raph?" Gabriel asked.

Raphael patted Michael's hand again as he answered. "I have the feeling someone is getting too sure of themselves. They've been content to let this creeping malaise divide us all for millennia, but now everything is happening in the blink of an eye."

Uriel frowned and exchanged a glance with Beliel. “Unlike Satan to be hasty,” he remarked.

Raphael rose to his feet and started pacing. “Exactly,” he said, “and the same can be said for Asmodeus. Which means Satan isn’t behind the plan or in ultimate charge of the Pit.”

“So you think we’re dealing with a demon?” Gabriel asked.

Raphael nodded but he was still deep in thought. Until Lucifer and the others had left Heaven, the angels had not even known of the existence of demons. Even now they knew very little about them or their ultimate purpose. They seemed to want a return to the original chaos that the angels had tamed and Nathaniel had used to create life but Raphael wondered if they wanted even more than that, if they wanted to destroy all life. “I’m almost certain of it.”

“I’ll tell Sandalphon that, also,” Gabriel said. He glanced around the room at them all. “We need to meet more often, whatever happens with the Pit. If we’d trusted each other more and spent more time together, we might have been able to prevent a lot of this from ever happening.”

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Beliel's green eyes narrowed. "Uriel's home has always been open to you all, but only Raphael ever visited regularly."

Gabriel bowed his head. "I know, Beliel, and I am deeply sorry for ignoring Uriel for so long."

Beliel was obviously about to say more but Uriel held up his hand for silence. "I left Heaven for very selfish reasons. I wanted to be with Beliel but I'd given my word to my brothers. So I created Hades so we could meet without either of us having to break faith. It seems to me now that something pushed me into creating this domain and ensuring that nobody, neither angel nor demon, can penetrate it without my permission. I appear to have created the perfect meeting place. Feel free to use it as you wish, my brothers."

Raphael smiled at Uriel. "You have provided us with exactly what we needed, a place, somewhere to plan without being observed. Thank you Uriel."

Beliel glanced around the room at each of the brothers in turn. "You listened to Lucifer being described as the Evil One when you should have known better," he said, "so let us hope that this

place can bring the machinations of the Lords of Deception to an end. *All* of the Lords of Deception.”



Michael was still distraught when he and Gabriel returned to the Heavenly plane. He had been so blind, so easily manipulated by both Heaven in the form of Metatron and seemingly by the denizens of the Pit also. He strode towards his quarters, intending to lock himself away for a while and to think without interruption or influence. Unfortunately for this plan, Gabriel had other ideas.

“It’s no use hiding away and brooding, Michael,” he said as he tried to keep up with his tall lover. “We don’t have the time for that. I need to find out if Sandalphon actually met with Samael and we need to make some decisions on what we should do if Metatron decides to go to war with Lucifer.”

Michael stopped to stare down at his tiny love. “If it hadn’t been for my stupidity we wouldn’t have to make any decisions at all.”

Gabriel placed both hands on his hips and stamped his foot. "Don't be ridiculous, of course we would. The only difference would be that our brothers would have been amongst the Fallen from the start."

Michael stared down at the pretty Water Archangel a frown on his face. "Why did they leave Heaven, Gabriel? Was it something that I said or did?"

Gabriel stood on tiptoe and pulled Michael's head down for a kiss. "Stoopid," he said endearingly. "Metatron pretending he was in charge was why they left. Uriel built Hades to be closer to Beliel without breaking his word to you. And Raphael..."

"Raphael should have gone with them. I know that much, I know what Samael's pain and anger made him do."

Gabriel glanced around. The long colonnaded walk was empty but he still raised his fingers to Michael's lips. "Not here. Let's get to our quarters first."

Michael nodded and took one of Gabriel's

hands in his as they continued on their way. He wasn't convinced that he'd done the right thing by his brothers, even with Gabriel's soothing words and the fact that Raphael and Uriel were still speaking to him at all. His tiny lover was brighter than he was, though, and had probably worked out their next moves already.

They reached the quarters they shared, an airy space open to a lovely garden with a tinkling fountain at its centre. There was a bed and some billowing silk dividers hanging from the lofty ceiling, a dresser and closet for their clothes and that was it. They ate and sat in the garden.

