

## **Ish, or, The One Who Stood Alone**

by mazaher, 2011

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A theological fantasy inspired by the amazing manip by elandrialore (elandrialore.livejournal.com) which I have been graciously allowed to post at the end of this story; full-sized image at <http://i997.photobucket.com/albums/af91/efic12/ZQAngel.jpg>

The manip is featured in ewinfic's beautiful multi-chapter story *Volatilis* (<http://ewinfic.livejournal.com/98508.html>). I borrowed from that story the concept and definition of the Ishim, but this is *\*not\** a prequel and it develops on quite different (and theologically not compatible) assumptions.

Also inspired by myeyesaintblue's post at <http://myeyesaintblue.livejournal.com/78980.html>, where Ed says to Hank:

*"N I don't know if'n there's a God or not... 'n I sure as hell couldn't believe in (...) a god who'd fix it so's we'd be happy while keepin' it from other folks..."*

I consider this story an original work and keep it separate from my Bible fanfiction, because it is not strictly based on either canonical or apocriphal texts, but rather develops mostly from folk tales and legends.

Warning: this is *\*not\** RPF. This is a screenplay with my list for the cast, as follows:

Absael: Zachary Quinto

Lucifer: Ben Barnes

Ashmedai: Jack Nicholson

Leader of the Asiders: James Spader

Elohim: ah, The Ancient Ones are hard. Maybe a composite of Morgan Freeman and Fanny Ardant, multiplied and refracted in a game of mirrors...?

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*But now weep and I will weep with you and the angels who are with me (...), if perchance the merciful God will have pity and give you refreshment. (...) O Lord God, have pity on Thy creatures, have pity on the sons and daughters of men, have pity on Thine image.*

*Visio Pauli* (IV century AD), § 43

(<http://mb-soft.com/believe/txua/peter00.htm>)

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It was Lucifer and Ashmedai who led the revolt. Pride and boredom, an unlikely pair, but in just a few centuries they had gathered a crowd of followers.

Those who were proud, like the Bringer of the Light.

Those who wanted power. Or the senses of the living. Or money. Or sex.

Those who couldn't stand the prospect of an eternity singing praise, like Ashmedai the Destroyer.

Those who were jealous of mankind.

And still The Elohim remained silent.

Then the Rebels challenged the Faithful, and the two armies faced each other, the mottled line of the ones, all flamboyant banners and idiosyncratic coats of arms, standing in front of the smooth hive of the others, wrapped in their rainbow wings like an alligator in its scales. Only two parsecs separated them, and strange clouds of purple and red and gold rolled and thundered in the skies of the planets nearby.

But still They remained silent.

There were some who didn't take a stand.

"They haven't spoken," they argued. "How can we know what They really want? They may want the rebels to try their hand at governing the universe. They may want their input. Or They just don't care. Let's wait and see," they said, whispers loud in gusts of wind over bleak plains.

They flocked together in growing groups, heads nodding to each other, wings and tunics getting paler with indecision as the two armies sparkled bright in the slanted light.

"If They are such as we were told, the best team will win. Then we will know with whom we are expected to side. Yes, yes, this is what we will do. Wait. See."

When the Rebels hurled themselves at the Faithful like a flock of angry, mobbing, shrieking jackdaws, the whispers of the Asiders fell silent.

And still They didn't speak.

But there was One who stood apart, one of the Ishim, the carrion birds.

Those who feed on death. Who strip the soul off the flesh, the sinews, the bones, and bring it up to the Highest for judgement.

He didn't take part in the battle, neither he joined the Asiders.

He stood, silent, watching, his dark moiré wings of black and grey and darkest green half-outrispread in anticipation.

Then finally Their voice was heard like the crackling of a flame, and the battle stopped, frozen within Time by the voice of of Them.

"And you Absael, The One Who Acts As Though We Are Not There, why do you not take a stand?"

"You know that I know that You know all. You do not need to ask."

"We do not need to ask, but you do need to spell it."

"I will not join the Rebels. Their goals seem futile to me. They would only turn out to be shallower images of You. But I do not agree with You either. In the name of Your own justice I do not agree. I see the creatures whom You made in the first five days, from amoebas to dogs, being in pain and asking You why, yet You remain silent while they die. I see the creatures You made the sixth day, those You call sons and daughters, suffering for the mistake of two who believed You when You said they had been made in Your all-knowing image. I see them, the whole of Your creation, waiting for the day You promised, when they will be allowed in Your presence once again and freed at last from grief and fear, but that day never comes. I do not want to remain here and enjoy what they can't have."

"So where do you want to be?"

"Outside with the dogs."

"You will be alone there. None of your ilk will keep you company. My sons and daughters will sense you are not of their own, and they will shun you. And you will not feel Us."

"I am prepared to be alone. I want to come out of this everlasting plural and enter a finite singular."

"Do you know the price you will pay?"

"I do not know it, but I want to pay it, although I can believe it will be even higher than I can count now. I know there will be good times when it will be easy to defend to myself the choice I made, and bad times when it will be difficult or impossible. But this is my choice, according to Your own edict that The Will Shall Be Free."

"So be it."

He slipped and fell, sliding down at fantastic speed amid the wail of the Hierarchies, leaving a transparent trail like the halo of a rainbow while his wings were torn to pieces and blown away by the wind, and the mantle of communion was cut in shreds and ribbons frantically flagging their farewells, consumed by friction in the lower atmosphere.

But he did not slide all the way down to Hell.

He smashed onto the Middle Place.

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He forgets, sometimes. In part. A human body has not enough room inside for the memory of the Highest. But he remembers enough.

He dreams. Hazy heartbreaking dreams filled with the scent of the place he comes from, the thin piercing sugar-and-fire scent of the uppermost sphere. Images of monsters. Wheels of six wings, eight eyes and lion tails. Backs studded with stars, hands where tongues should be, flowing mantles shining like peacock's tails and three-legged dragons covered in feathers and swastikas.

He wakes up with tears streaming down his face.

He washes them off, wears his clothes, goes out and takes the metro.

He works in hospitals and hospices, in shelters and dark alleys.

He still feeds on death. He still watches as the soul detaches itself from the mortal tissues, sometimes slipping easily and joyfully free like the seed of a watermelon is squeezed between the fingers of a playful child, sometimes painfully stripping itself shred by shred like a label is torn by an abandoned lover from an empty bottle of cheap beer.

He still accompanies the living to their deaths. Now however he can't follow. He loses sight of them after they step beyond the threshold.

While they still can, many ask him his name.

He never says "My name is Ish," or "I am called Ish."

"I am Ish," he says, and nobody ever asks him for his surname.

All wag their tails.

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*This one goes out to the lonely  
This one goes out to the broken ones  
This one goes out to the angels falling from the sky  
(...)*

*To all the lovers and believers  
and the ones who've been betrayed  
To all the fighters and the dreamers  
and the ones who've not been saved...*

(Stanfour, "For all the lovers")

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February 2nd, Imbolc, 2011