

Army of Heroes

Part 1 and 2

No Fear No Hesitation

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Part 1

Chapter 1

Today is the day the world ended, and no one knows it yet. The day started like any other day, nothing out of the ordinary. It was June, Tuesday, 5:30am if such details are important. Workers on third shift are getting ready to go home and first shift is getting ready to start. The sun is just starting to rise in the sky and the cool morning air makes a few early risers feel like a walk. A young man walks past a lumber factory as he looks inside the large open loading dock doors where the trucks would make their deliveries if they were there. He watches as forklifts drive past with stacks of long wood planks and workers are looking at their watches. These are the third shifters waiting for the last few minutes to tick away. The man walks on and crosses the empty side street into a park. He sits down on a bench and looks at the orange reddish horizon above the trees. The man suspects nothing strange about today, it's a beautiful morning. Little does he know he is being watched. Something behind him moves closer, it stalks him making no sound. The man continues to watch the sky and smiles as the new day is unfolding in front of him. The creature is close nearly upon him, and still the man is oblivious to the danger he is in. The creature finally reveals its presence with a low growl. The man turns slowly behind him and suddenly jumps up and moves back. He is staring at a large black dog growling and salivating. It bears its large fangs as it lowers its body ready to pounce. There is no escape the man is doomed. The dog lunges at him and blackness falls over his eyes.

A police car makes a left turn coming down the road the man crossed earlier. He drives past the park and notices a red blotch on the grass. He pulls over and gets out to inspect it. The blotch is no wider than a soccer ball. He squats down and rubs the tips of his fingers on the long blades of grass. He rubs his thumb over his fingers and looks around. No sign of the beast or the man, no trail. The police stands up and cleans his fingers on his pants then walks back to his car. It is time for him to go home as well. He tells himself it must have been a rabbit or something. The police will do nothing, it will be forgotten. 6:00 rolls

around and the city starts to become busy unaware of the man's fate or the evil that is waking up. The war has started, but it will be nearly a year into the war that the world will feel the effects. Until then there are others that knew of this day and trained for it in advance. It will be them that will fight and die without society ever knowing of their existence. These people are an elite force of warriors not only trained in weaponry but also in magic abilities and senses not available to everyday people. To this day there are people born into this world with special abilities or powers, these people are reinforcements allowed to live in normal society hopefully undetected by evil. But these warriors have been training for this very fight since the day of their birth. Some may refer to them as angels in other cultures they are known by different names, but their purpose remains the same, to protect the world and the life on it. Both evil and hope surrounds us, walking invisibly among us. Some may sense it others will ignore it. Where will you be, what will you be doing, when the world ends.

In an unknown location a luxury city stands as if the entire city was one giant palace. White stone houses with red or orange rooftops stood side by side, each had a short white stone fence with a blue ornate design running its length on the front side near the top. No house was without trees, flowers, or plants in the front and sides. Outside the city are long green grasslands with a stream cutting through it. Following the stream would take you to tall mountains with several waterfalls cascading down the side of the rocks. Not far from the city are several long buildings with red rooftops. These are the barracks where the soldiers await directions and to receive their missions. Each building was a different squad and each squad has a different purpose, ability, appearance and color. The first building is the warriors. They are made up of mostly strong and muscly males; however females make up a small percentage of this squad's population as well. Their specialties are ferocious melee attacks with long swords, medium, or even short swords. The bigger the sword and the more details on the sword the stronger its wielder is. These soldiers are dressed in red and black.

The second squad are rouges. They fight with bows and spears; they are able to hit their targets from a distance and are medium built. They are made up of an equal amount of males and females. Their colors are yellow and black.

The third squad are known as protectors. Their main purpose is to protect the other members on their side and also to help the innocent. Though they are equipped with a small dagger they don't use it too often. Their talents are mostly magical, mainly creating shields against oncoming attacks and to heal life threatening wounds as well as telekinetic abilities. They can control the movements of objects or people with their hands. They are also able to summon ball lightning for a devastating attack on their enemies. This squad is composed of mostly women however males can be protectors as well, but this is rare. Green and black defines this squad of protectors.

Inside each squad are also ranks. Everyone are soldiers at the beginning, some will never leave this rank others are able to move up even before training is over. The higher the rank the more power they possess. This takes a lot of practice and the knowledge of their abilities and the strengths and limits of their power. It typically takes about ten years to achieve the next rank except for the rank of general. The ranks are soldiers, champions, lieutenant, captain and general. Mostly everyone has a chance to be awarded the rank of champion, but anything past that is considered elite and not achievable by every individual. Generals are so powerful that it is usually fifty years before someone makes it to general. Their power can be so intense that the mere sight of them can stop your heart. They are nearly undefeatable even to other generals. Each squad will only have one captain and lieutenant, the rank of general usually means they fight alone and are clothed in blue and black to show their superiority and independence.

Each squad stands in two equal single file lines with aisles in between them. They wait for their assignments from their captains, but today is different everyone will receive their orders from one man. The man walks down the middle aisle and he is dressed in blue and black; he is a general and has authority over all the squads. Kisho is his name. He wears his double bladed sword on his back. It has a gold handle with an engraving of a lion and dragon in battle. The blade is serrated at the top of the top blade there is a space in between the top blade and the bottom blade only a smaller blade separates the two but it's not longer than a third of the entire blade. While generals are usually no younger than 60 or 70 years in age this man appears younger possibly 35, and his story is legendary, but that will come later. It is hard to tell the age of this group of people. They live as long as 500 years, so even a general who is 70

will still appear young. But it is a fact that this general is younger than all generals before him. His only downside is he has no emotion or at least never showed it. He has never broken a smile or shed a tear. He has a face of stone and a heart to match, but still he is admired and called a hero. His face remains straight and his words are clear. He turns to face all the squads in front of him. He stands tall and motionless with his hands held behind his back.

"You stand here proud of your ancestors and your culture. You have admired the stories of our past and the heroes that were born from them. Today you become part of history. We face the biggest war the world has ever seen. We have never sent so many down to this world at the same time before, and you all are already heroes." He reaches into his cloak and brings out a rolled up parchment. He unfolds it and explains. "I will read your squad and names and your destination. Today will be the first time squad members will be separated from their captains; I wish all of you luck." He puts his right hand on a keypad next to him and pushes a few buttons. Within moments a blue swirling portal opens up behind him. He continues, "Make haste into this portal it will know where you are to be. I will begin now. From squad one Kin and Geert, from squad two Genji and from squad three Ishi. You will be sent to Japan. We believe there is an enemy captain somewhere nearby, so be alert." The four run down from their present locations and run into the portal. Kisho continues reading the names off the parchment. "Squad one Takoda squad two Alric and squad three Kita. You will be going to Germany." The three quickly run down the aisles and into the portal. Kisho kept calling names and destinations as the numbers of available members became smaller and smaller. Finally after nearly two hours only five people remain. Kisho puts down his parchment for he knows these by their names. He motions the remaining members closer. They walk towards him and stand side by side of each other their hearts beating fast enough that Kisho can hear them. "Do not be nervous. You five are exceptional, your powers and abilities have increased greatly in your training period and for the first time in our history the rank of champion will be awarded before your first mission." The few smile and are overjoyed but try to contain their feelings as they do not know how Kisho will react to feelings of happiness. Kisho continues his speech, "Squad one Kano, step forward." Kano steps forward and Kisho approaches him. He puts his hand on his left shoulder and a patch with

two wavy bold lines appears on the top of his sleeve. "Congratulations." Kisho says. Kano smiles and bows then moves back into line. Kisho calls his next name, "squad two, Nara please step forward." Nara steps forward and Kisho puts his hand on her shoulder the same patch appears, he congratulates her and she bows and steps back. "Squad three, Akina." Akina steps forward with her hands folded in front of her. She receives the patch the same way as the others, gets congratulated and bows then steps back into line. The two remaining members are already past the rank of champion. A captain has the patch of a triangle with small circles at every point. The lieutenant patch consists of three wavy lines. Kisho starts to explain their mission, "Squad one captain Malachi and squad two lieutenant Erika will join you in this mission. We have reports of something big being planned here and we will not take this lightly. Also be on the lookout of reinforcements here, they may not know who they are as of yet" Reinforcements are people born with special abilities sometimes they know of their power sometimes they don't. Their purpose is to fight in this epic battle with guidance if they are so needed, sometimes they do without knowing. Kisho continues, "I wish we had more information of this place we fear an enemy general may roam free here and if this is so you must contact me at once. Even the five of you will have a hard time with him. I will follow you in but will not join you right away there is more I need to do and more information to discover." Kisho steps aside and says, "Now pass into the portal to the United States of America" Malachi leads the group in followed by Erika then Kano, Nara and lastly Akina. They disappear into the portal. The armies have been deployed, the war has started

Chapter 2

The night is cold and the wind blows unforgivingly. The tree's branches rub each other as the wind picks up; the rustling of the leaves brings chills down the spine of the man that stands under the large oak tree with a sword strapped to his side. He is cold but does not move, he rests his left hand on the handle of his sword and stares at the ground with his head hung low. The wind blows leaves around him, blowing his hair and clothes. Tired and cold he remains motionless. Something about the wind brings fear into his heart, but it is not fear that has him frozen. Anger and hatred is consuming him. A presence is close and watching, feeding off his agony. The man looks up and grips his sword; he can feel the watchful eyes of something unseen. All that surrounds him is open fields, a broken wooden fence a few yards in front of him and another large tree in the distance. It is on one of these branches of this tree a shadowed figure sits and glares at him. The man can see it now and stands his ground. The figure stands up and jumps down to the ground with incredible speed it rushes towards the man and stops a few feet from him in a split second. The moonlight shines on a white face creature with black lines down across its eyes. It appears to be once human. It smiles and speaks in a low deep haunting taunting voice as if the sound is coming from its throat. "Do you wish for more power? To defeat all your enemies at once? I can help you." The man narrows his eyes and holds his sword tight. The creature continues, "I can make you more powerful than anything this world has ever seen. The sight of you shall make you enemies flee in terror. Would you like to kill them all at nothing more than a glance in their direction?" The man turns his head away. The creature continues to tempt him. "Would you like to save her?" The creature asks. The man looks at the creature.

"How?" He asks. The creature smiles,

"If you had more power, she wouldn't have died. You can have a second chance to save her."

"And what do you want in return? I'm assuming there is something you would gain from this deal."

"With all the power I am about to give you all I ask is for you to defeat one of my enemies. He will be no match against your new abilities." The

man seems lost and unsure of the decision he has to make. The man looks back at the ground. "Surely the life of a stranger is not as important as the life of Sonya." The creature has found the man's weakness. The man has refused to mourn her death, instead he has filled his heart with anger and hate. With the next words the man seals his fate. "I'll do it." The creature smiles and slowly fades in front of him. It transforms into gray smoke and rushes into the body of the man. His head flies backwards and his arms fling sideways. His eyes start to glaze over and the creature's voice becomes his own. He opens his mouth and lets out a loud growling scream the same deep haunting voice of the creature. His body starts to transform, his face becomes white and black lines appear down his eyes. His sword becomes larger and more twisted and serrated. Two large black wings explode out of the man's back. Even his clothes transform into a long wavy black hooded cloak. The man becomes what he once hunted. He forgets love, he forgets his name, and most of all he forgets her. He forgets his passion to save her. Her name itself is lost. The man has been tricked, tempted and possessed. All he knows now is there is killing to be done. The killing of those once on his side. He becomes a demon, and will be known as Armaros.

Two months earlier this man went by the name of Joseph. Little did he know his whole life was about to change this very night. It was a peaceful June night; a cool breeze was blowing gently making the trees sway. For June it was nice and he took advantage of it. Call it fate or coincidence, but if it was a little bit warmer out he would have been inside watching TV with the air conditioning on. The events that were to unfold tonight would have been avoided. He walks out of his home and lights up a small cigar. He is not much of a smoker, but sometimes he will have one cigar. He walks to the sidewalk while puffing his cigar. For a moment he just stands there blowing smoke into the air. The street is quite and no one else seems to be out. The street light shines down on the sidewalk as he walks a few feet down the block. A shadow in front of him makes him gasp. It appears to be a large demon like creature towering over him its head has two horns sticking out from it and its arms are stretched out ready to grab him. He turns around and breathes a sigh of relief. He looks up at the street light shining through a large tree with many twisted branches. Joseph laughs to himself, but as he turns back around he opens his mouth in disbelief. The cigar falls from his

lips and hits the sidewalk. The shadow is gone. He looks around and feels a chill on his neck, but it can't be the wind. No trees are moving. He feels a pain in his chest, his heart beats faster. It feels like his heart is going to burst out of his chest. He puts his hand to his chest and groans in pain. Just then a silver flash flashes in front of him, and the pain is gone. A figure fades into view. It is a black demon with rows of fangs for teeth and two spiral shaped horns on its head. Embedded in its head is a large sword. Joseph's eyes follow the sword up to a beautiful girl who lifts the sword from the demon. She watches as the demon falls to the ground and liquefy into the earth. She sheaths her sword and looks up at Joseph. "Are you ok?" She asks.

"Did... what I just saw really happen." Joseph is confused and astonished.

"Yes. The world is changing. War is spreading all over, and the forces of darkness have manifested themselves in your world. We are here to try to stop them." Joseph takes a moment to let all that sink in. It seems impossible to him. "I know it's hard for you to understand what is happening, but the night is no longer safe and soon neither will be the day."

"Well, thank you for saving me." She smiles at him and turns away to walk off. "Wait, who are you?" Joseph's curiosity gets the better of him. She stops and looks back at him.

"My name is Sonya, and I am a lieutenant warrior from squad one."

"A lieutenant?" Sonya lifts up her arm and points to the patch on her shoulder.

"These three wavy lines mean I'm a lieutenant. I was sent here ahead of the others to try to help those that may be in danger. Unfortunately I was not able to save all of them." She says as she bows her head.

"I'm sorry, but you say there are more of you coming?"

"Yes, many more." She says and lifts her head up.

"And you say there are demons already here, but before today nothing seemed wrong."

"There are many of them here waiting and watching. Only few have felt their presence and some have been attacked and killed by them."

"My name is Joseph by the way." She smiles and says,

"Nice to meet you." She looks away and then at the sky. "It is time for me to go now."

"Wait, will I ever see you again?" Joseph asks. She turns and looks at him.

"I am sure you will." They both smile at each other and then Sonya bends her knees and jumps into the air disappearing in the night sky. Joseph looks up but cannot see her.

"Wow, I think I'm in love." He says out loud. He walks back into his house and looks at his wall of swords he has been collecting for years. Some are too big others are just for decoration, but one stands out. A medium sword with a sharp point and a white handle. He wonders if there will come a time when he might need to use it. He picks it up and swings it around in a circle in front of him. Maybe some practice couldn't hurt.

Sonya glides through the air like a giant bird. She lands softly on the ground and leaps again gliding twenty feet before she descends. She can sense evil everywhere, but she is after something that is far more dangerous. She rests on a thick branch of a tree, hidden by leaves and watches. This intersection is quite and the glow from the street lights makes it seem like the air is a light orange. She grabs her sword and pulls it out. She is looking at five hell dogs. They are black and large, they are known for their brutal attacks and strength. One can be a big enough challenge for many, but she is about to go up against five. She jumps out of hiding through the tree leaves with her sword raised. Leafs and twigs fly out from around her and fall to the ground. With one swing she cuts the head off of one of the dogs. She quickly turns around and sees the four remaining dogs after her. She has great agility and dodges their attacks. She counter attacks with her sword and slashes the belly of one of the dogs. Blood gushes into the air as the beasts intestines pour out of the fatal wound. The three dogs circle her growling and bearing their fangs as drool drips from their mouths. Sonya holds her ground and bends her knees waiting for their next attack. The dog in front of her and the one behind her leaps at her. She hits the ground and rolls out of danger as the two dogs miss each other in the air. The third dog takes advantage of the opportunity and attacks while she is on the ground. Sonya is quick with her blade, she thrusts her sword through the dog's neck, and it exists through its back. She does not hesitate and leaps back on her feet. She still has two more to worry about. The dog leaps at her and opens its mouth. The mouth expands large enough to swallow a man whole. She has no choice but to take her defensive stance. She somersaults in mid air as the dog passes her. She swings her sword as

soon as her feet hit the ground. The sword glides close, but misses the dogs flesh. She fights very well, only a lieutenant has a chance of fighting so many of these beasts at once. If she was a champion she would have been dead. Greater agility, speed, and strength come with a higher rank. She has to end the fight quickly before her strength is drained. She holds her sword with two hands and raises it high. The sword begins to glow a light blue then the glow travels down her arm and around her body. The two dogs try to make a surprise attack. They each attack from her sides. She blinks; the dogs seem to be moving in slow motion now. She turns to her right and spins her sword at the dog then she turns to her left and does the same to that dog. She moves forward and turns around and faces where she was as the blue glow wears off. The two dogs explode into many parts in mid air blood and guts cover the street. She has used her lieutenant shield. It can do many things depending on how she wants to use it. New abilities and more powerful attacks also come with higher ranks. She has used the last of her energy on that move. She breaths heavily and drags her sword on the cement and slowly lifts it up and sheaths it on her back. Mostly all high ranking warrior's swords are too large to store anywhere else but on their backs. She needs to rest and regain her power. She walks down a side street where there aren't too many houses and leaps into a large tree. She jumps each branch up and sits down when she is near the top. She rests her head back on the trunk of the tree and puts one arm on her knee and lets the other leg hang off the branch. She looks up at the clear night sky full of stars. "Where are you guys?" She whispers. She closes her eyes and falls asleep.

Chapter 3

The sun shines brightly in the clear blue sky today, just as before. Joseph wakes from his night sleep and slowly gets up from bed. Last night seemed more of a dream, but it is not forgotten. He puts on a pair of pants and some socks, but keeps the shirt he slept in on. He lives alone and is use to fending for himself and cleaning up. The house is neat as he walks through it to the kitchen. "Time for some breakfast." He opens the refrigerator and looks inside. Besides a can of mountain dew on the top shelf there is nothing to choose from. "Great, now I have to go shopping. And I was hoping I didn't have to go anywhere today, but I guess I have to eat." He says as he grabs the last mountain dew. He puts on some shoes, grabs his keys and wallet and heads out the door. As he is driving to the store he runs the conversion through his head he had with Sonya. *She saved my life*, he thinks. He keeps her smiling face in his head as he goes through the store picking up what he needs. *She is tough, but sweet. She probably could kick my ass* he tells himself. *I want to see her again. She can't be completely human; no one can fly like she did. She appeared out of nowhere and fought that demon like it was me stepping on a spider. No fear or hesitation. Who can she be? She said she was in a squad maybe she is a military experiment.* Joseph's cart is almost full as he picks up a box of noodles. He wheels his cart a little ways down and bends over to grab a bag of rice on the bottom shelf. Something falls behind him. He puts the rice in his cart while he looks back. A box of noodles is on the ground. *Did I bump the shelf?* He wonders as he bends over to pick it up. He looks at the box before putting it back on the shelf. Just then another box falls. *What is going on here? Is someone playing a trick on me? Maybe someone on the other side is pushing.* He picks that box up right as two more boxes fly off the shelf, but before he can say anything everything on the shelf starts to fall. As if some force tipped the entire shelf over. Except the shelves never moved. People flock to the aisle to see what is going on. They see Joseph with a box in his hands and ankle deep in what was once on the shelves. A man in a white shirt makes his way through the crowd he must be the manager.

"What is going on here?" He stops when he sees Joseph. All Joseph can do is look at the man and the crowd behind him with a surprised look on his face. "What do you think you are doing?" The man asks Joseph. "What? You think I did this?" Joseph says a bit confused he's being blamed for this mess.

"You were the only one here." A man in the crowd says. *Mind your own damn business* Joseph thinks to himself.

"Get out of this store." The manager says.

"Are you kidding me? How could I possibly make this whole mess by myself in two seconds? I didn't even move from this spot." Joseph explains.

"You vandalize my store and then lie to me. Get out now or I will call the police to get you out."

"Un-freaking-believable." Joseph says as he drops the box and walks out the aisle. He tries to avoid eye contact as he squeezes through the crowd.

"Well this is just great." Joseph thinks out loud as he walks to his car. *The only supermarket close-by and I get banned from it. And I'm hungry. I guess I'll just order a pizza when I get home. Maybe I'll get a discount if I order every day.* Joseph can't help but wonder if there was an evil spirit that did that. A spirit that is trying to harm him somehow. After last night anything is possible. What just happened was no doubt supernatural. Almost being killed the night before didn't help either. He is being followed, tracked, and under attack. Not too many people survive demon attacks. He is now part of this war and there is no turning back from it. Only one person can help him...Sonya. Their destiny is entwined and soon they will fight side by side.

Joseph looks around him; dead bodies of both demons and angels lay on the ground. Swords and shields lay broken. "Is this it? Is the war over?" He asks, looking around the battleground.

"No." A voice calls out from behind him. He turns and sees Sonya. She has the look of a tired warrior. Her robe is ripped and she is bleeding. She looks up and grabs her sword; she points the handle at Joseph.

"Take it." A voice says in Joseph's head. But he does not have a chance. The largest demon he has ever seen rises behind Sonya. He is dressed in thick plate armor a helmet of horns and he holds a large double bladed axe. Joseph opens his mouth to warn Sonya, but he cannot talk. He reaches out to her, but his feet will not move. Sonya stands still as if she is unaware of the demon behind her. The demon swings his axe in the

air and then lowers it slashing Sonya's mid back. Joseph watches as blood splatters from her open wound. The sword falls from her still outstretched arm. "NOOOO!" Joseph finds his voice, but still cannot catch her as she slowly falls. He feels helpless as she lands at his feet. Joseph looks at the demon in front of him. Its eyes glow red and it is laughing. The axe is swung again at Joseph. He feels pressure on his chest like someone is sitting on him. His neck tightens as if someone is choking him. The axe stops in front of him. He reads an engraving on the top of the large axe Alastor. The name of the beast, an executioner of hell. Joseph forces his eyes open and he struggles to sit up, he puts his hand out in front of him hoping for help. But it is only because he is confused where he is. His body feels heavy and he feels he is caged in an aura. It takes a moment for him to realize where he is, in his room, in bed. "A dream?" He says "Sonya." He steps out of bed the moonlight shines in through the window on his sword he left leaning against the wall. He walks over and picks it up; he holds it in front of his face with the blade pointing up. "I may not have the power or ability that you do. But I will not let that happen." He says. "I will find you. I just wish I knew where to look." The world may look the same, but it feels different, at least to Joseph. He cannot shrug off the signs he has been getting. He can no longer sit idle. When the morning comes he will take his first steps into battle. It's time to prepare for war. *Sonya and her team cannot win this by themselves, it is too epic. As long as I have a blade I will fight. After all, I do live here. I need to protect my home.* Joseph gathers his thoughts and for the first time he does not fear his dreams or the presence he believes was in his room trying to kill him in his sleep. He had these dreams before; old hag dreams they are called, but he will not run or hide anymore. He feels somehow strengthened no fear only the desire to fight. The wind comes in the open bedroom window blowing the drapes. He points his sword to the window and says, "Come at me, now that I am awake."

Sonya stands firm and alert on the sand. She watches the waves roll in and out, she listens to the waves and the sea gulls, and she smells the air. Her senses tell her it is a normal beach, but her feelings tell her something else. The wind blows around her, she closes her eyes. She tries to pinpoint where this unsettling feeling is coming from. She opens her eyes wide and grabs her sword. In the ocean it swims closer to the

shore and Sonya is in its sight. A giant sea snake not of this world swims in the form of an S on top of the water. It reaches the sand and rises up until it towers over Sonya. It opens its mouth and shows its fangs as it hisses. Sonya grips her sword tight and waits for the snake to make the first move. The snake draws back its head and strikes lightening fast. Sonya leaps into the air high above the snake and points her sword down to fall on the snakes head, but the snake dodges her attack at the last second. Sonya is surprised her move failed, but wastes no time regaining her posture. The snake tries at a second strike, but Sonya has a move up her sleeve. With the sword still half buried in the sand from her previous attack there will be no time to pull it out and swing. She stands on the handle of the sword with one foot while at the same time holding the handle. In this crouched stance she uses her energy to make a backward somersault this makes her foot kick up the sword as her body remains out of reach. The attack slashes the snake's eye. It now has a weakness as it is blind in one eye. The snake does not give up and seems more aggressive. It strikes several times with no breaks in between attacks. Sonya uses a combination of jumps and spins to avoid the snake's moves. She runs and jumps behind the snake's head hoping for a free hit at its neck, but there is something she did not take in account. The snake uses its tail to make a powerful hit. The hit makes her loose her sword and she flies out and lands hard on her back, she is dazed. The snake goes in for the kill, she lost this fight, but something makes the snake stop and turn around. A sword has been pierced in its belly. The wound itself will not have any effect on the snake, but the distraction is enough for Sonya to retrieve her ground and her sword. Who is her rescuer she wonders as she leaps up and spins in the air slashing the snakes neck. She quickly jumps up again and brings her sword down on the snake's head cutting it in two. The snake falls to the sand bringing her rescuer in view. She has seen this face before, she takes a moment to remember and with surprise in her voice she says, "Joseph?" He smiles and puts his sword in his sheath attached to his waist.

"You remember me." He says smiling.

"What are you doing here?"

"I like to come to the beach at dusk. It helps me think. I just decided to take a sword with me because of the events that took place the last few nights."

"Are you alright? Did anything happen to you?"

“Besides being banned from a super market and a really bad dream. Not really.”

“Banned from a supermarket?” Sonya asks confused as she puts her sword away.

“You will think I’m crazy.” Sonya smiles, but does not respond. “So, do you need a partner?”

“I appreciate your offer, but it will be too dangerous for you.”

“So, you know a lot of people that would run up and stab a big ass snake.” Sonya thinks for a moment. She has to admit it was a little crazy, but it could also be called bravery. She did get permission to recruit reinforcements before she left ahead of the others, but Joseph is not one of them. He does not have any type of power that she can sense, but he does have ambition, and she can sense his courage.

“Ok.” She says. “But when I tell you to back off or run you do just that.”

“I promise.” Joseph says. He walks beside Sonya as they head to their next location.

The sun is setting ending yet another day, what tomorrow will bring no one can tell. The rocky cliffs above the beach will be good enough shelter for the night. It is high enough to see all around them, and they only can be reached up the very path they used. Sonya makes a fire and the two sit down and talk about the last few days and what has happened to them. When they finally fall asleep they completely trust each other, and secretly vows to protect the other. These unlikely companions will make a great team. I wish I could say they win the war, defeat the evil, and live happily ever after, but we all know that will not happen. The enemy does not care about human emotion or our bonds to those closest to us. This war is for nothing less than the entire world. We are all soldiers in this war. Whether we chose to be or not. Evil cannot tell the fighters from the non-fighters, they will kill all. Just like any soldier, in any war, not all of us will come home.