Gabriel led him to the bed rather than the garden and Michael sat down on the edge of it and drew Gabriel close until the smaller angel was resting against Michael's inner thigh.

Michael gazed at his lover, wanting to talk about their problems but also wanting to make love to the adorable Water Archangel.

Gabriel smiled back at him. "Later," he promised. "I want you to think about something first."

Michael sighed mournfully. The last thing

he wanted to do right now was to think. It was thinking that had got them into this mess in the first place. But he knew Gabriel well enough to know there was no point in trying to start anything until his lover had said what he wanted to say. "I'm listening."

Gabriel's smile widened. "Consider this. If Uriel and Raphael had gone with the Fallen ten millennia ago we would never have discovered the lies that we've been told. We would have believed them all to be demons and would have fought them without question. Although the way it happened was more painful for our brothers, it was for the best in the long run."

Michael thought about that for a few minutes. "So you think I did the right thing when I persuaded them to stay?"

Gabriel nodded. "Yes. I'll go further than that. I believe none of us had any real choice in our actions at that time."

Michael frowned at his lover. "Whatever makes you say that?"

Gabriel shifted until he was leaning against

Michael's chest, his blond curls tickling Michael's chin. "If we'd all stayed in Heaven, we would never have found out about the existence of demons, and would have been helpless to combat them when they attacked us. They will attack, Michael, especially if they see us fighting amongst ourselves. But that's not nearly as bad as if we'd known nothing about them. We were so innocent back then."

Michael lifted Gabriel onto his lap and held him close, breathing in the sweet scent of his hair and skin. "So you're saying that Lucifer was right and we needed to look beyond the ends of our noses."

Gabriel snuggled closer. "Yes, but only in hindsight. At the time I couldn't see why he would want to bother. He wasn't nearly as excited by humanity as Nathaniel was and I think he only gave them the power of reason because Nathaniel wanted it for them. But something made him go and a good third of the host followed him without question. When you consider that Samael was one of those who wanted to go then it has to have been for something other than observing humanity from closer quarters."

Michael couldn't help the short bark of laughter that escaped his lips. "Of all of us Samael had the least time for humanity."

"Exactly, but he's more than strong enough to deal with any of the demons we've come across so far."

Michael grimaced. Samael had been both enthusiastic and inventive in his destruction of both demons and some of the worst of humanity. It was one of the reasons he had believed Metatron when he'd spoken of the Fallen's descent into the Abyss. "He's become cruel and sadistic and yet... he's still Samael, not a demon lord."

Gabriel rewarded that remark with a kiss and Michael forgot their problems for a while as he wholeheartedly returned the gesture. When Gabriel pulled away he almost whimpered in his frustration and glared at his teasing lover. Gabriel just smiled sweetly and began talking again. "And you don't want to fight him any more than you want to fight Raphael."

Michael's shoulders slumped in defeat. "Well, no, of course not but will I have any choice in the matter?"

Gabriel smiled gently at him. "There is always choice, Michael." Then he was being kissed again.

This time Gabriel didn't break it off and Michael leaned back on the bed, taking his lover with him.

Michael never ceased to be amazed by just how much strength and pleasure there was all wrapped up in the neat little package called Gabriel. What his lover lacked in stature he more than made up for in both skill and emotion and Michael was the lucky angel that Gabriel had given his heart to.

He let Gabriel take the lead in their lovemaking, knowing that any false moves on his part would have them straight back to discussing the situation they were in rather than making love and he was not prepared to give up this pleasure and think about Metatron's likely reaction to his decision not to take up arms against the Fallen. So Michael stayed still and let Gabriel run his hands over his body and wing ridges, closing his eyes to better savour the pleasure coursing through him.

"Well, of course, if you're not interested..."

The hands on his wing ridges stilled and Michael opened his eyes to find Gabriel grinning down at him.

“Of course I’m interested! I was seriously enjoying that.”

Gabriel’s grin became almost impossibly bigger. “What about my enjoyment?”

Michael grimaced, feeling somewhat abashed at his selfishness. “I’m sorry, Gabriel.” He immediately set about proving just how sorry he was by running his hands up and down Gabriel’s sides before thumbing his lover’s nipples.

Gabriel nodded hard enough to make his curls shake. “That’s more like it.”

