

CREDARA

RISE OF THE KRAYLEN

JE HENDERSON

**Arc-Pen
Publishing**

SITCIAN [si-chee-uhn] adjective, noun — Of or from the angel warrior forces of God, Masters of the Hamen Fighting Art.

Example: The Sitician Angels put down the rebellion of Lucifer, cast him out of Heaven, and forever into Hell.

...forever is a long time.

chapter two

In the Beginning There Was War

Gliding through the rays of a blazing sun, a lone majestic hawk soared across a cloudless sky. Beautiful and sounding off with a familiar screech, this hawk was special. The sacred gold pendant that hung from his neck bore the Arc-Pen symbol. God's symbol. From the very beginning the Arc-Pen has symbolized all that was of God, whether in Heaven or on earth. It was why this sacred symbol adorned the pendant around the neck of this special creature. The hawk, Flittorin.

It was not only the pendant that made Flittorin special, but also his age and the company he kept. For as long as all things have existed, Flittorin has traveled the realm of the angels. God's Heaven. And on this day, he soared above Heaven, screeching and making all aware of his presence. For on this day, Flittorin circled above that which was the end of the Great War.

With a cloud floor at their feet, Sitcian Angel warriors of white, with golden swords, bows, arrows and shields, all bearing the Arc-Pen symbol, and with the Hamen Mark of Sitcian upon their necks, surrounded thousands of defeated angel warriors of grey. Grey because their hearts had become

impure. And those impurities had become visible upon their very being. The grey angels scurried backwards, forming a tight huddle as they were cut off from escape, flanked on all sides of their ranks. Sitician archers continued to unleash a deluge of arrows into the pack of helpless angels. Every angel struck fell in a cloud of dust, smoke and grey feathers at the feet of the others. They were sweating and scarred. They stumbled exhausted from battle, their dirty and heavily damaged wings stood out in stark contrast to the brilliant white wings of their Sitician captors. In their eyes, defeat and an expectation for the worst.

Leading the Siticians was a young, handsome warrior. God's strong, dark-haired General, Archangel Michael. His eyes burned of victory and, were he to have it his way, he would have quickly ended the existence of every one of these enemies of God. How could they believe they would succeed in this reckless betrayal of the One who created them? But these were not his orders.

Just steps ahead of his Sitician legion, Michael approached as if wielding the might and authority of God himself. Then, he raised his sword. All at once the Sitician legion came to a dead halt and the surrounding stopped.

Michael scanned the horde of rogue angels. His disdain for them and their rebellious actions showed clearly upon his brow as he sought out their leader.

“Lucifer! Lucifer, you will show yourself!” demanded Michael. “Or I will cut a path to you with the blade of my sword!”

Suddenly Lucifer's voice rang out from the horde. "Step aside!" The angel warriors of grey stepped aside, making an opening and revealing their defeated leader.

Lucifer. A bit older than Michael, he was a strong, dark, evil being in both appearance and demeanor. Tall with dark hair, broad shoulders and a muscular build, he embodied the very definition of warrior. As their eyes met, Michael's heart-beat quickened and his anger built. He could not understand why God would not allow him to vanquish this one. One whom He loved and trusted, only to see him become a traitor to His kingdom. Michael's thoughts turned to the past when he and Lucifer were the pride of the Sictian force. He looked upon him like a brother as they joined together on many of the most important assignments given by God himself. He recalled how he and Lucifer captured and imprisoned the most destructive force of evil ever to find its way to God's kingdom. Where Lucifer once stood tall in God's favor as one of his top Generals, he had now allowed that very same evil to seduce him. It corrupted him, rotted away his goodness, and brought to Heaven the Great War.

Lucifer approached with arrogance and stood forward as the leader of the defeated angels.

"So what now, Michael? Death? Or, as I suspect, something far more interesting?" Lucifer asked.

"Were it to be my choice, you would no longer exist. But He decides all things. Something you would have been wise to remember. Nevertheless, know this: Whatever happens here

today, Lucifer... it is of your own doing," Michael said, returning the arrogance. Lucifer spat.

Just as the tension peaked, the sound of a heavenly horn blow broke the silence. Michael maintained eye contact with Lucifer as the Sictian Angels stepped aside to form an opening. With another blow of his horn, the Archangel Gabriel, a young, handsome, blond-haired messenger of God, glided in and landed beside Michael. Along with his beautiful golden horn, he carried an item wrapped and tied in gold and white cloth. Gabriel did not display the same anger as Michael as he faced Lucifer. His was much more administrative. At least this is how it started out.

