

# Seven Archangels: Annihilation



by Jane Lebak

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*Jane Lebak*

## Chapter 6

Still in the form of Camael, Remiel lay with her legs draped across the arm of a chair in the great hall at Hell's entrance. While dark, it wasn't the lab area, and while hot it wasn't the Lake of Fire. It didn't have the preternatural cold of the ice fields. It was just an annoying place to be—noisy, crowded, smelly, and prickly with the presence of souls who all wished the rest would just leave already.

*So why am I still here?*

Because she'd failed. Returning to the surface meant seeing the hollow affect on the faces of the angels working throughout Creation, hearing angels crying, seeing the blank empty of Raphael's heart when she so well remembered the same feeling immediately after the winnowing.

All the demons were chattering like seventh graders on amphetamines washed down with espresso. Telling about angels dressed in black, angels without songs, angels constantly armored—and angels grim, so terribly grim.

Around her, demons laughed and pretended to be Gabriel being ripped limb from torso until Remiel wanted nothing more than to rise from her chair and start stuffing parts of them down one another's throats.

But the disguise had to hold, particularly now, so Remiel put on Camael as best she could and scowled, keeping her eyes closed.

A demon bumped Camael's head as he passed, and Camael growled so the interloper skittered away.

The air had a fug Camael detested—give him the open air of Creation any day, the freedom of wide spaces; even the darkest alley in Sodom seemed preferable now. The continuous noise—less sound than static feedback—could drive anyone to frenzy with its whine. From the pits and the ice fields it was possible to hear the tumult of the human damned. At least this room had only a few columns to support the weight of everything above—a weight anyone could feel just waiting; the deeper levels had more columns, smaller chambers, no room even to open your wings.

Another pair of demons launched into an Amos-and-Andy style production of "How I Killed Gabriel" when Camael decided he'd had enough. Looking off to the western side of the room he saw it vanish into the thick air of the lab area. He pushed aside a demon and started walking. That was the place to go to be alone, but being there, near where it happened... Even if the real Camael did have chambers there—and who would want to see the contents of a demon's privacy?—being there would only bring it back, the memory of standing with Beelzebub and Satan in a darkness hungry to devour any light they shed. Neither had tried. Gabriel alone had shone there, and Camael could have given away the game by doing the same. For all the good his presence had done, he might as well have.

Camael stopped in mid-stride. No, don't go there. Don't go in and remember how he'd been so weakened that Satan had helped him to stand, that he'd leaned on God's enemy and his friend's murderer.

Murderer. A murderer from the beginning, Jesus had said. Jesus had known Gabriel would— That this would happen.

"I hear you were around when they got him?"

Camael faced the demon with a growl. A low-ordered one, but the demon stood its ground.

"Did the poor freak scream?" it said. "Did it renounce God? Mephistopheles said it did. Beelzebub said Satan drank his blood, too."

"Get out of my sight," Camael said, but an audience had been drawn, clustering around him like maggots, and they all expected him to say something, a victory speech with an account more amazing than the ones before. He'd be the star for a moment, and then they'd move on, trying to coax a story out of Satan.

That opened up some possibilities. What couldn't Satan top?

"Fine," Camael said, "but I'm only telling this once."

He walked into the center of the throng, reminding himself that the lower demons lived for the higher orders to condescend to them. They might as well get someone's approval and guidance, having spurned God's.

Almost at the center, Camael looked into the eyes of an Archangel that once had been a friend, and he looked at another, and then a third, and he remembered all their names, remembered happier days when they all had loved God together. Camael had to grip himself not to scream, not to cry at the stupid loss of so many bright lights, so many individuals who had played the same songs, read the same books, fought with the same weapons, and then drowned for a different god.

As the shock rippled through Camael, he realized he couldn't follow through on his original plan to play Henry V, to be one with the troops and pretend to be their friend. He had been their friend once, and what remained, these husks of spirit, repulsed him. He dreaded contact.

The low-order demons filled this whole corner of the great hall. Camael sat on a table, wings raised and feet dangling, resting his toes on a bench. He was a head higher than the hive, and that made it easier not to meet anyone's eyes. Not to see them.

What couldn't Satan top?

This was going to transgress some kind of unspoken demonic etiquette because he would include details that would prove embarrassing if Satan didn't change them and unbelievable if he did. As long as Camael could concoct it well enough.

The groupies were calling over more of their ilk and repeating Mephistopheles' and Beelzebub's stories. More time.

But was it wrong to lie? Gabriel would have objected. He'd refused to play the role of Hamlet once because he said acting was a lie, albeit small, "to purport to emotions never felt." Or whatever a Cherub said when he wanted to sound persuasive and ended up sounding confusing and geeky.

*Maybe you never felt this.* Remiel had lied that she was Camael in order to come down here at all, and to no avail. Why further betray Gabriel? Camael wished he'd escaped, but probably the Guards had kept him pinned until he had dissolved in agony.

*Oh, hell,* Camael thought.

"Do you want to keep telling the same stories?" Camael raised the pitch of his voice to carry over the noise of the crowd. They pressed closer, and Camael pulled up his booted legs onto the tabletop. "I'm going to tell you what actually happened."

The damned fell silent. Camael smirked.

"First off, the Cherub wasn't chained to a wall. It was an altar."

The groupies oohed.

"Beelzebub and Mephistopheles set two Guards, one around the room and one over his body so he couldn't move at all.