Michael smiled up at him. “You’re such a tease. You know that, don’t you?”

Gabriel’s eyes widened until he looked almost ridiculously innocent. “Who me?”

Michael chuckled. “Yes, you, you little handful.” He was about to say more on the subject but was prevented from doing so by a kiss that took his breath away. He held Gabriel close

as he returned the kiss, gently parting his lover's lips so he could slip his questing tongue into the sweet warmth of his mouth.

Gabriel moaned low in his throat and writhed against Michael, proving his pleasure at their lovemaking. Michael's hands held onto the small angel's hips as he ground his hips up to press their erections together. Both of them groaned in pleasure at the sensation.

"I love you so much," Michael whispered, "but I almost destroyed what we have with my pigheadedness."

Gabriel placed a finger on Michael's lips and shook his head. "No, you didn't. You had me irritated and annoyed for a long time but I don't think I'll ever stop loving you."

A great weight seemed to lift from Michael's shoulders at his lover's words. "I don't deserve you."

Gabriel's grin returned. "Now we're thinking along the same lines!"

Michael stared for a second, trying to come to terms with his lover's distorted sense of humour.

Then he wrestled Gabriel onto his back. “You little tease.”

Gabriel pouted. “I wanted to be the one on top this time.”

Michael mock glared at him. “I see how it is. I’ve let you get away with far too much over the eons and now you’re convinced you’re in charge!”

Gabriel gave him a look that said ‘what did you expect’ before saying completely straight faced, “Well we all know I’m the brains of this partnership while you just provide the rather attractive brawn.”

Michael spluttered in annoyance. Why did Gabriel always have to have the last word? He opened his mouth, about to give his lover a scathing retort when Gabriel shut him up by poking his tongue into Michael’s mouth and setting it to dance with his own.

The Water Archangel resumed his former perch astride Michael’s hips at some point during the passionate kiss they were sharing then pulled away to smirk down at Michael. “I’m getting

needy here, and we only have time for a quickie with all we still have to do.”

Michael rolled his eyes. He would never be the one in charge but being gently ruled by Gabriel wasn't such a terrible fate. There were worse possibilities. “So impatient,” he said with a smile as he reached under the pillow for the jar of lubricant they kept there.

Gabriel shook his head, sending his curls bouncing around his face. “No. You're the impatient one; I'm simply frustrated with the wait.”

Michael handed him the jar. “Then make yourself useful and stop whining,” he suggested.

Gabriel widened his eyes, all offended indignation. “I have to prepare myself?”

Michael grinned. “Well you are the one who's in such a hurry.”

Gabriel chuckled. “Point to you,” he conceded, “although I'm still about two billion ahead.”

Michael shrugged. “I stopped keeping count around a million or so years ago but I'm well aware just how far ahead you are.” He became

serious as he thought about their relationship. “I must bore you.”

Gabriel’s lovely eyes narrowed. “Stop that, Michael. I love you not *despite* who you are but because you *are* who you are.”

“But I’m slow and stupid.”

Gabriel shook his head once more. “No, you’re neither, not really. You just have a strong sense of duty and loyalty. We’ve all been misguided since Lucifer left Heaven.”

Michael sighed. “If he had stayed there would be no problem. He was more than capable of dealing with Metatron’s ambitions.”

Gabriel punched Michael’s chest lightly. “Why do you always start thinking these things through when we’re about to enjoy each other?”

Michael grimaced. “Sorry sweetheart.” He took the jar from Gabriel and opened it, smearing a good dollop of lube on his fingers. “I’m getting the idea that you want to be on top.”

Gabriel smiled. “I like it that way.”

Michael had the feeling his lover wasn’t just talking about sexual positions but let the remark

go. He wanted to bury himself in Gabriel's body, not start an argument with him, so he reached between Gabriel's legs and ran his lube coated fingers around the Water Archangel's tight little pucker, loosening the clenched muscles.

Gabriel gave a soft moan of appreciation and reached back to guide Michael's fingers into his body. Meanwhile he reached for the jar and scooped out enough lube to coat Michael's cock.

Michael started to gently stretch his lover but Gabriel had other ideas and impaled himself on his fingers, moving his hips up and down. "You really *are* hungry."

Gabriel gave him a bright and beautiful smile. "Always, for you."