Chapter 4

A few weeks have passed and Joseph and Sonya have fought alongside each other. During that time they have fought smaller demons and had short battles. Joseph has gotten stronger and Sonya teaches him sword moves as well as defensive techniques. In this time they have also gotten close emotionally. They enjoy each other's company and cannot imagine fighting without the other by their side. They train together in an open field. Sonya stands behind Joseph directing his moves with the sword. Sonya's attacks are very acrobatic and useful in battle, but Joseph has more of a direct slashing, piercing approach, his feet never leave the ground. "I'm impressed." Sonya says. "You learn quickly." "Well, I have a good teacher." Joseph responds. They smile at each other and practice sword attacks on each other. Sonya restrains from using her acrobatics and sticks to basic moves. They practice at all times even in the moonlight and in the rain. Battles can take place anywhere at any time. It is better they get use to it now in practice. They have had many victories up to this day, but an approaching battle will be more challenging. This evil will not seem threatening in the present form, in fact it is beautiful. And beauty can be more misleading and the best weapon evil has. She has the name of Lilith, and she can make any man lay down their sword, unless their heart completely belongs to another. Only the voice of that loved one can break Lilith's spell. Sonya shows off her sword moves and techniques in front of Joseph as he sits with his hands resting on the pommel of his sword. Joseph smiles as he watches her. She notices he is watching and gives him a small smile. She does a finishing move to end their practice for right now. Maybe, just maybe they have nothing to worry about.

The night is silent as they sleep closely by the dying fire. They do not dream about morning or the future only the moment they are in. The sun will rise in a few hours. With the new day will bring another fight. Lately they have been fighting more and more. Before it use to be once every other day then once a day now it is more like three to four fights a day. But it will get a lot worse before it gets better.

Joseph opens his eyes, it is morning. You would think if you told someone the world was about to end and somehow make them believe

it, they might be upset, sad, or scared. Joseph has a smile on his face. It's not because he wants the world to end, but before he met Sonya his life was boring and uneventful. He was never part of anything; he never had any accomplishments or stories to tell. Now he is lying next to a beautiful girl and is part of the biggest thing in our history, maybe the last thing in our history. Joseph watches as Sonya slowly starts to wake up. She opens her eyes. "You are up. Why didn't you wake me?" "How could I possibly do that?" They smile at each other, but they can't lie around all day. They stand up and bury the fire they had going; they put on their swords and start to walk to the forest in the near distance. The one called Lilith resides here. The two of them walk into the forest looking up and around them unknowingly of the encounter they are about to have... Sonya gets an uncomfortable feeling, but she continues. An hour has passed and they are now deep in this forest. Sonya stops suddenly and puts her hand out in front of Joseph to stop him from walking on. "What is it? Do you feel something?" Joseph asks. "Maybe, it's faint almost like its being concealed." "Well, let's go and find it." Joseph takes a few steps forward before Sonya puts her hand on his shoulder. "No, wait here. Let me scout ahead first. I'll come back here for you." "What if you need help?" "Remember what I told you? To stay back when I told you." "Yeah but..." "This is not up for discussion. Do as I say." Sonya does not wait for a response from Joseph and takes off running ahead. Sonya comes to a clearing in the forest a few moments later. She looks and sees a woman bathing in a pool of water on the bottom of a waterfall. The woman turns, but doesn't seem to care she is being watched. Sonya is at first confused. Is this energy pulse coming from this woman? The woman walks out of the pool and towards Sonya. Sonya puts her arm in front of her eyes. "Do you mind? Please cover yourself." "What is the matter? You don't like the female form?" "That is not it at all. I just don't want to see... another naked woman is all." Sonya tries to word her words carefully. This woman seems to be overly proud of her body and Sonya doesn't want to insult her. "I have everything you do. Maybe you are ashamed."

“What? No way I can’t believe you said that. Looking at myself is completely different then looking at someone else.” Sonya tries to look past the woman. “Don’t you have any clothes or something?”

“I don’t believe in hiding my body.”

“Oh great, no wonder you live out here.” The woman looks at Sonya and smiles.

“Your friend didn’t listen to you.”

“What?” Sonya says shocked. Sonya looks around and sees Joseph starring wide eyed at the naked woman. “Joseph! Have a little respect!” Sonya shouts at him. The energy pulse of the woman is getting stronger making Sonya turn her attention back on the woman. “Who are you?” she asks.

“My name is Lilith and no man can escape me. For as we speak your friend is under my spell.” Lilith does not take her eyes off of Joseph, and Joseph seems to be in a trance. Sonya draws her sword and looks at Joseph.

“Joseph!” She shouts. Lilith then speaks in a soft voice, but it seems harsh to Sonya.

“Joseph, give me your sword and walk with me.” Lilith reaches her hands out towards Joseph and walks closer to him. Sonya has more to say.

“Joseph! I will kick your face in if you give that woman your sword!”

“Wha..?” Joseph says and turns his head and looks at Sonya. Sonya’s voice made it past Lilith’s spell.

“What is this? Impossible no one broke free from my grasp before.” Lilith says in an angry demonic voice. Lilith’s appearance changes into a snake like monster. When her spell is broken her beauty fades and she has no hold over that person. Joseph holds his sword ready to fight. Sonya scolds Joseph again.

“I told you to stay put. You never listen.”

“Fine, you can yell at me later, but now we have this monster to take care of.” Lilith yells as two forked tongues flicker out of her mouth.

“I will have my revenge on you!” Lilith spins around several times and disappears before their eyes.

“What, Is that it? She just runs away.” Joseph says.

“She didn’t want to fight.” Sonya says and puts her sword away. Joseph can tell she is still upset. He puts his sword away and says,

“Look, I’m sorry, but I thought you would need help.” Sonya sighs.

“Forget about it. I’m sure that is not the first time you saw a naked woman.” Joseph looks at Sonya, but doesn’t say anything. Sonya looks up at Joseph.

“You mean you really never saw a naked woman before?” She asks joking.

“Let’s just go.” He says and starts to walk behind Sonya.

“Are you serious?” Sonya says while turning to face Joseph as he walks down a path.

“Can we just drop it?” Joseph says a little annoyed and embarrassed. Sonya persists,

“You have at least kissed a girl, right?” Joseph does not respond and continues walking. “No? Wow.” Sonya says, Joseph sighs.

“Shut up already!” Sonya smiles and starts to follow Joseph.

“You know, I’m a woman. Maybe you would like to see me naked sometime.” Joseph stops for a moment and looks at Sonya as she walks past him smiling. He realizes she is still making fun of him. Joseph walks behind her yelling.

“I don’t believe this. What is your problem? Just leave me alone! Ahhhh, I feel like killing something!” Joseph rambles. Sonya just keeps smiling while walking ahead.

In a not so far away place Lilith in her beautiful form walks into a room decorated with swords and axes on the walls. People are impaled on sticks over pools of blood. The room has a walkway in between the pools of blood. Lilith walks to a large thorny throne. A large monster sits leaned back with his hand on his knee and his legs spread relaxed. He is in heavy black and silver plate armor, but his head is too far up to be seen. “I have a job for you.” She says. In a deep demonic voice the monster asks.

“What is it this time?”

“I want you to kill a girl named Sonya, and bring me the boy she travels with.”

“And what do you offer me as payment?” Lilith smiles and puts her hands on her hips.

“The same thing I always offer.”

“Hmmm.” The demon thinks for a moment. He grabs a large axe that is leaned against his throne with his large hand, covered in spikes and long fingernails. Lilith smiles she knows she has gotten her way. The demon asks, “Where are they?”

Chapter 5

Sonya and Joseph walk side by side as the forest's end comes in view. They stand on a small grassy drop off when they clear the forest. Below is a stone path that leads up a hill. Sonya bends her knees and jumps off the seven foot ledge and lands softly on her feet. She looks up at Joseph still standing on the ledge. "Are you coming?" She asks, Joseph looks at her and says,

"I'm not as flexible as you. I would twist my ankle if I did that."

"Don't think about it and just jump." She says. Joseph takes off his sword and sheath and throws it down to the ground below. He then sits down on the ledge with his legs hanging over. He pushes himself over and lands on his feet and hands so he wouldn't fall forward. Sonya laughs a little and starts to walk up the hill.

"What's so funny?" Joseph asks.

"Nothing." Sonya answers while she shakes her head. They keep walking and soon enter a park full of flowers and trees. "This is a beautiful place." Sonya says admiring her surroundings.

"I lived here for so long and never knew this place was here." Joseph admits. Sonya looks at Joseph as if she is searching for something to say. After a few moments she speaks.

"I never said this before." Joseph looks at her as she continues. "But I'm glad you are here. It's nice to have company and someone to talk to. I'm usually always alone when I go on these missions, and I'm glad I met you."

"I'm glad I met you also. This is the only time I've ever done anything important." Joseph pauses for a moment and then says, "You are really the only one I know. Sad isn't it?"

"No, it's sad for whoever didn't give you a chance." The two looks at each other and gives each other a small smile. "I'm sorry I made fun of you earlier." Sonya says.

"It's not a big deal. I know you meant nothing by it." They continue to walk through the gardens when Sonya stops and puts her hand on a tree trunk. "What's the matter?" Joseph asks. Sonya bends over as if about to faint. "Are you ok?" Sonya looks around and says,

“There is energy here and it is strong, and evil. We need to get out of here. This is beyond the both of us.” Joseph helps Sonya to stand up straight. “Run!” Sonya yells. The two take off running as Sonya gives a warning. “Listen to me, if we end up crossing paths with this monster I want you to keep running. I need you to get as far away as possible. “Do you understand me?”

“What about you?”

“Just promise me, at least this time you will listen to me.” Joseph does not answer right away and Sonya seems impatient for an answer.

“Joseph!”

“Ok, if that is what you want.”

“It is.”

The demon bursts through the ground in the forest the two passed through earlier. Several trees are tossed in the air as the demon rises. Sonya and Joseph looks behind them while running. “What the...” Joseph starts to say.

“Don’t look back. Just keep running.” Sonya says. The demon is too close to run away from. The demon knows where they are. It leaps into the air blocking out the sun which is low in the sky. The demon lands almost on top of Joseph if Sonya didn’t grab him and used her body to push him out of the way. The two fall to the ground and look up as the demon towers over them. Joseph is horrified at what he sees, he knows who he is. It is the same demon that appeared in his dream, his name is Alastor. Sonya gets up and helps Joseph to his feet. She withdraws her sword and says.

“I’ll hold him off, now run!”

Sonya...” Joseph starts but is interrupted by Sonya.

“You promised me Joseph now run!”

“You don’t understand. I know this monster. He will kill you.” Alastor brings down his axe, but amazingly Sonya’s sword stops the axe as she holds it over her head. The ground shakes and tremors. *How did she take a hit like that? No way could she have repealed that.* Joseph thinks to himself.

“Joseph! Why are you still here? Run!”

“I know I promised you I would run, but I made a promise to myself I wasn’t going to let him kill you. So I’m sorry, but I’m not leaving.” Joseph says and takes out his sword.

“Then you leave me no choice.” Sonya says. Alastor lifts up his axe to prepare for another attack. Sonya takes that time and grabs Joseph’s arm. The environment he is in starts to fade. *“What is she doing to me?”* He wonders. Right before his eyes he is standing someplace else. *What did she do? Did she teleport me? I didn’t know she could do that.* Joseph’s head is filled with questions. *I don’t know where I am. Why did she do that? Which way do I run? Where are they?* “Sonya!” He shouts. Joseph picks a direction and starts running hoping he is going the right way. Hoping he gets there before it’s too late.

Back at the battle Sonya fights Alastor alone. His attacks are ferocious, but slow. She can predict his moves. She takes complete advantage of her agility and swift acrobatic attacks, but not one hit wounds Alastor, his armor is too thick and strong. Her sword just seems to bounce off. She knows she cannot escape, but she continues to fight. She will never give up. “You cannot defeat me little warrior, just stand still and accept your fate.” Alastor says.

“You will tire before me. Then I’m going to chop your head off.” She answers.

“The battle will not last that long.” Alastor says and brings his axe down hard. Sonya dodges it at the last second. The axe hits the ground with enough force to split the ground in two as well as a tree that was in its path. Sonya has no more ideas and she knows she has to think of something fast. Meanwhile Joseph runs as fast as he can. “Don’t quit on me now legs. Joseph tells himself. “I have to find her, I cannot let her die.” I need more speed, more power. Give me more strength” he says as he runs through the tall grass. He is not a religious man, but he hopes someone is listening and will grant him his requests. He does not watch where he is going and his next step is over a hill. He hits the ground hard and rolls down the hill. He grabs to a root sticking out of the dirt and holds on as he tries to get his footing back. He yells out in pain, but tries to ignore it. He hears something at that point. He hears fighting. “Sonya” he whispers. He slides down the hill and as soon as it flattens out he runs towards the sound of battle. He stops at the foot of a large drop off at least fifteen feet. “Damn” he says frustrated. He looks to his left and sees Alastor. He runs along side of the cliff until he stands over Alastor and Sonya fighting. He has to jump. He grips his sword tight and points it down. His plan is to jump on Alastor’s back and hoping to get a lucky strike at his neck. Sonya tries to block another attack with her

sword, but this time it is too much the sword shatters and she is knocked back. This is Joseph's chance "No fear, no hesitation" he says and then jumps. He lands on Alastor's back, but the sword hits steel and fails to leave a mark. The only thing he accomplished was to take Alastor's mind off of Sonya long enough for her to get up. Sonya picks up her broken sword, but it is useless. She looks up and shouts.

"Joseph no!" *How did he find us? Why did he come back?* She asks herself. Alastor jerks his shoulders forward and Joseph loses his balance. He is flipped over Alastor's head. Alastor swings his axe in Joseph's path. Joseph is falling and can do nothing. Sonya leaps up and catches Joseph, but she is not quick enough to avoid the blade of the axe. The axe slashes her mid back. She lands on her feet and lays Joseph down softly before falling to the ground on her side.

"Sonya, no!" Joseph turns her on her back and kneels by her side. "I'm sorry." He says.

"No." Sonya says and smiles. "Do not have any regrets. You did more than you were capable of. You are a hero as far as I'm concerned."

"Sonya." He says and bows his head. "Tell me what I can do."

"This is no longer in your hands my friend. Remember what I taught you." Joseph looks at Sonya, but Sonya is looking past him. She sees Alastor reaching down to grab Joseph. She will use the last of her energy to save him. As the sunlight fades she puts her hand on his cheek and smiles "goodbye, my friend." Joseph fades from that place. She has teleported him to safety again. He reappears kneeling underneath a large oak tree. At first he does nothing, he just stays there with his head down and his eyes closed. He hopes it's all a bad dream, but this time it's not. He opens his eyes and clenches his fists. He yells up at the sky SOOONYAAA!" He gets on his feet. He is angry at Alastor and swears revenge. He is angry at whoever allowed this to happen. Whoever refused to give him the power to defeat this demon. But most of all he is angry with himself. "Is she really dead?" He wonders. "Yes, she is dead. I killed her. It's all my fault. She died saving me. If I was not there she would not have had to risk her life. Why didn't I listen to her? Why didn't I just stay? I hate you." He says underneath his breath, and then he looks to the sky and shouts. "I hate you! I hate you all!"

The wind blows his clothes and it is here that his destiny changes. In the darkness he is approached by a white faced demon.

“I can help you.” It says. “Would you like to have the power to save her?”

“I’ll do it.” He says already forgetting Sonya’s message, *remember what I taught you*. If he had more time he would have known this is not what Sonya would have wanted. Joseph changes into Armaros that very night. “Welcome to war Armaros.” A voice says in its head. “Now kill the one named Malachi.”

“Yesss.” He answers and flies up into the night sky. The war is more real now than ever before. It is harder to deny what is happening. Nights are becoming longer. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are becoming more frequent, the Earth itself seems to be destroying itself. It took two months to corrupt a good man. How long will it take for everyone else?

Chapter 6

It is near dawn when Malachi and his team have only just arrived through the portal into the earthly world. They look around making sure everyone made it through. They all stand close looking at each other as Malachi explains. “Our first objective is to find Sonya; she is my lieutenant and was sent here before us to try to help those she could. We were supposed to meet here and exchange information. I wonder where she could be?” He says and looks around. They are in a field with tall grass. The very same field Joseph ran through to try and locate Sonya and Alastor.

“Something happened here, or nearby.” Akina says. Akina has the ability to sense emotions in the air or of those near her. “The wind carries much sorrow and anger.” She continues looking as if she is about to cry.

“Akina, are you going to be ok?” Malachi asks concerned. Akina nods her head yes as Nara puts her hand on Akina’s shoulder to comfort her. Akina closes her eyes and tries to read the wind.

“A battle happened here not too long ago.” Akina says. “Something is still here. And it is very angry.” The others keep watching Akina; they know her feelings on these things are very reliable. Akina opens her eyes. “It’s getting closer.” Malachi grabs his sword from his back and readies himself.

“I can feel it.” He says. The others do not hesitate to draw their weapons, they know Malachi doesn’t take his weapon out unless something is about to happen. Armaros hovers above them with his sword drawn. He has never seen this group of people, but his instincts tells him the one he needs to kill is one of them,

“Malachi.” He says to himself before diving down at them. Akina is the first to see him and she casts a large pink shield around everyone in the group just before Armaros’s attack. His sword hits the shield and bounces off. He lands near them on his feet. He looks at them for a moment.

“What is that?” Kano asks. Malachi shakes his head.

“I don’t know, but its energy pulse is strong.”

“Well we have to fight it anyways.” Erika says and readies her bow that shoots arrow beams made from her own energy. Nara’s bow is restricted to regular arrows and also has a smaller bow due to her being a lower rank than Erika. Armaros lets out a low growl and raises his sword. He charges the group heading right for Malachi. Both Erika and Nara fires their arrows. Armaros dodges them and brings his sword down fast above Malachi. Malachi’s sword as well as Kano’s stops him. Akina throws a lightning ball towards Armaros and it hits him on his right arm. He steps back and roars in pain as the wound starts to bleed.

“Good job Akina.” Erika says.

“Oh, thank you.” Akina says smiling so wide she has her eyes closed. Being complemented by anyone that is above you in rank is a great honor. Armaros knows he picked a fight with a formidable foe. Fighting them one at a time would be easy, but all of them at once is impossible. They all fight together and they all look after each other. Evil may have consumed him, but his memories are still intact somewhere in his head. He sees himself as Joseph supporting Sonya in battle. This group cares for each other as he cared for Sonya. He fights his own feelings, but his thoughts made him lose his concentration and Nara’s arrow pierces one of his wings. Armaros roars and swings his sword at Nara, but Kano knocks his sword away with his own. Malachi comes from his side, but Armaros sees him and swings at him forcing him to duck and roll out of attacking range. Kano slashes Armaros’s stomach and Erika’s arrow beam explodes in his chest. Armaros feels weak. Was this the power he asked for? He can’t even kill one of them. He thinks to himself. He is angry now that he made this deal and he chooses to take it out on those around him. He goes after Akina she seems the weakest and more fragile than the rest. She jumps back just in time for Kano and Malachi to intercept his attack. All three swords hit, they protect each other too well. The only way Armaros can win is to try to fight them when they get separated. He decides to retreat. He backs up a little bit and starts to fly up.

“He’s trying to escape.” Kano says.

“Not for long.” Erika says. She raises her bow and shoots her arrow beam as she says,

“Akina, Nara attack.” A combination of arrow beams, arrows, and a lightening ball hit Armaros. He starts to fall a few feet away where they

were fighting. The group starts to run to meet him head on. Armaros regains his balance and lands on his feet, but he is too weak to fly. He watches as Malachi and Kano runs at him. They jump and both their swords pierce his chest. Armaros howls in pain and his sword falls to the ground. *They have won.* He says to himself. He falls to his knees, and slowly starts to change back into Joseph.

“What is happening?” Kano asks.

“He’s... he’s just a young man.” Akina responds. They all look surprised at what they are seeing. Joseph falls on his back and looks at the clear blue sky. Malachi puts his sword away and kneels down on one knee next to Joseph.

“Who are you?” He asks. It is hard for Joseph to look at him so he continues to look up at the sky.

“My name...was Joseph.” He answers.

“How did you become this demon?” Malachi asks. The other group members surrounds Joseph and he looks around at all of them.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for this to happen.” His heart feels heavy with sorrow, but yet he does not cry. “It was the only way I could save her.”

“Who?” Malachi asks. Joseph pauses for a moment then answers,

“Sonya.”

“Sonya?” Everyone says almost all at once.

“You know Sonya. Can you please tell us where she is?” Kano asks. Joseph seems surprised that they knew each other.

“Who are you, and how do you know of Sonya?”

“She is my lieutenant as well as Kano’s.” Malachi says.

“We are squad one.” Kano adds.

“She said there were others.” Joseph says.

“We are squad two.” Erika says pointing to herself and Nara.

“And I’m squad three.” Akina joins in.

“I wish we all could have met under happier terms. I am ashamed I tried to kill you. Sonya would be very disappointed in me now.” Joseph struggles to finish his sentence. “Even if I had succeeded she would have never forgiven me. To kill her friends to save her. What have I become?”

“Where is Sonya?” Malachi asks again. Joseph gasps for air.

“She is dead...I killed her.” The group is astonished at what they just heard but Akina interrupts the silence.

“No you didn’t.” Everyone looks at her. “You couldn’t have killed her. You loved her.” Joseph eyes swell up with tears, but he tries to hide them by closing his eyes.

“She told me to stay away and I didn’t. She died saving my life. So it was me who killed her.”

“What attacked you?” Kano asks.

“Alastor.”

“Alastor?” Malachi says. Joseph nods his head.

Akina walks up to him and kneels down on his other side. She puts her hand on his chest, but she looks up sorrowful.

“I cannot heal him.”

“We are all sad to hear this news of her death, but do not blame yourself.” Malachi says. Joseph breathing is slowing down his wounds has taken their toll.

“I am sorry.” He says before his head falls to one side.

“Is he...?” Nara asks. Malachi puts two fingers on his neck and waits. He sighs and closes his eyes.

“He is.” He says and stands up.

Why couldn’t Akina heal him?” Kano asks.

“Because he didn’t want her too.” Erika replies. Malachi nods his head in agreement.

“So much sorrow, so much anger. He loved her.” Akina says and starts to cry. The emotions that were released from him when she touched him made her feel what he felt. She cried for him, because he never did.

Erika and Nara tries to comfort Akina.

“What evil are we dealing with, that could corrupt this man into what we saw?” Kano asks Malachi. But he does not have a chance to answer.

“We were too late.” Akina says wiping the tears from her face. “If we got here sooner we could have helped Sonya fight and Joseph would never have turned into this demon. We could have saved both of them.”

“Alastor.” Malachi repeats the name.

“Who is Alastor?” Kano asks.

“He is an executioner. And he never fights unless he is told who to go after. I just wish I knew who ordered him to kill Sonya.” He looks down at Joseph’s body. “I guess we will never find out now.” Malachi pauses and looks around. “We will bury him here. We can at least give him that.” They take the time to bury Joseph in this field and place a cross on the mound of dirt. Their first day here and they already had to fight a

demon and bury a man. Who would have thought that they were the same person? The group gathers around the grave.

“I hope you now find peace.” Erika says as she looks down at the grave site. They all bow their heads, but they cannot spend too much time here, they have to move forward. There is a demon general somewhere here that has remained hidden, even from Sonya. The team cannot afford to let their guards down now or all will be lost. A sad day today was and many more will come, for no war is without tears.

Chapter 7

Kisho walks down a long lighted hallway with marble floors and crystal archways. He comes to a stop at the end where two men stand in front of two large golden doors.

“Do you have any information for me?” Kisho asks. The two men look at each other as if they don’t want to be the ones to deliver bad news. One of them speaks.

“I’m afraid the news is not good.”

“Please tell me.” Kisho persists. The other man picks up the conversation.

“A few days ago Sonya and her companion, Joseph ran into Alastor.”

“Alastor cannot be killed with his armor on. Neither of them has that power. Were they able to get away?” The men look sad and slowly shake their heads.

“Sonya’s spirit was released. She will be joining us shortly.”

“What about Joseph?”

“He was possessed with anger.” The other man finishes the sentence.

“He was transformed into a demon known as Armaros. Malachi and his group fought him as soon as they arrived.”

“What happened to them?”

“Armaros was defeated and reverted back to his human form...”

“Unfortunately his wounds were too severe and his spirit was released as well.”

“Both of them defeated? This news comes to me too late.” Kisho pauses and looks away from the men. “They were sent too late.”

“The demon general is still hiding nearby; they are not too late to fight him.”

“And they will need your help to defeat it.”

“What will happen to Joseph?”

“He will arrive here soon, but he will not be allowed to pass.”

“You cannot send him down the other hallway. He is a good man.”

“Due to his demon form and the anger still in his heart even now. We have no choice but to reject him.”

“Sonya will not approve of this. She won’t give up on him.”

Sonya will have no choice, but to obey us.”

“You don’t know Sonya then.”

“That decision lies with us and yet to happen.”

“I am sorry, but you cannot be here when they arrive.”

“I understand.” Kisho says and bows. “Thank you Gabriel, Michael.”

Kisho turns and walks away down the hallway. He will meet up with Malachi and he hopes he is not late this time. He also hopes that Gabriel and Michael are kind with Joseph. On the day he sent Malachi into our world he already knew of Sonya and Joseph, but not of their present fate. In his heart he is sad to hear of their death, but his face will never show it.

Malachi leads his group to a lake in the middle of a large grassy field. He sits on a log while the others let out a sigh of relief as they sit on the grass. They have been walking for so long and it feels good to finally sit down. After a few moments Akina stands up and says.

“If everyone gives me their water canteens. I will fill them up with fresh water.”

“That is a good idea. Thank you Akina.” Malachi says. The others thanks her as well as she goes around collecting the canteens. Akina walks to the lake squats down, and starts to fill up the canteens. Malachi lifts his head up suddenly and seems focused.

“Malachi?” Kano says not sure what Malachi can sense.

“There is an energy pulse.” Malachi replies.

“Is it evil?” Nara asks. Malachi waits for a moment then replies.

“Yes, and it’s getting closer.”

“I feel it too now.” Erika says. An energy pulse can be strong or weak depending on the power of the opponent. It also can be detected weather it is good or evil. An evil energy pulse will feel like straight bold lines coming at you. While a good energy pulse will be wavy lines and doesn’t hit you so hard. The amount of lines determines their power .If the opponent is strong enough and evil it can make those that can sense it fall to the ground. Usually if the energy pulse itself can do that there is no chance of a victory if they were to fight in battle.

“Akina!” Malachi shouts as he stands up. “Come here and join us. There is danger nearby.” The others hurry to their feet as Akina rushes back with their canteens. She lets everyone take their own until she is left with only hers. For the first time Malachi looks worried as he warns everyone. “This may be the general we were told about. I only hope Kisho finds us soon.” Malachi withdraws his sword as the others follow

his lead. He looks into the distance and sees a dark figure holding a large iron club.

“It’s an oni general.” He says.

“An oni, here?” Kano replies.

“He must have been summoned.” Erika says. The oni walks closer and starts to take shape. It is a huge buff ogre type creature with red skin and two horns sprouting from the top of its head. It has a large thick black beard and large claw fingernails. The large iron club it holds is twice the length of a man and is referred to as a kanabo.

