

Hellfire

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Just an idea I had, lemme know what you think.

And btw I borrowed the bad guys from actual myths lol

*Also please make sure to **check out the Q&A section (for background info on Hellfire)**. I'll be updating it periodically.*

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0 - The Good Guys



Human name: Terance Shay
Demon name: Alagor
Height: 6'3"
Age: 435
Hair: Black
Eyes: Gray (Human); Red (Demon)
Born of: Shadow
Unique abilities: Flight
Personality: Sarcastic, overconfident





Human name: Devon Shay
Demon name: Astar
Height: 5'10"
Age: 42
Hair: Red
Eyes: Green (Human); Red (Demon)
Born of: Hellfire
Unique abilities: Super strength, speed, and agility
Personality: Reserved, clever



Human name: Nikita Shay
Demon name: Kaesi
Height: 5'6"
Age: 435
Hair: Black

Eyes: Green (Human); Red (Demon)
Born of: Shadow
Unique abilities: Phase through solid matter
Personality: Outgoing, determined



Name: Noah Collins
Height: 6'
Age: 17
Hair: Blonde
Eyes: Blue
Born of: Flesh
Unique abilities: advanced intelligence
Personality: Lazy, curious



0 - Q&A

This section is for question that I as a writer may fail to answer, so it's up to you as a reader to call me out on it! Obviously I won't let loose any spoilers in here, but you're welcome to ask any questions and I'll answer them when the time is appropriate. I will also leave a comment on your profile informing you when your question has been answered. And remember, there's no such thing as a stupid question!

One final thing: remember that these questions don't necessarily have to do with the plot of the story. If you want to know anything about the creation/development of the characters or story itself, feel free to ask!

Noah

Q: I wish I could read as many languages as Noah. Exactly how much does this kid study? ~ YoriXYamiForever

A: Noah actually doesn't study much. He was gifted with a natural ability to learn quickly. In fact, he learned most of the languages he now knows simply by ear.

Q: How many bookcases does he have total? ~ YoriXYamiForever

A: In his room? 16. In his house? 31.

General info

Q: Did Kaesi know Wallow somehow? ~ Blackwolfmoon

A: According to legend (Actual, not my own creation) Wallow, Gressil, and Abigor form a group called The Hidden, angels cast out of heaven by St. Peter himself. They have existed throughout eternity, and have always been "the baddest of the bad". It makes sense, then, that other demons would grow up knowing of them.

0 - The Bad Guys



Name: Abigor

Height: 6'

Age: ?

Hair: White

Eyes: Gray

Born of: Wind

Unique abilities: Intangibility, flight

Personality: Focused, quiet

Side: Bad



Name: Gressil

Height: 6'4"

Age: ?

Hair: Brown

Eyes: Brown

Born of: Stone

Unique abilities: Change in density

Personality: Rash, stubborn

Side: Bad



Name: Wallow

Height: 5'8"

Age: ?

Hair: Blue

Eyes: Blue

Born of: Water

Unique abilities: Changing states of matter

Personality: Teasing, cold

Side: Bad



Name: Blackheart

Height: 6'1"

Age: ?

Hair: Black

Eyes: Red

Born of: Sin

Unique abilities: Short range teleportation, limited telekinesis

Personality: Vengeful, greedy

Side: Bad

1 - The Arrival

"Typical," came a voice from nowhere.

The dark fog cleared just enough to make out the voice's owner, a tall figure with bright red eyes. A large pair of wings folded behind him. His attention was directed at another figure, standing to the side with its arms crossed, staring at the bright portal just ahead of him.

"We can't even go through for another few minutes," the voice came again.

"Two minutes and 43 seconds," the second figure responded. "And where exactly is Kaesi?"

"Omigod, Astar, relax," came yet a third voice.

The first figure, who obviously had been paying little attention, looked around stupidly for the source of the voice. Astar, however, looked at the ground just a few feet to his side. A cloud of smoke began to rise from the spot, and slowly come together to form a third figure.

"I'm here. I said I'd be here by midnight, I'm here by midnight. And frankly I'm insulted that you thought I wouldn't," she said, crossing her arms. "It's not like I'm Alagor or something."

"Love you too, sis," said the first figure with a slight grin.

"Sorry, Alagor," Kaesi said, rubbing the back of her head nervously. "Didn't realize you were here already."

"Midnight," Astar spoke up, tilting his head to point at the portal, which had been growing steadily larger. "Time to go."

Without another word, he stepped through the portal and disappeared. Alagor grabbed his sister's hand. "Ready?" he asked. She nodded, and as the two followed Astar through the portal, it instantly closed behind them.

Kaesi looked around. "So this is the human world, huh? Kinda boring," she said. Then, after thinking for a bit, added, "But I think it might grow on me."

The three began walking down the street, a look of mixed anxiety and determination on each of their faces.

"This oughta be fun at least," Alagor commented, "hard, mind you, but fun."

"On that, at least, we agree," Astar responded, "This certainly should be...fun," he finished with a wide grin, his fangs gleaming in the moonlight.

"See this is why they tell us to come on Halloween," Alagor said, "The fangs and glowing red eyes

would probably scare the hell out of most of these kids.”

“Right,” Kaesi spoke up, “because those wings of yours are so subtle, Alagor.”

“Heh,” he laughed, pointing at Astar with his thumb, “at least I’ve got control of my powers.”

They all turned their heads to look behind them. “Sorry,” Astar said, calming himself down. “Guess I’m a little overly excited,” he finished. They continued to walk in silence, a trail of smoldering footprints left in the road behind them.

2 - Newcomers

Astar was the first to wake up. He looked around, thrown slightly aback by his new surroundings. They had decided to stay in the only safe place they could think of, an abandoned chapel. He stood up and walked over to Kaesi. "Wake up," he said, shaking her slightly.

She yawned and sat up. "Is Alagor up yet?" she asked through another yawn.

Astar turned his head to look at Alagor. Astar's hand began to glow and suddenly a ball of red fire appeared. He opened his hand suddenly and the flame soared toward Alagor, hitting him in the chest. Alagor woke with a start, falling out of the seat he had fallen asleep on.

"Yeah, he's up," Astar said.

Alagor got up, brushing himself off. "I don't remember asking for the alarm clock from hell," he said. He cracked his neck on both sides then continued, "So have you guys picked out names and forms yet?"

"Devon," Astar replied. His body began to suddenly change, becoming more human. His eyes softened to a light green; his tail faded away. Suddenly a shirt, pants, and jacket formed around his body.

"Cute," Kaesi said. "And I think I'm going to go with Nikita," she finished as her body too began to transform. Her eyes also turned green and her tail disappeared. "And you, Alagor?"

"Terance," he answered, eyes fading to gray and his clothes forming around him. He noted that his and Kaesi's skin had grown paler upon transforming, while Astar's had stayed the same. "Well then," he said, "I guess we should go. This is gonna suck."

"Good morning class," said a tall woman.

"Morning Mrs. Bailey," came the mumbled response from the class.

"Today we've got three new students joining us. Now I want everyone to be kind to them, they've lost both their parents." She motioned for the new students to come in. "Class, please welcome Terance, Devon, and Nikita Shay."