Michael removed his fingers and positioned Gabriel over his cock. He grinned. "Ready when you are."

Gabriel chuckled. "Another good point to you." He slowly impaled himself on Michael's cock. "Make that two actually."

Michael chuckled and grabbed his lover's

hips to steady him. “If you say so, who am I to argue?”

Gabriel leaned forward to kiss him before lowering himself even further until Michael was buried up to his balls in tight, delicious heat. A slight shift in position had them both gasping in pleasure.

Michael resisted the urge to raise Gabriel up again, letting his lover set the pace. He did, however, buck his hips as a gentle reminder of his need.

Gabriel smiled and rose up slowly before letting himself sink back down. Michael groaned in appreciation. Slow and enticing or fast and frenetic, their lovemaking was always perfect.

Gabriel began to move more quickly, picking up the pace until he was gasping out his breath. Michael threw his head back and groaned as he fought to hold back his climax until Gabriel had come. He circled his lover’s beautifully formed cock with his hand and applied just a little pressure before pumping him.

Gabriel gave a small scream of bliss and the milky streamers of his pleasure spurted over

Michael's hand and belly. Michael groaned at the sight which was more than enough to send him over the edge and he released his seed deep into Gabriel's body with a sharp cry of total ecstasy. "So perfect!"

After a few minutes of recovery, Gabriel lifted his body off of Michael's softening cock and spread himself over the Fire Archangel's chest. Michael reached up to hug him close.

The afterglow was wonderful but his mind kept asking the same question over and over again. "Why did Lucifer walk away rather than take control of the situation?"

He didn't expect Gabriel to answer but he did. "I don't think he had any choice in the matter."

Michael frowned as he chewed that over. "But Lucifer is First, Fallen or not."

Gabriel nodded against his chest. "Yes, he's First and most powerful but who or what created him or the rest of us for that matter?"

Michael stared at the top of Gabriel's head.

“Are you saying that there is a higher power and that Metatron really is its voice?”

Gabriel twisted his neck until he was gazing up at Michael. “I’m saying something created us and probably the demons too. As for Metatron, for all I know he could be talking to himself.”

Michael wanted to be certain he understood this. “So whatever created us forced Lucifer to walk away?”

Gabriel nodded. “I just wish I knew why it wanted Nathaniel to stay.”

Michael sniffed. “That bit’s easy, to keep control of Heaven.”

Gabriel pushed himself up and frowned. “If it was control of Heaven and Metatron that was needed, better to have kept Samael behind. Nathaniel was never cut out for leadership.”

Michael frowned in his turn. “So whatever this being is, it’s manipulating us all.”

All Gabriel did was nod.



Daniel was getting very tired of being stuck in the apartment. He hadn't a clue what was going on but neither Samael nor Raphael would let him out of their sight, let alone out of the apartment. "Guys, I have to take some library books back today, unless you want to pay a huge fine."

Samael glowered at him. "We'll pay the fine or Raph can take the books back for you."

Daniel sighed irritably. "Yes, but I want to take more books out. I also want to know why you two are acting like a pair of demented nursemaids!"

Samael jumped to his feet and stalked towards the kitchen, obviously having no intention of answering the question, so Daniel turned to Raphael. "Well?"

Raphael shot Samael's retreating back a look of reproach before answering. "Nathaniel knows about you and told Samael to take special care of you."

Samael came to an abrupt halt. He turned and snarled at Raphael. "He didn't need to know that!"

Raphael rolled his eyes. “He’s not a child, Sam. If he’s going to be put under virtual house arrest he has the right to know the reason why.”

Daniel ignored the spat as he thought about the ramifications of what Raphael had said. “Did Nathaniel threaten me?”

“Not in so many words,” Samael admitted with a sigh. “What he said could be taken as a warning rather than a threat but either way get used to being with either Raphael or myself at all times.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake! You honestly believe he’s going to snatch me off a New York City street and drag me off to be held for ransom?”

Both angels looked away but not before Daniel had seen the worry and pain on their faces. “You *do* think that, don’t you?”

Samael continued towards the kitchen without answering and Daniel knew better than to disturb him when the Angel of Death was in this mood. He glanced at Raphael who was gazing at the carpet as if hoping to see the future in its tufts. “Tell me what it is that has you both so worried.”