“Everyone be ready, and be mindful of its Kanabo. It will only take one hit to kill you.” Malachi warns everyone. He tries to sound brave and reassuring, but he knows the power of this oni general and if Kisho does not show up to offer help they all will surely be defeated. Both Malachi and Kano stand in front with their swords ready for battle. Nara and Erika stand in back ready to fire when the oni is in range. Akina is off to the side ready to cast a lightening ball or cast a shield depending on the situation. The oni is in range and both Erika and Nara fire their arrows. Akina also joins the fight with her magic attack. They hit the oni, but it keeps walking closer unharmed. With an opponent this strong it is expected. The oni is now close enough for Malachi and Kano to attack. They attack at the same time with their swords. The oni swings his kanabo forcing the two to duck out of the way. Erika and Nara take this opportunity to fire as many arrows as they can. The arrows do not go deep enough into the oni’s skin to slow it down. Even Akina’s magic seems useless against it. The oni slams his kanabo to the ground throwing everyone off balance except for Malachi. Malachi slashes the oni’s side using all his force, but only a small scratch appears. Kano makes sure the others can’t hear him as he leans in closer to Malachi.

“There is no way we can win this fight.”

Malachi does not take his eyes off of the oni and replies “Do not be so quick to give up so soon.” The oni turns to Akina and rushes her.

“Akina, run!” Malachi shouts. Akina raises her hand as the club is brought down. The oni looks at his kanabo and snares. Akina has managed to stop it, but the oni’s strength proves to be greater than hers. As the oni uses more strength to push the club down Akina’s energy is consumed.

“Oh no.” She whispers as her eyes widen. The club travels down at her, but before the club brings Akina’s doom a large sonic blast surrounds

them. The oni is knocked back and Kisho appears in a mid air jump attack. His sword is held out in front of him and he cuts the oni's shoulder deeply. The oni yells out in pain. Kisho lands on the ground and turns and blocks the oni's counter attack. Iron club and sword collide making a loud clang. Kisho pushes the oni back. Malachi stands next to Kisho and says.

"I thought I would never say this, but I'm glad to see you." Kisho looks at Malachi with his always straight expression.

"Hmmm." Is all he has to say. Erika and Nara aim for the oni's head while Kisho, Malachi, and Kano try to cut away at him from his stomach. Kisho looks at Malachi and says.

"Tell Akina to cast a shield around all of you. I'm going to sonic blast him a few times more." A sonic blast is the strongest magic attack a general has. It can kill weaker opponents instantly. The blast attacks everyone in range even if they are on your side. Not wanting to kill his own side he hopes Akina's shield can withstand his blast, but if he had his doubts he wouldn't attempt it. He knows Akina is stronger then she thinks. Malachi shouts.

"Akina, shield now!" Akina tries to focus and a pink bubble starts to grow around her. "Everyone get close to her." Malachi says as he runs to her. Kisho makes sure everyone is inside and then blasts the oni three times. Each time the oni is hit by the blast he is knocked back and pieces of flesh fly off. Blood squirts from all over the oni's body. The oni is weakened, but he is still strong. He swings his kanabo at Kisho again and Kisho blocks with his sword, but the force behind this attack knocks him back and off his feet. Everyone gasps; a general is rarely ever knocked off his feet. Malachi and Kano rush and hover over Kisho trying to keep the oni distracted. Kisho jumps to his feet and says thank you to Malachi and Kano, they nod and the three fight the oni. Erika and Nara shoots more arrows at the oni and one of them hits his eye. He lets out a horrible roar, and smashes the ground with his kanabo. It is as if a bomb went off right underneath them, everyone is flown up and back. They lie on the ground in a daze. The oni now has the upper hand; all he has to do is choose his victim. Akina manages to get up on her hands and knees, but she is disoriented. The oni looks at her and lifts up his kanabo. Everyone looks in horror as she is helpless to the oni's attack. They try to get up to rescue her, but they are just as disoriented as Akina.

“Akina!” Kano yells. Malachi reaches out to her, but he is too far away to grab her. The dirt and dust that was blown up with them makes it hard to see. The oni brings down his kanabo. Akina can do nothing; she closes her eyes and waits for her fate. She hears a loud clap of thunder and feels someone embrace her around her stomach and pulled out of danger. The others look in her direction, but all they see is a pair of feet. The oni’s kanabo hits the bare ground. More dust and dirt is flown up into the air and a sword pierces the oni’s neck. Nearly decapitated the oni falls to the ground. When the dirt and dust clears everyone is still on the ground. They all look shocked at their hero.

“Impossible.” Malachi says. Even Kisho is shocked at who he sees. Standing tall with his bloody sword resting on his shoulder and the blade facing behind him he smiles.

“It cannot be.” Akina whispers, “Joseph?”

Chapter 8

Joseph walks down the same hallway that Kisho did not too long ago. When he reaches the end he is standing in front of Gabriel and Michael. "Where am I?" He asks.

"You are dead." Gabriel replies.

"Where is Sonya? Is she dead also?"

"Yes, she walked through here just before you did." Michael says.

"Damn. So I failed then."

"Failed? She doesn't need to be saved. She died heroically." Gabriel says.

"You should worry about yourself." Michael adds.

"Why? I thought I was dead. What else is there to worry about? Just move aside and let me pass. Isn't that how it works?"

"We cannot let you pass." Gabriel and Michael take turns talking.

"Why not?"

"Because you are too angry to be allowed inside."

"And due to your recent actions, you still have the demon blood in you."

"Well you are to blame for that. I asked for help and you ignored me."

Joseph says angrily.

"I would watch what you say to us if I were you." Michael says remaining calm.

"I asked you to help me save Sonya, but I guess that wasn't part of your plans."

"You asked for power, it was a greedy request. You cannot choose to save anyone anymore then we can."

"You should accept Sonya's death and honor the person she was. Not betray her and allow Sonneillon to tempt you."

"Maybe it's easy for you to let people die, but I won't."

"Silence!" Gabriel raises his voice and it echoes throughout the entire hallway.

"You wanted to save her to stop the sorrow in your heart. You wanted to save her for yourself. Therefore it was a greedy request."

"You should have mourned her death instead you blamed everyone else and let anger consume you."

"You see this is why we cannot let you pass."

“But we do believe there is good in you and your courage has shown through on more than one occasion.”

“So we are willing to make you a deal.”

“We will send you back as a guardian. Your task will be to help those that need it. By the time of your final dismiss if your actions are worthy enough. We will allow you to pass.”

“However, if you turn back into Armaros, or you decide not to help someone you will not be given another chance. This is not negotiable.”

“This is your last chance to regain your honor. Otherwise you will travel the hallway of flames.”

“We will send you back to where Malachi and the others are fighting. They will need more help.”

“As a guardian you will have a bit more strength and speed then you had as a human, but that’s it. You must earn everything else.”

“Remember what we have told you. Now go.” The hallway starts to fade and a battle scene starts to come into view. Joseph bursts through the gate between the afterlife and the living world making a large thunder clap. He notices that Akina is in danger. It is time for him to regain his honor.

How is this possible?” Erika asks.

“You didn’t expect me to show up did you? Hell, I guess I didn’t even expect to be standing here right now.” Everyone slowly gets to their feet and brushes themselves off with their hands. “Are you alright Akina?” Joseph asks.

“Um, yes thank you.” She replies still surprised to see him. Joseph looks over at the oni. The oni starts to squirm on the ground, it is still alive. Kisho walks over to it and raises his sword so the point is over its chest. With a fast jab he forces his sword into its heart. The final blow has been dealt, the oni is dead.

“Let’s go someplace else. There is much to discuss.” Kisho says as he lifts up his sword.

Somewhere in a secluded cabin the seven group members sit at a wooden table with the fireplace crackling behind them. Joseph has just finished explaining to the others what had happened before he showed up and what Gabriel and Michael told him. “They made you a guardian you say? Last time that happened was fifteen years ago.” Kisho says as if he was remembering something. Everyone listens while he continues

speaking. "This country is safe for now. It is time to move on to another place."

"Where will that be?" Erika asks.

"Japan, Kin and his group are being overrun by enemy armies. The armies that gathered in Japan are massive. Not too many high ranking enemies, but still a few champions. Besides the numbers that are present, high ranking opponents are not needed. They have been fighting nonstop everyday and most of the night. They need reinforcements or they will be overtaken. The seven of us will come to their aid. Consider the battles you fought here practice. This was nothing compared to what we will soon face." Kisho stands up. "It is time Erika." He says. Erika stands up and puts her arm straight out in front of her and closes her fist. The sapphire ring on her finger starts to glow and a royal blue light comes out from it.

"Japan." She says as a rotating portal opens up. Everyone besides Kisho seems surprised.

"I didn't know you could do that." Akina says. Erika just smiles.

"Everyone go inside. The portal will not stay up for long." Kisho says. One by one they get up and walk inside, Erika is the last one to go through. The portal reopens in a residential area on a small street with large fences on both sides. The seven are standing next to each other looking brave and confident. "So this is Japan. I never been here before." Joseph says looking around.

"I have." Kisho says. Everyone waits for him to say more, but he doesn't. Kisho does not tell anyone anymore then they need to know. Even now he seems distant. Maybe he thinks he is better than everyone else, or maybe he doesn't know how to open up to others. Maybe he doesn't want to. "It will be dark soon. Let's move on, our presence has already been detected. Be on your guards at all time we may not find group one right away." Kisho says and leads the others down the street. In total fifteen groups were made and sent to various parts of the world. The Japan group was the first group formed when Kisho was calling out names. While this group was the last one formed so it is group fifteen. Each squad is made up of at least twenty members and each group has three to five members. In all about sixty soldiers were dispatched to fight all the forces of hell.

While the seven group members follow the narrow street they come across a teenage girl sitting huddled up by a streetlight crying with

her face buried in her legs. "Are you ok?" Malachi asks. The girl looks up and seems scared. She holds her knees close to her and moves her back to the fence. "It's ok. We won't hurt you." Malachi says as he puts his hand out. The girl seems to believe him and says.

"My sister... she has been taken."

"Who took her?" Malachi continues.

"I... I don't know? We were just walking here and talking and something attacked us."

"What attacked you? What did it look like?" Kisho says.

"I never saw it." The girl said looking down at the ground still crying.

"It grabbed my arm and my sister fought it. I guess she could see it, but I couldn't. It dragged her down the street and I ran after her. But I couldn't catch up."

"What is her name?" Malachi asks.

"Kiska."

"And your name?"

"Keiko."

"We will find her, Keiko." Malachi tries to reassure her.

"Why don't you join us? We will find her together." Akina says and reaches her hand out. The girl smiles and takes it as Akina helps her up. Everyone starts walking down the street again in search for Kiska.

"It's a good thing she spoke English otherwise we wouldn't have known what was going on." Joseph said to Erika as they continued walking.

"What do you mean? She was speaking Japanese." She said.

"Then how come I could understand her?" Malachi looks back and says.

"We don't have any language boundaries. When you died and came back as a guardian you must have passively gotten that ability without you knowing it."

"You just hear it as your native language." Erika adds.

"That is awesome. So I can speak every language?" Joseph says overjoyed.

"Sort of. You just talk as you usually do and they hear what you say in their language." Malachi says.

"Oh that is so cool. Konnichi wa! Arigatoo! Sayonara! Coca-Cola!" He shouts and acting like a fool. Everyone turns around and looks at him a little confused. Akina looks at Keiko and smiles one of her big smiles that make her close her eyes.

"He's weird, isn't he?" She says. Keiko just smiles.

“Are you sure he’s still not possessed?” Erika says to Malachi. Everyone laughs except for Kisho that is, but it looked like he almost wanted to that time. The sun is starting to go down and the streetlights are coming on. Keiko is getting more worried, but before she says anything. Kisho stops.

“Why are you stopping?” She asks.

“There are malicious sprits ahead of us.” He says. “They may be the ones that attacked you and Kiska.” Everyone slowly walks foreword, and a body lying on the ground comes into view.

“Kiska!” Keiko yells and runs toward her.

“Keiko no, get back.” Malachi shouts and runs after her. Everyone else follows. When Keiko gets a little closer to the body a black demon with two spiral horns fades into view. Keiko screams and steps back. Malachi gets to her first and grabs her.

“Get behind us.” He says.

“Give us the girl.” Kisho says. The demon laughs.

“It’s the same demon that attacked me.” Joseph says then he lowers his voice and continues. “Before Sonya saved me.”

“She is ours.” It says. Everyone draws their swords or bows.

“You are no match for all of us. You should just give up.” Joseph says. The demon laughs as fifty more demons appear all around surrounding them.

“We are legion, and we are many.” It says.

“Dammit, shit.” Joseph says. Everyone now knew what Kisho meant. Seven against fifty does not give them good odds. Did they come all this way for nothing?

Chapter 9

The demons start to close in around them. The seven stands in a circle with Keiko protected in the middle. Everyone that has a sword starts to swing. They keep attacking, but the claws from the demons strike them. Akina puts her hand out and three demons were blown back. She does that continuously trying to give her team room to attack, but it is no use. There are too many of them. There is no room to move or escape there is no room to attack.

“There are too many of them!” Joseph yells.

“Stop counting and start killing.” Kano says.

“What do you think I’m trying to do?”

“Shut up you two and concentrate.” Nara says. Erika reaches behind her and grabs her long spear and starts to attack. Kisho can’t use his strong attacks or he will injure his own group. Akina’s shield will not be able to withstand so many attacks. Just as they think they are doomed a battle cry is heard from somewhere. A man and girl come running from around the fence. While two other jumps over the fence and all four join in the fight. The sight of the four gives everyone a boost in confidence.

Everyone starts to fight with all their might. Malachi slashed two demons at once, and Kano cuts a demon in half down the middle. Akina raises her hand and stops a demon’s hand from clawing Joseph’s back giving him time to turn around and stab it. Nara shoots her arrows at the demons out of sword range as Joseph and Kano protect her by slashing away at the demons close to her. Kisho sword seems to kill the demons by just getting close to them, his attacks are extremely fast. The four unknown soldiers finally reach the circle of seven and they fight their way forward. After a few more attacks and Akina blasting the demons back and then swords stabbing them before they can attack. Finally the last one gets killed. Joseph lets out a loud victory call.

“Wooo! We killed them all. They will think twice before missing with us again.” Malachi puts his hand on his shoulder and seriously says.

“Calm down, we almost didn’t make it out of that one.”

“Yes, in fact we owe these four brave souls our thanks.” Nara says, but they are familiar faces to some. Kisho walks to them and says.

“Welcome group one, we have been looking for you.”

“It’s nice to see you again Ishi.” Akina says and hugs her.

“Nice to see you also Akina.” She replies. “I see you are a champion.” She says looking at her patch.

“Yes, Kano and Nara also. We got them before we left.”

“That is very good; maybe you will be a captain someday. I always knew you were the best in the class.” Akina blushes and says.

“Oh, I don’t know about that.”

They all pat each other on the backs and shake each other’s hands to the members of their squad. Then they introduce each other to the ones they haven’t met.

“I am Kin from squad one.”

“I’m Gerret, also from squad one.”

“Genji, squad two.”

“Ishi, squad three.” Then the other side introduces each other except for Kisho which does not need an introduction. They look towards Joseph next.

“My name is Joseph, but I’m not part of any squad.” he says.

“He’s a guardian.” Kisho says, as their eyes widen.

“Wow, so you have seen the afterlife huh.” Ishi says.

“Well, yes.” Joseph answers surprised that she knew.

“That is the only way one becomes a guardian.” Kisho tells Joseph. The sound of crying interrupts their reunion. Everyone looks to see Keiko kneeling over Kiska. They had nearly forgotten about that. The victory of battle and the sight of old friends made them forget that they were still in a war. Malachi walks over and kneels down. He puts his hand on Kiska’s forehead and closes his eyes. After a few moments he opens his eyes and looks at Keiko. He doesn’t have to say anything, his eyes says it all. *I’m sorry, she is dead.* Keiko cries and hugs her sister rocking her back and forth. Malachi puts a comforting hand on her back and looks at Joseph. As if he would scold him for rejoicing too soon, but it is not his fault everyone felt the same way at the time. Everyone bows their heads; there is no victory in war, not when there is a casualty and someone’s life torn apart. Maybe this is why Kisho never smiles; he must know this feeling too well. Joseph feels ashamed for being happy and he slowly walks away with his head down. Akina walks after him.

“Joseph?” she says. He stops and after some time turns around.

“I’m fine.” He says as he looks at the ground. She wants to hug him, but she knows he will only back away. He keeps his sorrow bottled up

inside of him still. She wonders if he is afraid to cry, her warm embrace would bring it out of him and he doesn't want to show it, not in front of eleven people anyways. She will need to talk to him some other time. She slowly walks back to the group as Joseph looks down the street they had came from. No words are spoken for awhile until Malachi touches Keiko's shoulder.

"Come, we must get you home."

"No, I can't leave her." She cries and tries to hold on to her.

"I will carry her." He says. Malachi picks Kiska up holding her in front of him. "Where do you live?" He says. Keiko grabs her sister's arm and puts it on top of her stomach to stop it from dangling. Then without a word starts walking. The rest follow her silently and Joseph follows behind them at a distance. It has reminded him of Sonya and now another girl is dead. An innocent girl no older than him. He refuses to cry; instead anger continues to grow inside of him. It cannot be helped. It is easy to kill a demon outside with a sword, but a demon that is within is a bit more difficult. Akina looks behind her and watches Joseph. She feels his pain and is sad for him, but she also senses something else, anger. She recognizes this from last time they met. She does not tell anyone, but she knows that Armaros is not quite dead yet.

Keiko walks up to her house and opens the door. Malachi follows her inside as everyone else stays in the street underneath the streetlight. A few moments pass and he walks out closing the door behind him. He walks back to the street and looks at Joseph.

"Are you ok, Joseph?" He looks up and nods once.

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Alright, let's go. The eleven of us will fight together and now that we have two protectors our odds are better." Malachi says and starts to walk, but the flickering streetlight makes him look up. He feels an energy pulse, but it is not evil... yet. Akina looks at Joseph then realizes it's not coming from him. They turn back around. Keiko stands and looks at them. The streetlight flickers some more.

"I know why you are here. You are here to fight them aren't you? I want to help; I want to kill them all." The streetlight sparks and the bulb explodes.

"Keiko?" Malachi says.

"They killed her. She was protecting me and they killed her." She said tears still in her eyes.

“Keiko, calm down.” Malachi says.

“I know how to use a sword. I practiced with a samurai when my grandfather was alive. He taught me a lot.” Joseph watches her. She is going through the similar thing he did.

“Keiko, you are not thinking clearly.” The streetlights all the way down the street start to flicker. Her energy pulse is getting stronger; it must have been hidden until anger released it. “Your family will need you.” Malachi continues.

“Kiska was my family. She was all I had! My parents died in a plane crash a year ago.”

Another bulb explodes and then another.

“Keiko, you must control your anger. You must calm down. You need to take control of your power you have and not let it control you.” The rest of the streetlights stop flickering and shines down on the street. She is a reinforcement and Malachi knows she cannot be alone. “If you allow me to teach you how to control your abilities and agree to become my student. You can come with us and we will help you avenge your sister.” Malachi says.

“Ok, I will.” she says.

Kisho leans in close to Malachi.

“I hope you know what you are doing.”

“If I leave her here by herself, it’s like I’m killing her. They came after her for a reason and there were a lot of them. I can’t even imagine what she is capable of.”

“She is your responsibility.” He says. Malachi looks over at Keiko and says.

“Rule number one, if you are going to carry a weapon you must as well let people know you have it.” Keiko looks at him surprised, and then lifts up her shirt a little revealing a medium sized katana with a blue handle. “Come you will travel by my side.” Malachi says to Keiko as he lifts up his arm, but Keiko looks at Joseph and says.

“You have been staring at me for the longest time. What interests you so much?” She seems angry because she does not know what he is thinking. Joseph seems a bit surprised, but his face remains straight as he answers.

“Your story is similar to mine is all. Your anger reminds me of me.”

Keiko loosens up her face *He just went through some bad things like me. I hope I didn’t sound too mean.*

“What did you do about it?” She asks hoping for some advice. Joseph continues to look at her, his face does not change expression.

“I died.” Keiko’s eyes widen. He doesn’t know it, but Joseph just saved her from turning into a demon. She will never let anger consume her again. Kisho starts to lead the group onward. Malachi puts his arm around Keiko as they follow Kisho. Erika and Malachi looks at each other. They know his words helped her, but they sense he has become more distant. He needs to be watched closely. They know what his fate will be if Armaros wins over him again and it may already be starting.

Chapter 10

Keiko is looking out her bed room window in the middle of the night. Kiska wakes up next to her and sits up. “Keiko, are you ok?”

“I had a bad dream.” Kiska puts her arms around Keiko and says.

“It’s ok, it was just a dream. Why don’t you come back to bed?”

“I’m scared.”

“You don’t need to be scared. I’m right here. I will never let anything harm you. It’s my job as an older sister.”

Keiko remembers her sister as she sits in the shade of a large tree. Everyone has rested here for the night and it is morning again. Malachi approaches her.

“Keiko, it’s time to go.” She looks up at him and nods her head as she stands up. Joseph and Akina are sitting on a log talking as Malachi and Keiko passes them.

“Did you know Sonya?” Joseph asks her.

“Yes, She was in squad one so we didn’t see each other a lot. But we did talk. She was very kind to me; she was very kind to everyone. She taught me martial arts and different styles of fighting. You see squad three doesn’t teach you fighting only squad one has classes for that. When I told her I wanted to learn it. She made time to teach me. It’s no wonder she made lieutenant, she was the best at it.” Joseph smiles.

“I can believe that.” Erika’s voice interrupts them as she calls out to them.

“Come on you two it’s time to move on.” Akina and Joseph gets up and starts walking with the rest of the group.

“I have never seen you use your fighting skills.” Joseph continues speaking as they walk.

“Oh, well I never really finished my training. Besides they are a lot of people here that can fight better than me.”

“You don’t give yourself enough credit, if you learned from Sonya I think you could beat everyone here.” She smiles and looks at the ground; she gets serious again and says.

“I know you and Sonya was close, I could see it in your eyes before... Well you know.” Joseph is silent for a moment then says.

“She was my friend. She was the first person I ever trusted.” He starts to smile and continues. “She use to make fun of me too.” Akina laughs a little.

“She liked to have her fun.”

“I didn’t mind. My life began when I met her. I was lucky to have spent time with her.”

“I have to admit I’m a little jealous of you. You spent more time with her then I did. I wish I could have been there with the two of you.”

Akina pauses before she continues. “I was sad to hear of her death, but I was glad of the time we spent together.” Joseph looks at Akina and realized he felt the same way.

“You know, I see a lot of her in you.” Akina smiles,

“Thank you.” Joseph feelings have gotten less grim and less angry since he started talking to Akina. Akina is one of those people that can brighten a whole room up by just walking in. Akina is glad to have had this talk with Joseph and she senses it has helped him.

A deathly silence falls over the entire group as they enter the small town. It seems everyone left, and broken wooden fences are spread all over. “Where is everyone?” Ishi asks.

“I don’t know, but I have a bad feeling about this.” Genji says. The houses look like they haven’t been kept up in years. Broken windows, peeling paint, and missing doors tell of a grim fate for this town. The group walks through the town cautiously and looking around. Finally they see a sign of life, a man stands looking into a stream with his back towards the group.

“Maybe he will know what happened here.” Kano says pointing to the man.

“Excuse me.” Malachi says when they get closer to the man. Malachi puts his hand out to touch the man’s shoulder, but Kisho grabs his arm and shakes his head. The man turns around with an eerie unnatural smile on his face. Joseph looks at him with anger in his eyes. The white face demon has haunted him since that day when he possessed him. He withdraws his sword and yells as he charges him.

“Joseph, no!” Malachi takes out his sword and puts it in front of the demon’s face blocking his attack.

“This is just a man who has been possessed. You would not kill the demon, just the man.” Joseph eases up and withdraws his attack. He holds his sword tight, but does not put it away.

“Joseph.” The demon says. “Did you fail at saving Sonya a second time also?” Hate and anger glows in Joseph’s eyes.

“Sonneillon, leave him be!” Malachi says firmly, but the demon ignores him and continues.

“Do you miss her warm embrace, her smile... her smell?” Joseph loses his temper and charges him again. Malachi blocks his attack again as their swords cling.

“Joseph, sheath your weapon or I will take it.” He says angrily.

“I want to kill him.” He says.

“How many times do I have to tell you? You can not kill this demon with your blade. Now stand down.” a deep growl comes from Joseph’s throat. A growl that the others know all too well. Everyone senses his strong aggressive energy pulse and it makes Keiko feel ill as she closes her eyes and squats down. Joseph withdraws his attack, but refuses to put his sword away. Akina puts her hand on Joseph’s shoulder.

“Calm down please.” She says.

“Oh, I see. You have found someone to replace Sonya. She is probably crying.” Joseph ignores Malachi’s words and growls as he charges, but Kisho withdraws his sword. In a split second he hits Malachi’s sword and Joseph’s sword out of the way almost at the same time. Kisho puts his open hand on Joseph’s chest as a blast is released throwing him back and to the ground. The attack also makes him drop his sword.

“What the hell was that? Why did you attack me? I’m on your side.” Joseph says.

“Malachi has given you plenty of warnings. If physical pain is what it takes to get through to you then so be it.” Kisho says as Malachi picks up Joseph’s sword.

“I’m the only one trying to do anything and you scold me for my bravery.” He says.

“There is a fine line between bravery and stupidity. If you can’t tell the difference then you are of no use to us.” Kisho’s words are harsh and have failed to help the situation, but maybe they had to have been said. Joseph struggles to stand up. Sonneillon laughs, but is interrupted by Kisho as he grabs him by the shirt.

“I have had enough of you.”

“You can’t defeat me. My roots are deep in this man.”

“Not deep enough. Sonneillon I cast you out!” Kisho punches his fist through the man’s chest and a gray figure screams as it is pushed out the

man's back leaving no wound on the man at all. The man falls to his hands and knees, but Kisho helps him up.

"It's ok. You are safe." He says. The man looks around confused.

"My home, am I the only one left?"

"I don't know?" Malachi answers.

"I must search for my family they would have gone to another town."

The man says.

"You are welcomed to join us if you like." Malachi says.

"Thank you, but it is better if I go on my own."

"Then I wish you luck." Malachi says. The man bows and then heads downstream. Malachi looks at Joseph and says.

"Your anger hurt Keiko." Joseph looks at her, but she turns her head away from him. He can feel everyone's eyes on him.

"Can I have my sword back?" He says as Malachi looks at him surprised that he doesn't even seem sorry.

"No, you almost killed an innocent man." He says and hands Joseph's sword to Kano. "If you keep letting your anger consume you, then you are a threat to everyone here." Malachi continued. Joseph can hear Armaros growling from inside him, and he knows Malachi is right. *I fear nothing more than I fear myself.* He thinks to himself.

"You can fight your own damn war." He says in the most straight forward voice and without expression as he walks away.

Joseph wait." Akina calls after him.

"Let him go Akina. He has made his choice." Malachi says.

"Let's move on." Kisho says. They start to walk onward leaving Joseph behind. Malachi looks down at Keiko.

"Do you fear Joseph?" she looks up at him and says.

"No, I feel sorry for him. This Sonya was very important to him. Wasn't she?" Malachi doesn't answer right away but then says.

"Yes... yes she was."

"Will Joseph be ok?" Malachi looks at her.

"That is entirely up to Joseph. When he stops thinking his power comes from his anger, he could be a great warrior." The group finally comes up to a large building that looks like a dojo.

"This will be our base from now on." Kisho says. "I can feel the evil forces growing. The great battle will be soon. This is where we will all meet. The other groups are on their way. Here is where we will gather, and the final battle will be fought in this very field. We will continue to

fight until they arrive.” Everyone walks inside and starts to spread out. Kano lays Joseph’s sword on a nearby table.

