

Cloudshine

George R. Mathers, CEO and President of Mathers & Hamilton, was concerned.

“You mean to tell me,” he began, “that we will have to remove these protesting fanatics by *force*?” His brow wrinkled. “This is not a good look for the unveiling.”

Ari Barmor, Head Architect, tapped his pencil on the desk. “It's looking that way. Despite the statement we put out, the crowd keeps getting larger and larger. With the unveiling set to occur next week, we might be looking at potentially thousands of protestors by then.”

George Mathers scoffed. “What a ridiculous problem to run into. Human lunacy at its finest. Do they not see how they stifle innovation? How fruitless are their efforts? Every beam brought to life from the blueprint has been years in the making; every brick painstakingly-”

“George! Calm. A little bit of bad PR is nothing in the long run.”

“You say that now. Tomorrow they'll all be drinking Kool-Aid at the base of the building. You should be more considerate, for your own sake. The architect of the tallest structure ever constructed - now that's a title!” George R. Mathers removed his glasses and began cleaning them with a micro-fiber cloth he took from his breast pocket. “It's all the fault of that damn reverend. If only I could talk to him, man-to-man, this would all blow over.”

Ari looked thoughtful. “That might actually be a possibility. I know that they want nothing more than to speak to the man in charge. I can speak to our publicity manager, if you want.”

“Well.” George Mathers sat up with what he hoped was an air of dignity. “Let it never be said that I wasn't a man of the people.”

“I have nothing more to say,” said the man facing George R. Mathers; the man sitting in the same chair that Ari Barmor had occupied the previous day. He wore nothing save a tan, silk, habit with the hood pulled back and a pair of worn sandals.

George Mathers slapped his hand on the desk. “You're spouting the same nonsense you've been spouting on the news for three weeks now. All this about our building being an affront to the divine and a disgrace to God. Come on, man. I know that this isn't the only reason you've put so much effort into disrupting our work. Out with it.”

There was a long pause in the conversation. Suddenly, the man facing George let out a long, strange noise that was half-chuckle, half-sigh. He turned to George with a twisted smile.

“I suppose you're correct in that I haven't been entirely truthful with you,” he said. “The reality is that I represent a small group of individuals who believe that what you are trying to do is a very, very bad idea. The goal itself? Noble. I respect humanity's ever-reaching struggle to best itself. Constructing the tallest building ever created, inherently, is a respectable and worthy pursuit. And you're so close to the finish line. Construction is virtually complete; all that needs to be done now is the unveiling that will take place oh-so-soon. But in this, I bring a warning.”

A hand bunched up the fabric that had previously been smoothed out.

“It is true that I do believe in the concept of what you might call God. However, it is nothing like how you might think. I simply use that delineation so that the laypeople can understand me. Why do you think so many ancient religions draw their inspirations from the heights? Why is the face of God painted so clearly in the sky? Why did Enki upheave the plans of Enmerkar? Why does Zeus smite those that climb Olympus? Why did Yahweh ravage the tower of Babel? There are things that man cannot know, and then there are things that man cannot even hope to know. I am here to tell you, President, that you tread near waters that are even darker and murkier than you realize. By building so close and so near to the shadows above, you risk us all. The divine lives in the skies, but the divine is also wrathful! Plagues, pestilence, screaming and gnashing of teeth! Chaos, the great serpent! The supernatural is not friendly, President. Your lives-”

And then there was silence, for George Mathers had motioned for the security guard in his office to remove the strange man in the strange robe, and he was already out of earshot.

“Crazy old fool.”

Unveiling day came. At approximately 2:58pm, George R. Mathers and Ari Barmor stood at the base of the Hamilton tower, gazing up at the clouds that seemed to gather around the very top floors.

George smiled. “We did it.”

Two construction workers stood atop the Hamilton building, ready to pull the manual-release latch that, once pulled, would free the great curtain that concealed the top spire of the towering behemoth. One turned to the other.

“Do you think there's any truth to what the protestors have been saying? About wrath and anger and stuff?”

“Shut up, Jim.”

Standing in front of the building, George Mathers cut the ribbon spanning the stage with a very large pair of golden ceremonial scissors. Turning around, putting his back to the crowd, he soaked in the white noise of joy, congratulations, and awe.

Dimly, he became aware of a slight murmur to his left side, one that sounded distinctly different from the noises of celebration that were otherwise all-encompassing. He turned to investigate. Ari was standing frozen, face to the sky, one hand shielding his eyes from the sun, the other gripping his heart as though to protect it from some invisible force.

“George.” whispered Ari, mystically. “George, look.”

George R. Mathers slowly turned his eyes to the heavens as the clouds began to cleave asunder.