

# Seven Archangels: Annihilation



by Jane Lebak

# Seven Archangels: Annihilation

*Jane Lebak*

## Chapter 8

Raphael slow-danced through Uriel's house, singing the song of the Seraphim. *Holy, holy, holy*. Rocking Gabriel to the rise and rush of the song, he kept his head bowed and voice hushed, arms around the sling bundle made from one set of wings, another set cupped over him, the final one relaxed. The song lent itself to a waltz, but he didn't dance any formal step as much as he moved where it led.

A touch had transformed Gabriel's room into a greenhouse, windows for walls, windows for ceilings. The Angels Michael sent had summoned trees outside the windows and then birds for the trees, dragonflies for color, chipmunks and squirrels for warmth, a stream for vitality. They didn't omit any detail they could think of trying to make it more pleasant.

The birdsong wasn't enough, though, nor the rustling of the trees, so Raphael had listened for his choir's ever-present song, and he sang too.

Every so often Gabriel shifted, but only a little, just enough to be comfortable. It was something.

When Raphael made his way back into the transformed room, he found Jesus there, and he inclined his head with a smile.

"You need a break," Jesus said.

"I'm fine."

"Rapha'li."

Raphael said, "I'm not fine, but he needs me, and I'll cope as long as I'm helping him."

"That's more accurate, but not entirely." Jesus moved up behind him and stepped through the angel so he and Raphael were in exactly the same place. Raphael noted again how he and Jesus were the same height and build, but then Jesus said, "Now step out of the sling."

He froze.

"I'm not going to hurt him."

Raphael exhaled, then went insubstantial and stepped out of the sling so Gabriel was cuddled against Jesus's heart instead of his own.

Jesus had one arm around the bundle. "You need a break. I'll stay with him the whole time you're gone, but you need to recharge."

"Can't you just heal him?"

Jesus said, "I'm not going to abandon him, but I'm also not going to interfere."

Raphael said, "You can heal him if you will."

Jesus said, "Yes, I can."

Raphael looked him in the eyes. Jesus returned the look.

"Go." Jesus waved him off. "He'll need you to be strong when the time comes. And I'll need you to be thinking clearly."

Raphael indicated the amber healing glow around Gabriel. Jesus chuckled, and with a gesture, he detached the glow from Raphael and left it self-sustaining around Gabriel. "I made the universe," Jesus said. "I know how to provide for him."

Raphael vanished, reappearing on Earth.

A moment later, Jesus joined him, although not with Gabriel. This didn't strike Raphael as odd, since Jesus wasn't limited to a singularity of place. Jesus flagged over the three Angels Michael had sent to follow Raphael, and he assured them they could wait back at the bungalow, as he

would see to Raphael's safety himself. It amused Raphael that they argued they would stay anyhow, but only on the verge of sight, and Jesus laughingly agreed they could.

Raphael chose to visit a number of the angels under the umbrella of his command, all of whom asked how he was doing, gripped his hand, and conveyed an understanding that they knew how Gabriel was but were pretending he'd died in order to maintain Hell's ignorance. One at a time, Raphael met with guardian angels in charge of travel and transportation, his secondary purview. After helping an Archangel straighten out a snarl on the New York subway system, he moved on to checking his primary command, healing and health.

"You're right," he told Jesus between stops. "I needed to get out of there."

"What a surprise," Jesus said, and Raphael laughed as he spread his wings.

In a London hospital, a woman labored with her first baby. Raphael spoke to the guardians of the woman and her baby, who admitted to being at a loss. "It's hurting her," the woman's guardian said, "and her contractions are powerful, but she's not making any progress."

Raphael laid his hand on the woman as she rested between contractions, noting as he did the bright lights, the nurse with a studious expression as she regarded the monitors, the hovering new father. The baby felt safe for now, although Raphael made one quick adjustment and encouraged the baby to tuck his chin further. Then he felt the different energies flow through the mom as another contraction overtook her.

"There," Raphael said to her guardian. "Did you feel that?" The angel nodded but projected that he didn't know what it was he'd felt. "The uterus

is a basket-weave of muscles. The up and down ones are contracting to deliver the baby, making the uterus shorter. They don't have pain receptors."

The angel nodded. "Go on." The woman was resting again.

"The horizontal muscles are ordinarily tense to keep the baby in, except during labor when they need to relax—and they do have pain receptors. Unless the horizontal lower segments relax while the vertical segments contract, she's pushing against herself."

The angel's eyes widened. "Oh! Once she's relaxed and can let go, the rest of the system can do what it's supposed to?"

Raphael waited until he and the guardian rode through another one of the mom's contractions. Then, "She's fighting herself. That's making her more scared and less willing to relinquish control."

The angel nodded. "Thanks. I think I know what to do now." He turned away, then turned back. "Oh, and I'm sorry about Gabriel. I'm praying for you."

Raphael looked down. "Thanks. It helps."

Jesus brought Raphael to another birth, this one in a private house in the Netherlands. A midwife played guitar while a mother labored in a tub surrounded by her three children and husband, all singing. The mother would drop out of the song during contractions.

The angels all looked up when Jesus and Raphael arrived. "Is something wrong?"

"Not at all," Jesus said. "I wanted to show him something."