"Lucifer," Gabriel said.

"A rare honor indeed. To stand before messenger and executioner for judgment," Lucifer said.

Gabriel said, "You were His most loved Sictian, Lucifer."

"Do not part your lips to speak to a warrior," Lucifer responded. "It is I who swore to defend His kingdom. I who should share in the power and glory. Yet you, Messenger, are allowed to know his secrets. Do not speak to me of his love. You have it, and you deserve none of it." Lucifer angered Gabriel with his words. "Let there be no doubt, Messenger. It is I who should choose to love HIM!" Lucifer proclaimed angrily.

Angered, Michael stepped forward, pointing his sword directly at Lucifer's mouth. "Hold your tongue, Lucifer! Or I will remove it!"

Lucifer held his arrogance, eyeing Michael with contempt.

As Michael lowered his sword, he closed in on Lucifer until they were face to face. He then untied a sack on Lucifer's waist and removed a small thin book with the Arc-Pen symbol burned into its leather cover. His eyes met Lucifer's again. For a moment Michael thought about the punishment for defying God's orders and considered slaying this heretic right where he stood. His breathing accelerated. Lucifer smiled at Michael. He knew what he considered.

"Did you feel it, Sitcian? Does it surge through your blood?" Lucifer asked. "A fleeting moment of standing apart from Him. It's like ice and fire all at once, is it not? Defy him, Michael. Do it!" The very thought of defying God rattled Michael to the core. Horrified him. Then he gained control over his thoughts as his breathing calmed.

"You no longer deserve such an honor," Michael said, holding up the book. Having decided against the act of defiance, Michael backed up to Gabriel, never turning his back on Lucifer, never breaking eye contact. He handed the book to Gabriel, who placed it in a pouch on his waist.

Gabriel looked Lucifer directly in the eye and proclaimed, "You want to rule, Lucifer, and so you shall. But it shall be over a kingdom not of good men, but of your own kind. And you shall never again know His kindness, nor His mercy. Only the putrid fire of your own greed and jealousy."

Gabriel handed Michael the wrapped item. Michael untied and uncovered the item, revealing what few, even in His Kingdom, had the honor of beholding. The Credara. A beau-

tiful, ornate urn, slightly larger than Michael's hand, made of glistening silver metal and glass. Upon it, the Arc-Pen symbol. Within it, a precious water giving the Credara powers which can only be wielded by a Sircian Angel. The beauty of this vessel was overwhelming even to Archangels who had seen its beauty before, and knew of its power.

Michael held up the Credara as a gesture of honor, then tossed it onto the cloud floor near Lucifer's feet. Lucifer appeared frozen as the Credara created gold sparks and burned through the cloud floor. It then began plummeting to earth.

The Credara fell like a meteor cutting through space. It began to glow and trail fire. Then, in an uninhabited area, it struck the earth, creating a great opening with shock waves rippling from it. Suddenly a tremendous blast of bright light shot upward from the opening and into the clouds. The light struck the clouds just beneath Lucifer's feet and quickly burned through. Lucifer felt the cloud floor beneath his feet begin to give way, but before he could react, the light created an opening through which he began falling to earth.

Directly down through the beam of bright light Lucifer plummeted, flailing about and yelling as he began a painful transformation. His wings flared out and began to be pulled harder and harder until they were ripped torturously from his back. His skin began to smoke and burn as his muscles deformed and grew. His face pulsed and cracked as bones throughout his entire body broke and reformed. A tail burst forth painfully from his lower back and extended, taking a

scaly serpent-like form. As he screamed out in excruciating pain, his eyes turned blood red and horns exploded from his skull. His skin sweat and settled into a deep dark red tone as he transformed from angel warrior into the horned dragon-like figure known as Satan.

As he drew closer to earth, he continued growing larger. Larger and more horrid until finally, fully transformed, he fell through the opening in the earth. All that was heard were monstrous screams of horror as Lucifer was cast into the eternal fires of his new kingdom. A place over which he would now have eternal dominion. Lucifer's Lair. Hell.