“Do you think he will be back?” He asks.

“It’s hard to tell. Let him cool down, and be alone with his thoughts.”

Malachi says. After some time Ishi looks around and in a worried voice she asks.

“Where’s Akina?” Everyone looks around not even noticing she was missing. Keiko looks at the sword on the table and then looks at Ishi.

“She went after Joseph.”

Chapter 11

Akina walks through the dark woods. She can sense that Joseph had passed this way not too long ago. "I'm going to save you. I'm not going to let you accept that fate." She says. She has come after him alone for a reason; she doesn't want anyone else around. All his attention has to be on her. She finally finds him standing in a clearing completely still. "Joseph?" She says as she walks closer to him cautiously. She puts her hand on his shoulder and he turns around slowly. Akina lets out a tiny scream as she looks at him. Half of his face is white the other half is normal.

"Akina please leave here. I don't want to hurt you." He says.

"I'm sorry Joseph, but I can't do that. I came out here for a reason." She says. She takes out her dagger and says. "If pain is the only thing you understand then I have no choice. This has to stop now. I'm doing this because I care about you. I just hope you will forgive me." She drops her dagger on the ground and then sidekicks Joseph in his side as he yells out in pain.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?"

"Sonya was not your fault. So stop blaming yourself. And stop acting like you are the only one that is sad about her death." Joseph stands up and looks at Akina, but Akina punches him in his stomach then walks behind him and kicks the back of his knees making him fall.

"Well you stop that!" Joseph yells out. Akina keeps moving around him while talking.

"Every time someone says the name Sonya you go into a rage. You must mourn her death before you can move on. All your feelings bottled up have to hurt." Joseph stands up as Armaros is slowly talking over.

"You cannot win against me." He says in that deep haunting voice. He charges Akina, but she jumps out of the way and squats down to land a high kick in Joseph's waist. He turns around to grab her, but Akina jabs her palm into his chest.

"You see all that anger is blinding your instincts. I know you can fight better than this, especially if Sonya taught you like she taught me. All that power you thought you had from your anger is really your weakness." Joseph grabs a fallen branch and swings it at Akina, but

Akina rolls out of the way and karate chops his arm making him drop the branch. She grabs his arm and twists it around her own arm. She slowly forces him to the ground. Even though Akina is half his size she is able to bring him down.

“Sonya is in a better place and she is free from pain.” Akina uses her body to pin him against the ground. Joseph yells and doesn’t understand how she is doing it. Akina lets him go and backs up. “Have you had enough?” She says as she watches him trying to get up. “Sonya is watching over you every day, make her proud and stop hiding your sorrow. You are human.” Joseph’s face starts to return to normal again. “Stop, stop talking.” He says as he takes deep breaths and his voice is starting to break up.

“You need to cry. No one else is here, it’s just me.”

“NO!” He says and he runs at her, but she puts her hand up and lifts him up.

“If you are not going to cry on your own, then I’m going to make you.” She turns him upside down in mid air and bumps his head against the ground several times. “I can do this all day.”

“Put me down! Are you crazy?” She turns him on his side and then drops him on his arm. Joseph yells out in pain. He does not cry but he is too exhausted to get up. Akina stands beside him.

“Sonya was a strong fighter and she made her choice to save you. She couldn’t stand to see anything happen to you. She cared about you. All you had to do was say thank you and honor her sacrifice by being a strong fighter yourself. Put this anger aside. You have nothing to make up for. What’s in the past is over. Can’t you still feel her in your heart? She never left you.” Akina sees tears in his eyes for the first time. She kneels down and brings him close to her to hug him. And for the first time in the longest time he cries.

“I miss her so much.” He says crying.

“I do to, but I can still feel her around me. As long as you don’t forget the times you had she will never be gone.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“I forgive you.” Joseph has finally defeated Armaros with the help of Akina. Armaros has lost all power over him for the moment. His heart feels lighter and he can see Sonya’s face in his head, and he can hear her voice once again. Joseph holds Akina tightly. Her body glows a gold color and all of Joseph’s bruises and pain is gone.

“Thank you... for everything.”

It is dark when Akina and Joseph reach the dojo. They open the door and everyone looks at them.

“Akina!” Ishi says and runs to her as the others follow close behind. Ishi gives Akina a hug as the others gather around. Joseph is afraid that he will be hated because of his actions earlier and tries to avoid eye contact. Everyone senses a more gentle calmer energy pulse from him and they know his anger is gone. Kano walks up to him and holds Joseph’s sword handle towards him.

“Welcome back.” He says smiling. Joseph smiles back and takes his sword while saying.

“Sorry it took so long.” Malachi puts his strong hand on his shoulder.

“Come, we have food.”

Later that night as the group sleeps Kano is talking to Malachi.

“What do you think Akina did to bring Joseph back?”

“I don’t know but she is a special person. I’m sure you have sensed her kindness.”

“Yes, I have, but Joseph was pretty far gone.”

“What ever happened out there is between them. They both are back now and Joseph has learned a lesson. He can now finally do what he was sent back to do.”

“And what is that?”

“The same thing that we are here to do, to fight and win this war without regrets, even if it means the end of our lives. Sonya knew it, and now so does Joseph. Get some rest Kano. We don’t know what tomorrow will bring.”

The morning has arrived, but it’s hard to tell anymore. A dark cloud seems to loom over the earth. Nara and Erika are standing next to each other with their bows drawn. The both of them are concentrating hard on something when Nara says.

“Ok, you see that rock over there? I’m going to shoot my arrow up and make the point of it land on top of that rock.”

“That’s a hundred yards away.” Erika laughs. “But go ahead you’re on.”

Nara puts an arrow on her bow and looks at the rock then the sky, then back at the rock and lets her arrow fly. Akina, Ishi and Joseph have come to see what is going on.

“What’s going on?” Ishi asks.

“Shhhh.” Erika replies as she and Nara watch the rock. Just then a thin line comes down from the sky and hits the top of the rock.

“Oh yeah, I told you I could do it.”

“Ok, ok, ok, but I got something for you.”

“So, you guys are having a contest?” Joseph asks. Akina answers him.

“Yes, contests are a way to test each other’s skills against one another. It also is good practice. Every squad has some type of contest and everyone can challenge anyone. Usually it is a friendly dual or bet, but some people can take it too seriously.” Joseph nods his head. Erika gets ready an arrow and says.

“Ok, do you see that small tree?”

“Where?” Nara says looking around.

“That one right in front of you.”

“Are you kidding me? That black speck on the horizon?”

“Yes, that one. My arrow is going to cut it in half.”

“That’s impossible. Looks like I’m going to win this one. Go for it.” By now more people have come to see what’s going on. Everyone likes to watch these contests and it’s even grabbed the attention of Malachi and Kisho. Erika pulls back her bow and lets her arrow fly. Everyone strains their eyes to see and after a few moments. Nara speaks.

“Ha, you must of missed or your arrow fell short. There is no way it could have made it that far.” But just then the tiny speck leans to the side and falls to the ground.

“Whaaat!?” Nara says astonished. Erika raises her arms and bow as everyone claps. “Well you are a higher rank then me. That’s why you won.”

“No excuses Nara. You knew I was a lieutenant.” Genji who has been watching steps forward and says,

“I got something to show you.”

“By all means feel free to try.” Erika says waving her hand in front of her. Genji takes out her bow and loads an arrow.

“I’m going to shoot this arrow up and then shoot another arrow straight to hit the first arrow before it hits the ground.”

“Wooooo!” Everyway says eager to see it. Genji carefully aims her arrow at the sky almost straight above her before letting it go. She then loads another arrow and aims it straight in front of her. She waits a few moments then releases it. Everyone watches as the two arrows collide in mid air. Everyone claps as Erika says.

“That is indeed impressive, but I have a trick that is similar to that.”

Erika loads an energy arrow and shoots it high into the sky; she then quickly grabs another energy arrow and shoots it at the other one. The arrow hits the first one creating a spectacular explosion of colors.

“Wooooooo!” Everyone says.

“That is awesome; you can make your own fireworks.” Joseph says.

“Well, I have to say Erika is the winner here, but both Nara and Genji show was very impressive.” Malachi says as Erika bows to the crowd and they applaud her. Kano steps out of the crowd and faces everyone. They know he is about to challenge someone and they all fall silent. He takes out his sword and points it to someone in the crowd while saying, “I challenge you, Joseph.”

“Me? But I didn’t have the same training as you did.”

“I know that, but I’ve seen you fight and someone had to have taught you.” Joseph and Akina exchange looks and she smiles motioning him to take the challenge.

“Fine, what’s the name of the game?” He says stepping out and standing in front of Kano.

“All that needs to be done to win is force the other person’s sword to the ground or make him drop it. Whichever comes first.”

“That’s it?” Joseph remembers Sonya and him talking about something similar to this. He pictures it in his head.

“This new move I’m about to show you is both defensive and offensive. Try to aim for the middle of your opponent’s sword with your sword and with all your strength push it down to the ground. Now that the sword is out of use you can quickly use your handle to hit them in the eye since they will be hunched over holding their sword. Sonya talks through the steps as she demonstrates with him as her opponent. Kano brings him back to present time as he speaks.

“Don’t sound too confident it took me about two months to master it.”

The two hold their swords together to form an X.

“Ready, Begin.” Malachi says. Kano gets his sword on top of Joseph’s and starts to force it down. For the moment Joseph lets him, but just before his sword is about to hit the ground he spins his sword on top of Kano’s and pushes his sword down to the ground. Kano blinks as Joseph’s sword handle is inches from his eye. Everyone claps and cheers Joseph on. Akina smiles her big smiles as she claps.

“I struggle and arise.”

“You’ve done that before haven’t you?” Kano says.

“Maybe.” Joseph smiles.

“Well, I am surprised. I won’t underestimate you the next time.” Kano says putting his sword away. A flash of lightening lights up the sky; following by a loud clap of thunder. Everyone looks up as Malachi says. “It’s going to storm, it’s a sign that war is coming. The others should be here soon and so will the demons and hell itself. A great battle will soon be fought here.” Malachi looks around and then says. “Let’s get inside, no point in staying out here if we are not needed.” The group slowly walks into the dojo leaving only Malachi and Kisho outside.

“Evil is approaching.” Malachi says.

“Yes, and in great numbers. Let’s hope the others arrive before then.”

Miles and miles away armies of demons and monsters march closer. With swords and clubs, they snarl, howl, and growl. The end of their formations seems endless. Could this be the end of humanity?

Chapter 12

Someone or something moves outside the door of the dojo in the blackness of night. Malachi wakes up and shakes Kano who is sleeping nearby. Kano opens his eyes and looks up at Malachi. "Something moves outside, wake Joseph and grab your sword." Kano hurries up and shakes Joseph's shoulder. Joseph slowly opens his eyes and in a sleepy voice asks.

"What's going on?"

"Malachi heard something outside, get your sword. We're gonna check it out." The three slowly walks to the door with their swords ready. The door opens and a man stands in the doorway.

"Stop right there." Malachi says. "Who are you?"

"My name is Razi, squad one, the last survivor of group nine." Malachi sighs and motions the others to put their swords away.

"Please come in." He says. Kano lights a candle and places it on the table where the four sit down. "I am sorry to hear the fate of your other group members. Where were you sent?" Malachi asks.

"We were sent to Russia. The place was out of control by the time we arrived there. Many cities lie in ruins. It was the last battle before coming here that my two companions fell." He said lowering his head.

"I'm sorry again. There are many casualties of both innocent people and our squads." Malachi continues. "Were you able to find this place ok?" Razi nods his head and says.

"Yes, I just followed the signal."

"Signal?" Joseph asks.

"You may not have been able to pick it up, but this building has its own energy pulse. No one really knows how or why, but this is what we have been following. All over the world this place is attracting both us and demons. This is where we will stand our ground." Malachi says. Razi looks around at the other sleeping people spread across the floor with nothing more than a blanket for a bed.

"Is this everyone?"

"So far it is. All of us arrived here together; you are the only one that has showed up in the two days we've been here." Malachi continues. "There is an uneasy feeling in the air. The enemy is massively growing and

marching this way as we speak. Their energy pulse gets stronger every day. It will not be more than a week before they are here. I pray that we have more by then.”

“While we were in Russia we met the eleventh group. They had just left New Zealand and came to aid us, but we were split up. I do not know what ever happened to them.”

“Have faith and courage my friend.” Malachi says as he puts his hand on Razi’s shoulder. “There is food and water on the table across the room. Help yourself to whatever you like. There are also blankets in the closet if you want to sleep. Malachi says pointing to their locations.

“Thank you.” Razi says and walks to the other side of the room. Kano and Joseph lies back down as Malachi blows out the candle.

Morning approaches and everyone wakes up and gets ready for whatever the day will bring. Akina notices Joseph outside standing with his hands in his pockets. She walks outside and stands next to him as he looks up at the sky.

“What are you looking at?”

“Nothing. I just notice the sun doesn’t shine anymore. Too many of these dark clouds block it out.” Akina looks up and nods her head. The sound of chatter make them look behind then as they see Malachi walk out of the dojo with Razi and Keiko close to his sides. They continue to walk away from Joseph and Akina.

“Who is that guy with them?” Akina asks.

“His name is Razi, from squad one; he arrived last night. He is the last survivor of group nine he told us.” Akina looks sad for him and the lost soldiers she did not know as Joseph continues speaking. “It’s not looking to good for our side so far. I don’t know what is keeping everyone.”

“All we can do is wait. There is no point in troubling our minds on things we don’t know and can’t predict.”

“Easy for you to say. Not so easy for me to do.” Akina smiles and puts her hand on his shoulder,

“Come let’s eat, and not think about it.”

Malachi and Keiko are walking side by side in the open field by the dojo.

“When the fighting starts I don’t want you to be a part of it.” Malachi says, Keiko looks up at him surprised.

“Why not? I can fight.”

“Not against these. The others have trained for years to get to where they are now. A green soldier like you will not have a chance in this war.”

“Joseph didn’t train for years. He was dragged into this like me.”

“That is true, but when he came back his body was changed. His spirit is stronger and his power and skills is still increasing.” Malachi seems lost in thought. “I wonder... if he could be another Kisho?”

“Kisho?” Malachi smiles and says,

“Don’t worry about it. I was just thinking out loud.” Keiko seems upset and says,

“So, what am I supposed to do if I can’t fight?”

“You can be my scout.”

“A scout? What do they do?”

“They have an important job. They watch for enemies and makes sure our perimeter stays safe.”

“Sounds like a kid’s job to me. You still think I’m a kid.”

“A scout’s responsibility is great. If the scout is bad, enemies can surround us and take us by surprise and then the war will be lost. Your job could help us win. It is most definitely not a kid’s job. Can you be a good scout? Can you be brave?”

“Yes, I’ll be the best damn scout you ever saw.” She says squeezing her fist. Malachi smiles.

“Well then, I will not keep you from your duties soldier.” Malachi salutes her, and she salutes him back.

“If you spot anything you will let me know immediately right.”

“Yes sir.” She says and starts walking with a keen eye on all her surroundings. Malachi walks back inside the dojo and sits down next to Joseph, Akina, and Kano as they are eating bread and fruit.

“What’s Keiko doing? I see her walking back and forth.” Akina asks as she looks out the window next to them.

“I gave her a job to do. She is our new scout.”

“Do you think she will be ok?” Kano asks. “She is the most inexperienced one here.”

“Her spirit is strong, she is capable of great things, in fact I would like to take her back with us and train her to be a squad one soldier.”

“Will you be allowed to do that?” Kano asks.

“In her case I will be able too.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I’ve done it before.”

“Who?” Malachi looks at him and then Joseph.

“Sonya.” He says.

Sonya?” Kano and Joseph says at the same time.

“Yes, she was an orphan the world forgot when I met her. Her energy pulse was undeniably strong for a child of twelve. I trained her and she became a lieutenant in less than ten years. She might have made it to captain one day. Keiko has the same energy pulse. I would not let her age fool you.” Just then Keiko comes running in as fast as she can.

“Malachi!” she says Malachi jumps to his feet.

“What is it Keiko?”

“There are people coming.” Malachi quickly follows Keiko as Kano, Joseph and Akina stands up and runs after them along with everyone else unsure of what to expect. When they get outside they see a large group of people walking towards the dojo. As they get closer a warm relieved feeling enters everyone’s heart. The long awaited groups have made it. Squad two captain and squad three captain lead the group to the dojo. Squad three captain speaks,

“Sorry to have kept you waiting, but we were picking up and training our reinforcements.”

“You do not need to apologize Kichi.” Malachi says smiling. “There are a lot more of you then I expected.”

“Well, every group found a few reinforcements, and we ran into more on our journey here. We are now somewhere around one hundred twenty.”

“Welcome, please come inside and eat.” Malachi steps aside and allows everyone to pass tapping a few on the back. Razi hugs someone.

“It is good to see you made it group eleven.” Akina and Ishi runs and hugs another woman from squad three.

“Those squad three people are very friendly with each other aren’t they?” Joseph says as he watches them. Kano nods his head in agreement also not taking his eyes off of them. Joseph and Kano are the last ones inside as they stand next to the door while listening to the captains talk to the entire group.

“We are all united once again. We are no longer fifteen groups made from three different squads, but one army!” Squad two captain shouts as everyone cheers. Squad three captain speaks next,

“You all stand among friends that you trained with for many years, and now you will fight alongside each other. Remember what you have been

taught and what you have discovered. Stand strong and brave. We fight together as one.” Malachi only has one thing to say.

“Are you ready for war?” The crowd yells a mighty cheer. They all are confident and completely sure everyone has each other’s back.

Everyone eats and talks with each other while Joseph walks outside to find Keiko standing guard.

“We haven’t really talked or gotten to know each other.” He says as he stands next to her looking at the open field.

“No, I guess there wasn’t much time for that.”

“I wouldn’t blame you if you never wanted to talk to me after the way I acted. I didn’t know the strength of my own energy pulse. I am sorry I hurt you.” She looks at him and says.

“Malachi told me about you and Sonya, and Akina also talked to me. If I was in the same situation I might have done the same thing as you. So I do not blame you. I’m glad you found your way back.” Joseph pauses before speaking.

“Before all of this happened I never wanted anyone around me. I felt dead and empty. But then so many people have gone out of their way to save me when deep inside I was certain I wasn’t worth it. That’s why I felt the need to save Sonya so bad. I could not understand why she did what she did and I didn’t want to believe it. Why would anyone waste their life for me? Then Akina went out of her way to save me from myself. It’s hard for me to explain how I feel or why all of a sudden I told you this. But I am indebted to the both of them and I don’t want their actions to go for nothing. That’s my motivation, to make them proud.”

“That’s how I felt when Kiska died. She sacrificed herself to save me, when she was better at everything than me. She embraced her power, I ignored mine. I wonder if I had built my power up I could have saved her. I also blame myself for her death and don’t want her choice to be for nothing.”

“It seems we have a lot in common.”

“Yes, I guess you don’t realize how lonely you are until you find someone to connect with. Sometimes all it takes is an embrace to save your life.” They are silent as they think what the other has said.

Do people cross paths by accident or do they cross paths when each other needs help the most. Is the other person’s influence and spirit what fills your emptiness? There is a moment in everyone’s life when

they feel out of faith and out of luck and it is time to end it. Joseph remembers a time when he stood at the edge of cliff thinking. *It will take three seconds to hit the ground, three seconds of freedom.* At that time an older man walks up to him and says.

“It is a beautiful morning, isn’t it?” Joseph looks at him.

“It looks the same as yesterday.”

“Yesterday was a good day also, but tomorrow will be better than today.” The man touches his shoulder and walks away. Joseph backs away from the cliff and turns around, but the man is gone. Was he just a man out for a walk? Or was he someone else? The ground rumbles bringing Joseph back to the present. Keiko and Joseph looks at the small rocks on the patch of dirt jump up and down.

“What’s that?” Joseph asks. They feel the ground vibrating. “An earthquake?” Keiko looks up at the horizon as her eyes widen. She runs back to the dojo and busts through the door making everyone stop and look.

“They’re coming!” She yells. Everyone grabs their weapons and rushes out the door. They join Joseph and watch the massive army marching closer. Beasts of all sizes come into view. Everyone forms their battle lines with squad one in front and then squad two and lastly squad three. Lightning flashes and thunder roars overhead as the demon army charges forward. Joseph takes out his sword and Kano stands next to him.

“Do not stray too far. Let them come to us. We all fight together. Have faith in squad three.” Kano says.

“I do.” squad three casts shields around everyone as they absorb their energy and starts to glow. They stand their ground as the demon army gets closer. The fate of the world will be decided by the outcome of this very battle.

Chapter 13

The first wave of demons reaches the front lines and squad one along with Joseph starts fighting. Arrows whizz by from squad two and swords sever limbs of the demons and crushes skulls. Kisho jumps in the middle of the demons and swings his sword around him in a whirlwind motion, slashing great numbers of demons in half. Malachi's high speed attacks make it hard to see his sword at all. Squad three uses their ball lightening attacks when they can, but their main job is to protect the soldiers. A squad one man is stabbed next to Kano. "Squad three!" He yells as a woman from squad three rushes to the man. Everyone gathers around her and fights the demons to keep her safe while she heals the man. Joseph watches as he sees her hand glow gold and the wound seems to heal instantly. Joseph uses his foot to push a demon away that got too close and Kano cuts its head off.

"Thank you." Joseph says.

"No problem, it's what we do." Joseph continues to fight as he notices his body starts to glow a light red he looks around and Akina smiles at him. He smiles back, but words are not needed. He cuts another demon that got behind Kano. These demons are tiny, but fierce and are goblin like in appearance. He looks ahead and sees larger monsters coming and some with armor. A man yells somewhere in the crowd.

"An Oni is here." Joseph looks and sees what he was talking about, but this one is not a general. Many arrows pierce its flesh and swords cut the demon down. A larger demon swings its axe at Joseph and he dodges out of the way just in time. He uses multiple attacks making the demon finally fall. Malachi saw Joseph's victory and thinks to himself. *Amazing, he just killed a champion by himself. His energy is getting stronger and more powerful at a fast rate.* The demons pile up higher and higher as they keep on coming. Every now and then a champion would appear and sometimes it takes three or four to finally defeat it. Joseph stands on a pile of dead goblins and tries to see everything around him, but he does not know that a goblin is climbing up behind him as stealthily as it can. He looks and sees Erika pointing her bow at him. *What is she doing?* He wonders. Just then she lets her arrow fly towards him. The arrow flies in between Joseph's legs and hits the

goblin in the forehead behind him and it falls off the pile onto the ground. Joseph is stunned and looks down at where the arrow just had passed. He then looks behind him at the fallen goblin and then looks back at Erika who is standing a few yards in front of him. When Joseph finally finds his voice he says.

“Are you insane?!” Erika smiles and says.

“Are you ok?”

“I can’t believe you did that. If that was a millimeter higher part of me would have been pinned to his forehead.” Erika tries not to laugh as she speaks.

“I knew I had enough room.” Joseph hasn’t moved from his pose through the entire conversation and finally has enough feeling in his legs to move them. He looks at Erika and says.

“Never do that again.” Erika snickers and apologizes. Larger monsters finally reach them and Joseph rushes to aid the others as they try to fight it. Joseph feels stronger and his attacks are more lethal. A champion with heavy armor on runs past the front line and heads towards group two. Joseph runs after him and swings his sword. The sword slices through the armor as if it was nothing more than cloth. Joseph jabs his sword straight and pierces two demons at the same time. Joseph thinks to himself. *“Sonya, I wonder if she is helping me. I feel different, and I like it”* The glow around him turns from a light red to a light blue. And for a moment everything seems to move a little slower, but Joseph isn’t paying that much attention to it and continues fighting. Kano notices that Joseph is fading from view then reappears. *What is happening to him?* He wonders. Malachi knows this technique. *“Did he just use a lieutenant shield?”* A flying monster interrupts his thoughts as it flies over him. It has picked out it’s pray. “Akina!” He yells as he tries to run to her rescue. The demon bird reaches its talons down over her, but Joseph jumps in front of her. The talons pierce his chest and throws him against Akina. A volley of arrows brings the bird down a few feet away.

“Joseph!” she yells as Malachi reaches them.

“Cover Akina!” He yells, Kano and a few others surround Akina and Joseph. Akina puts her hands on his chest, but his wounds are not healing.

“I need help.” She yells out. Ishi runs to her and kneels down as both of them try to heal his wounds. The two of them finally succeed, and

Joseph's eyes open. He feels his chest with his fingers. It is if he was never hurt.

"Thank you." He says looking at them.

"Don't you ever scare me like that again." Akina says half angry and half relieved. Joseph grabs his sword and gets up. "I'll try not too" He says and joins back into the fight. Malachi who is fighting next to him turns his head slightly and says.

"Don't tell me you are getting brave on me." Joseph smiles,

"It wasn't bravery, it was a miscalculation."

"Call it what you want, but sometimes even the best fall." Black beasts runs through the crowd of demons towards everyone. Not sure of what they are he keeps his eyes on them until one of them jumps up and towards someone else. He hears someone call out "Hell dogs. Kill the Hell dogs." Everyone comes together and tries to kill the dogs as they run out of control around them. If one should jump to attack someone arrows would bring it down. The other dogs learn and bite the legs trying to make them fall to the ground. They kill quickly and squad three does not have time to save the one or two that falls to the ground. Joseph notices a hell dog running up behind Kano and one running towards him. He will only have time to kill one of them. He grasps his sword tight and digs his sword deep into the back of the hell dog that was about to attack Kano. Joseph turns to face the other hell dog as it opens its mouth, but he is lifted up and the dog runs under him and is killed by someone else. He looks around and sees Ishi holding him up. She gently lowers him to the ground. She smiles and shakes her head as if to say don't make Akina angry. All the hell dogs seem to be gone now, and Joseph turns his concentration back to the goblins. Kisho steps far enough away from the others and uses his energy blast. About ten goblins fly up into the air. Kisho uses it again and goblins explode that are in the blast radius. The ground starts to shake and a large demon with armor comes into view on the other end of the field. Joseph is shocked at what he sees anger grows inside of him and his energy shield starts to flare up and grow larger. Malachi feels this increase in energy and looks to see what Joseph sees. The demon is none other than Alastor, Sonya's killer. Joseph starts to walk to get too him, but Kano grabs his sleeve.

"We fight together. Only together will we be able to defeat him." Joseph nods his head and continues to fight thinking to himself; *He will not*

escape me this time. Malachi sighs a sigh of relief. “Thank you Kano.” He whispers to himself. Malachi and Kisho are now standing next to each other.

“Joseph has come a long way.” Malachi says.

“Yes, he has. I have noticed a lot of change in him.”

“Do you think he has won his honor back?”

“I would say yes, Sonya would be proud of him.”

“I think he needs to hear that.” Kisho looks at Malachi,

“You can do that.”

“I knew you would say something like that... Akina can tell him.” After a few moments. Kisho tells Malachi.

“When Alastor gets closer I will weaken him as much as I can. Then you lead everyone to attack him.” Malachi nods letting him know he understands. Malachi fights his way back to where Joseph is.

“When I give the signal we all will rush Alastor, let Kisho attack first.”

Joseph nods his head. He knows he cannot defeat him alone and he holds back his anger. Joseph is not the only one that wants to see Alastor dead. Sonya was a friend to all, and it is personal to everyone. Kisho finally decides Alastor is close enough. He jumps up into the air and brings his sword down across his chest plate and uses his energy blast. Small pieces of his armor fly off. Joseph starts to get closer to where they are fighting.