The three sat down at empty desks in the back. There was only one other person in the row, a blonde haired boy with glasses.

"Now you three, Noah there will help you get used to everything here, ok?"

Devon nodded to communicate the groups acknowledgment. Noah didn't look any more thrilled about it than they did.

After school the three were walking home, venting to each other.

"How do people *do* that every day?" Terance said, holding his hands on his head. "Four hundred plus

years in hell and I *still* hated that.”

“It gets easier,” Devon said. “Not much, but still.”

“Hey, wasn’t that Noah kid supposed to walk home with us?” Nikita asked.

“We told him where to find us,” Devon said, “he’ll come by if he needs to.”

Noah looked at the clock: it was nearly ten o’clock.

“*Damn,*” he thought, picking up his backpack. “*I gotta go talk to those new kids before school tomorrow, hope it isn’t too late.*” He headed towards the door, shouting upstairs, “Be back soon, Mom, just gotta run a quick errand,” he finished, shutting the door behind him. As he walked along the road he thought how glad he was that the old chapel was just down the street. He looked down and slowed down for a minute as he noticed what seemed to be footprints etched into the pavement.

“You’d think I’d remember something like that,” he said to himself. He looked up, realizing that he had reached the chapel.

3 - Friendship

He pushed the door open slightly. At first he didn't see anyone, and then he noticed Terance was sitting in front of the podium in a meditative pose. He walked over to him, but just as he was about to speak, Terance stood up suddenly and whipped around.

"I don't think s-" he stopped short, realizing who was behind him.

Noah's eyes had widened, a look of terror on his face. It took Terance a moment to realize that his eyes had returned to their red color and that his fangs were once more visible. He thought for a moment, and then grinned widely. Noah stumbled backwards and bumped into one of the seats. He broke off a piece of the decrepit old wood and ran toward Terance, piercing it through his chest. Noah's breath, which had been becoming steadily more erratic, began to slow down again. He let out a sigh of relief.

"What the hell, man?"

Noah looked up slowly to see the same red eyes looking down at him. He fell backwards, wishing he had the courage to get up and run. "Do I look like a vampire to you?" Terance asked, pulling the wooden chunk from his body. Noah watched as the wound instantly healed, with no sign of bleeding anywhere.

"Wh-wh-what are y-" he stuttered, trying to regain his wits.

"We're demons," came Devon's voice from above. Noah looked up to see Devon perched on a rafter. He jumped off it and began falling. Noah braced himself for the impact he was sure Devon's body would cause, but he seemed to slow down just before touching the ground and landing gracefully.

"D-d-dem-" Noah managed to get out.

"Are you stupid?" Terance asked. "Say it with me, 'dee-muh n'".

"Oh, be nice, Alagor," came a Nikita's voice. Noah turned his head, trembling, to see her form coming through the wall. "You *were* about to attack him, after all."

"I was just gonna rough him up a little," Alagor mumbled to himself.

Noah, still on the ground, looked around wildly. His eyes were still wide with fear, and his heart felt as though it was going to burst through his chest. As he darted his eyes around, he accidentally made contact with Astar's glare. Noah felt a cold chill run through his body, his limbs completely petrified. He tried to speak but no sound left his lips. After what seemed like an eternity he drew his breath and, in the calmest voice he could, said, "So...what happens, now that I kn-know you guys are d-"

"Demons," Alagor finished for him.

“Right, that,” Noah said.

The three exchanged glances, seemingly communicating without a word. After several moments, Astar spoke.

“Nothing,” he said simply.

“*What the hell is going on?*” Noah thought to himself. Then, as if they all knew what was on his mind, the three nodded their approval to one another. It was Alagor who spoke next.

“Sit down,” he said through a sigh, “this might take a while.”

“Wh-why are you here, on Earth?” Noah asked, still having a little trouble keeping his wits about him. “I mean, there aren’t a bunch of demons in disguise walking around, are there?”

“Ha!” Alagor laughed, “I wish, it’d definitely piss Dad off.” He looked to Astar for a reaction but received only an empty stare. “No,” Alagor continued, calming back down, “no, there aren’t. It’s just the three of us...and a few others.”

“Believe it or not, demons aren’t necessarily bad,” Kaesi interjected. “Certain demons have just given a bad impression to the human world. Personally I blame Grandfather.”

Astar snickered under his breath. Alagor turned to him and raised his hands in frustration. “Oh, *she* gets a reaction, of course.”

Kaesi, deciding to ignore her brother, continued, “But of course, there *are* also evil ones, same as with humans. And that’s why we were sent here.”

Noah, who all at once seemed to replace his fear with interest, sat up and asked, “Why? Because something evil is here?”

Astar nodded his head. He began to reel off facts as if they told one fluid story. “Three of the worst demons of all eternity have all been set free. They call themselves ‘The Hidden’. Their leader is another demon named Blackheart. Blackhea-”

Noah nearly jumped out of his chair. “Blackheart???” he asked excitedly. “Isn’t he supposed to be the son of the devil?”

“Um, yes,” Astar responded, taken aback. “How did you know that?”

A slight grin broke the corners of Noah’s mouth. “I...read a lot,” he said with a bit of a blush, realizing how overeager he sounded. “I mean, I’ve always been interested in mythology, and he’s...come up...a lot,” he finished, his words fading. After a few moments of silence, he added, “But I’ve never heard of you guys. Who are you anyway? I mean your real names?”

“Kaesi, Alagor, and Astar,” Alagor said, pointing with his thumb to each in turn. “And I’m not too surprised you haven’t heard of us, Kaesi and me are barely over 400 years old. Astar’s just a little over

100.”

“Why is he so much youn-” Noah began, but once again was cut off.

“Astar is... *different* than Alagor and myself,” Kaesi said.

There was yet another bout of silence, until once more it was broken by Noah's voice. “So there are four bad guys, Blackheart, and The Hidden?” he asked.

Astar nodded. “Wallow, Abigor, and Gressil,” he expounded.

“Right, well my point is it's three against four,” Noah said. “And I know a lot about mythology, maybe I could help!” he concluded, only now hearing how desperate his voice had sounded.

“You know,” Kaesi said thoughtfully, “he makes a good point.”

Astar remained expressionless, and then asked, “What do you think Alagor?”

“I liked him better when he was about to pee his pants,” he said. Then, grinning and clapping a hand on Noah's shoulder, he continued, “but this is good too.”

Noah felt Kaesi's hand come down on his other shoulder. He looked up at her; for once, she had no smile on her face, only a look of worry.

“In order to join us, you have to accept the Mark of the Damned,” Astar explained, reaching out and placing a hand on Noah's chest.

Noah nodded his acknowledgement. Kaesi and Alagor tightened their grip.

“This,” Astar said, “is going to hurt.”

Noah's screams could be heard echoing through the darkness.

4 - Marked

The bell rang. Mrs. Bailey was reading down the roll call list.

“Butler, Clay,” she said.

“Here, unfortunately,” Clay mumbled. “Why the hell are we still doing roll call in senior year?” he whispered to a nearby classmate.

