



Gregory Horning

NOAH'S  
BOYS

IN THE CITY OF  
MOTHER EARTH

## *Noah's Boys in the City of Mother Earth*

How do you keep a positive outlook when the whole world is going off a cliff? In this classic adventure story for readers of all ages, an aged patriarch relates his thrilling experiences in the Last Days of the Old World, a time of decline and impending catastrophe.

A budding young inventor, Japheth's peaceful plans are shattered when calamities strike, and his life becomes filled with perplexing moral questions, conflicting desires, and a seemingly endless series of dangerous challenges. Bolstered by his solid upbringing at the feet of the patriarchs, a healthy sense of humor, and the support of his faithful brothers Shem and Ham, Japheth survives sudden disasters, resists seductive beauties, and narrowly escapes death from monstrous behemoths. When corrupt politicians betray their homeland, the sturdy brothers fight, but are taken as hostages to the powerful but doomed City of Mother Earth. Determined to do what is right, the brothers turn the deceitful propaganda of their captors against them, save a beautiful Adamite girl from savage Cainites, and chase assassins through the fabled Zoo. Despite their successes, dangers mount, and the brothers must finally choose between embracing the illicit pleasures of an evil world system and trusting the faith of their father.

Join Noah's boys as they live confidently, purposefully, and even have fun, despite the utter destruction looming over them.

# *Noah's Boys in the City of Mother Earth*

## *What Others Are Saying*

*"Noah's Boys – Because sometimes things end in catastrophe!" – S. Macbeth*

*"Finally! A Noah's story for adults!" --Enoch's Valley News*

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*Noah's Boys in the City of Mother Earth*  
*Or, Noah's Boys and the Dam Flood:*  
*Adventures in the Last Days*

*Gregory Horning*

Gregory Horning

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## *Book One: Noah's Boys in Enoch's Valley*

### *Chapter One: What Was It Like In The Old Days?*

“What was it like in the Old World when you were growing up, Grandpa? Did you know that disaster was coming, or how much time was left? Were all the people then so very bad? Did they try to corrupt you? How did you meet Grandma? Was it love at first sight? Will you tell us your adventures?”

I have been asked these questions many times. For many years, I could sit my grandchildren around me to answer their questions, spin tales and give sage advice; but now, with my family scattered over the face of the earth, writing is the only answer. I put it off for years, but I think the time has come to do it. For one reason, I have grown old, and must soon join my fathers, but there is something else. Many of my own children have abandoned the faith of the patriarchs, and are making poor life choices. I feel a special urgency to tell them my story.

Frankly, I am a realist. If our children insist on holding onto a stubborn, godless attitude, the society they build will soon be no better than the one that was destroyed. I only wish that when our Creator washed off the world, he had thoroughly washed off the human heart, as well: something in it always wants to choose evil. Unless mankind is somehow given a new heart, I fear even our fresh, clean New World will one day end in catastrophe, just like the Old, and for the same reasons. At the same time, I am confident, as was the patriarch Enoch, that for those who walk with him, our Maker will ultimately provide our story with the Perfectly Happy Ending, and set everything absolutely right.



So, what was it like in the Old Days? Well, as I have often told you, it was completely different from today. There was no scorched wasteland of dust and sand to the south, and no frigid expanse of snow and ice to the north. There were no thunderstorms, tornados, or hurricanes. Exploding volcanoes, earthquakes, and lightning bolts occurred, but were very rare. Mountains were not jagged masses of naked rock erupting out of sandy sea-bottoms. Instead, gentle slopes arose into softly rounded hills and mountains. The entire surface of the earth<sup>1</sup> was covered with a thick blanket of rich black soil, and carpeted with dense vegetation and great forests. The whole world was lush and green, and filled with life.

The sky was deep blue then, and shimmering, as though it were all filled up. There was no ocean, of course; and it had never rained: but water was everywhere. Clean and clear, it bubbled up in springs and burst out of the ground every morning in heavy sprays and mists, nurturing rich woodlands and meadows. There were no harsh summers or winters. The seasons were always mild. We harvested two or three crops a year, and the fruits, vegetables, and grains were more delicious and satisfying than anything we can grow in today's thin, weak soil. I could weep when I remember the taste of my mother's cooked potatoes, so nutty and wholesome! But potatoes just don't grow like that anymore.