His red eyes descended into the darkness and fire as the opening began to close. Lucifer's screams became more distant while two five-foot-thick stone plates forming half circles began sliding together to close the lair entrance. While closing, a metal pillar positioned in the center of the stone plates, with the Credara on top, began spinning, rotating and descending, until finally the two halves slammed shut. The Lair Entrance was locked. The Credara, now the key to Lucifer's Lair, sat atop the entrance. Dead silence.

All at once the ground trembled as the earth around the entrance began to build up. From nothing, dirt and rock formed until it became a small mountain covering the lair entrance entirely. The crest of this new mountain formation bore a uniqueness all its own. The Arc-Pen symbol.

All eyes were fixed on the hole formed in the cloud floor as it slowly closed. Lucifer's young General, Licronus, stepped

forward. Strong and dark like Lucifer, Licronus had a dusty complexion and wasn't as muscular. But what he lacked in size, he made up for in fearlessness. And Licronus was much more sinister.

Despite what he had just seen, Licronus stared at Gabriel and Michael for a moment. Then arrogantly he began to laugh, mocking their action against Lucifer.

He then stopped, replacing his laughter with a defiant stare.

"Now. What is to become of us, oh great Sitcian," Licronus asked, "now that you have your victory—for now?"

Gabriel confronted Licronus. "You could have been one of us, Licronus. An honor you chose to waste on Lucifer's lies and deception." Licronus smirked, almost laughing again.

"Do you doubt my words, Licronus?" Gabriel asked.

"I doubt everything, Gabriel," Licronus replied.

Gabriel, became more serious. "You shall pay for your sins, Licronus. You and your brethren."

Licronus interrupted, "And your blood, Gabriel, yours... shall travel the length of my blade."

"You and your horde shall be known from this day forth as Kraylen, after the filth and refuse discarded after the creation of the heavens and earth," Gabriel continued.

"Every Sitcian will fall!" Licronus said.

"Look around, Licronus!" Gabriel continued. "See the beauty of Heaven for the last time. For He has said: You shall never set eyes upon it again."

Licronus sneered at Gabriel, declaring, “We shall see about that.”

Gabriel lifted his hands and conjured a tremendous force of light and energy. The wind whipped through as the energy built to its peak. Then, with one step forward, pushing, Gabriel directed this force to Licronus and his angel warriors. Explosively, all angels of grey were propelled up and outward in all directions.

Licronus and his warrior angels tumbled and fell uncontrollably from Heaven towards earth. As they fell, they too began to painfully transform. Their wings remained intact but burned and turned from grey to jet black. Their skin turned leathery and darkened to the color of something dead. Their faces changed to those of ugly, demonic versions of their former selves—an unmistakably evil appearance to anyone setting eyes upon them. This was the look of the Kraylen. In every corner of the earth, they landed with great force and in crumpled heaps.

A fisherman and his young son were trolling for net floats not far from shore in the chilled waters of the China Sea. Just as the man reached for a float, a strange light and sound drew his attention. He and his son looked to the sky just in time to see a Kraylen land with tremendous force in the water nearby, sending a plume of water hundreds of feet into the air. The initial look of shock on their faces suddenly turned to one of horror as the force sent a forty-foot wave of water rolling their way. They both scrambled to grab the oars and escape, but it was too late. The huge wave capsized their boat.

Seconds later, the young boy popped up out of the water and immediately began calling out as he frantically searched for his father.

Suddenly, with the force of an active volcano, the winged Kraylen erupted from the water, swooped down and began flying directly towards the boy. The young boy's look of horror returned when he saw the ugly creature coming towards him. Just as it was about to decapitate him, the boy ducked under the water. The Kraylen missed its target and continued flying towards the shore, deciding not to return for another try. The boy popped up out of the water and watched with fright as the creature soared off into the distance.

In the sunlight of a clear sky, the leaves of a tropical forest glistened from an afternoon rain. A troop of chimps enjoyed a meal of fruit, leaves and buds from the abundance of trees. They happily swung from limb to limb, interacting during the course of a typical day.

Several of the chimps spotted something strange above the tree canopy. A space in the thick canopy allowed them to see several trails of bright light that had appeared in the sky. This resulted in a flurry of activity, near panic among the troop as they all clamored to see. But only one of the light trails streaking across the sky was of interest to the troop: The one headed in their direction.