“Buxton, Analee,” Mrs. Bailey, who either had not heard the comment or else chose to ignore it, continued.

Analee, who had already fallen half-asleep on her desk, merely raised one arm in the air lazily.

“Castello, Peter.”

“Here,” Peter answered brightly.

Clay pretended to cough into his hand. “Kiss-@ss.”

Terance couldn't help but let out a small laugh. He felt a sharp jab in the rib and looked over just in time to see Nikita pulling her elbow back and glaring at him.

“What?” Terance asked in a whisper, “it was funny.”

“Collins, Noah.”

There was a moment of silence. Devon, along with Nikita and Terance, didn't seem to find it odd. The rest of the class, however, acted as though something was terribly wrong. Everyone was looking around, trying to figure out why Noah had not responded. Apparently Noah had never been late to class.

Mrs. Bailey, attempting to bring order back to the classroom, continued, “Foster, James.”

Terance, who had decided to disregard the rest of the roll call, turned to Devon. “You think he's alright?” Terance asked.

“He's fine,” Devon answered without making the slightest facial expression.

“So what mark do you think he'll have?” Nikita asked excitedly.

“Impossible to know,” Devon shrugged, “We'll have to wait and see.”

“Well that's why I asked what you *thought*.”

"Give it up, sis, he's too literal," Terance said.

"I am not t-" Devon paused, seeing the door fly open. Noah entered, walking directly to his seat.

Once they were about half an hour into class, Noah finally spoke. "Why didn't you tell me?" he whispered angrily.

"Tell you what?" Devon asked calmly.

Noah pulled the zipper of his jacket down just enough to show a faint light shining through the shirt beneath. He glared at Devon, who looked briefly and then turned back to the front of the class. "Calm down," he said simply.

"What do you mean, 'calm down'?" Noah hissed back.

Devon turned back and stared Noah in the eye. "Calm. Down," he said calmly, "and it'll stop glowing."

Noah hesitated, unsure whether Devon was serious or not. Then, Noah relaxed in his chair and took a deep breath. As he slowly exhaled, he could feel the burning in his chest die down. He glanced down his jacket and saw that the light had faded away. Noah let out a sigh of relief.

"I told you," Devon said without so much as looking at him.

After school, the gang walked to the chapel together.

"Don't your parents wonder where you are all day?" Nikita asked Noah.

"Nah, I just tell them I'm hanging out with friends. Which is sorta true."

"Am I the only one that's bothered by the fact that we've been here three days and haven't even begun training?" Devon asked somewhat harshly.

"You know, that's a good idea; I've been wanting a chance to kick your butt," Terance said with a grin.

"Teeth," Nikita, Noah and Devon said in unison, without ever needing to look. Terance closed his mouth quickly and pulled back his fangs yet again.

"Shut up."

As the four walked into the chapel, Terance shut the door behind them and bolted it shut. At once, the three demons began to revert to their natural forms. Noah watched in disbelief as they change appearance completely.

"That's still cool," he said in awe.

Kaesi smiled, Alagor shrugged, and Astar ignored the comment altogether. He was too busy walking over to a corner of the chapel; upon reaching it, he moved a statue, revealing a door built into the stone

floor. It occurred to Noah that the statue had to have weighed at least one hundred pounds, and yet Astar had moved it as if it were no heavier than a pillow.

“What’s that?” Noah asked.

“Trap door,” Astar answered, as if no more explanation was needed.

“It leads to the room under the building,” Alagor explained further. He had a wide grin on his face; it was obvious he was excited. “Of course, we had to make it a good bit bigger to be able to use it as a training room. And the best part is, even if someone finds the door, they can’t open it ‘cause the handle’s been worn away on the outside. Only way to open the door is from below.”

“Then how exactly...” Noah began, but Kaesi interrupted him.

“Like this,” she said, winking. And with that, her body turned into black smoke and dissolved into the ground. A few moments later, the door opened, and Kaesi climbed out of the hole.

Astar, without a word, jumped down into the hole. Kaesi, Alagor, and Noah followed suit. Once below the chapel, Noah was able to see the hidden room. The wall’s looked irregularly built, as if someone had melted them away. He had a hunch that Astar had been in charge of enlarging the room.

“Welcome to our training room,” Astar said to Noah, turning around to face him. Suddenly, Astar’s hands began to glow a bright red. “Now fight.”

5 - Prophecy

A wall of flame soared right past Noah, missing him by inches. He could feel the intense heat; this was no natural fire. Noah felt the beads of sweat running down his face.

“What are you – ahh!” he screamed as he barely dodged yet another fiery blast.

“I. Said. Fight,” Astar repeated. Yet another blast rushed by him. Noah looked in terror to see that Astar was building up one single ball of fire between his hands. Noah stumbled backward, trying to run, and fell to the floor. He closed his eyes and threw his arms in front of his face, waiting for the next fiery blast to come. But it never did. After a few moments, Noah drew forth the courage to open his eyes. There in front of him, arm extended, stood Terance.

“That’s not what he signed on for, Astar,” Alagor said.

Astar stood still for several moments, taken aback by Alagor’s interference. At long last he turned and began walking toward the corner. “You’re right,” he said, never turning his head.

“Look just because yo-...I’m what now?”

Astar sat down silently in the corner. A wall of bright red fire sprung from the ground and surrounded him.

“Well...okay then,” Alagor said, slightly confused. He helped Noah, who was still trembling slightly, come to his feet. “Don’t worry,” Alagor continued, “it won’t happen again.”

After a while, the tension in the room had died down. Noah was in the corner reading, while Alagor and Astar had begun fighting. Kaesi was standing to the side, forming small balls of black energy in her hands and then subsequently making them disappear. Occasionally, she would fall backwards and disappear into the wall, only to reemerge from the ground moments later.

“I don’t...get...it,” Astar grunted between attacks.

“What?” Alagor asked, “How I’m...kicking...your butt?”

“Hardly,” Astar panted, snapping his fingers. A series of fiery explosions surrounded Alagor, sending him back several feet, where he crashed to the floor.

“What I don’t get,” he continued, brushing himself off, “is why we have *yet* to see any activity from Blackheart or his pathetic little followers.”

Alagor clamored back to his feet. “Are you saying you weren’t even *trying!*?” he asked, walking back over to join Astar.

"I mean we know for a fact that they came to this town," Astar continued, ignoring Alagor. "What do you think, Kaesi?"

"I honestly have no idea," she responded, slightly surprised that the conversation had turned to her. "Alagor, do you-"

"Don't bother asking," Astar cut her off, "Alagor's an idio- ow!" He rubbed the back of his head where Alagor had hit him.

"Next time it won't be my fist, *or* your head."

Astar hesitated – for a moment it seemed as if he might retort Alagor's threat, but then decided to move on.

"How did you know?" came Noah's voice from the corner.

"Know what?" Astar asked distractedly.

"That Blackheart was here, how did you know?"

"Oh that's right, of course you don't know," Kaesi answered. "All throughout Hell are small portals through which demons can observe the human world. Didn't you ever wonder how we knew human names to take, or even how to interact?"