And animals? Why, every kind of creature, whether bird, fish, or reptile, whether plant eater or meat eater, teemed everywhere, and in far greater variety than today! The climate was altogether perfect. Plants and animals--and even some people--grew very, very big. The Old Days were the days of the Great Behemoths<sup>2</sup> and the Mighty Men of Renown. Even people came in wide variety: some were big, some were small, and some had spots or stripes. The earth was filled with

people. Instead of the isolated little villages we have today, there were vast cities spreading out with millions of people: it was hard to find privacy! People grew more slowly then, and lived many times longer than they do today. Sometimes as many as five or six generations lived together. It was a wonderful thing to have the knowledge and guidance of the old patriarchs, and we treated them with great respect and honor.

Father was a preacher by calling, but a builder by trade, with a large construction business in town. We lived on a plantation in Patriarch's Plateau, above the Hiddekel River—the original Hiddekel River—in an agricultural district known as Enoch's Valley, right on the edge of the wilderness. Wilderness areas at that time were getting smaller and smaller as the population expanded, so we considered ourselves lucky to have wide areas to explore, and room to grow up.

We had vineyards, vegetable gardens, grain and bean fields, and pastures for milk cows and sheep. Beyond the pastures were groves of fruit trees, including orange, guava, breadfruit, apple, and papaya. And we had mangoes, too--my favorite--as well as stands of coconut and date palms, bananas, and walnut, pecan, macadamia, and other nut trees.

Our plantation was guarded by strong natural defenses. That suited father fine, especially after all he had gone through in his early life. Our stronghold stood on the edge of a great cliff overlooking the Hiddekel, and it was fortified with tall, thick walls and a tower. The tower, along with father's showcase barn, was easily seen from the river, which was good advertising for his business. The only way to or from our plantation was from the south, along a narrow road through a dangerous swampy jungle. The north and west sides of our plantation were protected by a dense forest of gopherwood

that ascended into the vast wilderness of the Doubtful Mountains, an area notorious for gigantic, terrifying predators. They were called the Doubtful Mountains for good reason: if you ever found yourself in them, it was doubtful you would ever get out.

Now, the forest is worth telling you more about, because it was much of the reason we were protected for so long. The gopherwood trees had not always guarded the forest, we were told. In fact, they had only begun to take over a few decades before we were born, when father inherited the property. By the time we came along, however, the gopherwood forest formed an impassable hedge around the plantation, almost like it was planted just for that purpose.

Gopherwood may be rare today, but it was plentiful then, and father prized its tall, straight, strong lumber. As you know, the trunks are covered with long, stiff thorns; but the gashercut bushes that always grew around them were far worse. Their branches were thin, razor-sharp, and springy, like whips; and they dripped a poisonous sap that could turn a little scratch into hours of torment. We could not pay workers enough to clear out those bushes, and father finally stopped trying. Maybe that was just as well, because the gopherwood forest kept trespassers out, both human and beast. On occasion, though, a sabertooth, a bear, or perhaps a small behemoth would slip through and carry off a sheep, so we never left our compound unarmed. On quiet afternoons at the creek we could often hear deep roars and desperate shrieks in the distance. That gave us the shivers. We were very glad for our gopherwood hedge.

The three of us had a long, happy, and mostly carefree childhood. Time seemed to stretch on and on, and we saw no special rush to grow up. Each morning we awoke to a day that

was fresh and clean, and filled with all kinds of possibilities. Enthusiasm pulsed through our veins: there was so much to see and do, and we were eager to do it! We had chores to do, of course; and we had schoolwork, for we were expected to learn reading, scribing, history, mathematics, geography, music, and lots of other things.

Our family had a special calling from the Creator, father told us: to save people. While he went on preaching trips, we made our own preparations for that calling. We learned about swimming rescues, fire safety, and first aid, and self-defense. It is very hard to save others, Uncle Krulak told us, if you are weak and defenseless. So he made sure we weren't. We had rigorous physical training, and diligently practiced at arms.