Raphael took a deep breath and met Daniel's gaze. "We don't think you'd be held for ransom. We think you might be tortured or killed. Nathaniel seems to have become friendly with Satan and if he's joined forces with the demons we need to look at worst case scenarios."

Daniel felt his stomach give a terrified lurch and he sat down next to Raphael on the couch. He took hold of one of the angel's hands, noticing just how cold it was. "You really think they want to hurt me?"

Raphael shook his head and squeezed Daniel's hand reassuringly, even though his blue eyes were full of unshed tears. "Not for anything personal but as a way of hurting Samael so badly that he is unable to fight them."

Daniel swallowed hard, all anger gone in the face of these revelations. "So I'm to be one of the pawns in a cosmic game of chess?"

"That's about the size of it, yes," Raphael agreed. He smiled, the expression forced and a little crooked. "If you still want to go to the library, I'll go with you."

Daniel shook his head. “No, but if one of you could return the books I would be grateful. You’re right and I’m now too scared to set foot outside of the apartment.”

Raphael took hold of his shoulders and turned him so he was gazing into that gentle and beautiful face. “No. You need to be able to live as normally as you possibly can. You need to return your own books no matter what Sam says.” He smiled. “Besides, I want to see what the library has to offer.”

Samael returned with three mugs of coffee on a tray. “Are you preaching mutiny, Raph?”

“No, but as long as one of us is with him, Daniel has a right to leave the apartment.”

Daniel dared a glance at Samael. The final decision would be his no matter what Raphael said. The dark angel put the tray down on the coffee table and looked from Raphael to him and back again. “I suppose he does have that right. But one of us stays with him at all times while he’s out.”

Daniel frowned at Samael. “Will you stop talking about me as if I’m not sitting here? I

agree to one of you being with me at all times outside of the apartment as long as you give me some space when inside it.” His heart gave a lurch at the fathomless gaze Samael turned on him. It was the sort of expression that he hadn’t seen since he’d first known the Death Angel. The sort of expression that reminded Daniel just how powerful and dangerous Samael really was.

“Agreed.”

Daniel had been so mesmerised by Samael’s black eyes that he almost missed the softly spoken word. When it sank in he jumped off the couch and threw his arms round Samael’s neck. “Thank you.”

Samael disentangled himself and held Daniel at arm’s length. “Don’t thank me for making such a ridiculous decision. Even with us you are still in danger outside this apartment. Just remember that. You can trust no other angel apart from Lucifer and us.”

Daniel heard Raphael give a start behind him. “Sam?”

Samael glanced in Raphael’s direction. “There’s

too much happening much too quickly for me to be able to trust any of them.” He sat down in a chair and pulled Daniel down onto his lap. “I just wish I knew who’s pulling all our strings.”

Auburnimp

The pen name of Tracy Boyall. She is the author of two successful series *Fallen Angels* and *Sweepers* and the co-author of the *Dragonhope* books.

She has been writing since she was fifteen but it is only in recent years that she decided to see what publishers thought of her work. Her characters are always strong, feisty and often impetuous enough to get into dangerous situations rather like their creator.

She has recently become a partner in a e-publishing house, *Shadowfire Press*, where she is responsible for finances and customer service.

She has been a knife-thrower's target, an exotic dancer, a drummer, a homeless wanderer and many other things due to a desire to go wherever life takes her.

She now lives in a small house in a large English city with four resident cats and one frequent visitor.

She is female and has blue eyes; anything else is often subject to change without notice.

Links

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Book Excerpts

Following are some excerpts of other hot m/m erotic romance titles from Shadowfire Press.

If you enjoyed *Lords of Deception*, by Auburnimp, You might also like *Sweet Pet* by J. Applebee.

Geon is desperate to be free. Can Stephan's love release the shapeshifter from his cage?

Geon is a Shapeshifter, raised by humans, but kept like a pet. His new owner, Robert wants to use him for his own pleasure, and to entertain friends, but Geon dreams of a life beyond being Robert's personal sex toy.

As Christmas draws near, Geon escapes into the arms of a stranger named Stephan. Together they enjoy intense passionate encounters that leave both men hungry for more. However, Robert wants his pet back, and he thinks nothing of using force and blackmail to snatch the shifter away.