"Um...no," Noah admitted. "Never even crossed my mind."

"Well, you need to stay sharper than that if you're going to be hanging around us," she chastised him playfully.

"And you can start by helping to figure out my Blackheart hasn't come out of hiding yet," Astar snapped.

"Be nice," Kaesi warned.

"Yea," Alagor added, "he hasn't done anything to deserve you yelling at him. You're just pissed because you're Hellfire powers have been getting weaker."

"You know that happens when the suns power is lower," Astar said, dismissing the comment. "There's probably an eclipse on the way."

Noah sat up with a jolt. "The Day of Crescent Sun!" he shouted. Kaesi looked at him with a look of curiosity, raising an eyebrow. Noah immediately discerned there was no point explaining quite yet. "I need to go get a book," he said, "just to be sure."

"I'll get it," Kaesi offered. "I'm quicker. Where is it?"

"In my room, on the middle shelf on the twelfth bookcase. Only one with a black cover."

"I'm on it," she said cheerfully. She faded into the floor and was gone. There was a brief moment's silence.

"Who the hell has twelve bookcases?" Alagor asked.

"I didn't say I had twelve, I said it was the twelfth," Noah retorted with a slight grin.

After a few minutes had passed, Kaesi reemerged from the floor, holding a thick book with the title "1001 Unfulfilled Prophecies" in yellow letters on the cover.

"This the one?" she asked with a smile. "Oh and by the way, what's with those magazines?"

Alagor looked from Noah to Kaesi. "What magaz-"

"Nothing," Noah said quickly, grabbing the book. He sat down and began flipping through it. Astar peeked over his shoulder.

"It's in another language?" he asked.

"Seventy-two," Noah responded distractedly, scanning through the pages. "Helps to avoid biased translations."

"Well, demons are only taught Latin. Some, like us, learn other languages if we are ever to be sent here. We obviously had to learn English. Bottom line is unless it's one of those two, we're going to have a problem reading these."

"Oh, I can read sixty-four languages," Noah mumbled, still flipping through the book.

"Why?" asked Alagor, who was now lying on his back in midair. "When is that skill ever going to be even remotely useful?"

"Right now seems to be a good example," Kaesi answered with a smirk.

"Here!" Noah exclaimed suddenly, slamming the book to the floor. "Here's one in Greek: 'And come day of blackest sun, so shall he, Son of Hades, grow powers anew, and it shall pass that he of only body and mind shall become indomitable'," he read. Again he flipped through the pages, coming to a stop after a few moments. "Egyptian: 'And Anubis shall have children, and the eldest shall be stronger than the father. And one day Ra shall sleep, and Anubis' children shall become strong, and he who has no soul shall too, have no equal'". Again Noah scanned the book; "Here's an Old English one: 'Come *Day of Crescent Sun*, he who was born in Hell shall rise, and no demon nor angel shall stand his equal'". Noah closed the book; everyone looked at one another wordlessly. After a few moments, Alagor let out a sigh.

"That sucks."

6 - Encounter

At the other end of town, a blonde-haired boy and three others stood gathered around a small lake. The moonlight reflected off the surface, the water sparkling in the otherwise dark atmosphere. The boy tossed a rock at the lake, where it skipped twice then sunk to the bottom.

“So Clay,” one of the other boys asked, “that Nikita girl’s pretty cute, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Clay answered. “But that cousin of hers scares the hell out of me.”

“Oh that red-haired kid?” a curly-haired girl chimed in, “I know, he’s so...creepy.”

“This girl,” came a cold, raspy voice from underneath a nearby tree. In the pale glow of the moon the figure was indistinguishable; only his outline was visible. “Nikita, did you say? Does she have a brother, both with dark hair?”

The fourth of their group, a tall, well-built boy, stood up and stepped forward. “And who the hell are you?” he asked.

The figure stepped forward, the moonlight washing over his face. His eyes glowed a bright red; he wore a long, black jacket that nearly touched the ground. “My name is immaterial,” he said with a flicker of a smile. He turned back to Clay, approaching him. “Now, to answer my question, does she have a brother?”

Clay’s eyes began to glaze over. When he spoke there was no inflection in his voice. “Yes.”

“And where would I find them?” the man asked in a near whisper.

“The building at the end of Thirteenth Street,” Clay replied.

“Thank you” the man hissed, grinning.

“Of course,” Clay answered blankly.

“Hey wait a minute,” the taller boy interrupted, “What are you doing, Clay?”

“It’s fine, James,” Clay said.

There was a sudden splashing sound from the lake. Everyone but Clay and the man turned to look. From the middle of the calm surface emitted a ripple, followed by another, and then another, each larger than the last. A rock was propelled from the depths of the lake, landing near James’ feet. The girl walked over and picked it up; she then looked back at the water.

“What —” she began. A massive wave rose from the middle of the lake. In a single motion, it formed into

a tentacle-like tube and wrapped around her, James, and the other boy, lifting them up. The ground beneath them opened up as it were a whirlpool. All three had a look of terror on their face, two petrified to speak. The watery arm slammed them into the hole, which instantly closed. All that could be heard was a discomfoting crunching sound.

The man laughed coldly and raised his hand. Each of his fingertips grew longer and sharper. Overhead, a cloud drifted in front of the moon. The already faint light grew darker. Clay's eyes shot back to life; he spun around hysterically.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"They call me Blackheart," he said with a grin. Without warning, he plunged his hand into Clay's chest. Rather than leaving a wound, his hand seemed to dissolve into the boy's body. When his hand emerged, it was clutching a glowing bluish-green orb. The instant the orb was completely removed, Clay's body fell to the ground. Once more, the ground mysteriously opened up and swallowed it. Blackheart closed his fist; the bluish-green light from the orb could be seen coursing through his arm, and finally disappearing into his chest. He let out a cleansing breath.

"Gressil!" Blackheart shouted into the night.

All of a sudden, a pillar rose from the earth, taking on a human form. His skin was dark and dry; he had a certain solid appearance to him.

"Wallow!"

A girl emerged from the lake; the water seemed to become something that was solid but not ice: a substitute skin, bluish in color. Somehow, it looked as though she would be soft to touch.

"Abigor!" Blackheart finished.

A swirling vortex of fog appeared in the air and slowly fell to the ground. When the fog dissipated a ghostly-white skinned man stood in its place. Black tattoos covered his body; his face was bare and expressionless, except a single scar between his eyes.

"Let's go say hello," Blackheart said with a look of excitement in his eyes.

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"Damn it!" Astar shouted, slamming his fist into the wall. "All this time I thought he was training, but he's just been waiting! Waiting for this damn eclipse!"

"Well, wait a minute," Kaesi said, trying to calm him down, "We're stronger than we used to be, too."

"It doesn't matter how strong we are!" Astar spat. "As soon as that eclipse comes, we've lost!"

"Calm down, Astar," Kaesi continued, "We don't even know when this eclipse is coming."

They all turned to Noah, looking hopeful.