We grew up largely isolated from what our parents described as the hazards and temptations of the world of men. We could imagine the dangers of living among lawless people. Occasionally, we heard about the wild mobs that formed in cities, and our elders told us about Cainites, of course. Identified by their tiger stripes, Cainites were plunderers and looters. Just like packs of wolves, gatherings of Cainites were prone to slip into a wild rage. When that happened, they would kill and destroy until nothing was left. Temptations were a little harder to picture at our tender age. Our elders made sure, however, that we knew about the dangers of strong spirits, gambling, and idolatry. As we grew older, they hinted that "womanizing" was another ruinous temptation. We had no idea what that was.

While most of the week we stayed on the plantation, a day or two before each Sabbath we traveled down to Jared's Mill for worship meetings, lessons, and various events. Our elders tutored us, and offered us insights into the challenges of life. Sometimes we even asked for them, for as the patriarch

cautioned, "Only a fool learns everything by personal experience." The years skipped by pleasantly as we acquired knowledge and developed skills, and we eventually entered the adolescent years, when we tackled the eternal question: what would we do when we grew up?

One day as I pondered that question, father gave me good advice. He said, "Do what you want to do!" What simple advice, yet how profound! Did I have any special gifts or useful skills? Of course! Then why wouldn't I want to employ them in a productive way? Perhaps a lazy or morally confused person might misunderstand; but for me, that simple bit of advice opened my eyes. Suddenly, I knew I wanted to be an inventor! A weight fell from my heart. I felt free and full of energy, and I saw the world in a fresh new way.

Outside of my own life, however, there was a big world, one filled with violence, crime, and continual evil. Things had gotten so bad, the patriarchs warned, that our Creator had found it intolerable. I believed them, but it was hard to picture that the Maker might actually step in to do something dramatic.

Anyway, time finally brought us to the threshold of adulthood. Powerful juices now flowed through our veins, bringing new desires and ambitions. We felt eager to accomplish great things and experience thrilling adventures. In fact, we even planned them all out. We had yet to learn the ancient proverb: "Man's heart may plan his way, but his Maker determines his steps<sup>3</sup>."

True adventures, we were about to find, often begin unexpectedly. And they are sometimes disguised as disasters. Oh, we had many exciting adventures in those Last Days; but I think they really all began one day at the creek, when the simple test of an invention turned into a dam catastrophe.

## *Noah's Boys in the City of Mother Earth*

<sup>1</sup>*Editor's Note:* The text here indicates a round fruit like a pomegranate. The numerous apparent anachronisms, and the many seemingly modern concepts quite baffled the translator.

<sup>2</sup>*Editor's Note:* The term behemoth is apparently a transliteration of the original language, here very similar to ancient Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup>*Editor's Note:* The manuscript contains a number of such adages, which are reminiscent of the proverbs in the Bible. Man has apparently always struggled to acquire a perspective on life.

## *Chapter Two: One Day At The Creek*

My invention was a pump powered by the flow of the stream itself, and I had great hopes for a successful test. Uncle Nebach and Uncle Lemuel had both liked the design, and had even promised to manufacture and sell it, if it actually worked. Having earnings was a happy thought; but I confess I had another motivation. How many students came to the renowned School of Tubal-Cain with an invention already in production?

Despite a full week of hard physical labor, when we got to the creek that day, our dam still measured less than the full six cubits<sup>1</sup> required: we needed more rocks. As it turned out, finishing the dam took more work than I had thought. By the end of the morning, we were drenched with sweat and nearly exhausted, but the dam was finished, except for attaching the sleeve pipe. Unfortunately, just when I needed his muscle the most, my youngest brother had to leave. The birds were not singing right, he said. That could mean a serious threat. Now to me, the birds were making their usual racket; but since Ham understood birds, I had to trust his judgment.