“Not yet Joseph.” Malachi says. Alastor raises his gigantic axe and brings it down, but misses Kisho. The ground shakes catastrophically. Kisho knows it takes time before he can raise his axe again for another attack. He uses all his power to try to weaken his armor and then blasts him. Alastor’s Helmet is shattered off and everyone looks upon the true face of Alastor. To everyone’s surprise it is not a horrible face of a demon, but the face of a man, one could call him handsome if his actions were not so evil.

“I did not expect that.” Joseph says. Malachi tells him.

“Do not judge by appearance alone. This man is Lucifer’s right hand man. And just so you know Lucifer is not red with a pointy tail. It is hard for someone to hate something they consider beautiful. So they make him out to be a horrid creature. But that was before he let hatred consume him. Just as you turned into Armaros he also has turned into a monster less then admirable, but it is not what is drawn in books.”

Alastor yells and goblins try to overtake Kisho, but a few energy blasts

and they are tossed in all directions also cracking Alastor's chest plate more. Kisho jumps up at him again and brings his sword down once again on his chest plate. It explodes off of him. Alastor has had enough and he throws his axe down and withdraws his long sword which no one has noticed till now.

"Where did he get that?" Joseph asks. Malachi's eyes widen as an uneasy feeling enters him. Kisho knows his job. He will weaken Alastor as much as possible, no matter the cost. Malachi sounds the attack.

Everyone runs towards Kisho and Alastor. Kisho jumps up one last time and slashes the chest of Alastor with the serrated edge of his sword. An attack that is meant to make the wound never stop bleeding and to slow the opponent down slowly killing it. Alastor times his attack right and as Kisho lands on his feet again and turns around to face Alastor. Alastor uses all of his might driving the sword through Kisho's chest. The blade exits his back and Kisho's arms fly out to his sides. His sword drops to the ground as he keeps his face of stone. No tears, no cry of pain.

"Kisho!" Malachi calls out. Everyone is in shock, but they will not let that hinder them now. They are driven by sheer determination to kill Alastor. Alastor brings his sword back and Kisho falls to the ground on his back. Joseph is the first to reach Alastor and he leaps to drive his sword through Alastor's waist. Arrows and spears fly past him as Alastor is mercilessly attacked by everyone at the same time. Every sword pieces his bare flesh, every bow has shoot arrows after arrows. And even every squad three lightening attacks hit him all over. It is an attack that not even the right hand man of Satan can withstand. Alastor falls to the ground defeated.

"That's for you Sonya." Joseph says under his breath. The massive united attack on Alastor and the death of the demons most strongest ally has struck them with fear and they finally start to retreat. Leaving the once green field muddy and dead. Puddles of blood and demons and demon's parts lay all over showing an astonishing scene. Among the demons a few of the slain heroes lie. It is a gruesome scene to view. Squad three members surround Kisho as all their hands try to heal his wounds, but it has little effect. The bleeding continues as everyone surrounds him hoping to see him recover. The wound should have killed him instantly, but squad three's attempt to save him only seems to prolong the inevitable. The bleeding seems to have stopped, but he is not out of the woods yet. Malachi speaks,

“Squad three, you have done enough. We will bring him inside and bandage him. Conserve the rest of your energy, we will carry him.” Joseph, Kano and one other lend Malachi a hand carrying Kisho inside.

Moments later after Kisho has been bandaged and lays in a makeshift cot Malachi walks up to Joseph, who is looking out the window at the rotting corpses outside. They have already gathered their own dead and they lie wrapped in white cloth waiting to be buried. Joseph looks at him and says.

“They will be back won’t they?”

“Yes, the war is not over yet. We must stay alert all night. I’ll set up shifts Keiko has volunteered to take the first watch.”

“I will join her.” Malachi nods his head.

“Ok, but first go talk to Kisho. He has asked for you.” Joseph looks at him surprised, they have never talked before. Malachi grabs a shovel leaning against the wall and opens the door to walk outside and join a few others already digging.

Joseph walks slowly to the cot where Kisho is lying down. Kisho opens his eyes and looks at him.

“Come here.” he says. “There is something I should have told you a long time ago.” Joseph kneels down beside him, but does not speak. Kisho swallows before talking. “Do you remember when I said it has been a long time since the last guardian?” Joseph nods his head. “They are not common, only a certain type of person will be allowed to come back for a second chance. I know this because I was the last guardian.” Joseph is surprised at what he heard.

“You mean....”

“Yes, I died once before. I was a boy when my town was attacked by savages. Not demons, but men driven by greed. They destroyed everything and killed everyone. My whole family was murdered, all my friends, everyone I knew. I hid underneath an overturned cart and watched helplessly as everything I held dear burned and collapsed. After they left I was ashamed of my cowardice and swore revenge. It was a few years before I mastered a sword and found them. I attacked them without thinking and fought them, but I was outnumbered and killed. I could not bring myself to accept defeat. I thought I would wander the earth forever as a ghost, but Gabriel and Michael came to me. They said the evil deeds of these men cannot go unpunished. I accepted their offer to destroy them. The next time I fought them I won. I saved countless of

lives and my power grew rapidly. When my job was done I was ready to accept death, but I was told there was another reason for sending me back. They did not tell me right away what that was, but I was lead to the society where these brave people trained and joined them as a general. I never could smile or show any emotion after seeing so much destruction. I separated myself from everyone else. As far as I was concerned I was still alive only to accomplish my last job. When I found out you were sent back I wondered why, maybe you were to take my place. I watched as your power grew as well as your anger. I saw you separate yourself, and then I saw you come back. I saw a better part of me in you. I should have helped you, and I am sorry I didn't. You have great potential in you, and I was angry when I saw you almost threw it all away. I should have realized all you needed was guidance. No one, no matter how tough they are can make it without someone's help. That's something you found out before me. Your presence has changed many lives including mine. You have made everyone proud and today you fought on the same level as a lieutenant. You are now one of us as an independent lieutenant." Kisho puts his hand on his shoulder and a patch with three wavy lines appear.

"Thank you." Joseph says a little surprised as he bows his head.

"Your power is still increasing, if you keep it up you may even reach general someday. As it is a normal man to reach the rank of lieutenant has never happened before, even though you had to die first." Kisho pauses for a moment and then continues. "Sonya is very proud of you. I'm sure she can't stop smiling, and you will see her again. There is no such thing as death, only new life."

"You are going to be alright." Joseph says trying to reinsure him.

"Every passing hour wounds, the last one kills. The only way to live forever is to stop time." Kisho closes his eyes and breaths steadily as he sleeps.

Joseph walks back to where Malachi and the others sit after having just buried their dead. Malachi immediately lifts up his head and looks at Joseph as he walks closer. He smiles and says.

"Congratulations Joseph." Joseph can't stop smiling his energy pulse is different and Malachi can sense it. Kano and Akina turns to look at him and notices the patch on his shoulder.

“I don’t believe it.” Kano says shocked. Akina eyes light up and she jumps up and runs to him giving him a big hug. Everyone in the room turns to see what all the excitement is about.

“This is amazing, I’m so proud of you.” Akina says. Malachi stands up and slaps him on the back.

“You have earned it. Your actions on the battlefield as won your honor back and you no longer let your anger consume you.” Malachi shouts so everyone can hear. “Joseph has just made the rank of Lieutenant!” Everyone claps their hands and cheers as they stand up. Joseph is a bit embarrassed at all the notice, but he still can’t stop smiling.

The night approaches and Keiko walks outside to start her lookout shift as Joseph follows her. He stands next to her when they are outside and he stretches his arms in front of her. He looks at her and then stretches again. She knows what he is trying to do and she smiles and says.

“I heard, you don’t need to shove your patch in my face.”

“What, I was just stretching.” Joseph says trying to play it off.

“Surrre.” Keiko says and after a pause she says. “Congratulations.”

“Oh you’ve noticed, thank you.” Keiko smiles and shakes her head as they start their patrol.

Chapter 14

Hours have passed when Malachi and Kano walks in front of Joseph and Keiko.

“We will take over from here. Go and get some rest.” They nod and walk inside as Malachi and Kano keeps an eye out for any type of movement.

On the battlefield Akina keeps an eye on Joseph he seems to be handling himself very well as he fights countless goblins and chopping them down. She turns away and watches as more enemies approach them. But something is out of place, everyone is so far away. Only herself and Joseph are left to fight these. She looks back at Joseph seeing that is he surrounded by demons, he fights bravely slashing as many as he can. A demon gets a sword past him and digs it deep in his side; he tries to ignore the pain and keeps fighting. Another demon stabs him and then another, he is outnumbered and cannot block their attacks. Akina yells,

“Joseph! Noooo!” She can’t save him for some reason she watches as sword after sword is driven into him. His eyes never leave Akina’s face as she cries.

“Ahhhhh!” She screams. Everyone wakes up and jumps to their feet grabbing their swords including Joseph.

“What is it?” Joseph asks as he looks all around. Malachi and Kano come running through the door hearing her scream from outside.

“What’s wrong?” Malachi asks. Akina is sitting up and in a quite embarrassed voice she says,

“Um, sorry, I had a bad dream.” Everyone sighs a sigh of relief and puts their swords away.

“Well I suppose we should be getting up anyways.” Erika says and looks outside. The sun still can’t shine past the thick black clouds, but it is morning none the less. Everyone starts getting ready for the day and the battle that may or may not take place. Akina walks past everyone and heads outside to be alone. Malachi walks up behind her as she stares into the distance.

“Is everything all right Akina?” She looks at him and tries to smile.

“Yes everything is fine.”

“Why is it that I don’t believe you? You are very bad at hiding whatever it is that’s bothering you. So, come on now, what is it?” Akina pauses for a moment thinking how she is going to word her thoughts.

“Well, it... it’s just my dream. I can’t stop thinking about it, but I suppose it’s just a dream, right?”

“Dreams are a tricky thing. Sometimes it’s your restless mind or your fears. Sometimes it’s a warning or a sign of something to come. Then again sometimes it’s nothing, nothing at all. Do you want to tell me what you dreamt about?” Akina looks away and speaks.

“I dreamt Joseph died and I could not save him.”

“But you already saved Joseph.” Akina looks at him confused.

“What do you mean?” Malachi looks at her and smiles.

“There isn’t much I don’t know about. Even Kisho doesn’t know. I admire your strength. It’s easy to fight a foe, but to be able to fight a friend, that’s true strength.” Akina realizes what he is talking about.

“How did you know about that?”

“I have my ways, but don’t worry it will stay between us. As far as your dream goes, don’t put too much thought into it. We do all that we can, if we can do no more then we should have no regrets. Don’t worry about Joseph he can take care of himself, he’s a lieutenant now you know.”

Akina smiles.

“Yes he is. Thank you Malachi.” He smiles and says.

“Anytime, let’s go back inside. The air is not so fresh out here anymore.” They smile at each other.

“No, it’s not.” She says and walks beside Malachi as they enter the dojo. As they enter Malachi is approached by Kichi, the squad three captain.

“We tried to heal Kisho’s wounds again, but with no success. Alastor’s sword must have had a magic attack that cannot be healed by us. He has to heal naturally. He should make a full recovery, but he will no longer be able to join us in battle. It will be months before that wound closes.”

“Thank you Kichi.” Malachi says. Without a general able to fight, everyone feels uneasy about any upcoming battles. Everyone sits around and waits impatiently. They do not know when the next army will attack or how many there will be, but without a general their chance of success has diminished. Joseph looks around the room seeing what everyone is doing. He looks at Kano who is spinning his sword on its point. He looks over to see Akina with her head in her hands looking outside. But

there is someone he doesn't see. He stands up and everyone turns to him wondering if he sees something.

"Where's Keiko?" Malachi and a few others look around the room.

"I don't know, maybe she went to patrol outside. You know she takes her job very seriously." Akina says.

"I'll go check. She shouldn't have gone alone." Joseph replies and starts to walk outside followed by Nara, Akina, and Malachi. They look around the dojo and up and down the fields. Just then Nara takes out her bow and shoots an arrow in the distance. A small goblin like creature runs, but the arrow stops him and it falls to the ground.

"A scout. We were being watched all this time." She says.

"That's why they didn't attack last night they must have seen we were keeping watch." Akina adds.

"How come no one could spot that scout before?" Joseph asks.

"Well it was probably hiding far out like it was just now. And if it was dark you wouldn't be able to see it unless it moved, and they usually don't. So don't blame yourself." Nara answers. Akina closes her eyes and then opens them.

"I cannot sense Keiko's energy anywhere nearby." She says worried.

"Do you think she was taken?" Joseph asks. Malachi looks at him and says.

"The time of sitting here and waiting is over. We will go and find them. They must be close since they had a scout watching us." Malachi opens the door to the dojo and yells.

"Alright everyone we're moving out!" Everyone rushes outside as Malachi tells the group what is happening.

"We just killed an enemy scout and there is no sign of Keiko anywhere. We believe she might have been taken to draw us out. This very well could be a trap, so stay vigilant and do not make any rash decisions. Our first order of business is to rescue Keiko, but be aware of your surroundings. Only after we have Keiko back will we kill every last one of them." This is the first time Joseph has seen Malachi so determined. He blames himself no doubt. She was his responsibility, that's what Kisho said to him. She is his student.

The army of heroes walks across fields and mountainous terrain. They are fueled with a passion to save Keiko. Their greatest strength is they fight united. Every move the evil side can make will only unite them more and give them more passion to fight. Even Joseph

has to admit that he lives to fight, he enjoys fighting and he can't wait to kill. It is a part of him as it is a part of everyone that fights. It is a few hours past mid day when demonic laughter and chanting can be heard. Malachi starts running towards a drop off. Everyone quickly follows him. He senses something and it has made him angry. Everyone looks down from a high cliff at a large army of demonic beasts. They are waving their weapons in the air as if they are being entertained. Fire torches are lit and spread out around them as smaller camp fires burn high. It becomes noticeable what they are so happy about. Keiko has her hands tied behind her and her feet tied together. She is on her knees as a large fat demon cracks his whip on her back and all over her body. She yells out in pain and cannot protect herself. Malachi's anger has increased and his energy pulse has increased with it. He lets out a fearsome battle cry that seems to echo throughout the world. The demons become silent and look up at the army that is lead by Malachi. Keiko looks up "Malachi" she whispers and smiles. Malachi withdraws his sword and Joseph follows his lead. The demons seem urgent for battle, but also a little hesitant. They outnumber the army of heroes, but that didn't matter last time. The energy that Malachi is releasing is causing the smaller demons to back away. With no warning Malachi leaps off the cliff and lands in the middle of the demons. Joseph along with the others leaps after him. Malachi walks to where Keiko is held captive. He raises his sword and cuts her loose. She jumps up and takes out her sword and also cries out a battle cry as she leaps over the demon that was whipping her and slashes his back then leaps back over his head and slashes his stomach, then finishes him off by leaping one last time and slitting his throat. The demon falls to the ground hard as the other demons slowly advance towards them. Keiko looks up at Malachi and says.

"I knew you would come for me."

"There was nothing to think about. I am impressed with your skill with the sword." Keiko smiles and says.

"I told you I could fight." Malachi smiles back,

"I'm sorry I doubted you. You can fight in this battle, but stay close to me."

"Yes sir." She says and faces the demons. Everyone prepares for what looks to be like their final stand. There is no escape for either side. Only one side can be victorious here. This is the final epic battle that will

decide who controls the world. The demon army seems endless, but no one has any fear only a desire to fight. A large demon sits on an evil looking throne. He watches as he motions the demon army to fight. This demon can be none other than the ruler of hell, the devil himself. The demons obey their lord and rush the army of heroes. Just as before they hold their ground and accept their fate. They will fight united and without fear or hesitation. Can good prevail over evil? This battle will tell. The last battle of the war, there is no denying it now. All our hope lies within these few exceptional elite soldiers, and the entire world knows it, Armageddon is upon us.

Chapter 15

Swords clash against swords and pierce flesh as the demons start their attack. Squad three sets up their shields and tries to keep an eye on everyone in the front lines. Squad two kills the larger beasts from a distance before then can reach squad one, whose main goal is to make sure nothing gets past them. Joseph watches Keiko fight. Her style is similar to that of Sonya's; her moves are fast and very acrobatic. She doesn't fight with two feet on the ground like he does; she fights in the air, and never in one place too long. For a girl, and so young she can handle herself very well, but Joseph learned a long time ago never to underestimate a woman with a strong will. Everyone fights in this war, and it is nothing short from admirable. A demon grabs Kano and pulls him towards them, causing him to lose his balance. Joseph cuts the demon's arm off as Kano falls to the ground. He quickly puts his sword over Kano's body as another demon's sword comes down on it. Kano trusts his sword over his face and stabs the demon in the stomach. Joseph holds his hand out and helps Kano to his feet. Kano nods his head once to say thank you. Joseph replies with a smile and continues to fight. A champion demon with plate armor swings his axe at Keiko, but she jumps back and then quickly ducks as both Joseph and Kano swing their swords above her head and cut the demon's head off at the same time.

"Are you ok Keiko?" Joseph says.

"Yes, you have quick reflexes."

"I was going to say the same thing about you. Your fighting style is very similar to Sonya." Joseph says while fighting.

"Thank you. I wish I could have met her." Keiko replies as she fights.

"I wish she was here right now."

"She is." Keiko looks at him and smiles; He returns the smile and says,

"Yes, I know." Akina looks over at Joseph, concerned that her dream might come true. He is fighting next to Kano and Malachi not too far away, her trust in them puts her at ease. Joseph looks and sees a large buff demon staring at him in the distance. It growls but does not approach. *What the hell is that?* He wonders, *I'll worry about him when he gets closer.* A demon with a long spear charges Keiko as her back is

turned, but Malachi grabs another demon and pushes him in front of the spear. The demon gets the full force of the spear as Malachi kills the demon that used it. Joseph watches the demon that cannot stop looking at him. There is something strange about this one; he has no weapon and hardly any armor at all. No one else seems to notice him. Joseph continues to fight. *No need in getting distracted, I'll deal with him if I need too.* As the war continues the devil on his thrown seems to be entertained by the battle, he does not make a move he just watches. Joseph suddenly feels a strong energy pulse, *what can that be?* He thinks. Just then he turns around and faces the buff demon, *What the, how did he...* But Joseph does not have time to react, the demon punches Joseph's chest throwing him back several feet. His sword slides out of reach as the demon comes after him. It grabs his foot and lifts him up before hitting him against the ground as if he was nothing more than a rag doll.

"I'm going to tear you apart." It says in a growling voice. Joseph struggles to get up, but he feels his body is broken. *Dammit, I can't move my legs or arms, that bastard.* Just then Keiko runs and stands in front of Joseph with her sword ready. The demon reaches to grab her, but her speed seems to have increased. She leaps up, somersaults in the air and a small scratch appears on the demon's chest before she lands to his right. Joseph is surprised; *I didn't even see her sword get close to him.* The demon looks down and growls. Keiko repeats her move this time landing to his left; another wound appears on the demon's chest. *She is so fast. I saw nothing but a blur.* Keiko keeps repeating her attacks left to right and then left again as wound after wound appears on the demon's chest. Keiko's attacks seem to be getting faster and faster as she continues. Keiko finally stops in a squat close to the ground ready to pounce if she needs to, but Malachi and Kano has come to aid and attacks the beast. Arrows pierce his skin as Malachi and Kano slash away at him. Keiko fights the smaller demons around them so they can focus only on this demon. Akina runs up to Joseph and puts a hand on his chest as her hand starts to glow. Feeling reenters Joseph legs and arms.

"I'm sorry I took so long to get here."

"Don't worry about it." Joseph says as he gets to his feet with the help of Akina.

"Are you going to be ok?" Akina asks concerned.

“Yes, I feel much better, thank you.” Akina looks around on the ground and grabs Joseph’s sword and hands it to him. Joseph takes it and smiles at Akina. He was just healed by Akina, but he still feels drained. His bones are no longer broken, but he feels his strength has left him. He ignores it and lifts up his sword to the large demon. The demon swings his massive arm and knocks Kano out of the way. He then turns to Malachi and grabs his sword with his bare hand. Joseph sticks his sword into the demon’s back as far as he can. The demon growls in pain as he yanks the sword from Malachi’s hand and turns around and shoves it into Joseph’s stomach. He then grabs Malachi’s throat with his other hand and lifts him up. The demon has been attacked countless of times and bleeds nonstop, but it seems none of his strength has left him. Akina sees the sword pierce Joseph and she calls out to him. Kichi grabs Akina before she runs to him. She turns around surprised,

“What are you doing?”

“He was stabbed with Malachi’s sword, a captain’s blade. Only I can heal him, but we need to wait until he is released.” Kano is busy helping Keiko if he stops and helps Joseph and Malachi Keiko will die, but if he doesn’t help them they will die also. He reaches and grabs a small can from his belt. He pulls the tab and throws it high up into the air. It explodes moments later into a blue flare. It is a call for help. Those that saw it come to his side and help him fight. Demons run past them and attack squad two. There are too many of them, their line of defense is broken. The demon tosses Malachi’s body into the army of demons. They raise their swords so Malachi will fall on them as he lands, but just then a large energy blast comes down from the sky and the group is scatted in all directions before Malachi hits the ground. Kisho seems to float down from the skies. When his feet hit the ground he brings down his sword and cuts the demon’s arm off that held Malachi’s sword in Joseph. Kisho wastes no time cutting its head off. They fought against a captain and nearly didn’t make it. Joseph falls to the ground as Kichi and Akina runs to his side.

“Take the sword out of him.” Kichi tells Akina. Akina pulls with all her strength until the sword comes out. Kichi puts both her hands on Joseph as gold and blue light sparkle around him. Akina has tears in her eyes as she watches, but also her anger grows. Kisho’s large reach clears all the demons in the area with one swing of his sword. He then clears the area where Malachi has fallen and helps him up. Kisho continues to fight the

onslaught as Malachi runs to Joseph and grabs his sword back that rests at his feet. He cuts his hand with his own blade and lets the drops of blood fall on Joseph's wounds. Akina looks at him confused; he looks at her and says.

"A captain can never be injured by his own sword; if Joseph is to survive he will need some of my blood." Kichi keeps her hands on Joseph, but only after Malachi dripped his blood on his wound did it start to heal. Kichi was just keeping him alive until then. Kichi lets up and Joseph sits up. Malachi puts his hand on his shoulder and says.

"You have been through a lot you need to rest."

"There is no time, I must continue." Joseph says as he grabs his sword and puts the point to the ground to help him up.

"You can't even get up on your own." Akina points out.

"There is no other choice; you need all the help you can get. I have to fight or I have no reason to be here." Joseph says. Everyone knows he is right, but his body is still flesh and blood, it will not hold out much longer. Akina hates to see him in pain and she knows she can't heal him more. She turns around to face the demons and puts her hand together as if she was holding a large invisible ball. Lightening starts to form around her hands and it gets larger and flares up. She brings one arm back and pushes her other arm forward as she releases the ball lightening into the army of demons. It travels for awhile and then hits a large demon. The ball lightening explodes cataclysmically as fifty or more demons get blasted into the air. Joseph is surprised at what he saw as well as everyone else. Even Akina looks surprised. Joseph watches as one by one the lifeless demons fall back to the ground.

"How did you do that?" He asks.

"I... I don't know I was just angry."

"Your power is increasing, now you must learn to control it." Kichi says. They have fought for so long they hadn't noticed that it is night, and the only light comes from the torches and fires throughout the battlefield. Their numbers have greatly diminished, but the presence of evil is also starting to become less strong. They must continue, and most are only fighting on adrenaline alone. Malachi stands next to Kisho and says.

"I'm not saying I'm not glad to see you, but you should be resting."

"How can I rest at a time like this? This is what I was meant to do."

"Are you well enough to fight?"

“Well enough. Is Joseph ok?”

“Yes, his will is strong, it will guide him.”

“We are in for a long night. Try to conserve as much energy as you can.” Kisho continues to fight even though he is bandaged, and blood stains appear as he fights on the cloth that covers his wounds. Everyone seems to be a little more confident that he is here. The demons remain persistent and continue their onslaught. Squad three makes sure everyone has a shield around them and Akina does not leave Joseph’s side. Akina gathers energy for another ball lightening attack. Keiko leaps into the air for her next attack. Joseph holds his sword tight and ready with a determined look on his face. The battle will rage on throughout the night.

Chapter 16

The ruler of hell sits angry in his throne, he has seen enough. There is a faint light on the horizon, the sun. Joseph wonders, *Is it morning already? But at least it has broken through the dense black clouds.* Satan stands up from his throne as flames engulf his entire body, he will join the battle now and not even Kisho can harm him. Satan raises his sword and walks slowly towards them. As he gets close his energy pulse is too strong for most of the army and many fall to the ground. Keiko falls to her knees, but Malachi picks her up and carries her back to get her away. Akina grabs her chest and cries out in pain. Joseph grabs her arm and makes her walk back. He stands in front of her.

“Stay behind me.” He says hoping he can shield her from the energy pulse. He has to admit it is even more than he can handle, but he does not back away. His heart beats faster as Satan gets closer. His eyes glow red and his body is in the form of a bipedal dragon. Its tail has scales like a crocodile and there are several horns sprouting from his head. He is a horrific creature as far as Joseph can tell. All that is left standing is Kisho, the captains and a few of the lieutenants. Satan swings his sword at Kisho, but he puts his sword up to block his attack. The sword smashes Kisho’s sword and pieces fall to the ground leaving him holding nothing more than a handle. The beast laughs,

“No blade can stand up against me, not even yours.” A horrible thought enters Joseph’s mind, this demon cannot be defeated. He watches as Keiko and Akina suffers and he sees Kano struggling to get up. *What can I do? Not even Kisho withstood his attack. Must think fast or Kisho and Malachi will be killed, they are the first ones in his path. Maybe he is distracted enough by Kisho and Malachi.* Joseph holds his sword in front of him and runs towards Satan as Kano yells after him.

“No!” he reaches out to grab his leg but misses. Akina looks in horror as Joseph continues. *He’s not looking I have a chance. No fear, no hesitation.* As he gets close he feels the energy pulse of the demon, it is too strong His legs are weak, he feels his body shutting down. The natural strength of this foe is too great and its energy pulse blasts Joseph

even before he gets close enough to use his sword. He flies through the air and lands on his back. There is nothing left in him. Akina cries as she tries to reach him, but the energy pulse is too great and she cannot move, she feels helpless like in her dream. The demon turns around and looks at Joseph. He laughs a demonic laugh and speaks.

“Foolish move. Foolish boy, your actions as proved nothing. I am the new lord and ruler of this world.” He turns to Kisho and Malachi. “Your deaths will not be the last.” He raises his sword for the final attack, but just then a loud clap of thunder roars and two figures seem to leap out of nowhere. Their swords are drawn and they land beside Satan.

“Not if we have anything to say about it.” Kisho looks at them and says. “What took you so long?”

“We are sorry. We would have been here sooner, but this beast sealed the passage way with evil magic. Only a heroic sacrifice broke its power over us.” They say as they look at Joseph. Joseph’s eyes are slightly open. He recognizes these men, he met with them before. They are the archangels Gabriel and Michael. Satan brings his sword down on Michael, but Michael holds his own sword up. Satan’s sword crashes against Michael’s and the sword remains intact. He didn’t even flinch, his arm wasn’t even knocked down.