“What?” he asked, “I’m supposed to know?” There was a brief pause. Noah rolled his eyes and sighed, pulling out his phone. “Let’s see…” he drifted off, pressing a few buttons. He stopped suddenly, not wanting to look back up.

“Oh, wait, let me guess,” Alagor said exasperatedly. “It’s tonight.”

“Fortunately, no,” Noah answered. “It isn’t until November 29th.” He looked back down at his phone. “November 6th.” An ominous gust of wind chilled the air. “That means we’ve got just over three weeks to find Blackheart. We have to stop him.” He paused as another gust of wind rushed past him. His eyes narrowed in thought as he looked up. “We’re…underground.” The air in the room suddenly grew thick. It was as if a tornado was enveloping each of their bodies. The room around them seemed to blur into nothingness. Noah felt himself losing sensation; it was as if the outside world had detached itself from him. The next thing he knew, Noah was laying spread-eagle on the ground outside the chapel. A tall, dark figure with bright red eyes stood before him, the moonlight illuminating his face.

“Well now,” Blackheart laughed evilly. “We can’t have that, can we?”

He held out his fist. When he opened it, a piece of paper with a red border and strange symbols fell from it. The paper stopped in midair and began to glow. Alagor’s eyes widened.

“Not a —” he stopped short. Noah knew why; once again he could feel himself losing sensation. But this time was different, this time was more gentle. He felt his eyelids growing heavier, but he wasn’t tired. Everything around him began to fade away. The air grew darker, until he was surrounded by nothingness. His eyes closed, and when they opened again, he was in the schoolyard, neither friend nor foe in sight.

## 7 - Alagor

“– Teleportation Scroll!” Alagor finished. There was a sudden flood of darkness. When it dissipated, he was no longer in the churchyard. He spun around wildly. Blackheart was nowhere in sight. Neither were The Hidden.

“Damn it,” he sighed, “Any idea how he managed to get a Scroll, Astar?”

There was no response.

“Astar?” he asked again almost absent-mindedly, still looking around.

He was somehow in the schoolyard now. Astar again gave no response.

“Astar?!” Alagor snapped this time, growing frustrated.

He turned to yell at him, but found only empty space where Astar stood seconds ago. It only now registered with Alagor that Blackheart and his minions were not the only ones missing. Astar, Kaesi, and Noah were gone as well.

“Astar!” he called out, hearing no answer other than his own voice, echoing faintly in the eerie stillness. “Noah! Kaesi!”

More silence. An uncomfortable lump began to form in the back of his throat. Something was wrong. He knew that paper Blackheart had dropped *had* to have been a Teleportation Scroll. But had it only sent him away?

*“Maybe he forged a scroll,” Alagor thought, “Maybe it wasn’t strong enough to move all four of us, maybe...”*

He stopped, again looking around. Something didn’t feel right. It was as if an unseen pair of eyes was watching him.

“Kaesi!” he screamed out again. He was growing more worried with each passing second.

“Anybody?...” he asked quietly.

He did his best to shake the eerie feeling that was crawling down his spine. There was a sudden, confusing impulse focused around his chest. It was as if something inside him had sprung to life. A single word formed in his mind: chapel. He wasn’t sure why, but he knew he had to act on this feeling.

“Calm down,” he told himself. “You’ve just got to get down to the chapel; it’s only a few blocks away.” He looked around and, confirming that no one was watching, sprouted his long, black wings. “It’s a good thing this is a small town,” he added. With one mighty thrash, he propelled himself several meters



into the air, where he turned in the direction of the chapel and took off. After a few minutes, he still couldn't shake the feeling that, despite not being able to find anyone, he was being watched. Alagor slowed down, coming to a hover. He focused all his energy into his ears. There was a faint, almost silent, whistling noise. It was getting louder; closer. Alagor's eyes widened.

"Oh sh—"

There was a sudden pressure on his back; it felt as if someone had strapped a ten ton weight to him. He could feel himself plummeting to the ground, any minute he would collide. He spread his wings as wide as he could, trying to slow himself down. Alagor slowly started to come back to a hover, but it was too late. He was too close the ground now, and, with a painful thud, his body hit the pavement.

"Now I see why people without wings don't fly," he grumbled, pushing himself to his feet. He cracked his neck, stretching. "It hurts."

"They aren't there," said a quiet, inflectionless voice.

Alagor turned to find Abigor standing flatfooted, hovering inches off the ground.

"What?" Alagor asked, still recovering from his crash.

"Your friends. They aren't at the Holy Ground."

"It's an abandoned chapel," Alagor said, panting, "It's hardly Holy Ground."

"It may be abandoned," Abigor continued, no expression ever breaking his straight face, "but Blackheart was unable to enter; it must, therefore, be Holy Ground."

"Heh," Alagor laughed, grinning. "Well that was what we were hoping for when we chose that spot." He paused. "So where are they then? Where are Astar and Kaesi and Noah?"

"Oh, I imagine they're about where you are," Abigor answered with an air of mystery, gently sinking to the ground.

Alagor stormed toward Abigor and grabbed him by his scarf. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Abigor, despite Alagor's threatening manner, remained absolutely stoic. "I don't believe I'm supposed to tell you," he said, "but concurrently, I do not much care. You are not in the town of New Haven that you have come to know. It is in fact replica, existing only in your mind. However," he paused. Alagor felt a sudden pain as Abigor's fist made brief contact with his face. Alagor was knocked back several feet. "Everything that happens here is as real as ever."

"And I'm guessing," Alagor responded as he got back to his feet, "That the same goes for you," he finished, running forward and swinging at Abigor. However, rather than landing a punch, Alagor's fist went right through him. Abigor's body where the punch had connected had become nothing more than smoke.

“No. I cannot be harmed.”

Alagor attacked again, with no change in result.

“Maybe I can’t hit you, but I doubt you can avoid this!” Alagor shouted, hurling a shadowy ball at Abigor. However, the blast simply phased through him.

“You cannot touch the wind,” Abigor said simply.

Alagor summoned his energy into his fist. A pitch-black orb formed around it. He swung again at Abigor as hard as he could. Just like every other attempt, Alagor’s fist met only air. Abigor held out a hand. A powerful gust of wind came from nowhere, hitting Alagor square in the chest; it felt as though he had been hit with a wrecking ball. Alagor fell to the ground, doubled over in pain. He looked at the ground, lost in thought. This pain was too severe to have come from a single attack.

“I’m not going to win this, am I?” Alagor asked, gasping for breath.

“Perhaps you aren’t as moronic as you look,” Abigor responded quietly. “Though I suppose you couldn’t very well walk and breathe at once if you were.”

Alagor laughed and grinned. “What’s the old saying?” he asked. “If you can’t beat ‘em?...”

## 8 - Astar

Astar opened his eyes. He was lying on the ground; he could feel the cold, hard surface beneath him. He pushed himself up, wincing. There was a throbbing pain on the side of his head that he couldn't explain. As he stood up he realized how dizzy he was.

"Must have hit my head," Astar mumbled to himself. He had an inexplicable feeling that he had been unconscious a long time.

"I'm afraid that was me," said a deep, coarse voice.