I sighed, but I was determined to finish the job alone if necessary. Mother had often said I was like a snapping turtle: I always got submerged in my work, and once I bit onto something, I never let go. Fortunately, my faithful brother Shem had a helpful, uncomplaining disposition, and he assured me the two of us could do it. After we carried the heavy piece of bronze over, we took a breath, braced our feet, and began to wrestle it into place. At just that moment, a loud voice startled us.

“Prepare to die, Adamites!”

I lost my grip on the sleeve pipe. It clanged onto the rock, nearly crushing my foot, and bounced off into the water.

“Judgment is here!” the voice shouted. “You were warned to flee from the wrath to come, and now you are too late!”

I looked up. A sturdy broad-shouldered soldier stood on top of our dam, dramatically silhouetted in the sun. He held a shield in one hand, and a spear in the other. I was alarmed. Shem and I were completely unarmed, and far away from help. And where was Ham? My heart pounded. The soldier’s face lay in the shade of a wide turtle shell helmet. Metal rings on his stout armored breastplate held a sword and various pieces of gear, while a skirt of overlapping leather plates protected his upper legs. His feet, however, had strong leather moccasins much like our own.

“Why were you not prepared?” the soldier demanded harshly. “You were warned that these were the Last Days! And now destruction has come—by the hands of a cruel enemy! Doom! Doom! Doom!!”

As the soldier continued his rant, gesturing dramatically with his spear, my shock began to subside. Shem coughed, a sound he often made before laughing, and I looked more carefully. Dark hair curled out from around the soldier’s helmet, which was emblazoned with a circled trillium. That symbol indicated devotion to the Creator God of the patriarchs, and it was just like the one on my own cap. Then I noticed a pair of monkeys chattering and jumping around the soldier. They gave the whole caper away. This was no enemy: it was our prankster brother!

While relieved, I was still annoyed that I had been so easily frightened. Ham liked to have fun, and pulling stunts like this was his greatest pleasure. Ordinarily he targeted vain,



hypocritical people, but on rare occasions, he might decide to pick on gullible youths consumed by their work, though there were special risks in tricking brothers.

Ham's practical jokes often involved slimy worms, disgusting bugs, or animal droppings; sometimes they had a cruel edge. As a boy, he had always been cute enough to get away with his pranks. For a brief time, I had tried to imitate him, but I had quickly learned that what was darling for him only earned me scowls. In recent years, Ham had grown into a handsome young man with dark, romantic eyes and a winning smile; and he still got away with his pranks!

Having gained our attention, Ham continued his performance, affecting the serious manner of someone we knew very well.

"But, perhaps," he spoke gravely, but with twinkling eyes, "if you repent of your fornications, idolatries, and sins of every description, and ask for mercy, you may yet be saved. Otherwise, be sure that your sin has found you out! Behold! Even now, the ground opens its jaws to swallow you alive into the depths of hell! Turn back, or you will slip of your own weight, and..."

At that moment Ham lost his footing. Releasing his spear and shield, he flailed his arms wildly, but finally slipped and fell onto his rump. Shem and I grimaced, but Ham was uninjured, and soon offered us a humble smile. We could not help but laugh, but I had no intention of letting him off easily.

"Not a good time for a joke, Ham!" I said, as we helped him down. "Shem or I could have been seriously hurt."

"You needed a good fright, Japheth," Ham rebutted. "You have been driving us for days on this dam project. Anyway, I wanted to show you our new armor. With wars popping up

everywhere, and now piracy on the Hiddekel, the council of elders finally agreed to fund new gear for Valley Vigilance. What do you think? It is stronger and lighter; and it makes me look big and tough! See?" Ham beat on his breastplate with his fists, grunting like a bull ape. The monkeys shrieked and beat their own chests, too, and we laughed again.

"The armor looks great," I agreed. "And it is time they did something! All this bad news is affecting everyone—even me. Maybe that was why I was so jumpy. The other night I dreamed we were suddenly attacked. I wanted to fight, but it was dark, and I could not even move. When I awoke, I found our dog Tar sleeping on my chest, which explained part. The rest of the dream must have been due to all the upsetting news. Maybe if we start preparing, we will worry less, and feel better."