Stephan takes matters into his own hands

Book Excerpts

when he sets out to rescue his new lover from the clutches of the powerful man. He uses an innovative and sexually charged plan to make sure that when the New Year rolls around, Geon will be free forever.

Here is a short excerpt from *Sweet Pet* by J. Applebee

Geon answered him, by removing the large coat in a single shrug. Stephan looked at the garment as it lay around Geon's bare feet, and then he looked up, followed the sleek lines of Geon's legs, the powerful looking muscles of his thighs, the rigid cock that pointed right at him.

Stephan gulped at the sight. He returned his hands to Geon's cool skin, stroked up and down the other man's chest, and over the peaked points of his nipples. Geon gasped quietly, and arched up to Stephan's exploring fingers with a murmur of delight. The sound seemed to echo against Stephan's own frame, and he could feel himself begin to harden.

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“This is all kinds of wrong,” he murmured. “This shouldn’t be happening.”

“Just tell me how you feel.” Geon nuzzled the dark brown skin of Stephan’s neck, with hot breath, and he felt the other man stiffen with resistance before he finally spoke.

“Good, so good,” Stephan whispered, surprised at the hoarseness in his throat. “What does it feel like--when you change I mean, do you feel the fur coming out? Does it hurt?” Stephan asked with curiosity, and Geon chuckled lightly. He stroked a gentle path over Stephan’s backside, on the skin just above his thick leather belt.

“It’s ticklish; makes me want to rub myself all over,” Geon growled, and then ground his hips against Stephan.

“My bedroom’s upstairs,” he whispered.

Stephan climbed the stairs, not daring to look over his shoulder as he moved. He didn’t want to question what was real, and what was not.

As the door closed behind them, Stephan stepped out of his T-shirt and jeans. The warmth that had gathered now slipped away from him, and he was left feeling exposed and

totally vulnerable. Geon's arms were around him in moments, squeezing, and kneading the long muscles of his arms and his back. Each press of flesh released a soft moan of surrender, and Geon claimed that too. He crushed his lips on Stephan's own, parted the hungry mouth beneath, and sucked on the hesitant tongue inside.

Stephan felt the room tip as he fell backwards onto his small bed. He exhaled in a whoosh of forced breath as Geon landed on top of him, with those amazing green eyes open, drinking in the sight of him. All too soon the comforting weight disappeared as Geon lifted himself up on his knees and elbows. He bent his head and nipped at a spot on Stephan's throat, then lower to his collarbone. Tiny flickers of not-quite-pain sparked wherever Geon bit and Stephan could almost imagine the little red marks that would be left in his wake.

When Geon reached his purple-tinged cock, Stephan held himself rigidly, not daring to move. But Geon did not bite; he just made a low noise in his throat that reverberated against Stephan's balls. He swallowed him completely in a slow,

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wet gulp. When Geon withdrew, the empty dampness made Stephan want to howl with frustration. He felt his hands move to Geon's hair, but his new lover batted his hand away, and kept out of reach.

"Tell me what you want, Stephan," he purred.

A thousand different words battled on Stephan's tongue, and he mouthed soundlessly until a single expression escaped into the air.

"Please," he gasped, arching off the bed. "Please, Geon." He was shameless with desire; it had been longer than he wanted to admit since someone had done anything close to this with him. He looked up, and the evil smile on Geon's face made him want to snarl. Geon lowered his head once more, and sucked Stephan's dick in a noisy slurp. Geon's tongue was longer and more agile than any that Stephan had encountered before; it seemed to wrap itself around the length of his hardness, and pull on the core of his being, until he felt himself disappear into the depths of Geon's throat. Stephan jerked violently as he came with a muttered curse.

Book Excerpts

Or you might also enjoy *Plague Dance* by Michael Barnette.

A plague ravaged the world. Cory and Deshawn survived. But can they survive Roderik, the man who would be King?

After a mutated strain of Ebola ended the world as we know it, Staff Sergeant Deshawn Roberts finds himself alone and longing for companionship.

Cory Wilson, one time office worker, finds himself a captive of Roderick, King of the Lone Star Empire. It's a life of slavery worse than death, and Cory escapes to find himself on the run.