“Your time has expired here Lucifer.” Michael says.

“Back to your own domain for all of eternity, Beelzebub.” Gabriel adds. Both Michael and Gabriel draw back their swords and thrust them through the demon’s torso. A light explodes out of him as he yells in the most demonic evil screech that anyone has ever heard. The fire that surrounds him disappears and the ground shakes as a fracture in the ground opens up. In a few more moments the beast is dragged down and disappears. Gabriel and Michael look around at the remaining demons that watched from a distance. They hold out their swords and swing them in front of them as a white blade made out of energy sweeps over the land killing every last one of the demons.

“The world is now cleansed.” Gabriel says.

“We could have used that before.” Malachi says.

“If we could have gotten here we would have.” Michael replies.

Everyone slowly starts to pick themselves up now that the energy pulse is gone. Akina runs over to Joseph and touches his arm. Joseph slowly looks at her as tears run down her face.

“Don’t cry. We won the war.” He says trying to smile. Kisho, Malachi, Gabriel, and Michael walk over to him as the others slowly gather around. “I guess I didn’t think too well about that last attack, huh?” He says looking at Malachi.

“You did very well.” Michael says.

“If you hadn’t done what you did. We may have never been able to get here in time.” Gabriel adds. Akina moves her hand over Joseph’s heart, but nothing happens.

“Akina.” Michael says. “You cannot heal him this time.” Akina lowers her head and cries.

“I have already died once before. You wouldn’t even have known me if I didn’t return.”

“But you did return, and I do know you. You are my friend.” Kichi and Ishi put their hands on Akina’s back in hopes to comfort her.

“I am glad I was able to have met everyone here. I am honored to have been a part of this, and I am happy, thank you Akina. Joseph’s eyes slowly closes and his heart falls silent. Akina hugs his lifeless body reminding Keiko of the way she held her sister. Everyone bows their heads. Gabriel kneels down besides Joseph and puts his hand on Akina.

“Please sit up, and watch.” She sits up and looks at Gabriel as he puts his hand on Joseph’s chest a bright light emanates around him and he is lift up to stand on his feet. His eyes reopen and he looks around.

“Am I alive?” He says confused.

“Death is no longer a concern for you. Remember what Kisho said. There is no such thing as death only new life. You are now one of us.” Michael says.

“Let us all return home now. Our work is done in this world.” Gabriel says as they fade from view and appear back where they started. Back where the squads trained and were given their orders. Back to the white stone houses and large green fields. Akina looks around and says.

“This is where we grew up this is our home.”

“Yes, we all eventually return to the place we were born.” Michael says.

“So you see there was no reason to fear death, because this is what lies behind the golden doors.” Gabriel adds.

“You mean this is...”

“Yes Joseph this is heaven, but do not consider yourself dead.”

“You mean all this time we were here. We were angels?” Akina asks.

“Yes, war called for you, that is the only reason you left.”

“So that’s why we had different abilities then everyone else that lived there.”

“And now you all know the truth.” Everyone looks in front of them as a familiar face appears. She smiles as she comes closer. Joseph looks in disbelief at the face he missed so much.

“Sonya.” He says in almost a whisper. He runs to her and hugs her as everyone else gathers around her.

“You see, there was no need to be angry, I never really died.” She says and hugs him back. Akina is next to hug her.

“So, what do we do now?” Joseph asks.

“Same thing we did before, we train. The world will always need us. And we all may be called to war again in the far off future. The world has been reset and people will rebuild their cities and families will come together. Everyone here is reborn and enlisted back into duty.” Gabriel says before Michael begins.

“Everyone here will go to their next rank as proof of you heroic actions. Erika is now captain of squad two, and Nara is lieutenant. Akina is lieutenant of squad three, as Kano is of squad one. Sonya is now captain of squad one, and starting today every squad will now have their own general. Malachi as well as Kichi and Koko is promoted to the rank of general of their squads. Joseph is now the captain to a new squad. Squad four and will be known as the reinforcements. Your colors will be white and black. As for Kisho you are now commander of all squads and we will follow you wherever you lead us.” Joseph looks at Sonya and smiles.

“So I guess we both are captains now.”

“Yes, so it would seem.”

“So, that means I don’t have to listen to you anymore.” She smiles and shakes her head,

“How is that different than before?” Malachi puts his hand on Keiko’s shoulder,

“You will be trained in squad one with us.” She nods her head and smiles. She turns her head and sees Kiska smiling at her in the distance. She runs toward her and hugs her as Malachi watches and smiles.

Everyone congratulates each other and rejoices. The night will bring a great feast and celebration until the morning when the squads and their captains and generals will get together and confront the new recruits as well as the older ones. Joseph and Sonya are once again reunited and

will someday fight as a team. Until that point Joseph and Sonya duels in the open field as the others cheer them on. The sun starts to set as Joseph's new squad four student's watch as their captain has a friendly duel with an old friend. They show off in front of the crowd more than fight each other as they hear their oos and ahs.

Today is the day the world survived...

...and everyone knows it.

End of Part 1

Part 2

Chapter 1

It has been three months since the war and people are rebuilding their homes and forming towns. The world is back in medieval times. No more strip malls, or movie theaters. No more highways and factories. Just simple towns with simple people who are fishers, foresters, and hunters and gathers. In the future cities might be built up into large metropolises with skyscrapers and busy streets, but that won't be for a while. Maybe history does repeat itself. Maybe this was meant to happen. After all this will be the closest thing to world peace.

Meanwhile back in the heavenly world Joseph is leading squad four students to a roped area in the field a few yards from the barracks. This is the training ground for all the squads. Joseph can hear Sonya yelling orders to her squad one students as he gets closer. He stops and stands next to Sonya. She looks at him and speaks.

"Is it your turn now for this space?"

"Yup."

"Ok, we will be done soon."

"How is Keiko doing?"

"Very well. Her control still needs work, but she has gotten stronger."

"That's good."

"You know I'm a little jealous of your squad."

"Why is that?"

"Because you get to practice everything. Squad one only practices fighting and sword attacks. Squad two only practices with bows and spears. And Squad three practices healing and magic moves. You get to try all of them."

"Well yes, but we are reinforcements we need to know everything since we could be assigned to any squad."

"Yes I know that, but I think it would be better if everyone had training in everything as well."

"I see your point." Sonya yells to her squad.

"Ok everyone that's enough training for today. Pick up your things and get back to the squad one barrack. We are on squad four's time now."

Everyone rushes around grabbing some things and then walks out of the open area. Keiko walks by and smiles.

“Hello Joseph.”

“Hi Keiko I hear you are doing well.”

“Ah, thanks, I try.” She says then runs to catch up to the rest of her squad. Joseph steps aside and allows his students to walk into the training grounds.

“It’s all yours.” Sonya says and starts to walk away.

“Thank you.” Joseph responds. Sonya hears Joseph speak to his students as she walks away.

“Today we will practice counter attacks so everyone group up.” Sonya smiles, she heard of his duel with Kano. *I wonder if he will gloat about that or claim that it was his move. Maybe I will have to duel him later on. As it is he has never been able to win against me.* She thinks to herself.

It is dusk and Sonya and Joseph are in the open field taking. Akina, Kano, and Keiko are sitting around the campfire on logs near the pond that the waterfall empties into. They continue to walk side by side until the other group members are out of view.

“You know I am a captain now, so we are on the same power level.”

Joseph says.

“Oh, then how come you have never beaten me in a duel?” Sonya reminds him. “We may both be captains, but I am stronger then you.”

“That’s not true. I can beat you right now.” He says and grabs his sword. Sonya smiles and grabs her sword.

“Your actions are so predictable.” She says smiling. Joseph swings his sword towards her, but she leaps out of the way and prepares to make her counter attack. It is no doubt she is faster than him and can out maneuver him with little effort, but Joseph will never accept defeat. She pushes off a nearby tree trunk with her feet and lands behind Joseph. He quickly turns around and both swords cling as they strike each other. Joseph brings his sword back and then prepares to swing at her hips, but it is a trick he made this move slower so she would move away from his attack. He has watched her fighting style very closely and knows where she will land. He quickly changes his sword’s aim in front of him as she hits the ground. She looks wide eyed at the incoming blade.

“Whoa.” She says and squats down. Joseph swings his sword over her head and lands it deep into the tree trunk. He struggles to get it out, but

Sonya quickly recovers and lands a karate kick to his side. Joseph yells out and falls to the ground. "Oops. I'm sorry Joseph. Are you ok? Sometimes I don't know my own strength." Joseph lays there looking at the sky as Sonya walks over him and looks down. "Are your ribs broken?" Joseph lets out a frustrated sigh and replies.

"I'm fine."

"I am impressed, you are getting better you almost had me that time." She walks over to the tree where Joseph's sword is stuck and twists it from side to side until she pulls it out. She hands him his sword as he picks himself up. "I win again." She says and smiles.

"You cheated; you kicked me when I was unable to defend myself."

"It's not my fault you got your weapon stuck. And that kick was my natural reflexes I didn't mean to kick you so hard."

"Well in any case I don't think that was entirely fair so this duel isn't over."

"Of course not. It will never be over until you win. You are like a little child who always calls redo every time you feel you are losing." She enjoys teasing him and can always get the best of him.

"I'm not a child. I am Captain of squad four the best squad of them all." Sonya can't help but laugh.

"You take everything so seriously. You really should lighten up." Joseph breaks a small branch off of the tree and points it at her.

"I'll show you. I bet I can cut you with this twig that is how good I am. I will make this innocent twig a deadly weapon of death."

"Oh brother." Sonya sighs. "You really have to work on your word play." Joseph swings his branch at her and accidentally rips her cloak across her chest revealing her cleavage. His eyes widen as she looks down and touches her rip.

"Aww, you tarred it." She looks up to see him running away. "What? You're leaving so soon." Joseph gets back to the campfire and jumps into the pond. Kano looks at him confused and stands up and walks over to the edge of the pond.

"What are you doing?" Joseph sighs as Sonya walks by with her cloak still ripped and her cleavage noticeable.

"Such a child." She says smiling knowing full well what has got him worked up. Kano looks behind him as Sonya gets closer.

"S-Sonya, y-your cloak. Cover yourself up."

“What do you mean?” She says as she grabs her cloak out to look at it, but making the rip slightly bigger. She hears a splash and looks up at both Joseph and Kano in the pond. Just then Keiko and Akina come walking by and looks at them in the water.

“Why are you boys in the pond fully clothed?” Keiko asks confused.

“Oh, well we didn’t want to make you ladies feel uncomfortable.”

Joseph says.

“That’s right; we are very considerable guys you know.” Kano adds.

“Oh I see, you are shy.” Keiko says smiling. Akina then notices Sonya’s ripped cloak.

“Sonya you have a rip. How did that happen?”

“I do don’t I, it must have been a twig or something. I’ll go and sew it up.” She looks at the guys in the pond and smiles “So bashful.” She says as she walks off. Akina looks at them and asks.

“Isn’t that water cold?” She shrugs her shoulders and walks off saying

“You guys are weird.” Joseph and Kano looks at each other.

“Let’s agree never to talk about this.” Joseph says.

“Agreed.”

It is night as Kano and Joseph walks back to their appropriate rooms at the barracks. They walk slowly from the weight of the water.

“Why does she taunt me?” Joseph asks as they walk.

“Isn’t it obvious? She must like you.” Kano asks.

“What? No way, she always tries to humiliate me.” Joseph says surprised. Kano smiles.

“Well, how about Akina, or Keiko? All three are very cute. Sometimes I want to get hurt just so Akina would put her hands on me and heal me.”

“What?! You are sick. You would injure yourself just so Akina would touch you.”

“I didn’t say I would injure myself, just that if I were to happen to get injured by fighting bravely in battle I would want Akina to heal me.” Kano says trying to redeem his honor.

“Well, that means you still like Keiko and she is a kid. So that makes you a pedophile.”

“Pedophile?! I see you looking at her the same way also. All three of them always talk to you.” He says raising his voice.

“Awww and you feel left out, don’t you?” Joseph says jokily.

“That’s it. I’m going to pummel you.” They both wrestle each other to the ground and Kano puts his arm around Joseph’s neck as he struggles

to free himself from the headlock. Just then a pair of feet approaches them and they look up. They quickly jump up on their feet and put their hands to their forehead in a salute.

“Good evening Malachi, general sir.” They both say at once.

“Why are you two fighting this late at night? You are waking everyone up.”

“We weren’t fighting. Just practicing some hand to hand combat sir.” Joseph says.

“That’s right.” Kano says pretending to fight with Joseph.

“Well, leave that type of horse play for the morning will you.”

“Yes sir.” They answer at the same time. Malachi looks at them and asks confused.

“And why are you soaking wet?” Joseph and Kano looks at each other.

“We... got too close to the waterfall.” Kano answers. Joseph nods his head in agreement.

“You boys need constant supervision. Have you seen Sonya?”

“What do you mean have I seen Sonya?!” Joseph asks surprised. Malachi raises an eyebrow.

“Wasn’t she with you earlier?”

“Oh, yes she was. She must have gone to her room.” Joseph answers feeling foolish. Kano starts to laugh at Joseph’s reaction to Malachi’s question, but Joseph elbows him in his side. Kano pushes him away just as Malachi grabs both Joseph and Kano by their collars.

“I said that’s enough. Now head to your rooms. I’ll talk to Sonya tomorrow.”

“Yes sir.” They say. Malachi releases them and they head towards the barracks to turn in for the night.

Chapter 2

The following day everyone is in the packed cafeteria eating their breakfast when Sonya approaches Joseph.

“What are you having?” Joseph looks at her and swallows his food before speaking.

“I’m just having some toast, and bacon, and some eggs.” He says.

“Oh is that all.” She says as she leans in closer and puts her chest in his face. “What do you think of my stitch job? You can’t even see the line can you?”

“Oh my...!” Joseph says and slides off his bench hitting the floor. Making some people turn their heads to look at him.

“Oh, you should be more careful.” Sonya says smiling as she walks off to get herself some breakfast. Kano looks at him smiling as Joseph picks himself up.

“Not a word.” Joseph warns him. After a few moments Sonya returns with a tray full of food. She sits down next to Akina across the table from Kano and Joseph. She picks up a small glass shaker and hands it to Joseph.

“Would you like some sugar for your tea?” She says smiling.

“Oh yes, thank you.” Joseph replies and takes the shaker and starts shaking the small crystals into his tea. Sonya covers her mouth with her hand and starts snickering.

“You have a sweet tooth don’t you?”

“Yes, I guess I do.” After several shakes Joseph starts sipping his tea, but spits it out on the floor. Sonya busts out laughing.

“I can’t believe you put all that salt into your tea.” She says hysterically.

“That’s it. I’m going to get you for that.” Joseph says as he picks up a piece of toast with jam and tosses it at Sonya. She moves her head and it flies past her and hits Keiko in the back of the head as she’s walking by. The piece of toast slowly slides down the back of her head and falls to the floor leaving a streak of jam in her hair. She stops and turns around and glares at Joseph and Kano. Kano quickly puts his head down and starts shoveling in food pretending he didn’t see anything.

“Who did that?” Keiko asks narrowing her eyes while looking between Joseph and Kano. Joseph stares at Keiko with a guilty look on his face.

Before he knows it Keiko jumps on the table and grabs some toast with jam from other people, and rubs it in Joseph's face and hair.

"Do you like that?! Do you know how long it's going to take me to get this out?!" She yells. Just then a man approaches the table and coughs to get everyone's attention. Keiko stops her abuse on Joseph and looks up.

"I am sorry to interrupt your meal, but Malachi has requested the five of you to meet him in squad one's meeting room." The man says and then walks away.

The five walk into squad one's meeting room and sees Malachi in the back of the room in front of a table with cleanly washed sheets and towels. They approach him and wait for their orders. Malachi turns around to face them and begins.

"We have been assigned to go to the earthly world for some research work. It will be a full day event and also..." Malachi stops speaking when his eyes come across Joseph.

"What is that on your face?" He says confused.

"I don't feel like talking about it at the moment." He says looking down.

"It's jam." Sonya says trying not to laugh. Malachi reaches behind him and grabs a towel off one of the piles and throws it at Joseph.

"Clean yourself up. Don't you have any self respect?"

"Sorry sir." He says as he wipes his face.

"Now as I was saying. We are going to earthly world to take some samples of the air, water, dirt, and some other things. After the recent war a lot of energy has been released and we need to make sure it hasn't disrupted the composition of the elements. It will be winter now and very cold so some warm clothing as been delivered to your rooms. This will be a full day event and we will be leaving in about two hours so be ready by the transport portal by then. You are dismissed." *Good enough time for a shower and try to get this crap out of my hair.* Keiko thinks to herself.

Malachi and the rest enter the cold wintery environment of earth dressed as warmly as they could. A fresh blanket of snow covers the ground and trees. Akina looks around amazed.

"What is this stuff all over?"

"It's snow. You never saw snow before?" Joseph says.

"No, I haven't. What is it?"

"Well you see when it gets cold the rain drops freeze and falls down as snow." Joseph says trying to sound smart. Joseph looks and sees Sonya

looking around as well. An evil grin appears on Joseph's face. *This is my chance to get even with her she's not paying attention.* He thinks to himself as he bends down and clumps some snow in his hands making a snowball. He takes aim and throws it at her. She ducks at the last second and the snowball hits Keiko smack dab in the middle of the face. *Damn Sonya and her quick reflexes.* Keiko narrows her eyes and looks at Joseph.

"Oh oh." He says as he watches her fist travel right for his eye. She punches him then knocks him to the ground and rubs his face into the snow.

"How do you like it?! Now my face is going to be cold the whole day!" Malachi just sighs as Kano turns to Akina and says.

"Don't you feel a little sorry for him?"

"Ah huh." She says nodding her head.

"Ok children if we can get to work now." Malachi says. Keiko gets off of Joseph and stands up. Malachi continues speaking. I'm going to break you off into groups of two. Joseph and Kano... hmmm no." Malachi thinks for a moment if he puts Kano with him they will need supervision. And Keiko and Joseph doesn't seem like a good idea either. "Akina and Joseph, Kano and Keiko and I will go with Sonya." He says. He takes the back pack he was holding on his shoulder and opens it. He takes out three smaller packs and explains. "This is some materials and tools you may need along with a list of things you need to gather. When you have everything head back here and wait for everyone else." He hands a bag to Akina and Keiko and keeps one for himself.

"So this is like a scavenger hunt." Joseph says. He looks at Kano and says. "I bet me and Akina will be the first one back."

"No way, it's going to be me and Keiko. You won't even be half way done by the time we finish." They each hold their fist in each other's face while they argue. Malachi sighs again.

"I can't win. Maybe the ladies can keep them in line." He says then explains one last thing. "This is just a precaution since this world is very sensitive and if the structure of the elements changes too much the whole world will be affected and could fall apart. We should be able to take all the samples we need and bring them back to be studied. Don't worry about demons; they should still be dormant since our last battle." Keiko walks up to Joseph before leaving and says.

“Malachi told me I should apologize... So I’m sorry.” Keiko is wearing a large overcoat and a very large bulky scarf. She looks at Joseph waiting for an answer.

“Don’t you have anything to say?”

“I’m sorry, it’s just that flotation device around your neck is distracting me.” Keiko jabs her palm at Joseph’s nose.

“Shut up! It keeps me warm.”

“Ahhh! Why is it always in the face?” He says putting his hands to his nose to see if he is bleeding. Keiko stomps away.

“I guess it’s unavoidable.” Malachi says shaking his head. Sonya walks over to Joseph.

“I told you she’s getting stronger, but she does have a little temper.”

“Maybe she needs a nap she can use that pillow around her neck.” Joseph has a feeling he’s being watched and slowly turns around to see Keiko right behind him with her arms folded and tapping her foot. He sees her fist coming at him again.

“What is the matter with you? Do you like to get smacked?”

“Ahhh! In the face again.” He says holding his nose.

“Keiko, stop beating up on Joseph.” Malachi says.

“I’m sorry, but he gets me so mad sometimes.”

“I know the feeling.” Sonya says.

“He does have that way about him. Doesn’t he?” Malachi says smiling. Akina also smiles and nods her head.

“Why are you all against me?” Joseph says. He looks at Sonya and says.

“Maybe she shouldn’t have been put in squad one. You made her into a monster.” Sonya smiles and then follows after Malachi into the forest. Akina grabs Joseph’s arm and starts walking.

“I don’t need to be dragged away like a little kid Akina.”

“Well I don’t want to see you get beat up anymore.”

“I wasn’t beet up.”

Chapter 3

Joseph looks down on his list only a few things remain. “Sand? Where the hell am I going to find sand?” Joseph says out loud as he is reading.

“At the beach.” A tiny girl’s voice says. Joseph looks behind him and sees a small child wearing a coat, hat, and mittens.

“Hello, what is your name?” Joseph asks.

“Sarah.” She answers.

“Well Sarah can you show me where the beach is. I am new around here.”

“Sure follow me.” She starts running as Joseph jogs behind her. After a few moments the beach comes into view along with a small town. Sarah turns around and looks at Joseph. “Here is the sand.”

“Thank you.” Joseph says taking out a small bottle and filling it up.

“Why are you collecting sand?”

“To study it.”

“Why do you want to study it?”

“Well, I’m not studying it someone else will. And it’s kinda hard to explain.”

“What is your name?”

“Joseph.” He answers as the girl reaches out her hand. Joseph looks at it a little confused. Sarah looks at him and says.

“Well, aren’t you going to shake it? When you meet someone new you are supposed to shake their hands.”

“Oh, it has been awhile since I had to do that.” Joseph says feeling stupid. He shakes her hand while her parents watch her from a few yards away.

“What is Sarah doing the father asks?” The mother looks where Sarah is and smiles.

“Oh isn’t that cute. She’s playing with an imaginary friend.” Her mother calls to her just then. “Sarah come home and wash up for supper.”

“Ok.” She yells back. “Well, I have to go. Bye bye Woseph.” She says as she runs home.

“Ok good bye... Woseph?” He repeats as Akina walks up to him.

“I see you found a new friend.” She says smiling.

“Oh, ya I guess. Her parents didn’t seem worried I was talking to her though.”

“That’s because they couldn’t see you.”

“What?”

“Our energy pulse is different than everyone else’s. Only a few people will be able to see us. Most of them will be children.” Joseph keeps looking at the small house where the girl went it. “Is everything ok?” Joseph looks at Akina.

“Yeah it looks like nothing has changed. Mothers still make their kids wash their hands before supper... and to think it almost all ended.” Akina smiles and pulls on his sleeve.

“Let’s finish up, I’m getting cold... Woseph.”

“Don’t call me Woseph. How long have you been watching us anyways?”

Joseph and Akina continue walking and collecting their samples until Akina picks up a pine cone and places it in a bag.

“That’s it the last thing on the list.” She says.

“Great, lets head back to the meeting spot.” Joseph says eager to see if anyone finished yet. Akina puts the bag in the pack she is holding and the two starts to walk. Akina suddenly stops and looks over a frozen pond. “What is it, is everything all right?”

“The water, it looks different.”

“That’s because it’s frozen. When it is cold water freezes into ice making it solid. Just like when it is heated it becomes steam which is a gas.” Akina puts down her pack and steps onto the frozen pond. She seems surprised and excited at the same time.

“I can stand on it. I can walk on water.” She says smiling.

“Well be careful ice is very slip...” Before Joseph can finish he sees Akina start to fall backwards. He rushes onto the ice and catches her under her arms but loses his balance and falls on the ice with Akina on top of him. She starts to laugh.

“Sorry, are you ok?” She asks.

“Yes, I’m fine. It’s not my first time falling on ice.” He says smiling, just then Akina looks up and seems to be embarrassed. Joseph looks behind him and sees Kano with his mouth open. “It’s not what it looks like. Akina just slipped and I caught her.” Keiko walks out of the woods behind Kano and sighs and folds her arms when she sees Joseph and

Akina on the ice. Akina starts to get up and slips again falling on Joseph's stomach.

"Oh my God!" Kano says. Keiko reaches out her hand and grabs Akina's arm and helps her onto the snow.

"Thank you." She says blushing while picking up her pack. Joseph manages to get to the snow and walks up to Kano who still has his mouth wide open. Joseph slaps him on the back.

It was nothing." He says and follows Keiko and Akina into the forest. Kano runs up to him.

"Nothing my ass...tell me everything!" He says wide eyed.

"She slipped, that's it end of story."

"You are such a liar."

"Shut up! Nothing happened."

By the time the four get to the meeting point Sonya and Malachi is already there.

"Well it's about time. We've been waiting for like an hour. What happened?" Sonya asks.

"Why don't you ask Joseph." Kano says.

"That's it." Joseph says and tosses himself at Kano and throws him to the ground.

"Get off of me I'm not Akina." He says as they roll around in the snow.

"Shut up!" Both Sonya and Malachi looks a little puzzled at Akina who is just looking around pretending she didn't hear anything.

"All right that's enough you two." Malachi says. "This constant fighting is immature. Try to be adults." He pulls Joseph away from Kano. "Did the two of you manage to get everything on the list?" Keiko walks over with her pack and says.

"Yes, we did." She hands the pack to Malachi as Akina walks up with her pack and hands it to him as well.

"We did also."

"Well I'm glad at least some of us are responsible." He says.

"Good job girls." Sonya says smiling to further humiliate Joseph and Kano.

"We are done here. Let's head back." Malachi says opening the portal.

"You two go in first." Malachi says directing Joseph and Kano inside.

"Why do we have to go in first?" Kano asks.

"So we can keep an eye on you." Malachi responds. Akina usually doesn't like to see other people in trouble, but this time it was mildly

amusing. Joseph and Kano walks inside the portal with the feeling that the three girls is laughing behind their backs.

The next morning Joseph opens the door to the squad four barracks.

“Training starts today again. Be ready in five minutes.” His students rush around getting their swords and shoes. One student looks to another and says.

“It’s about time. We waited two days and no training.”

“Well he’s been busy.” The other student answers.

Joseph stands in front of his students as they stand side by side listening to his lecture. Joseph paces back and forth as he talks. “I am sorry I have neglected your training for so long, but I was in the earthly world with a few of the others on a research project. We have learned defensive and offensive techniques. Today we will learn how to use them together.” Sonya smiles and watches him with her arms folded as she sits on a branch of a tree a few yards away. Akina walks by and notices her.

“What are you doing up there Sonya?”

“Come on up.” Sonya says smiling. Akina climbs up the tree grabbing branch after branch until she is at the same level as Sonya. Akina turns her head into the direction that Sonya is looking. “I’m watching Joseph teach, it’s funny to me. I never thought I would see the day.” She says smiling.

“What is he teaching them about?” Sonya looks at her.

“The same things I taught him.” Akina smiles and says.

“He admires you.”

“I know, but he admires you also.”

“No he doesn’t.” She says looking down.

“Oh yes, yes he does.”

“Really?”

“Yup.” Akina blushes a little and smiles.

“Should we be spying on him like this?”

“We aren’t spying. We are just watching him from a distance hidden in a tree.”

“Oh, well then I guess I can stay for a little while.” Akina takes a seat on a nearby branch and watches Joseph raise his sword and speak, then his students raise their swords. “Joseph can be responsible when he wants to be.” Akina points out.

“Yes, he can. It’s only when him and Kano is together that he acts foolish. Must be a guy thing we don’t understand.” Sonya and Akina laughs.