"I agree," Shem said. "Things have been so grim lately that people have lost their sense of humor. Still, you may want to stick to animal impressions for a while, Ham. Father is hurt that so few take him seriously. Every time he returns from a preaching trip, he laments that he must be the poorest prophet ever. He risks his life to warn the heathen, but they only laugh at him. Father doubts they would listen even if he brought Enoch back from heaven, or raised Adam from the grave!"

"Father has a great sense of humor!" Ham retorted. "He often pokes fun at himself, and loves to pop inflated egos. Remember Cousin Sharezer finding his hat all covered with bird droppings? Or Auntie Pelosah pouring worms into her cup? I got those ideas from father!" Shem and I chuckled, remembering their faces.

"Well," I said, "maybe I have been pushing too hard. But once we fasten this bronze sleeve pipe, we are done! We can

have lunch while the water rises. Remember: if this test is successful, we all win!"

My brothers finally consented. We fastened the pipe, closed the water gate, and climbed up the grassy knoll to enjoy mother's delicious lunch. I can still taste those cheese and potato-filled pastries, crunchy raw vegetables, and big, succulent fruits. Grapes then were the size of your fist, and strawberries were like apples! Once our bellies were happily filled, we stretched out to bask in the warm sun.

The three of us had spent countless days around that creek. It was the perfect place for swimming and playing, or simply catching frogs or turtles. Sometimes we pretended we were monkeys swinging from vines; other times we slid down the clay bank like otters, and splashed into the pond. We practiced fancy dives from the rock ledge, swam, shot with bow and arrow, and threw javelins and hammers. We daydreamed about glorious adventures, fantastic inventions, and hidden treasures of gold or precious jewels. Lately, we had imagined rescuing beautiful maidens of rare virtue.

"Hey!" Ham exclaimed. "See those black specks soaring above the ridge? I think those are death raptors! There must be three or four of them, too! We may have to organize a hunt."

Shem and I looked. They were death raptors, all right. We had helped clean out a nest of the ugly winged behemoths the previous summer. It had been exciting, but very dangerous. The giant predators had been terrorizing herds on the other side of the valley, carrying off sheep and cows. Something had to be done. A hunting party was organized, and we got permission to join. While the hunt was successful, several men had been injured. Now we had a new family of death raptors. We watched them circle slowly in the distant updrafts. Living

as we did on the very edge of the wilderness, we always had to be prepared to face snakes, leopards, or even carnivorous behemoths.

Our elders had taught us there were three types of evil in the world. The first was natural evil, like falling off a cliff or being gobbled by a behemoth. The second was moral evil, bad acts committed by wicked men. The third kind was supernatural evil, otherwise called "spiritual wickedness in high places." Whatever that was, it sounded scary. Now every time I looked up to the mountains, I thought about supernatural evil. Even today, watching the death raptors, I shivered.

"I don't need any more excitement, Ham," I answered. "I just want to test the pump, and enjoy being home. In just a few months, you know, I leave for Tubal." I took a deep breath. The air was filled with familiar scents: the fragrant flowers, the earthy smell of mud, and the fishy smell of water. A sweet, pungent smell of sour guavas wafted in from the old orchard, but the fresh breeze from the mountains soon blew it away. I heard the bright singing of nearby birds, and the busy droning of bees working the flowers. I lay back and sighed contentedly.

"We are lucky to live in Enoch's Valley!" I said. "We have a great plantation, healthy exercise, and plenty to eat. We have 'youth and vigor,' as the patriarch describes it, and even have leisure to think up inventions. I think I am happy!"

"Good for you!" Shem laughed. "Mother would approve. She says we should enjoy our blessings, and let the elders worry about the evil world system. Sure, there are wars and disasters far away; but we have our own jobs to attend to right here. When you go to school, Japheth, your job will be to pick the brains of your masters, and think up inventions. Before long, you will be rich, and can marry the girl of your dreams. I

suppose Ham and I will have to seek out our own fortunes someday, too. Ham, what will you do? Become an entertainer?"