Astar rolled his eyes and looked in the direction of the voice to find Gressil sitting on a pillar of stone in front of a building, his legs hanging off the edge. It finally occurred to Astar that he was in the school yard.

"So they still let you walk around without your bag?" Astar asked.

"What bag?" Gressil spat.

"The one you keep on your face so small children won't cry."

Gressil slammed his hands into the top of the pillar, pushing himself off. As he fell to the ground, the pillar withdrew back into the earth. As Gressil's feet hit the ground, Astar could feel the quaking it caused beneath his feet.

"You think you're funny?" Gressil asked angrily, cracking his knuckles menacingly.

"No, I just think you're ugly. And apparently easily confused."

Gressil jerked his head to the side. A second pillar shot from the ground at an angle and connected with Astar's shoulder. Astar stumbled back but remained standing. Gressil grinned and jerked his head to the other side, sending a third stone pillar into Astar's face. Astar lost his balance and fell backward, landing with a thud. Astar chuckled, rising to his feet.

"I've been waiting for a chance to see how much this training has paid off," he said with a smirk.

As he clenched his fist, they caught fire, burning a brilliant red-orange. He dashed toward Gressil, moving in a zigzag pattern with a speed unlike anything Gressil had ever seen; it was almost impossible to follow his movements. With a final swift dash, Astar appeared, his fist hurtling toward Gressil's stomach. Rather than sending Gressil back as expected, the punch merely collided, neither demon giving an inch. Astar's fire faded away. He pulled back his fist, leaving a singed cavity of ash in Gressil's body. Gressil merely laughed and regenerated his injury.

"You can't defeat me, not with your Hellfire growing weaker," he laughed. "Then again, you couldn't at

your strongest.”

Astar aimed another punch, but missed; Gressil sunk into the ground, blending into the Earth.

“Where did yo—”

“...*Chapel...*”

It burst into his head without reason or warning. Before he could focus on where the voice was coming from, he felt a blinding pain on the back of his neck where Gressil’s elbow had hit him. Astar grunted, falling to his knees.

“...*Chapel...*”

There it was again. It was a voice inside his head, but he couldn’t explain where it came from. All Astar knew was he needed to get there, and soon.

“So, I’ll admit it,” he told Gressil, “You’re stronger than me. But I’m still faster.” He turned to face Gressil and grinned. “A lot faster.”

It was as if Astar disappeared; the next thing Gressil knew, he was looking around foolishly, only to find Astar had already made it several yards away from the school. Gressil simply snickered.

“I know exactly where your headed, child. And there is nowhere on Earth I cannot find you.” And with that, Gressil once more descended into the depths of the Earth.

“*Almost there,*” Astar thought to himself. “*Hang on Kaesi...Alagor...Noah...*”

He skidded to a halt; the pavement beneath his feet shattered from sheer friction. There before him was the chapel, but with one small difference: there were red spots on the ground, trailing to the door. Astar darted forward and threw the doors open, immediately slamming them shut behind him. Inside, he found a continued trail of red. What was it? Paint? It glistened, almost like...

His eyes followed the trail as it moved toward the wall to his side. He stood, speechless, as he looked at the wall. There, written in the red liquid, was a message that Astar couldn’t help but smile at. He raised his eyebrow in curiosity as an image began to form underneath the last line. It was a handprint, and Astar knew exactly what he needed to do. He reached out to place his hand over the red handprint, but as he did so, the ground beneath his feet shook, knocked him down.

“Are you coming out?” called a rough voice from outside. “Or do I have to come in?”

“*Damn it,*” Astar thought to himself. “*Him again.*”

“To be honest,” Gressil continued, “I don’t really care how we do this. One way or another, I’m going to beat you within an inch of your afterlife.”

Astar stood himself back up and, placing his hand back on the wall, responded, “Maybe later, I’m out of

here.”

Gressil’s face contorted in rage. He reached out in front of himself; a chunk of Earth broke apart from the ground and rose up. He waved his arm to the side and the boulder propelled itself into the door, smashing it down. The boulder shattered, creating a cloud of dust. There was a bright light, and when the cloud dissolved, Gressil found nothing but an empty building.

## 9 - Kaesi

“*The schoolyard...*” Kaesi thought to herself, looking around. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. The disorientation hadn’t quite gone away.

“Alagor, was that a —” She stopped short. Alagor was gone, as was everyone else.

“Why do I get the feeling that something bad is going to happen?” she asked herself. “Because something bad *always* happens to the pretty girl, that’s why,” she answered.

“I think that’s being a little generous, don’t you, love?” The voice, despite its sing-song, harmonious tone, made Kaesi cringe.

“What do you want, Wallow?” she mumbled, already irritated. She looked up to find Wallow laying stomach-down on a small cloud, presumably one of her own conjuring.

“Now, now, now, is that anyway to talk to the one person who knows how to get you back to your friends?” Wallow teased, wagging her finger.

A look of mixed confusion and surprise washed over Kaesi’s face. “You’d actually do that?”

“Of course not,” Wallow answered, beaming. Something about her overly sweet voice and saccharine smile made Kaesi feel sick to her stomach.

“So let me guess,” Kaesi said snidely, “He got his hands on a Teleportation Scroll.”

“Close,” Wallow answered, winking. Her cloud dissipated as she slowly drifted back to Earth. “But not quite.”

“Then what?” Kaesi asked hesitantly. She was beginning to wonder if Wallow was planning on divulging anything or merely wasting her time.

“Yes, what indeed,” Wallow grinned, putting her fingertip against her lips as if thinking. She began walking in circles, looking up in mock-confusion. “What looks like a Teleportation Scroll, works like a Teleportation Scroll, but is so much better than a Teleportation Scroll?”

Kaesi’s eyes widened. She desperately didn’t want to say what was on her mind for fear that she might be right. It was too late; Wallow had caught her expression.

“Oooh aren’t we the clever one? Figured it out already, have you, love?”

Kaesi looked at her feet, not wanting to make eye contact. “It was a Banishment Scroll, wasn’t it?” she asked dejectedly. She knew that that meant she was stuck here. “*Well,*” she thought, “*only if she says —*”

“Yes.”

Closing her eyes, Wallow grinned harmlessly. “So I’m afraid tha– ahh!” Her eyes shot open. Wallow shrieked as Kaesi’s fist connected with her stomach. Wallow glared; it was the first time she had broken her child-like demeanor.

“You little brat!” she shouted, grabbing onto Kaesi’s wrist with both hands.

Kaesi allowed her arm to dissolve into the familiar shadowy smoke and pulled it out of Wallow’s grasp. She clenched her fist, solidified her arm and, without losing a second, swung again, landing a punch between Wallow’s eyes. Wallow stumbled backward but balanced herself.

“This is one fight,” Wallow said as her legs became pure water, slowly rising and twisting, “that you shouldn’t have started.” Wallow looked down on Kaesi from her self-made pedestal. She smiled menacingly, two rows of razor-sharp fangs staring down on Kaesi.