It is night and Joseph is leaning on a small fence looking at the starry sky. Sonya walks up to him from behind and leans on the fence beside him. “Not much for sleep are we?” Joseph looks at her and gives a little smile.

“I like the night. How about you? You’re not sleeping.”

“Not yet, it’s only midnight.” She smiles and after a few moments speaks again. “You make a good teacher.”

“You were watching me.”

“Yes, when am I not watching you.” Joseph laughs. “Malachi is coming.” She says. Joseph looks up and sees him walking towards them.

“How does he always appear around you?” Joseph asks.

“I have no idea.” Sonya says smiling.

“You two are still up huh.” Malachi stops and puts his hand on the fence. “We finished studying the samples we brought back.”

“Is everything normal?” Joseph asks.

“Yes, for the most part. The only thing is that there is less oxygen in the air. It won’t be a problem yet, but over time it could affect the way plants, animals, and even humans grow. We have developed a balance which should be ready sometime tomorrow. We just need someone to go down and release it into the air.” He says looking away. Sonya knows he is expecting them to volunteer.

“I can go.” Sonya says. Joseph doesn’t say anything until Sonya and Malachi starts staring at him.

“What?” Joseph says looking between them. “I would go, but I have a squad that needs training.”

“I can take over until you get back.” Malachi says. Joseph waits a moment then says.

“Fine, I will go.”

“Good, the two of you should get some sleep, preferably not together.” He says as he is walking away. Both Sonya and Joseph look behind them as Malachi walks away.

“Did he just make a joke?” Joseph asks.

“I think so.” Sonya answers a little stunned.

The morning comes quickly and Joseph slowly opens his eyes as the sun shines brightly in his face. He groans and turns over pulling the

covers over his head. Just then his door flies open and Sonya barges in.

“Rise and shine. It’s another beautiful day.” Joseph growls.

“Leave me alone.”

“Why are you still in bed? Get up we have work to do today.” Sonya says as she pulls his covers off his bed.

“Sonya! You just messed up my whole bed.” Joseph says as he starts to sit up.

“So, you do know how to make your own bed don’t you?” Sonya teases. Joseph looks at her.

“You are going to make it.” Sonya laughs out loud in the most annoying fake laugh she can come up with. “Why do you have so much energy this morning? You were up just as late as me.”

“Well for one I didn’t sleep with my regular clothes on.” Joseph looks at himself and notices he still has his cloak on and everything else except his shoes and sword.

“How does that change anything?”

“Well studies show that in order for you to be fully rested you need to be in pajamas.”

“You just made that up.” Joseph says as he is putting on his shoes and then walking over to get his sword.

“Not really. You need to be comfortable to get sleep.”

“Whatever. Let’s go.” The two walks outside while all the squads are training. Joseph notices Malachi is already with his squad four students and that Squads one, two, and three are spread out all over. “So, who is teaching squad one if you are going also?”

“Well, it was going to be Kano, but I decided to go with my second best student.”

“Won’t Kano be mad?”

“Be mad about what?” Kano says as he walks up to them. Joseph looks at Sonya.

“He talked to me last night. He wants to come too.” Sonya says. “And I already talked with Malachi and he left me in charge. So I will not tolerate any horseplay or fooling around of any kind.” She says in a stern voice.

“We are not children Sonya.” Joseph says.

“Well you can prove that to me today.” The three walk until they meet Kisho by the transport portal. Kisho reaches into his pocket and takes

out three slender bottles at a time of a light blue cloud like substance. He hands the bottles to each of them while explaining.

“This will balance out the oxygen levels. The bottles need to be opened at three different locations, near water, trees, and mountains. All three bottles needs to be emptied at the same location. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir.” Everyone says.

“Good, then off you go and be careful. Do not open the bottles until you are at your location. The air inside will escape immediately.”

“Yes sir, thank you.” The team speaks at once. Kisho activates the portal and the three walk in one after each other.

The three reappear in the earthly world and it seems to be late spring. All the snow is gone and flowers are starting to bloom. “Weren’t we just here three days ago?” Kano asks.

“Time travels differently from our world and this one.” Sonya says. “Ok we all know what we have to do. I suggest we split up. I will go to the beach, Kano can head into the forest and Joseph you can head towards the mountains that way.” Sonya points to the west. “When we are done we will meet with Joseph since he will be the farthest away. Understand?”

Joseph and Kano nods and they split up to their assigned locations.

After ten minutes Joseph finally reaches the bottom of the mountain.

“Well this is it.” He says looking up. He grabs one bottle out of his cloak pocket and looks at the swirling light blue cloud inside. He raises it above his head and points it towards the sky while taking off the cap. A gentle breeze escapes from the bottle. “I guess that’s all there is to it.” He says looking inside the empty bottle. He puts it in his pocket and grabs another one and repeats the steps. Just then he hears footsteps behind him. He turns around, but no one is there. He looks around before taking out the final bottle. He hears a hissing sound that seems to come from all directions. He puts one hand on his sword and looks around him. “Who is there? Show yourself.” He says. After a few moments he takes his hand off his sword and points the bottle up. “Must be a reaction from the crap in this bottle” he thinks out loud. He opens the cap and the breeze escapes upward into the air. Just then he hears laughter and a hissing “Yessss.”

He turns around quickly and withdraws his sword. A Cloud in front of him is starting to take shape, and a strong energy pulse radiates from it. His eyes widen at the form that stands in front of him.

Meanwhile as Sonya and Kano is walking towards where Joseph is Sonya stops and lifts her head up. Her eyes widen and she gasps.

“What is it?” Kano asks.

“It’s Joseph, he’s in trouble.” A few miles away Joseph comes face to face with an old enemy... Lilith.

Chapter 4

Joseph looks up and sees Lilith standing in front of him. Unlike last time this time she is wearing a white gown that is flowing in the wind. She recognizes him and smiles. She walks closer to him then stops and speaks.

“Ah, Joseph. Are you surprised to see me again?” Joseph looks around and realizes he is alone. He has to fight her on his own. He has to overcome her spells and tricks with no assistance. He looks at her in the eyes and says.

“Lilith, I see you are still alive, but as I recall you fled from battle last time.” Lilith laughs.

“I am glad to see you remember me. Then again I did leave quite an impression.” She walks closer and peers into his eyes. “Come with me and I will take good care of you.”

“Your tricks won’t work on me this time. I am stronger.” Lilith smiles.

“Very well, I like it when they put up a fight. It makes it so much more enjoyable when I defeat them.” Her gown blows away as she raises her arms revealing a two piece black leather armor ensemble. Her fingernails turn into claws and two fangs come down from her mouth. A long tail grows out of her as it whips in the air. “Let see if you can defeat me now in my true form.” Joseph knows this battle was intended just for him, he has to win on his own. Joseph holds his sword tight as Lilith runs at him. She swipes her claws at his belly, but he moves out the way and swings his sword at her. She seemed to know about his attack and wraps her tail around his hand and handle of the sword and tosses him to the side. He falls to the ground and quickly rolls himself out of Lilith’s path as she lands where he would have been. He swings his sword at her but only manages to slightly cut her arm. She stands up and looks at her wound. She rubs her finger over the wound and then licks the blood from her fingertips. “Not bad, you landed a cut on me.” She looks at him and smiles. “I can’t wait to take you home with me. You will love my home; everything you desire will be there for you. And my yard is vast with apple trees. I will make you a prince.”

“I have no desire to be a prince. And I can get apples anywhere.”

“Your lonely eyes tell me differently. You do not belong with them. You don’t belong in this world. You don’t belong anywhere. You do not need to hide your emotions from me.” Joseph holds his sword over his head and yells as he runs towards her, but before he can bring it down on her she kicks him hard in the gut forcing him to fly back. “Aggressive aren’t we.” He slowly gets up, but Lilith turns her tail into a weapon and whips him all over his body. “I can play just as hard as you.” She says kicking the sword from his reach and picking him up by the neck. “Now are you ready to come with me?”

“Never.” He says trying to pry her fingers away as they cut deeper into his flesh. Her eyes turn into that of a snake’s and a forked tongue sticks out between her two fangs as she yells in frustration and slams him to the ground. She then walks over to where his sword is as Joseph lifts his head and sees her pick it up.

“Is this your power?” She says as she looks at it. “What will you do without it?” She slams his sword against a rock and it shatters into pieces. Joseph lets out a gasp in disbelief. “Where is your power now, hmm? Without your sword you are worthless, powerless, and meaningless.” Joseph puts his forehead to the ground as Lilith walks over to him and lifts his head up to look into his eyes. She smiles. “You are defeated and I will take you now. You can’t fight me anymore, but don’t worry you won’t have too ever again. My medicine will heal you quickly. Am I not forgiving?” Joseph knows he has no chance of winning without his sword, maybe he doesn’t belong with the people he considered friends for so long. Lilith has not only crushed his sword, but also his spirit. He has given up. Lilith picks him up by his waist as if he weighed no more than a small animal.

“Put him down!” A voice calls out. He looks up and sees Sonya and Kano appear.

“You are too late. He’s mine now.” Sonya starts to glow a light blue as anger grows inside of her. The blue aura covers her body and then flairs out and hits Lilith’s arm that held Joseph. She drops him and he hits the ground, but he has no more energy to get up. Lilith growls, “You interfered with me once before, I will not let you win again.” Sonya and Kano charge her, but Lilith cartwheels back and avoids Kano’s blade only to get her stomach slashed by Sonya. She yells out. “If you really cared for this boy, you should have let me take him.”

“Why would I let you do that?” Sonya says as Lilith jumps over her and back to where Joseph is lying.

“Because I am a greedy woman. If I can’t have him no one will.” She turns Joseph on to his side and sticks her claws into Joseph’s belly. His eyes open wide as he gasps.

“Nooooo!” Sonya yells out.

“My poison will kill him shortly.” Lilith says and disappears just as Kano’s sword swings where she was. Sonya drops her sword and kneels by Joseph as she puts her hands under him. Joseph looks at her and gasps for air as his breathing gets faster than slower and then faster. He can’t control his heart beats.

“I’m sorry... I lost.” He says.

“No, I should have gotten here sooner. I’m going to save you.” Joseph closes his eyes and his body goes limp. His brain wasn’t getting enough oxygen and he has passed out. Sonya looks at Kano “I need to get him help. Will you be ok on your own?” Kano nods and looks at her as if to say *you don’t need to ask*. Sonya holds Joseph as she closes her eyes and the two fade from view.

Sonya reappears back in the barracks with Joseph on the ground.

“Akina!” She yells. Malachi runs over to Sonya and kneels down putting his hand on Joseph’s head.

“Lilith poisoned him.” Malachi looks at someone near him and says.

“Find Akina fast.” Malachi looks at Joseph. “He is fading fast. Lilith’s poison is hard to cure. Akina can’t heal him, but she can keep his heart from giving out. There is only one person that can help him.” Just then Akina runs through the crowd and sees Joseph lying on the ground.

“Joseph! No!” She kneels down and puts her hands on his chest as she starts to glow golden.

“Only keep his heart from stopping Akina. Do not stop.” Sonya says. Malachi puts his hand on Akina’s back and Sonya’s hand which is on Joseph’s stomach and the four fade. They are looking at a wooden door when they reappear. Malachi knocks on the door several times before it opens. A tall man in a purple and black cloak stands in the doorway. The cabin is dark as if everyone was sleeping. A few candles are lit and dried herbs and roots hang on the walls. There are a lot of shelves with bottles on them and many different size books. A desk stood in the corner of the room with piles and piles of papers and journals on top of it.

“We need your help.” Malachi says as he picks up Joseph while Akina concentrates on her healing.

“Malachi?!”

“Can we come in?” The man moves aside and Malachi walks in and lays Joseph on a long wooden table.

“What happened?” the man asks.

“He has been poisoned by Lilith, we need a cure.”

“Anti venom for Lilith’s poison is not easy to come by.”

“Do you have it or not.” Malachi says losing his temper.

“Of course I do. You are lucky I just made this a week ago when I noticed I had none in storage. The man walks to a cabinet and moves jars around each with a different color liquid in them. “I always try to have one of each of my products in stock just in case.”

“Can you please hurry up?” Malachi says impatiently.

“Calm down. Ah, here it is.” He finally takes out a slender glass tube with a green liquid inside and places a needle into the liquid. He fills up the syringe and looks at Sonya. “Lift up his shirt. I need a clear path to his heart.” She complies and he sticks the needle in him. Akina has her eyes close and shakes as she tries to use the last of her energy to heal him. Her nose starts to bleed and tears run down her cheeks.

“That’s enough Akina.” Malachi says. She lets up and starts to fall backwards, but is caught by Malachi.

“There is a bed in the next room. Put her there I will be there in a moment.” The man says. Malachi nods and carries her away. The man puts his hand over Joseph’s heart. “His heart is beating normally and his temperature has come down. He should be fine.” The man walks off as Sonya puts her hand on Joseph’s hand. He shakes uncontrollable as his body tries to heal itself. Sonya’s eyes swell up with tears and she bows her head.

“I am sorry I let you down.” The man returns with a pillow and a blanket. Sonya stands up I will take care of this check on Akina. The man hands her the blanket and pillow and walks into the next room. Sonya covers Joseph up and puts the pillow under his head. Moments later Malachi walks out of the room and joins Sonya. She looks up and says. “How is she?”

“She will be ok. She just needs rest.” We will stay here until they are better.”

"I should never have pushed her. I could tell she was weakening." Sonya says as tears run down her face.

"She would have done the same thing even if you hadn't told her. She cares very much about Joseph as well." Sonya is silent for a few moments before speaking again.

"I now know what Joseph must have felt when I died in front of him. Anger, it's so powerful. I want to kill her. I want to kill her so bad even now when Joseph is struggling just to stay alive. I am a bad person." Malachi walks around the table and puts his arm around Sonya.

"No, anger is a powerful emotion. We all know that. There is a time for revenge and there is a time to care for our friends. You made the right choice. Do not tell yourself any differently." The stranger walks past them and opens the door; he looks at Malachi for a moment and then walks outside closing the door behind him. "Joseph will be ok, he is strong." Sonya smiles and nods then sits down next to him as Malachi follows the man outside. He has his arms folded and turns to Malachi when he sees him approaching him.

"I have to say I am very surprised to see you. I didn't think you would be able to find me. Are you still trying to capture me?" Malachi smiles.

"No, the past is the past. The truth is I knew where you were a long time ago, but decided not to make my appearance. I kept your whereabouts a secret from the high council to this day, and have no intention of telling them. If it wasn't for Joseph's injuries I would never have came, but you saved his life, and I am grateful." The man smiles and nods.

"Let the past stay in the past old friend." He says slapping Malachi on the back and then walking away.

It is evening now as Malachi and Sonya are sitting on a bench just outside of the cabin. The cabin sits in a clearing of a gloomy forest surrounded by large trees covered in moss that seem to be hundreds of years old. There is a dirt path that leads from the door of the cabin out into the forest and forks to a small pond in the distance. She turns to face Malachi and says.

"I know Joseph is stronger than her. He was able to fight her without falling under her spells and he landed his attacks on her. I just don't know what she did to crush him so badly." Malachi looks at Sonya and explains.

"Lilith's greatest strength is to know everyone else's greatest weakness. And she attacks that weakness relentlessly, until either that person's will

power or body crashes. She tends to escape almost immediately when she is out numbered, she can only concentrate on one person at a time.”

“I want to kill her. This is the second time she has gotten away and she almost killed him this time. She would have killed him if it wasn’t for this man’s cure.” Sonya’s anger raises her energy pulse and a strong wind picks up blowing the trees almost over. Malachi puts his hand on her shoulder and the wind dies down.

“Calm down. She will not evade us forever, but this is not a fight for one person. We need to trap her or ambush her. Do not let her win over you. Do not let revenge blind your instincts. Learn from Joseph’s past mistakes. His anger gave birth to a demon.”

“Yes, but he defeated that demon.”

“With the help of his friends he was able to overpower it, but to say it is defeated would be a lie. It can come back if Joseph losses control.”

Sonya has a worried look on her face. She must remain rational, she has to be strong and maybe Joseph will absorb some of that. She needs to accept Lilith’s escape for Joseph’s sake. She looks at Malachi and nods as if to say thank you, but she still has one more question.

“Who is this man? You seem to know him.” Malachi looks at her and responds.

“His name is Darius and we use to fight side by side. In fact he use to be my friend.”

“Use to be?” Malachi seems hesitant to say more, but he continues.

“It was a very long time ago, before there were any squads. You see he is an alchemist and alchemy is not allowed in our world because it uses dark magic in most recipes. He refused to give up his research and I was ordered to capture him...”

“Darius.” Malachi says standing behind him as he is bent over a pond gathering an underwater plant. Darius turns and faces him.

“So, this is who they send to take me in. Still always doing what you are told Malachi? Have you ever tried thinking for yourself?”

“Please Darius come with me. I don’t want to use force.” Darius pulls back his cloak revealing his katana.

“Well, I’m giving you no choice.” He says as he withdraws his weapon.

“So be it.” Malachi replies and takes out his weapon just in time to block Darius’s attack. Darius swings high at Malachi’s chest then low at his knees trying to fake him out, but Malachi blocks every time. Darius

reaches into his cloak and throws a small cloth bag at Malachi's face. He puts the sword in front to block it, but as soon as the bag hits the side of the blade it explodes in his face.

"Do you like my new invention? I call it fire dust." Malachi tries to rub the burning powder out of his face. Just then an arrow whizzes past him into Darius's chest. Darius looks at the arrow then falls to the ground. Malachi walks over to him and inspects the arrow and the wound.

"A tranquilizing arrow." He looks back and sees a man walking towards him holding a bow. "I could have handled him." Malachi says.

"It doesn't matter; he was getting out of hand." The man responds.

Malachi and the man toss Darius in a cell and walks away. Nightfall approaches and a large explosion is heard from the cell. Guards rush to the location as Malachi squeezes his way through the crowd to find an empty cell with a hole in the wall. *It seems he had one more trick up his sleeve.* Malachi thinks to himself.

"I tried to track his location after that day. I knew he wouldn't stay in our world and he wouldn't go to the earthly world since we are always monitoring it. So that only means he retreated to one of his own worlds he created."

"You mean he created this world?" Sonya asks looking around.

"Yes, you see there is a lot of open space not being used. Call it other realms or alternate universes, but you can fill it how you want. I knew of his projects with these worlds and I spent many years trying to locate him. Since these worlds don't really exist you can't track anyone in them, unless you know where to look. When I finally found him my anger was gone and I decided not to make any more trouble. I will let him be. Deep inside I think I saw a use for his craft. Sometimes the way to help someone may not always be the most righteous choice, but as long as you don't let it consume you or you don't hurt anyone else in the process it can't be that bad. I decided not to tell anyone of my findings. Since I was never authorized to do so in the first place I saw no reason to let anyone know. If the high council ever finds out they will no doubt take disciplinary action against me. If that were to ever happen I don't want you to get involved at all. I knew them for a long time and I was there when they were first formed. I might be able to talk my way out of it. But promise me you won't get involved I do not want to drag anyone else into my mess." Sonya looks at him and then nods her head.

“I promise.”

Meanwhile Akina sits on a log besides Joseph by the pond and can sense that Joseph is upset. He has bandages all over his body since Lilith’s whip broke the skin every time they hit him. He is looking at the ground and seems not to notice she is there.

“What’s wrong?” She asks. Without looking up Joseph answers.

“Nothing.”

“You can’t lie to me Joseph. I can sense other people’s feelings and I know something is wrong.” After a moment Joseph speaks.

“Maybe she was right”

“Who?”

“Lilith.”

“What, why do you let her words get to you? She is the enemy it doesn’t matter what she says.”

“But she’s right. I am useless without my sword. I depend on my sword for my power. Without it I am nothing.” Akina makes a fist and bonks Joseph on the top of the head.

“OW! Why did you do that?” He says as he rubs his head.

“I’m trying to knock some sense back into you. Have you forgotten already? Your power doesn’t come from your sword, that is just a tool. Your power comes from inside your heart. Why did you decide to pick up a sword the very first time?” Joseph thinks back, it was to protect Sonya. “You didn’t have any power back then and not much skill with a sword either, but you still fought. Wasn’t it because you had determination? A promise to yourself? You came a long way since then. You were even made a captain of a new squad. That has never happened in our history. Why do you think they would give you that responsibility if you were useless? Do you even know why you fight anymore?” Joseph remembers a past conversation with Keiko. *“I don’t want their actions to go for nothing. That’s my motivation, to make them proud.”* He then remembers what Malachi told him. *“Even the best sometimes fall.”* Joseph lifts his head up and looks at Akina.

“To protect, and make everyone that went out of their way for me proud... Thank you Akina” She smiles at him and says.

“When we get back I’ll take you to the armory and help you get a new sword.” Joseph smiles back at her. Where would he be if it wasn’t for his friends? Deep inside he is grateful to have them even though they pummel him from time to time.

The door of the cabin opens and everyone turns to see Akina holding Joseph's arm and helping him inside. The wooden table is set with two loafs of bread, a block of cheese and a plate of meat. Everyone is sitting around the table eating and conversing as Akina pulls out a chair for Joseph and then sitting herself beside him. Sonya and Malachi looks at each other and smiles. Joseph notices it and asks.

"What?" Malachi shakes his head.

"Nothing, eat and regain your strength." Malachi then turns to Darius.

"So have you been here from the start?" Darius swallows his tea and puts his cup down.

"No, I spent a year or so in the earthly world under the disguise of an elderly man. Until I was sure this world would be stable." Joseph stops eating and looks across the table at him.

"An elderly man you say?" he says out loud not intending too. Malachi looks at Joseph and says,

"Joseph? Did you remember something?"

"No, it's nothing." He says and continues eating. Darius looks at Joseph for a moment. A flashback of him standing near a cliff talking to a young man enters his mind. A young man that closely resembles Joseph. He walks towards the man who is looking over the cliff he starts to slide his foot closer to the edge.

"Wait, don't. That is not your path." The man turns around and faces him.

"I don't belong here." He says.

"Sea turtles don't belong on land; it is merely a starting point until they make their way into the ocean. The same is for you. Do not let doubt and misfortunes lead you astray. Today is a good day, but tomorrow will be better." Darius now knows that that man is Joseph.

Joseph stands outside in the night air and looks up at the stars. This man has saved his life twice, but he is ashamed that he needed help the first time. Someone knows what he almost did. He had to be pulled back from the edge. To take one's own life is to be a coward, to be weak. How can he face the others who tried so hard to save him? To die would be the greatest insult of them all to the people he respects. Sonya saved him the first time they met and that led to a friendship and eventually it lead him into the greatest battle of all time. That was the first time he felt he belonged. "It took the world to end, for me to find

my place in it.” He says to himself. Darius walks from behind him and stands by his side.

“You should be resting.” He says looking straight.

“I’m not tired.” Joseph says not making eye contact. Darius looks at him.

“I will not tell them about the cliff.” Joseph looks at him as he continues.

“Do not doubt your strength. You have come far from that day. While the heavenly world and earthly world fought hell itself. I remained here in this prison I made for myself unaware of the disaster that was taking place. Malachi told me everything about the war and of those that fought in it. I have hid here for far too long as an exiled. This place use to have a sun and green fields, but through the years my influence has turned it dark and gloomy, it became the way I felt. It is time I left this place. After you are better I will go back to the earthly world and put my abilities to good use. Now it’s my turn to earn my honor back.”

“Maybe everything does happen for a reason.” Joseph says. Darius nods.

“We are all connected, everyone we meet has a purpose in our life and for us to succeed depends on who we befriend. You need your friends just as much as they need you. The greatest lie is to convince yourself you do not need anyone.” They exchange smiles before Darius walks back into his cabin. Joseph feels a great burdened lifted from him; he feels his strength returning and his body feels renewed. He takes off his sling around his arm and makes a fist. It does not hurt, he smiles and starts walking back into the cabin to get a few hours of sleep.

Chapter 5

Joseph awakes the next day feeling refreshed and ready to go back. “It’s been another few days that my squad hasn’t received any training. They are going to think I deserted them.” He thinks out loud. He walks out of the cabin to see everyone standing close by, Joseph notices the sun in the sky. He looks at Darius and smiles as he returns the smile. “How are your wounds Joseph?” Malachi asks.

“Very well, I’m ready to go back whenever you are.”

“Good to hear it. We don’t want to stay here too long or we might be asked a lot of questions when we get back.” Malachi reaches out his hand and Darius grabs Malachi’s left elbow and shakes his hand with the other.

“Thank you.” Darius says. Malachi nods.

“Thank you and Goodbye.” They both smile at each other. “Ok everyone grab hands and I will take us back.” Malachi holds his hands out as everyone grabs on to the person next to them. They slowly fade from view and within moments they are standing back home. Kano runs towards them smiling.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes I’m fine.” Joseph says.

“How did you get better?” Malachi answers the question before anyone else has a chance to talk.

“The same way everyone else gets better; with a lot of sleep and some natural medication.”

“Well, I’m just glad everyone is ok.” Kano says smiling.

“Excuse me for a moment I must report to the high council and let them know that we are back.” Malachi says before walking away.

“Come on; let’s get you that new sword I promised you.” Akina says motioning Joseph to follow her.

Akina walks into the armory with Joseph and looks around thinking. “Hmmm.” She finally picks out a sword and hands it to Joseph.

“I think this one will be perfect for you.”

“A katana?” Joseph says and takes it. He takes it out of the scabbard and swings it around. It is lighter than his other one and he feels power flow

through him. The sword's handle is red and black and he feels stronger holding it.

"You will be able to attack faster with that sword and it is more convenient to slash your enemies. That's what we all use. It's about time you had one yourself."

"You got good taste Akina." Joseph says and smiles at her. She gives him one of her big smiles and walks out with him. Sonya notices his new sword.

"Wow, nice sword. Maybe now you might be able to win in our duels. I can't believe you held on to that other piece of shit for so long."

"You mean you didn't like my other one?"

"No way, I'm surprised you were able to fight with it. The curved blade of the katana is a lot better than the straight blade you had. Now go back to your squad before they think you don't like them." Joseph laughs and hugs Akina and then Sonya. As Joseph walks off Sonya smiles at Akina who turned a little red in the cheeks.

"He seems friendly today. Doesn't he?" Sonya says. Akina laughs a little and says.

"Yes, he does."

It is a little past noon and Joseph, Sonya and Akina is sitting under a large apple tree. Sonya grabs an apple from the tree and holds it as she leans her sword against the tree getting ready to sit down and enjoy her fruit. Just then a blade gets near the apple and sticks it taking it out of her hand.

"Huh?" Sonya says looking at her empty hand and then up.

"Joseph! That was my apple."

"Oh and it is so juicy and tasty." He says as he is munching away on it. Akina laughs. Sonya turns to her.

"This is your fault for giving him that sword." Akina smiles and lifts her hand bringing an apple down from the tree with her ability. "Oh thank you Akina." Joseph's blade gets close to Sonya's apple again.

"Don't even think about it!" She says as she moves her apple from his reach. The three sit in a circle eating apples and talking. Just then Kano jumps in the middle of them.

"Hello ladies. Sonya I like your hair style. Did you change it?"

"Um, no...."

"And Akina looking pretty as usual." Akina blushes and smiles.

“Thank you Kano.” Joseph growls and stands up grabbing Kano by the collar and dragging him away.

“Bye bye ladies.” He waves as he is getting dragged away.

“You are pathetic interrupting us like that.” Joseph says when they are far enough so the others can’t hear.

