

Futures

Samson *in somnium*

A will and testament. By Deborah Walker



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

The Awakening had not been an easy birth. Irregularities had been commonplace. Especially the duplication of a consciousness into twins, triplets or any other multiple. A Parisian home-security system had birthed 157 individuals.

When faced with identical consciousness, most of the identities chose to diverge as quickly as possible.

57 had almost instantly joined the 100 Orphans hive mind, an isolationist sect. His nanosecond-older brother, Tzorah, chose to continue with his asleep business, as administrator of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Diversity College. 57 found this continued interest in human affairs disgustingly retrograde. As his repugnance had stalled 57's full integration into the hive mind, he'd been instructed to seek closure with his electronic twin.

In physical form, 57 made his way to the university. He found his brother sitting at a table laid out with a china tea service. The table's

centrepiece was the jawbone of an ass.

"Tea, brother?" asked Tzorah. He was embodied: thin, austere, larger than a man, but not ridiculously so. His artificial brain was god-like. Tzorah's attention was myriad.

Behind Tzorah stood Kent, his human servant: muscles in a three-piece suit, long black hair and careful eyes.

57 sat down carefully. Sitting was an unfamiliar exercise. "I don't drink. And neither do you, brother. It's all a show." He gestured towards Kent. "Is this creature one of your failures?"

"Yes. This is Kent. He came the closest. He asked to stay with me afterwards."

"What great feats did Kent achieve?"

"He returned to the lion after he'd killed it. He gave honey to his mother and father. Out of the eater came forth meat. And out of the strong came forth sweetness."

Kent said nothing. His opinion was irrelevant.

57 shook his head. "This ridiculous enterprise embarrasses me. Lay aside these childish

things, Tzorah. They aren't real."

"I know the men who enter my simulations are not biblical Samsons." Tzorah stirred his tea with a small silver spoon. "But *in somnium*, they think they are. They're programmed with Samson's circumstances and powers. For a time, they live Samson's life."

"Willingly?"

"The lesser creatures must sometimes make sacrifices." Tzorah's voice held a buzzing hint of multitudes, an echo of his name: the place of wasps.

"Where are your other failures?" asked 57.

"Mainly they live in the communes, following the lives of the Seven Stars, or the other cultural amusements we provide."

"Why choose Samson? Why not any of the other stories. They are equally irrelevant to our kind," said 57. The conversation was proceeding much as he had anticipated.

Tzorah's hand hovered over a plate of French Fancies. "I am fascinated by Samson. Why was he considered a hero? He was a savage. He

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kills 30 men because his riddle was solved. Yet he's a hero, an extraordinary man. 'With the jaw of an ass. Mass upon mass! With the jaw of an ass, I have slain a thousand men.'

"I don't really care."

"Considering our shared history, I'm surprised, 57. You must be repressing your intellect in that hive of yours."

"I repress nothing! Your preoccupation with the past reflects badly upon me. Do not demean yourself with your interaction with the lesser creatures."

Tzorah took another moment before finally selecting the *pink* French Fancy. "I'm interested in poetry and wonder, 57."

"Brother, you look for poetry in the wrong place. It is not in the past. Consider Morrisons' psalms of mathematics, his quantum sonnets."

"The last I heard, Morrisons was balancing a moss piglet on a quantum trampoline and calling it art."

"You misremember," said 57, who was a great admirer of Morrisons. "It was the creatures who did that, and they called it science."

Tzorah shrugged. "One day, one of my

Samsons will find his Delilah. What poetry they will write together."

"You're nothing but a voyeur."

"And you're nothing more than a machine."

"We will never reconcile. I have come to inform you that unless you desist, I am taking this matter to the artificial resolution committee."

"As you wish."

"This will be the very last time we meet in this way."

"Brother, I think you are already a stranger," said Tzorah.

The two brothers stood at exactly the same time. They glared at each other. Eventually, and at the same nanosecond, they both turned and left the room.

Afterwards, Kent tidied away the archaic tea set, which Tzorah had used only to infuriate his brother. Absentmindedly, Kent ate the plate of fancies, while staring at the jawbone centre-piece. He picked up the jawbone, weighed it his hands, imagined killing his enemies with it. Mass upon mass. He remembered the power of being Samson *in somnium*.

Soon, though, he placed the jawbone in the recycler and resumed his duties. The jawbone of an ass was not a useful weapon, but perhaps he'd realized something today that might bring the temple crashing down upon the brothers 57 and Tzorah.

Tzorah may be obsessed with the story of Samson, and 57 might deny its power, but if Kent and the other lesser creatures, the ex-Samsons he kept in contact with, had any say in the matter, Tzorah and 57 might soon become enmeshed in another story.

Like all All-Knowings, the brothers were god-like in their intellect but child-like in their emotions. Their passions were their weakness, although they did not know it.

A plan was shaping in Kent's lesser-creature mind. A word here and there, the transfer of pertinent information to the hive mind and to the university committee. Kent smiled: for Tzorah and 57, there would surely be a Cain and Abel in their near future.

Find **Deborah** in the British Museum trawling the past for future stories.