"Something like that," Ham said, watching a large groundhog retreat from the rising water. It was leaving very deep tracks up the hillside. That surprised me. Why would there be mud so high above the water? Had we disturbed a spring?

"I plan to build a zoo someday," Ham continued, "and train animals to perform tricks for my shows. I told Cousin Zillai that last week. I said I wanted everyone to come, so I planned to let people in for free. Do you know what he told me? He said he personally liked the idea of free admission; but he thought people might appreciate my show even more--if they paid for it! I realized he was right. Now I intend to charge a stiff fee!"

"Good thinking!" Shem said, laughing again. "A zoo will be perfect for you! The patriarch always says we should follow our gifts, so you have to work with animals! Do you think your zoo will be like the Menagerie in Hercules City, or the Great Zoo of Mother Earth?"

"Mine will be far better!" Ham declared.

"What about you, Shem?" I asked. "You are so gifted in dealing with people! You could be a fine preacher; but father says preachers are mostly paid with headaches, and one must eat. What about being a merchant or a politician?"

"I don't know," Shem replied. "With you two gone, father will need help with his business. But Ham's stunt made me think. What if these really are the Last Days? Will we even have time to become inventors or zookeepers?"

"Do you really think it might be, with God unleashing terrible earthquakes, wars, and catastrophes?" Ham asked eagerly. "That would be exciting! Maybe I shouldn't say this, but I think it might be kind of fun to see a disaster someday – as long as we could safely return home."

"Do you think so?" Shem laughed. "The elders tell us we have enjoyed supernatural protection; but father says we cannot count on it much longer. Despite having had the patriarchs to guide us, he thinks many people still have no heart for the things of God. He would not be surprised to see us get a little taste of divine judgment ourselves."

"Well, Uncle Krulak thinks our divine protection is going away," Ham said. "He says that the strangers all swarming in these days are bringing their crime with them, and now Valley Vigilance has to deal with it. At this rate, he says, Enoch's Valley will soon be no safer than the places those people came from!"

"It would be different if the newcomers embraced our faith," Shem said, sharing a glance with Ham. "Some have; but I wonder about others. For example, I know one family that worships with us sometimes, but I see no signs that their heart is in it. To me, their son acts more like a Cainite than a believer; and I even wonder about his pretty sister."

I was puzzled for a moment; but I finally realized that he meant Aziza, and unconsciously flushed. Why did he have to bring her up? That girl bothered me, though I kept thinking about her. While certain thoughts and urges were considered normal at my age, Aziza seemed to have some sort of spell over me. Yet how could I admit that to my brothers?

"She likes me, guys," I said, "so she cannot be all bad, despite her brother. If I rejected her without a good reason, it

would hurt her feelings. And you have to admit, she is as pretty as a papaya!"

"And ripening nicely, too!" Ham said, whinnying like a horse. "Watch out, Japheth. She is laying out a trap when she flaunts her feminine equipment. Last week I saw her rub up against you like a cat! Remember the proverb: 'When a mare is in heat, the stallion is dead meat.'"

"That is so vulgar, Ham," I said, turning red. "People are not animals!"

What were my brothers thinking? That I was infatuated? Maybe I was. When Aziza had moved to Enoch's Valley, I was not the first one to notice her beauty. She had a gorgeous face with emerald green eyes; and her figure had all the swellings and curves that I had recently begun to notice. She was athletic, too, and her smooth, springy walk reminded me of a cheetah, though cheetahs did not wiggle like that. Aziza had instantly become popular. Her talk was smart and a little crude; but she was at the same time totally charming. Her accent fascinated me, and evoked images of exotic, faraway lands.

But there were warning bells. Sandal, her older brother, was strong and athletic. Annoyingly, pretty girls found him handsome. He had a short temper, was a bully, and seemed to hold a special resentment against our family. Someday, I expected we would have to settle things.

Aziza's mother was known as a great beauty, though she was somewhat of a mystery, and always veiled in public. Aziza's father Shahoot was a wealthy merchant, and so popular among the newcomers that he had promptly been elected an elder in the council. Still, father had reservations about him. For one thing, no one could figure out why

Shahoot had even moved to Enoch's Valley. It was not because of religious persecution, and certainly not because of economic distress. He was probably not fleeing the hand of justice, either, because he always liked to be seen.