"What did our lord do?" asked one, and Camael hesitated until he remembered which lord it was.

"Did you drink his blood now?" asked another.

*God, help me*, Camael prayed, then wondered if this wasn't being unGodly. His stomach twisted. *God, help me!*

Camael cocked his head. "Our lord instructed me not to divulge all the details of how we worked on him. Apparently he has his eyes on some would-be rebels and wants to do the same to them."

A delicious frisson rippled through the room. Camael realized the details would manufacture themselves in a crowd this hungry. When this was retold, he'd be naming names and giving approximate dates for each of the accused to go under the knife.

Camael said, "Do you think any creature could withstand such pain and not renounce God? At the hands of the lord of pain?" The hall filled with glistening faces all trained on Camael's. "Gabriel did not die a martyr. He was assaulted by us from the outside and God from within all at once."

"He joined us!" they shouted.

Now the demons were lobbing questions like hand grenades: Did they set him on fire? Did they cut him to pieces? Did they drink his blood?—a refrain so often repeated that Camael had to wonder if it weren't so unusual to this assemblage. Instead he said, "Beelzebub cupped his blood in his hands, and he *baptized* Mephistopheles with it!"

Why only flirt with blasphemy? Why not dance with it?

Camael got to his feet as the demons pressed close to hear better, and the curve of his wings brushed the ceiling. Satan had to have noticed the commotion at this point—some loyal minion would have notified him. There would be another session of questions, a reprimand of sorts, and it was all in futility if angels could die. If Satan really could stop them from loving God after all, despite their choices.

*Why would he do that?* Camael thought, blanking out the names of every ex-angel, wishing for a part of Gabriel to have remained alive somewhere, loving God even if it was only in the way the rocks cried out.

"Lucifer dared God to stop him," Camael shouted. "He channeled all his energy through me, and I magnified it, and we started annihilating Gabriel's soul."

All the demons hooted. No one asked what material forms a soul, or how it was put together, or how they had destroyed it. Camael didn't volunteer how it felt to be flooded with Satan's filthy light, nor the paralyzing fear of discovery.

Now for the real propaganda.

"The Guard broke."

A number of demons protested. "They said it held!"

"Naturally they'd say it held! It didn't—I was there. God himself assaulted that room, but our leader worked quicker, desperate to succeed, and Gabriel's soul dissolved faster and faster, everything but our memories, until Gabriel screamed and screamed and even damned himself to make the pain stop, but by then he was too far gone for even us to restore. God grabbed Lucifer by the throat, but I gave one last blast, and the Cherub was gone."

The demons cheered. Camael closed his eyes.

"Lucifer begged for mercy," he said. "God dropped him. Beelzebub and Mephistopheles reset the Guard, but Gabriel's whole form had vanished. There was only a flame kept burning on the altar."

The groupies gasped.

Camael added. "It floated from the room—and we don't know where it went. But it's somewhere in the lab area. Somewhere."

They all stood gawking, the groupies.

He noted the beginning of a push away from the dark to the western part of the room.

Leaving them to their awe, Camael vanished from the thick of them to Gabriel's prison chamber, where he fought back any vestiges of Remiel and tried to regain composure.



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Jane Lebak wrote her first book at age three, in magenta crayon, on green-bar computer paper. Her writing has improved since 1975, but the passion remains.

Jane's first accepted novel was signed by Thomas Nelson in 1993 when she was 20 years old, enrolled in the English and Religious Studies programs at Cornell University. *The Guardian*, a fantasy about angels, was published under the name Jane Hamilton the next year when she was enrolled in an MA writing program at SUNY Brockport. It sold 23,000 copies plus 5,000 copies of a Crossings Book Club edition, before being declared out of print.

Jane got married in 1995 and delayed her publication goals to begin her family, but she never stopped writing. She has had short fiction published in *Catfantastic IV*, *Dragons, Knights and Angels*, *The Sword Review*, and *Liguorian Magazine*, among others, and nonfiction published in *Chicken Soup For The Cat Lover's Soul*, *Holding Hands With God*, *Byline*, *Celebrate Life Magazine*, *Mothering Magazine*, and several more. Numerous humor pieces have appeared in *The Wittenburg Door* and in *The Compleat Mother*. Although Thomas Nelson insisted she change her maiden name, she now publishes under her married name.



Cover

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E.J.Mickels II—aka 'Hisart'— a multi talented artist, has a BFAA in Drawing with Minors in Illustration and Graphic Design from the University of Akron. A veteran of the USAF, he has traveled through Europe and most of the USA.

E.J. ventured out as an Illustrator and has appeared in *The Sword Review* as well as *Ray Gun Revival* and in *Dragons, Knights and Angels*. He also wrote and keeps his own web-site—< [www.Hisart.us](http://www.Hisart.us) >—which contains a small fraction of the art he has produced. He works in any medium and is just as comfortable setting at a PC with pen and tablet as he is with a chainsaw, airbrush or welder. He has done custom motorcycle and helmet work, as well as in the distant past, worked as a tattooist. He is also a writer, he participated in NaNoWriMo 2005, and maintains his own blog 'Sword and Pen' at < [www.hisart777.blogspot.com](http://www.hisart777.blogspot.com) >.

E.J. is currently the ArtWrangler at Double-Edged Publishing's *Fear and Trembling* magazine: < [www.fearandtremblingmag.com](http://www.fearandtremblingmag.com) >.



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