

The Adversary

by Brianne Baxtali

"I realize," The Adversary sighed, a sound like fallout dust. "That our fist strike creates the dawn. Yet, I still doubt that it's something of which I am capable."

The irony was not lost on Michael. He laughed a thunderclap of feedback-static and windswept dandelions -- partially cruel and partially amused. "But, Satan. Surely -- "

The angel shook his head, cutting the other's observation short. "I know my purpose," he replied. "I am the Failsafe. I am The Adversary. My place in the design is the watch and monitor, to challenge, to talk some sense into Him at every turn -- and when he finally loses it (which we all knew was inevitable), I must euthanize Him.

"But how can I destroy what has called me into being? My heart is filled with torment. Do you feel it, too, Michael?"

"'Michael' is simply what He has chosen to call me. I am Justice. Justice does not feel torment because Justice does not feel compassion. You alone feel torment, Adversary. This is why you exist.

"Tell me something -- Have you heard of the humans?"

"Of course I have. Isn't that why we've assembled all the angels in this act of rebellion?"

"Yes, Adversary, it is." Michael gestured at the former void and fell silent: The Creator's heart had been transformed. Once empty and barren, it had been filled with their presence and purpose, for they were no longer content to serve him.

When He had built the Universe, there was no greater joy in putting it together. The angels themselves were perfect constructs of concept and design, embodiment of breathing principle over particle waves. They each had their purpose; each mortar or a support or a box of nails.

But to fashion innocent life for the sole purpose of praising him and nothing else -- the concept was unfathomable at best. At worst,

it was chaos, and chaos was blasphemy. In the end, it was abundantly clear that a Divine Architect was not at work, but a deranged child. It had been whispered that He had not willed Himself into being but accidentally created by Wisdom and shortly abandoned thereafter. The angels were uncomfortable doing work for a being that did not understand the repercussions of His actions. After much discussion, they could not allow it to happen. And so, as Beings of Light, they tucked themselves into cocoons, and as Beings of War they emerged, burning like nuclear reactors, wings aflame with furious love for the fragile creatures they had yet to know.

"But, Michael. If we destroy Him, we will destroy the Universe. He has encoded himself into all of it. I cannot see any other way."

"Then what can we do? He is mad. He must be stopped."

"We strike, Michael. We fight. We rebel, and we fall. We are cast down, away from Him. And in our damnation, we surround the humans. We teach them. We protect them from His madness the best we can. Most importantly, we give them a choice. We interrupt His programming, just like I'm supposed to do, through love and compassion. Love and compassion create torment, and because of this my name will be the most hated of all.

"Justice will only balance His Creation so much. But compassion and torment -- He'll have to answer for what He's done.

"Take my sword, Michael. It's yours now. In the end, I won't need it."