It was as if something inside Wallow had exploded; her entire body fell into a single burst of water, plummeting back to Earth. As soon as the water came near the ground, it formed a tidal wave-like wall and rushed forward, engulfing Kaesi’s body. Kaesi felt an icy, prickling sensation constricting every nerve in her body. There was a sudden sharp pain in her forehead. The single word “chapel” was slammed to the front of her mind.

All of a sudden, and as quickly as it had happened, the watery entity rushed backward to reform Wallow’s body some several feet back. Kaesi twitched; it was as someone was sending periodic pulses of electricity through her body.

“What’s that matter, love?” Wallow asked, her sweet voice returning. “Did the baby get hurt?!” She put particular emphasis on the last word as she threw her arms in front of herself, turning them into a flood of spiraling water. Kaesi braced herself, but wasn’t ready for what happened next: the water hardened at the moment before impact and became a blunt pillar of solid ice. Kaesi tried to make her body intangible but instead received a sharp pain. She was hurled back several feet.

“I’m afraid that little smoke trick won’t work for quite some time,” Wallow teased. “The inside of your body is completely frozen, and with my special ice no less.” She smiled then looked at Kaesi with a look of curiosity. As Kaesi had tried to use her powers again, something had sparkled. It was brief, but Wallow was sure she had seen something gold sparkle from somewhere within Kaesi.

There was a sudden sharp pain in Wallow’s leg. She looked down at it then back up to see Kaesi, arm outstretched and hand smoking a dark substance.

“How dare you blast me,” she huffed. “But of course, I know you’re just trying to distract me.” The defeated look on Kaesi’s face told her she was right. “That’s angel’s hair, isn’t it? Only one reason for that.”

She walked over to Kaesi, who was still nearly paralyzed from Wallow’s attack. Wallow place her hand against Kaesi’s chest. Her entire hand and arm suddenly dissolved into a thick mist and sunk into Kaesi’s body. Kaesi winced and screamed out in pain. She almost hoped she would pass out just so

she couldn't feel the pain anymore. Wallow's arm passing through her was forcing Kaesi to use her powers, causing an even greater pain. Tears began flowing down Kaesi's face; this was too unbearable. At long last Wallow removed her hand. In it, she now held three Scrolls, each lined in silver, with a glowing golden string binding them together.

"No..." Kaesi panted, now too exhausted to speak.

"Well, well, well," Wallow sang gleefully. "I think dear old Blackheart would be most interested in seeing *these*. And for being such a helpful little girl, I think I'll spare you." She began to dissolve on the spot

"For now." And with that, she was gone.

Kaesi, breathing heavily and trying to stay conscious, summoned what remained of her strength and faded away into the ground. Several blocks away, she reemerged in front of the chapel and, pushing herself to her feet, limped inside.

Just as she had gotten through the door, she noticed something red appearing on the wall. It slowly started to form sentences:

*Four shall be sent  
To worlds apart.  
Bodies separate;  
United by heart.  
But four shall return,  
Each hand in hand;  
Divided they fall  
But together they stand.*

A red handprint appeared beneath it, and Kaesi reached out to touch it. As her hand met the mysterious print, there was a bright light, and she was gone.



## 10 - Noah

Noah whirled around hysterically. No matter where he looked, he couldn't find a trace of another living creature. Or a *nonliving* creature for that matter. His heart was racing. He knew something was wrong, something was –

"It's different," he told himself. He began to worry. He had always stayed in his own little safe zone and, sure enough, as soon as he stepped out, *this* happened. His heartbeat quickened. A white light shone faintly front under his shirt. In the midst of his fear, Noah found the will to laugh a little.

*"I had almost forgotten about this mark,"* he thought to himself. He took a deep breath and tried to calm down. The glowing subsided. He took another breath and began walking forward, though he wasn't quite sure where he was going. Should he go home? No, something told him he should go back to the chapel; that maybe the others were still there. Maybe they were immune to whatever Blackheart had done with that paper?

The farther he walked, the more he began to feel that somehow, despite never seeing a soul, he was not alone. He was right.

"Noah, is it?" said a cold, yet somehow soft, voice.

Noah wasn't sure what had happened. There behind him, where he himself had stood seconds ago, stood Blackheart. He stood a mere few inches from Noah; it felt as if his bright red eyes were burning through Noah's.

"You are quite the intelligent one, from what I've been told. Keeping that in mind, I present you with two options: join me, or die."

Noah tried to speak, but no words would come.

"An understandable reaction," Blackheart scoffed. "But I must insist on an answer," he added menacingly.

Noah was suddenly very aware of the lump forming in his throat, of his heartbeat raising, of his hands shaking. At long last he drew forth the courage to speak.

"I...I c-can't join you. N-not ever."

"How sad," Blackheart said thoughtfully. What's more, he actually looked like he meant it. He looked at his hand, closing each finger into a fist one at a time and then opening them again. He did this several times and, on the sixth or so time, he flung his fingers open, each one now long and slender, each with a sharp tip. Noah staggered backwards and fell to the ground. Blackheart reach his arm out toward him. Noah was paralyzed with fear; he couldn't do anything to make his body move as Blackheart placed every one of his needle-like fingers against his face. Blackheart pressed them harder and harder against

Noah's face but nothing happened.

"But of course," Blackheart said, almost grinning. He reached upward with his other hand. A faint light materialized in his chest and traveled up his arm and into his hand. Blackheart immediately expelled the light, firing a bluish-green orb into the sky, where it vanished.

"Now..." Blackheart continued, turning back to Noah. But there was no one there. Blackheart looked around angrily. There ahead of him, now several feet away, was Noah, running as quickly as he could.

Noah, still running at break-neck pace, looked behind him. Blackheart was gone. He grunted as he hit something hard, knocking him back to the ground. His glasses fell from his face and slid several feet away. Squinting as tightly as he could, Noah could see staring down at him, his face contorted with rage.

"You impudent little Fleshchild," Blackheart hissed, "You dare insult my abilities with your pathetic efforts to escape?"

He sliced his fingers across Noah's face. Noah winced in pain as Blackheart's fingers cut into his skin, leaving a wound stretching diagonally across his face. Noah screamed out in pain, but he was not alone. Blackheart's hand shot back, smoking. He was screaming even louder than Noah. Blackheart looked in horror at his hand as it continued to sizzle. Noah, covering the majority of his cut with his hand, looked on in astonishment; he wondered what had just happened. He suddenly recalled something Alagor had said to him:

*"The most significant difference between demons and humans," he explained, "is the obvious difference. Demons aren't alive."*

*"And why exactly is that so significant?" Noah asked.*

*"Well, it all has to do with how demons are created. We aren't born from flesh like humans. When a person dies, they leave behind tiny fragments of their soul. In some cases, those fragments can be blended with an element of nature. When that happens, a demon is spawned.*

*"So you and Kaesi, you were blended with shadows?"*

*"Yeah, and of course, just like with different people, each demon develops a unique trait. Just like my wings or Kaesi's matter phasing."*

*"And Astar, he was blended with fire?"*

*"I think that's a story he needs to tell," Alagor answered evasively. "What I'm trying to explain is that the fact that we have a fraction of a soul is what sets demons apart."*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"It's the reason we can exist but never die. No soul to take. It's also the reason that demons can hurt other demons, the contact of souls is just enough for us to feel pain. But most important of all," he said, hesitating, making sure he had Noah's full attention, "it's why Blackheart is so much stronger than*

*other demons; he has no soul at all. And that's your biggest advantage over him. Because no part of him was ever alive, his body can't handle contact with blood."*

Noah removed his hand from his face and looked down on it; it was covered in blood. Both his heart and mind were racing. In fact, he could actually hear his heartbeat. A light burst forth from Noah's chest; it was as if the sun were right in front of him. His Mark shone so brightly that it was, for the first time, completely visible through his clothing. Blackheart, momentarily distracted from his own pain looked at Noah's mark and laughed.