Brought together by chance, can these two men survive in the harsh reality of post Collapse America, and will they find the love they both crave?

Here is a short excerpt from *Plague Dance* by Michael Barnette

Book Excerpts

A torrent poured forth from the darkened sky, the pounding drops intermingled with the chattering sounds of hail against the windows. Bursts of lightning shattered the night, bright as explosions in an embattled city.

Deshawn Roberts stared out at the fury of nature, wondering who else might be out there witnessing the storm. Wondering if he might be the only one left after the outbreak of Ebola tore through the country leaving millions dead.

Millions that included almost everyone else on the base where he'd been stationed.

Other than himself he didn't know who else might have survived the pandemic that had swept the US— the entire world— and left more people dead than living.

The barracks where he'd lived with the rest of his platoon was empty, the rest of the men he'd liked, and those he'd tolerated were dead. Their mortal remains lay in the mass grave he'd managed to dig with a backhoe from a construction site, a subdivision that would never be finished.

There was no one left to do the work, and no one alive to buy the half finished houses anyway.

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Of the hundreds of people who'd lived at the base, he was the only one left.

Him alone with the echoing silence. He'd never understood that term, 'echoing silence' until he experienced the utter quiet of a place so devoid of life that seeing a bird made his heart fill with joy.

He braced his forearms against the window sill, stared out at the raging storm.

Lonely.

He craved the sound of a human voice. The camaraderie of other soldiers, of men he knew, missed, wished he could talk to one last time. Share a beer and off color jokes, stare at the TV and hear laughter and angry words exchanged.

To hear any voice break the plague of silence that ate at him day after day the way the plague of the body had eaten away at the people he knew until all that remained was the dust of the grave.

Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. The words mocked him. Taunted him with the promise of a release from loneliness he was unable to take.

A few others *had* survived, a couple men from

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a different platoon, one of the officers from his own command group. But they'd gone to find their families and no one had tried to prevent it. Not after captain Ferrel had killed himself in the bedroom of his home, surrounded by his Ebola murdered family. There wasn't much point in saying anything to them about duty or remaining to guard the base. Not after the government collapsed.

That's what the media had begun to call it in the last few struggling days of the United States. The Collapse. The end of civilization as everyone knew it. Even then the reports of warlords rising to power were coming in. Men— women too— carving out a niche in the plague shattered land.

He wondered if any of the men he'd known reached their homes. Wondered if they'd found anyone alive if they had.

Deshawn sighed, gaze riveted on the wild night, the storm torn riot beyond the glass and came to a decision.

At first light he would load up a Humvee with supplies and head out. There wasn't any reason to remain at the base, no one left to care what he

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did or whether he remained loyal to his oath as a soldier.

With no government he had no one left to be loyal *to*, so his oath meant less than the rain hammering the base.

Sooner or later other survivors would show up. Survivors he might not want to meet. People like the warlord types the last few newscasts he'd seen reported about. He'd heard a few radio broadcasts after that, the station running on a generator for a few days. The last disc-jockey left for hundreds of miles talking himself hoarse, passing on any information he received, broadcasting rumors about the self-proclaimed King of the Lone Star Empire. A king who the rumors said was some former military guy named Roderik who'd raised an army and sent them rampaging around the countryside capturing the few people alive. People he forced to work for him, women he turned into servants fit only to cook and clean, the prettiest ones forced into lives of slave prostitution.

Then the station went silent. Either out of fuel for the generator or silenced by one of

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the warlords. Deshawn didn't know and he'd probably never find out.

In the long run it hardly mattered.

The world had gone from a thriving global economy, from civilized high-tech and instant communication across the globe to a barbaric age of savagery in the span of less than a month.

There *were* some really bad customers out there, prowling the post-Collapse landscape. People he had no desire to meet. Nor any desire to join in their egomaniacal quest for power.

"Rain, rain go away," he murmured to himself before turning from the hammering of hail and rain to try and get some sleep.

Deshawn climbed out of his bunk the next morning, loaded up the Humvee and rolled out into the new world created by the Hand of Fate at a wink from Old Man Death.

You can buy *Sweet Pet* by J. Applebee and *Plague Dance* by Michael Barnette along with other fine m/m erotic romance and yaoi titles from:

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