As it approached, the chimps somehow knew they were directly in the fireball's path. An alert went out among the troop, and hundreds of chimps instantly and frantically made

a mass exodus through the trees and brush to get out of its way. And not a moment too soon as, all at once, the fireball blasted through the tree canopy and landed, cutting a swath through the forest floor. Trees burst into flames and exploded into the air as the fireball plowed a deep chasm through the earth's soil. Finally, it came to rest.

For a brief moment there was silence. Then, as quickly as they ran for cover, several of the chimps came back into the area to satisfy their natural curiosity. When the Kraylen emerged from the crater, smoking from the heat, the chimps again ran for safety. The Kraylen flexed its wings, then tucked them away. He then walked out of the crater and along the deep chasm formed by his landing.

As did the others, Licronus transformed as he streaked across the sky. He landed in a rocky deserted area, smashing into a huge boulder. A huge dust cloud emerged as the boulder instantly turned to rubble.

Licronus crawled from the rubble and dusted himself off, almost as if annoyed by Gabriel's actions. Did he believe such a pitiful act would destroy them? As he continued dusting himself off, Licronus caught a glance at his hands which had taken on a dark leathery look. He then touched his face, feeling, searching for some iota of his former self. He found little. Fury rose as Licronus realized he had been changed, horribly disfigured from his former self. With great anger Licronus released a loud, frightening scream that resonated throughout the mountains. Sweating from his anger, he spread his now

jet-black wings and prepared to take to the air as the echoes diminished. Then he paused to think. Now was not the time to allow his anger to take over. Perhaps it would be best to preserve his energy. This world was not his. He had been cast out from his rightful home in Heaven. He knew the humans would not look kindly upon an ugly winged creature such as himself. So he tucked his wings away, drawing them into his body, and began walking.

Days and nights passed as he trekked through the dry rocky landscape, stopping for neither food nor water, his anger barely at bay, until one day at dusk he stumbled over something in his path and fell face forward to the ground. He spat out dirt and brushed off his face. He turned to see what it was that had tripped him. A human. A man, wearing a warrior's garb, face down in the dirt. These pitiful humans know nothing of true war, he thought. They are given everything to exist peacefully and they make a mockery of it, destroying the greatest gift He has given them. Life. They should be made to pay.

Licronus stood and slowly moved closer to the man. He then reached down and turned him over, confirming his suspicions. The man was dead, the blade that had pierced his heart still within him. Licronus noticed the man's hand. The thick scar on the back of it, contrasted by a large unique ring on one of the fingers.

"Ahh. Something from this wretched world I actually want," Licronus said.

Licronus reached for the ring. As his hand neared the man's, suddenly a strange feeling rushed through him. A familiar feeling he couldn't believe was happening. Transformation. He closed his eyes until this brief moment ended. Then, he reopened them. When he did, he confirmed something he had never expected. His hand had been transformed into an exact copy of that of the dead man. Ring, scar and all. Licronus then touched his face. Exactly like that of the dead man's. He now realized that somehow, despite the burning and deforming exile from Heaven, he had kept his power to transform.

An enviable power, Licronus always viewed the ability to transform, to shape shift to any human form, as a curse. Put to use whenever an angel was given a mission on the surface with the humans, it allowed an angel to blend in. Licronus would reject these missions whenever he could, as he despised the human creatures. He could never understand God's love for them. As an angel, he felt the humans were beneath him, literally and figuratively. So why? Why was this power not taken away? And what of the others? Then, Licronus realized. Again, his anger escalated.

"A cruel joke. The power to fit in unseen among these filthy humans," Licronus said. He stood and looked to the heavens.

"You bury us among them! Lower us into the dirt that is their worthless existence! I will not let you forget us! WE WILL HAVE OUR REVENGE!" he yelled.

Licronus then closed his eyes and, focusing his energy, transformed back into his Kraylen form. Breathing heavily for a moment, he inspected his hands once again. Then, he looked at the ring on the dead man's finger. He knelt, removed the ring and placed it on a finger of his left hand. He clenched his fist as he stared ahead in anger. Licronus then removed the man's sword, stood, turned and continued walking.

Day turned into night as he traversed the rocky dry landscape, continuing until day returned. Then, appearing almost like a mirage, he saw a large caravan of Amorites in the distance.

Licronus moved in closer and then paused out of sight for a moment to study them. Their color, hair, mannerisms and their garb. Then, he began walking directly towards them. After a few steps, Licronus transformed himself into his own human form, wearing their nomadic garb. For now, he would be one of them.