"So they've marked you. That explains why they've invested so much interest in you," he said. "And the Mark of Sacrifice no less," he added, looking closer at Noah's Mark. It was a straight vertical line with two arrows crossing through it.

"Mark of...Sacrifice?..." Noah mumbled to himself. He looked to the ground. When he looked back up, Blackheart's hand was coming toward him again. Noah grabbed Blackheart's arm with his blood-soaked hand. There was a bright flash of light; suddenly Noah found himself back at the chapel. Seizing the opportunity, he released Blackheart's arm and ran inside, leaving a trail of blood behind him. There was an eerie quiet. Noah looked back through the window; Blackheart had made no effort to move toward the chapel, instead he just stood there.

"Where are they?" Noah called out.

"In worlds apart," Blackheart laughed threateningly.

Something triggered in Noah's memory. One of the prophecies Noah had been reading mentioned something about "worlds apart". He closed his eyes and thought back.

*Four shall be sent  
To worlds apart.  
Bodies separate;  
United by heart.  
But three shall return,  
Each hand in hand;  
Divided they fall  
But together they stand.*

"United by heart..." he mumbled, "by heart...no...by blood..." He ran his finger across his cut and began writing on the wall. "Please guys...come to the chapel...please be able to see this somehow, and come to the chapel." After he finished the "united by heart" line, he paused.

"Three...maybe...hopefully...it's wrong," he said as he made one small change to the line. At the end he pressed his blood covered hand against the wall and, after a few moments, felt the familiar sensation that came with being flung across space. All at once, Astar and Kaesi stood beside him. Noah looked from one to the other, then at the ground.

"Three..."

## 11 - Betrayal

"Damn that kid!" Blackheart shouted as he appeared on the spot. He pulled back his right sleeve to reveal his arm. Radiating from the place Noah's hand had been, it was as if the skin had been melted away. There was total darkness surrounding him, with no apparent floor or walls. He walked a distance then sat down on what seemed to be nothing; it was as if a chair made of solid air sat beneath him. He gripped his injured arm with his good hand. He took a deep breath and sighed heavily with a hint of a grimace as his arm repaired itself.

"Looks like Astar did a number on you," a voiced mocked from somewhere in the shadows. Blackheart glared into the abyss as Alagor stepped forward into view. Blackheart's eyes started to glow a bright red; Alagor's arms snapped to his side as his body became stiff and immovable.

"It was the human boy." Blackheart said passingly. "And how did you—"

"I brought him here," Abigor said softly from the shadows as he, too, stepped forward. "I believe he is of more use with us than lost in some parallel world."

"Not so lost," Blackheart said spitefully, releasing Alagor, "That insolent Fleshchild found a way to escape."

A portal opened and Gressil's body materialized. "The pretender, too" he said gruffly.

A stream of water poured down from nowhere. Once finished, the puddle it had formed rose up and shaped Wallow's body.

"Fortunately," she said with an innocent smile, "I have some good news." She held out her hand to reveal the three Scrolls she had taken from Kaesi.

Blackheart stood up and held out his arm as the Scrolls soared through the air and into his hand. "Well, it seems today was not wasted after all," he said, laughing wickedly.

"So you managed to take the Exile Scrolls from Kaesi," Alagor said, half impressed.

Blackheart looked from the Scrolls to Alagor. "Only three?" he asked. "I'm sure you were aware I had enlisted The Hidden. Surely my father would have fashioned one for each of us?"

Alagor shrugged as his body transformed into its human form. "Well he had one for you. But then we found out about these three and well," he paused exasperatedly, "there wasn't enough time to make three more."

"So..." Blackheart thought aloud, "how do I know that you are truly sincere in your desire to join us?" he asked Terance.

“What is it you’re looking for?” Terance asked absentmindedly, swirling a trail of black smoke around his finger.

“You ask a question to which you already know the answer?” Blackheart asked almost amusedly.

“You want information, then? Fine. On the day of the eclipse, when you’re powers get a supercharge,” he paused as he crushed the smoke in his fist, looking up at Blackheart, “Astar’s will be gone. Temporarily, of course.”

Blackheart looked at Terance with a mixed look of bemusement and incredulousness. For a moment it seemed it might actually smile; instead he held his hand in front of his chest and flicked his wrist. Terance’s body was thrown to the ground.

“And you seek to tempt me with knowledge I have long since possessed?” Blackheart spat.

Terance got up and brushed himself off.

“He has nothing to say,” Gressil said angrily. “He cannot be trusted!”

“Aww,” Wallow said sympathetically. “I think he’s rather cute,” she said, wrapping her arms around him from behind.

Terance shrugged her off and took a step to the side. “Fine,” he said. “You want information you can use? Don’t touch the kid.”

“The human? And why do you suggest such a thing?”

“You need to ask after what happened to your hand? And the stronger you get, the more damage it’ll do to you if you touch him.”

“And this information,” Blackheart asked, “it is...reliable?”

“Meaning what?” Terance asked sharply.

“Meaning I have naught but your word that what you’ve told me can be trusted!” Blackheart yelled.

“What has he to gain?” Abigor asked quietly. “Should his information be found faulty,”

“He will be dealt with,” Gressil finished for him, slamming his fist into his open hand, “Severely.”

“They raise a fair point,” Blackheart said thoughtfully, “But answer me this: Can you follow through with such an act of treachery against your sister?”

“It doesn’t look like I have another choice,” Terance responded.

Blackheart laughed malevolently. “And the boy? And Astar?”

“Now *those* won't be a problem.”

“He lies!” Gressil shouted coarsely. “He cannot be trusted, Blackhea—”

“Enough!” Blackheart shouted back without so much as turning to face Gressil, whose face contorted in anger as he fought back the urge to argue.

“I say let him join,” said Wallow as she slowly walked in a circle around Terance. “And if he strays...” she trailed off as she placed her hand on his right arm. An icy chill spread from her hand as his skin turned a light blue. He looked in fear from his arm, which felt as if every nerve in it had been paralyzed, to Wallow, who smiled mischievously back at him. She released her grip and the feeling came flooding back to Terance's arm. It had just now dawned on him how powerful these demons really were.

“So,” Blackheart continued, “You believe you are up to the task of joining us?”

“I am,” Terance answered simply, taking a knee and looking down.

“Then welcome to the winning side, dear Alagor.”

“Thank you,” Terance answered, never looking up, “Father.”