The baby's guardian relaxed, and the other angels all returned their attention to the family. They should have joined in the song; they didn't. The

baby's guardian took Raphael's hand and said how sorry she was about Gabriel.

"This was what I wanted to explain before," Raphael murmured to Jesus. "She's working hard, but it's effective because she's not fighting her own body."

"He understood," Jesus said, "and I can see you understand too."

Jesus brought Raphael to a hamlet in Zimbabwe where Raphael consulted with the guardian of an old man dying of tuberculosis. The angel had his hands on the man's chest to give him some relief from the wracking cough. More condolences, more reassurances of prayers from the man's guardian.

Raphael and Jesus walked outside.

It was midnight on this part of the planet. Had the attack come only four hours earlier? How could someone's world change so quickly?

"I want to go back."

"Not yet," Jesus said. "There's no rush. He's still the same."

"I just want to be with him," Raphael said, but he didn't protest. He didn't want to hear another condolence message either, though, so instead of going to the next stop on his rounds, he walked into the jungle. Jesus kept pace. After a few steps, Raphael found himself solid and wingless, nearly human. A stick cracked beneath his feet, and the rich scent of rotting detritus enfolded him. Night insects sang, and even the air had a gritty flavor. Raphael looked over his shoulder at Jesus, who was now dismissing the three Angels. Jesus gestured he should move forward.

The path, such as he could follow one, headed eastward, presumably to another small collection of homes in another jungle clearing. The canopy

of trees hid the starlight, and Raphael quickly found himself knee-deep in underbrush without a trail to follow.

There was something to just standing here, surrounded in a place he'd managed to work his way into but that had no path out. In this half-magic night he could be fully present, breathing the spice, dwelling in God's presence, feeding the world's largest mosquito, hearing the full spectrum of life that had multiplied to fill this world of wonders. Back home there were worried faces and an impossible task and the hollowness of something he knew to be true but would deny and deny until he had no choice but to accept.

Gabriel—

He struck forward again, forcing back the brambles as he moved, random snapping sounds in his wake. Gabriel wasn't getting better, maybe never would, but if he had it in him, even for a second longer, he'd keep the Cherub alive. Giving up was not an option because Gabriel was Gabriel, and what would the universe be without him? A bell without a clapper, or a dry engine, a barren fig tree, that was what. An old stream bed waiting for floods decades after the land had gone to the desert, or a ship at the bottom of the Mediterranean longing to set sail again. And that—

No, that mustn't ever happen, because not even God could set right something of that magnitude, and Remiel had dealt with the pain, but how could he?

The Cherub couldn't love or serve God from beyond the grave.

Raphael's soul vibrated like a grand piano with all its keys struck simultaneously.

As he struck through a low bush, something wrapped around his face.

He pushed back at it, but then he felt it grip his arms like a dozen tiny hooks. Back he pulled, but it tautened.

"Hey!" He twisted, and now it gripped his legs, the thorns embedded in his jeans. He couldn't kick free, and his arms were drawn fast by the brambles. Leaves stuck to his face, and when he shook his head to dislodge them, the vines constricted around his shoulders.

Full-blown panic set in. Thrashing, Raphael blew back into his angelic form only to find the vines and brambles and thorns still holding him. He summoned his sword, but against vines that now enwrapped his forearms with a strangling tension, he couldn't bring it to bear. The ones around his neck threatened to crush his windpipe. He ignited into a blue-white flame, trying to consume them, but they wouldn't burn.

"God!"

Jesus was right in front of him, looking him directly in the eyes. "Stop struggling!"

Raphael tried, but the vines stayed tight, and he wanted to get out of here, get free, get away—

"Stop!" Jesus said. "Be still!"

It was the same voice that had commanded the waves, and it commanded Raphael too. He was still.

As he stopped fighting, the vines relaxed, and Raphael found them letting go. The grip slacked off, and Jesus was able to make them loosen so he could work free.

He turned to Jesus, shaking.

"Remember," Jesus said, and then he was gone.



Copyright 2008, *Jane Lebak*

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

Copyright 2008, *E. J. Mickels*

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) >.



**MindFlights** is a publication of Double-Edged Publishing, Inc. It is available at < [www.mindflights.com](http://www.mindflights.com) > and updates are published several times each week. Issues are completed monthly.

**MindFlights** (ISSN Pending)  
9618 Misty Brook Cove, Cordova, Tennessee 38016

For more information visit < [www.mindflights.com](http://www.mindflights.com) >. The above items appear as part of Volume 1, 2008, Issue 1.



## Support **MindFlights**

*MindFlights* is a publication of Double-Edged Publishing, Inc., a nonprofit corporation designated as a 501(c)(3) public charity. Double-Edged Publishing believes the written word is a powerful tool, capable of shaping ideas and changing lives.

Mail checks to:

Double-Edged Publishing, Inc.  
Development  
9618 Misty Brook Cove  
Cordova, Tennessee 38016

Online donations can be made and more information can be found via the *MindFlights* or the Double-Edged Publishing websites:

< [www.mindflights.com](http://www.mindflights.com) >  
< [www.doubleedgedpublishing.com](http://www.doubleedgedpublishing.com) >



[www.mindflights.com](http://www.mindflights.com)