Aziza had been amused at my interest. She began to tease me and ask me to fetch things while she joked and laughed with her girlfriends. She deliberately flirted with me, too, using coy smiles, flattery, and winks. I was drawn to her, though I sometimes wondered if her affection was real.

"Maybe you are right," I admitted. "She looks at me as though I were a spring sheep; but I have no wool! Why would she have an interest in me?"

"I wonder that myself," Shem said frankly. "Aziza is beautiful, talented and ambitious. Her family is very worldly, with both wealth and connections. I cannot imagine her marrying a quiet inventor like you, living on a sleepy plantation, and raising babies. She must have plans, but I cannot imagine how you fit in. On the other hand, maybe she is just dazzled by your good looks!"

I had not even thought about her motives. I had just been flattered to be noticed! Shem understood people, and he thought of such things. But this discussion was getting painful. I stood up, stretched, and looked around. No dangers that I could see. The water was rising pretty quickly: we could test the pump soon. Finally, I thought of something to change the subject.

"The race," I said eagerly. "Let's talk about the patriarch's race. I think we can win this year! We were so close last time!"

Ham was poking into the mud at the edge of the water with a stick, but now he turned around.



“Cush thinks we should win this year, if the race is honest,” Ham said. “Both our teams have gotten better since we started training together. Sure: Sandal’s team is good; but we could have beaten him last year, and maybe even the year before that, except for all those pesky accidents!”

“What are you getting at?” I asked, frowning.

Ham’s eyes narrowed. “The broken steps to the climbing wall, the shredded ropes on the water swing, the loose wheels on both our carts: those are way too many accidents! Cush thinks Sandal has been cheating since his first race, and I agree. The more we know about him, the less we trust him.”

“But do you have any evidence?” Shem asked. “That is a serious accusation. His father is an elder in the council, and the most prominent newcomer in the valley. If we accuse his son, there will be trouble. We need certain proof.”

“We have no proof,” Ham admitted, “but this time Cush and I are going to take a few precautions. Let’s leave it at that.”

We did leave it at that, because at that very moment the ground began to rumble and shake. The trees swayed, and entire flocks suddenly took wing. Leaves, sticks, and feathers began to rain down. With time, I began to feel dizzy, but the movement finally slowed and disappeared altogether.

A low whistling sound came from the mountainside. It became louder, and rose in pitch. A small puff of air rustled the leaves, and all became quiet. Suddenly, a powerful wind slammed into us, as cold as ice. The force knocked us right to the ground, and practically sucked out our breath. The trees around us were pushed way over, with their leaves shredding. With branches and debris flying everywhere, we pressed our faces to the ground, and protected our eyes with our hands.

An eerie cascade of foreign emotions swept through me. I felt guilt and fear, injured pride and uncontrollable anger. It seemed crazy, but I felt as though some terrible criminal had just escaped, and was rushing out to seek revenge. The whole thing was scary enough to make my skin tingle. Thankfully, as the wind subsided, the strange emotions passed away, too. All that remained was an unpleasant smell of sulfur. We lay on the ground for a good while, but when the leaves and twigs stopped falling, we sat up.

“What was all that?” I gasped.

“I don’t know,” Shem replied, “but it sure was spooky!”

Later, we learned that everyone in Enoch’s Valley had experienced the earthquake and the eerie wind. Many speculated on what it meant, but at that moment I was convinced that some spiritual evil had occurred in a high place. I looked up at the sky. It was as blue as ever, and the death raptors were gone.

<sup>1</sup>*Editor’s Note:* The cubit, an ancient standard of measure, is the length of a man’s forearm, about 1.5 feet.

<sup>2</sup>*Editor’s Note:* Death raptors were apparently very large flying creatures, and considered a type of behemoth, as indicated later in the manuscript. Their description seems reminiscent of the extinct *Quetzalcoatlus*, while their behavior appears similar to the legendary Sanskrit or Arabian Roc, as in the tales of Sinbad.