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About 825 words

The Plagues of Tyre

The King of Tyre couldn't sleep. He feared this particular dream. For 8 days he fell from Heaven, and hit the ground like a lighting blast. The earth trembled, and after several agonizing seconds, resumed its customary spin.

Now there was a plague to manage, and rumors of barbarians. Why? Why had he ever pursued knowledge and offended heaven? Better to be happy in an ibex's butt than witness to permutations of chaos in the divine number clouds.

Fruit disappeared and reappeared in carved wooden bowls on the table. The palace was glitching.

A parrot barked like a jackal then spit out a partially masticated scroll. Since when had this half-sentient housepet become a prophet?

The king uncurled the slobbery papyrus. Another riddle.

Who rules the nations with a mock hairpiece?

Who picks opponents like his nose?

Who eats arguments like they're breadcrumbs?

Who gets angry when the wind blows?

The King of Tyre sighed. Clearly this was a reference to the military dictator of Babylon. His star pupil was now marching in war to his master's gate.

Speaking of the wind, it whistled through the empty streets and markets of his once bustling coastal capital.

"Alexa," said the dead king. "How about some music?"

A disembodied voice sprung up from the marble floor tiles.

“What style of music?”

“Something apocalyptic.”

The sound of softly beating war drums filled the hall. The omens had been similarly bad all day. The constellations had been rewritten by scribes 6 times that evening - and now by the looks of the sky it seemed as if all the heavenly signs had been digested and pooped out into pellet form by an owl composed of comets.

‘How had evil become so unreliable?’

A pile of bones shyly approached.

“What is it?”

“The dictator of Babylon requests an audience.”

“Very well.”

Smoke wafted up from incense burners surrounding the king’s 4-poster bed, and out of the smoke appeared a flaming orange head.

“Hello?” it said.

“Do not weary me with words, human. What is it you want? My surrender?”

“We are under attack!”

“By whom? My powers of sight are much diminished these days.”

“By plagues and by our own gods! They’ve all come to life and started gathering all the people into their temples. Then they surround the temples with sticks and light them on fire.”

“The people are merely afraid. Only fear could cause them to imagine such things. Pay the survivors. Distract their minds from such disturbing visions.”

The orange head appeared to dim a couple shades.

“There’s a commoner who gives voice to the rabble’s discontent. He comforts the people that I am frail and near death. That I am infected with the plague. That he is good! But he is even older than me!”

“Fear not this commoner. Old vessels leak and crack. They can’t hold new wine.”

“New wine?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so.”

“What is that?”

The King of Tyre rubbed his sore head.

“I’m led to believe it’s very pleasant. And very good.”

The orange head groaned.

“It sounds fruity. Do the people know about it? Will it cure this damn plague?”

“The plague is just the beginning. Then the visions. And then. All the cures. For everything. Cures for the plague. Cures for the visions. Cures for the wars. And finally cures for the tyrants. Finally, evil as we know it, will just disappear.”

“How? Who is fermenting these dangerous lies? How can evil just disappear? Without evil, there can be no good.”

“Believe me. I told them the exact same thing. They’re not buying it this time.”

“What do I do, then?”

“It’s all lost. My very kingdom is unravelling. If you continue to fight, it will go far worse for you.”

The orange head turned quite red.

“You wet leathery sheath to my golden sword!” it cried. “I will not be defeated by some loving-hearted wine steward and his cracked vessels!”

The orange head shone with the intensity of the sun, causing the surrounding bed curtains to ignite.

“I will give you what evil I have remaining,” said the exhausted king, as he lay down in the inferno. He turned over on his side and pulled the charred remnants of his linen sheets over his robes. Light poured in from all the windows and the king clenched his eyes shut. After what seemed like an eternity, cool shadows mercifully wrapped around his eyes like a mask.

When he awoke, he was very young again. His sea-faring city was alive with noise. A salty breeze blew in from the shore, and swirled the sheer draperies. There were humans outside in the streets and markets.

“The plague is over!” they cried. “Babylon is no more! Tyre is no more!”

The king started as if by the sound of trumpets. Then he was falling once more. Alone in a terrifying dream from which there was no end...