“Well why do you always get to talk to them? Now they like me because I complemented them. Soon I will be popular with them and you can watch as they hug me and tell me how I am such a ladies’ man.” He says hugging himself. Joseph punches him lightly in the jaw taking him out of his fantasy. Sonya and Akina watch them in the distance as they are fighting.

“What do you think they are fighting about now?” Akina asks.

“Hmm, who knows, but if Malachi catches them again they going to be in trouble.”

“Today two members from squad three will be joining us to teach you some of their techniques,” Joseph explains to his students as they give him their full attention. “They are two very good friends of mine and deserve to be treated with respect. I fought by their side during the Great War and I trust them with my life.” His students seem to be very excited. They admire the men and woman that fought in the war. The students know everyone by name and tells their story between themselves over and over. It is a great honor to meet them face to face and to be taught by them is even a greater honor. Joseph heard about when Malachi took his place as teacher. His students couldn’t even sleep. For a general to take their time to talk to you was a sign that you are very important. Akina and Ishi walk towards Joseph and his students. Before Joseph can introduce them his entire class bows and says.

“We are honored by your presence matriarch Akina, and matriarch Ishi.” They seem a little surprised at their reaction and smiles. Joseph jokily bows with a wide smile on his face before Akina and Ishi and says.

“They are all yours.” Joseph walks to tree a few yards back and leans against the tree truck watching Akina and Ishi teach his students. A hand comes down from the tree and taps him on the shoulder. He turns around, but doesn’t see anyone. He turns back around and continues to watch his class. The hand comes down again and taps him on his opposite shoulder. He turns around and looks behind him. He walks around the tree and doesn’t see anyone. He pinches his cloak at the

shoulders and rotates his shoulders. Just then two hands come down from the tree and push him away from the tree. Joseph takes out his sword. "What is going on?" Laughter comes from the tree and the person jumps down. Joseph sighs and puts his sword away.

"Sonya, I should have known it was you." She continues laughing.

"You are so easy to mess with."

"Shut up. What are you doing hiding in a tree anyways?"

"I wasn't hiding." Sonya says seriously. "I was just resting."

"Seems to me like you were spying."

"Spying?! How can you say such mean things?" She says sniffing with her back towards him. Joseph looks at her concerned.

"Oh Sonya I'm sorry I was only kidding." He says reaching his hand out to her shoulder. She turns around smiling.

"I got you again." Joseph sighs again.

"Now who is being a child?" He says leaning back against the tree.

"Shut up." She says and leans next to him crossing her arms.

"So, you making Akina and Ishi teach your students for you huh."

"It is part of their training. Tomorrow Erika and Nara from squad two might stop by."

"I see. So who is your best student?" Joseph is quite for a moment and then looks at Sonya.

"Um...well...the one...with hair." Joseph responds while scratching his cheek. Sonya looks at him confused.

"They all have hair. What are you talking about? Ahh I see, you don't even know their names do you?"

"Um, not really no." Joseph admits.

"That is horrible, you should be ashamed. You can't tell me one of your student's names?" Joseph remains quite.

"A teacher that doesn't know their student's name is insulting."

"Ok, shut up I get it. Even if I did ask for their names I wouldn't remember them anyways." Sonya looks at him even more shocked then before.

"You mean you didn't even take the time to ask their names? Maybe you need me to teach you some manners. That is the first thing every teacher does is ask everyone's names. To forget is one thing, but not to make an effort is something else."

"Are you done talking yet?" Joseph says not really caring what she has to say. Sonya slaps him upside the head.

“Shut up, this is important. You are rude and disrespectful. Someone needs to sit you down and teach you proper speech.” Joseph sticks his tongue out and blows making a rude sound. Sonya glares at him and shakes her head. “You are hopeless.” The two continue to watch Akina and Ishi explain a few basic techniques as the students try to keep up.

Later that day Joseph walks up to Akina and Ishi as his students start to head back to their barrack. “How did it go?”

“Very well. They are all good listeners, but Isaac seems to be the fastest learner.” Akina says.

“Isaac?” Joseph says a little surprised that Akina already knows more of his student’s names than he does.

“Do you remember who he is?” Akina asks.

“Ah Isaac, yes...good guy.” Joseph says trying to fake it.

“He doesn’t know him.” Ishi says smiling along with Akina.

“You’re a bad liar Joseph.” Akina says.

“Whatever.” Joseph says rolling his eyes.

“Did you have fun watching us?” Ishi says smiling.

“Ah, you saw us huh.” Joseph says feeling guilty.

“Well you were in plain view.” Ishi adds. Akina and Ishi start to walk off.

“Hay, hold on for a moment.” Joseph says. The girls turn around.

“I was wondering something.”

“Yes, what is it.” Ishi says.

“Well, every squad is supposed to have one general, one captain and one lieutenant. My squad is too new to be completely formed. But I have no clue who squad three’s Captain is.” Akina and Ishi looks at each other confused.

“I don’t know who our captain is we never met her.” Akina says after thinking about it for a moment.

“It was Kichi then she was made general.” Ishi adds. “If anyone were to know it would be Kichi.”

“Yes, let’s go ask her. I am curious.” Akina says as the two walk off leaving Joseph by himself.

“And they just walk off, doesn’t say bye or we will let you know.” Joseph says out loud before turning around and walking in the opposite direction.

Akina and Ishi walks into the squad three barrack and walks down a long hallway passing several doors on both sides until they reach

the door at the end of the hallway. A sign on the wall reads, *Kichi Squad 3 General*. Akina knocks on the door and a voice from inside says “Come in.” Kichi is at her desk with a stack of papers writing something on a piece of paper as Akina and Ishi walk in and approach her.

“Kichi, we have a question.” Akina starts. Kichi looks up from her work and puts her pen down to listen. “Well me and Ishi and Joseph... oh we just left Joseph behind. We just walked away from him didn’t we? That is so rude.” Ishi and Akina looks behind themselves to see if he is there, but Kichi grabs their attention.

“Akina, you said you had a question?” Akina faces Kichi again.

“Yes, we were wondering who the captain of squad three is? I know it is odd to ask after all this time, but we never thought about it before.”

“I see. Her name is Violet and she is on a special assignment in China. She won’t be back for quite some time yet.”

“How come we never met her?” Ishi asks.

“She left right after the war so there was no time for introductions, but you will meet her in the future.”

Sounds of yelling and shouting bring Joseph out of his room in the barracks. He runs outside to see everyone running past him. “What is going on?!” A new recruit stops and looks at him.

“There is trouble in the earthly world.” He says and starts running with the crowd. Joseph takes off after them until he reaches the transport portal and sees Kisho ready to talk to everyone. He notices Malachi and Sonya nearby and runs to their side almost tripping and falling down if Malachi didn’t grab him.

“What is happening?”

“We don’t know yet. Wait and listen.” Malachi says. Everyone stops and falls quite as Kisho starts to speak.

“Southeastern Europe is under attack. We have reports of a large army trying to take over the area and moving rapidly.” The portal starts swirling and an image appears of a town on fire and people running frantically screaming. A large monster appears crushing over a wall. It had the torso of a man, but the body and legs of a scorpion. Kisho continues speaking. “They are known as Scorpion men, and must be dealt with swiftly. Stay together and watch out for each other. These things are ruthless and if not paying attention they can easily outnumber and overpower you. The poison in their tails should not be taken lightly. The symptoms range from paralysis, hallucinating, and even death.

There is nothing we can do for this town. Unfortunately it will be lost, but there are many towns in the area that we can still save. These things will spread throughout the entire world if not stopped. The following have been chosen to go to war, Malachi, Erika, Sonya, Joseph, Akina, Kano, Nara, and Ishi. The rest of you will be called if needed. We will be monitoring the situation constantly and send in reinforcements when able too. I wish you the best of luck and look forward to everyone's safe return. Now please hurry." Those that had their names called start running towards the portal as a freighting scene starts to unfold. The image pans over the top of the approaching scorpion men army. One hundred individuals stomp everything under their feet.

Chapter 6

The group appears in the middle of a deserted town. It seems everyone fled in a hurry. Garden tools lay on the ground and wheel barrels still full of hay or dirt lay abandoned. Joseph runs up the steps and looks over the medium sized wooden fence. The approaching army is moving their way as they kick dust and sand up into the air. The fence mind as well not even be there and the town has no weapons. Its eight verses one hundred. Joseph looks down at the others and shouts. "They are coming!" The others climb the stairs and join Joseph by his side. Erika takes out her bow and shoots one of her arrows in the crowd more than two hundred yards away and lands her arrow in one of the scorpion's head. It lets out a raspy cry then falls to the ground dead. The army seems to pick up their pace.

"I think you made them mad." Kano says then Malachi starts giving his orders.

"Ok, Akina and Ishi get up on the front middle tower over the entrance.

Get those protection shields and spells ready. Erika you take the right front tower and Nara takes the left front tower. The rest of you follow me." Akina and Ishi climbs the ladder to the middle tower as Erika and Nara runs along the walkway to the corner towers. Malachi jumps off the fence to the ground on the other side of the fence followed by Sonya, Kano, and Joseph. They take out their swords and hold them close to their face as Erika and Nara strings back their bows and Akina and Nara speak there spells as shields start to form around Malachi and his team.

The first few scorpion men come into attacking range towering forty feet over their heads. Arrows wiz past them as they slice through the front line. Joseph swings his sword cutting off two of the scorpion's legs, then Sonya and Kano slices the stomach of the beast until it falls over. Sonya jumps high and swings her sword around cutting off the head of another scorpion for a quick kill. Joseph dodges the legs of the scorpions that try to step on him as he slices another leg off. It flies up into the air and lands a few feet away. Sonya leaps and grabs Kano pushing him out of the way just before a scorpion falls where he was with several arrows in its face. Kano nods to her and continues fighting. Malachi's attacks are the most deadly one slash from his sword and the scorpion's insides spill

out. Before long they are fighting on a mountain of dead scorpions. The scorpions press forward and break through the fence. The middle tower becomes unstable and starts to break apart. Joseph hears the screams of Akina as he sees her fall from the tower. He runs and jumps catching her before she hits the ground. Akina puts her arms around his neck as he lands on his feet.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes, thank you.” He puts her down and turns around just in time to block the tail of the scorpion from piercing him with his sword. A lighting ball roars past him and explodes in the scorpion’s torso. It rears up and falls backwards. Joseph looks behind him and smiles at Akina just as she puts her hands down. Just then Ishi calls for help.

“Ishi!” Akina calls out as Joseph looks up and sees her hanging on to the damaged tower with one hand. Malachi jumps through the air and grabs her by the waist bringing her down to safety. Malachi shouts. “Akina, Ishi get to the inside middle tower!” They take off and hurry up the ladder of the middle tower which is not attached to the fence. Erika and Nara fire their arrows as fast as they can. A scorpion gets past them and moves to the middle tower where Akina and Ishi now stand. Joseph runs after it and trusts his sword up into the scorpion’s belly. Kano joins him as the two take it down. It falls sideways crushing a house. The shields are renewed around the group as the fighting continues. A scorpion rushes them, but falls to the ground with over ten arrows in its chest. Joseph and Kano jump over the dead scorpion and rejoin Malachi and Sonya. A scorpion rears up and slams forward right in front of Sonya knocking her back and to the ground. Its tail comes rushing at her. Joseph runs in front of her and swings his sword upward slashing its tail tip off. He turns around and grabs her hand to help her up. They exchange smiles and continue fighting.

“Stay together!” Malachi shouts. Another wave rushes them. Arrows and lighting balls fly overhead, but two scorpions manage to run past them into the town. Malachi runs after one of them. He jumps and flies over the back of the scorpion and points his sword in front of him. The blade explodes through the back of the beast as it explodes into a pile of thick scales and goo. The other one goes after Nara and runs through the tower. She jumps out just in time and runs along the wall to the tower in the back. “They are trying to take down the towers!” Malachi yells. A scorpion steps through the roof of another building and heads towards

Joseph who has his back towards it. Malachi and Sonya jumps into the air from opposite directions behind Joseph. Malachi slashes the scorpion's front and Sonya slashes the scorpion's back. Then it falls over crushing a stable. Just then a scorpion charges Kano and raises one of its legs and pierces it through one of his shoulders. He yells out in pain just as Joseph and Sonya comes to his rescue. Joseph cuts the leg off that is stuck in Kano as Sonya pulls him out of danger. "Kano!" Ishi yells as her and Akina lifts him up with their ability to heal him. Sonya runs back to Joseph to assist in the kill. Sonya starts to glow blue and flares striking several surrounding scorpions in various locations. Their wounds bleed nonstop making them weaker and easier to kill. They watch as the other front tower crumbles to the ground.

"Erika!" Sonya yells looking around. She finally sees her running across the roof of a building towards the last available tower in the back. She sighs in relief and continues fighting. Kano jumps off the middle tower after being healed and rejoins the fight.

"Are you ok?" Joseph says when he sees him again.

"It was nothing more than a scratch." He says modestly lifting up his sword and attacking another scorpion. Joseph smiles and helps Kano attack his scorpion. Sonya and Malachi is now standing next to them and for the first time they can count how many scorpions are left. Arrows and lighting balls hit the few scorpions left as Malachi and Joseph jointly kill a scorpion. Three scorpions remain Sonya jumps up and slashes the head off of one, but the scorpion next to it raises its arm and hits her hard to the ground. She is dazed as she struggles to get up.

"Sonya!" Joseph yells. He watches as the tail is brought down over her. A flash of seeing her in front of him dying from Alastor's attack enters his mind. He runs towards her and stops in front of the incoming stinger, but it happens too fast for him to react with his sword; and the stinger pierces deep into his chest. His world becomes blurry. His arms are stretched outwards and his sword falls to the ground. Sonya comes to her senses and turns around.

"Joseph! No!" She stands up behind him and puts her arms around him. Malachi and Kano yell as they slash the last scorpion down. Malachi cuts the tail tip off freeing Joseph. He starts to fall backwards as Sonya eases him down. Colors and sounds blend together as if he was dreaming. "Why Joseph? Why did you do that?!" Sonya says as Erika and Nara run to his side with Akina and Ishi right behind them. Malachi

grabs the large stinger and the end of the tail and pulls it out of Joseph's chest as blood squirts out.

"Joseph!" Akina yells with tears in her eyes she and Ishi kneels on either side of Joseph and puts their hands on him. The yellow glow is bright as it consumes around Joseph's body. After a few moments the glowing fades. Akina and Ishi don't have enough power left in them to continue. The wound closed a little bit and the bleeding slowed, but they were unable to extract the poison. Akina puts her hand on Joseph's forehead. "Joseph?" She waits for an answer but his eyes remain closed. Just then his chest starts to raise and fall, he is breathing again. Malachi looks around and notices a house that is still standing. He picks Joseph up and says.

"We need to get him inside." He starts walking towards the house. Sonya grabs Akina and hugs her as tears run down their faces. They follow Malachi into the house as the others follow close by. When they enter the house they see Malachi digging through the draws and taking some cloth with him into a room with a single bed. He starts wrapping the cloth around Joseph's chest. Everyone crowds around the bed afraid to ask any questions for fear of the answer. The sun starts to set in the sky. Malachi walks outside and in a few moments comes back. "We have to stay here for the night. Joseph is too weak to travel back." Everyone grabs a seat in the room and sits down; some of them sit on the floor and lean up against a wall. Akina lays her head on the bed next to Joseph's arm while she sits on the floor. Within moments they fall asleep, everyone except for Sonya who is standing outside looking up at the night sky.

"Joseph, why are you so reckless with your life? Don't put yourself in danger to save me. I cannot live with that fact, don't die for me." She stands with her back to the house as she looks across the dead scorpions. "You are strong Joseph, you will survive this I am sure of that." Sonya's instincts give her a bad feeling as she listens. She hears footsteps behind her and the sound of a blade coming down behind her. She gasps and withdraws her sword and swings it up in front of her face while turning around just as the sword clings against hers. She looks at her attacker wide eyed and with disbelief. "Joseph?!"

Chapter 7

Sonya takes her defensive stance and blocks another attack trying not to return any.

“You can’t escape me this time, Lilith.” Joseph says.

“Lilith?” Sonya wonders. “No, Joseph it’s me, Sonya. Stop this at once you are hallucinating.” Joseph sees her as Lilith and continues to fight her. He swings at her neck, but she summersaults backwards in mid air. She uses her sword to follow Joseph’s direction trying to predict where his sword is going to be. The past duels she had with him for fun is now paying off. She can protect herself and not harm Joseph at the same time, but even that is a flawed method and she can’t rely on it for too long. “You need to rest and let it wear off.” Her words seem to have no effect. Joseph still is fighting her with all his might.

“Your tricks won’t work on me Lilith. I am not powerless!” She notices his blood soaked cloth around his chest. *He’s pushing himself too much his wound has opened up again. If he keeps this up he’s going to kill himself.* She thinks to herself.

“No Joseph you are not powerless, please calm down. I don’t want to hurt you.” Joseph swings his sword again and cuts her arm. She steps back and glances at her wound and then grasps her sword as the blood runs down her arm and drips off her hand to the ground. If she is going to survive, she has to attack back. “Joseph, snap out of it!” She yells. Joseph glares at her and lifts his sword again for another swing. Sonya knows she has no other choice. She jumps up and slams her sword’s handle into Joseph’s left shoulder, then spins around and kicks him hard in the lower stomach. Joseph gets knocked back and lies on the ground as Sonya walks over him and points her sword in his face. “Do not get up.” She says strictly. Joseph blinks a few times and then says.

“Sonya?”

“Joseph, is it really you?” Sonya puts her sword away and puts her hand on the spot where she kicked him.

“Of course it’s me. What’s going on?”

“You don’t remember? You were hallucinating and attacked me. I’m sorry I kicked you, but I had no other choice.” Joseph starts coughing and spits up blood. Sonya looks worried. “I’m so sorry?”

"I'm fine just got the wind knocked out of me. I can tell it was you that kicked me." Joseph tries to joke. Sonya puts his arm around her neck and starts to lift him up to his feet. Joseph leans against her to stay up as she walks him back inside. Joseph limps and takes small steps.

"I'm sorry, but it was the only thing I could think of without cutting you with my blade."

"You don't need to apologize Sonya. I'm the one that put you into that situation."

"Let's just get you back. You still need to rest. The hallucinate is still in your body and you need to stay in bed. And this time please listen to me." Joseph can hear the worry in her voice.

"Maybe for a few minutes."

"No, for the rest of the night and probably all of tomorrow as well. You will heal a lot faster that way."

"There is no way I can stay in bed all day with the sun in the sky."

"I will knock you unconscious just to make you stay in bed. I'm giving you a choice." Joseph looks at her a little surprised, but then gives in.

"Fine, but if you need me...."

"We are more than capable of fighting without you. We are all strong." They enter the room where he was resting a few moments ago. Akina immediately rushes over to them.

"What happened? Is he ok?" She whispers trying not to wake anyone. "I was worried when I saw he was gone." Akina takes his other arm and puts it around her shoulder as they lead him back to bed.

"He'll be ok, after he rests." Sonya whispers. Sonya walks out of the room as Akina puts her hand on his stomach and heals him a bit more. Sonya comes back with a glass of water.

"Drink this so you don't get dehydrated. The hallucinate absorbs a lot of water in your body." Joseph takes the glass and drinks some of it.

"All of it." Sonya says folding her arms. Joseph drinks the rest and hands the glass back to her. His eyes start to feel heavy and his head hits the pillow.

"What's happening? Did you just drug me?"

"Sleep." Sonya says.

"You said you were going to give me a choice." He says in a sleepy voice.

"I didn't knock you unconscious did I? Now sleep." Joseph finally closes his eyes and falls asleep as Sonya and Akina find a place to sit

and watch him for the night. It isn't long before they also fall asleep themselves.

Joseph wakes up the next morning to find Malachi taking off his bandage. Joseph's chest feels stiff and he has trouble moving his arms and legs. Malachi reaches the skin and inspects his wound. The half closed hole in his chest has turned black and seems to be spreading. "Oh no." Malachi says under his breath. Joseph's heart starts beating faster and his breathing gets heavier.

"It's bad isn't it?" Joseph says. Malachi looks at him. "I can't move."

"Don't try, just rest." Akina hears the talking and wakes up. She turns her head to look at Joseph with a smile, but her smile fades quickly when she sees the condition of his wound.

"Ishi!" Akina yells waking everyone up, Ishi runs over to Akina and Joseph as Malachi tries to keep everyone away.

"Stay back, give them room." He says. They watch helplessly and worried as Akina and Ishi puts their hands over his chest. The glowing from their hands consumes his wound. They concentrate with eyes closed, but after a few moments the glowing fades and the wound looks the same as before. Ishi looks at Akina worried.

"His body is shutting down; the poison has spread too far. This is beyond us." Akina looks up at Malachi.

"We need Kichi. She is the only one with skill high enough to heal this." Joseph starts to shiver and he starts to wheeze as his breathing gets heavier. "He's dying! We need to get him back now!" Akina shouts. Malachi looks at her concerned and shakes his head.

"No, we need to bring Kichi to him. I'll hurry back." Malachi says as he starts to fade from view.

"I've been hurt... many times before, but this is by far... the most painful injury... I have ever had." Joseph says struggling to speak. The others in the room crowd around his bed. Akina puts her hand on top of his and says.

"Save your energy, Malachi went to get Kichi."

Meanwhile Malachi appears back at the barracks and takes off running. He runs inside squad three's barrack and down the long hallway. He opens the door as a startled Kichi looks up at him. "Joseph needs your help, take my hand." Moments later Malachi and Kichi appear back where Joseph lays. Everyone moves out of the way as Kichi runs up to Joseph she puts one hand on his forehead and the other on his

wound and closes her eyes. A bright white light emanates around her hand and travels around her body and then around Joseph. What seems like minutes goes by before the aura around Kichi and Joseph fades. Kichi lifts up her hand revealing the wound completely gone. It is like it was never there. Everyone lets out a sigh of relief.

"I think I got it all." Kichi says slowly taking her hand off of Joseph's forehead.

"Thank you. Akina says as Joseph opens his eyes.

"He still needs to remain in bed; there are some things even I can't heal. His body needs to heal naturally on its own, but he will live."

"Is it safe for us to take him back?" Malachi asks. Kichi looks at him and smiles.

"Yes, I gave him some of my energy. Just make sure he rests. That will be the only way he can regain his own strength."

"Ok, I'll go and open the portal. Everyone meet me outside when you are ready." Malachi says as he is walking out of the room. Malachi as well as Sonya can both teleport themselves to the heavenly world without a portal and can also take two others with them; or they can take four if Malachi and Sonya channels their energy, but it would take too much energy and strain on the body to take a large group such as this back. The crossing between the two worlds also puts a small amount of strain on every traveling individual. Anyone with a decent amount of energy may not feel any strain at all, but in Joseph's weakened state it was not safe for him to travel, the strain and added stress would have killed him. Anyone can open a portal if they have a sapphire ring like Erika has, but those are not issued to everyone. Only Malachi and Sonya have the power to open a portal using their minds. Joseph sits up and Akina and Ishi help him to his feet.

"Are you ok?" Kano asks. Joseph smiles and responds.

"Ya, nothing but a scratch." Kano smiles and taps him on the back.

"You had us scared there for a moment." Erika says as they are walking outside. Joseph turns to her and smiles.

"Sorry about that." Sonya is standing next to Malachi with the open portal as the others approach. Joseph notices Sonya is carrying two swords and one of them is his.

"Ah, Sonya you found my sword." She looks down at it and then up at him.

“Yes, I will hold on to it. You won’t need it until you are better.” She says in a voice that sounds non negotiable. Joseph smiles and nods as everyone steps through the portal to head back home.

Joseph is in bed when Sonya walks in his room later that day. Sonya looks at him and smiles.

“It’s good to see you listen for once.” She says as she places his sword on a table.

“I feel fine now. Do I really need to stay in bed all day?”

“If Kichi says you need to stay in bed you are going to stay in bed.”

“What about my squad?”

“Erika and Nara is teaching them some squad two techniques and then Kano is going to teach them some advanced squad one techniques. So you don’t need to use your squad as an excuse to leave bed.”

“Don’t you have a squad of your own to train today?”

“No, Malachi is training them today and I already mastered those techniques so I don’t need to be there.” She grabs a chair and carries it to his bed and sits down. Joseph is silent for a moment before speaking again.

“What happens to us when we die?” Sonya looks at him a little surprised at his question, but then smiles and responds.

“I remember asking the same question a long time ago, this is what Malachi told me. When people on Earth die they come here and can either pick a different life to live or join one of the squads. When we die we may end up in a new life on Earth or appear here again, but be forbidden to go back to Earth for a certain length of time. There is no such thing as death, just a new life in a different time and place, with a different mission. Once someone exists they exist forever.” *He really was scared this time. That’s why he stayed in bed.* Sonya thinks to herself.

“You are going to sit here and make sure I don’t get up aren’t you?”

“Of course I am.” She says smiling.

Chapter 8

Joseph opens his eyes and looks around the room. It is completely dark except for the little bit of moonlight shining through the window. "I must have fallen asleep." He thinks, but he was a feeling that he is being watched. He scans the room again and a dark figure catches his eye. It stands motionless in a dark corner of his room. "Sonya?" He says thinking it might be her playing another joke on him. It's not Sonya; this feeling in his heart is heavy. He looks over at the table where his sword rests, but it is too far to reach. He gets ready to get up, but just then the figure moves into the moonlight. The face Joseph sees is one he has not seen in a long time. It's a face his friends has come to know, it's the face of Armaros. Joseph tries to make a dash for his sword, but the demon rushes him and blocks his path.

"I'm coming for you Joseph." It says in that deep haunting voice Joseph knows all too well.

"I won't let you."

"You no longer have that control. I am not imprisoned in you anymore. I am free." The demon makes him feel trapped in his own bed. He feels as if the walls are closing in on him. "I'm coming and you are powerless to stop me. I will kill all your friends then I will kill you."

"There is no way I will ever let that happen. If you seek me out you will find your end." Joseph replies. The demon reaches for him and grabs his neck forcing him down on his bed.

"I will kill all your friends then I will kill you." It repeats as it chokes Joseph with both hands. Joseph kicks in the air and twists his body trying to get away. He grabs Armaros's hands and tries to pry them off of him. For a reason he cannot understand he has no strength to escape. "I will kill all your friends then I will kill you." Armaros repeats again as Joseph struggles to breath. He feels his heart about to burst as he tosses and turns his body violently. He looks into the glowing red eyes and hears his voice once again. "I will kill all your friends then I will kill you." Joseph goes to grab Armaros's eyes and yells.

"Nooooo!" He pushes off from the bed and his hand goes through the demon's face. He falls forward and hits the floor as the demon fades and the tightness around his neck slowly lightens. He lies on the floor on his

hands and knees gasping for air. He takes deep breaths and then looks around, but no one is there. "Was it a dream...or a warning?" He thinks out loud. "No, it was a dream nothing more. I refuse to consider it anything more." He kneels up and can hear his own heart beat; he puts his hand over his heart and tries to get his breathing back to normal. The last time he had a dream like this was before he joined up with Sonya. He dreamed of her death, but this time it was worse. It's as if his leg was tied to a large rock on the bottom of the ocean, and he was drowning. He could look up and see the surface of the water and the shining sun, but there is no way to reach it. He fears if he stayed in that condition much longer his heart would have given up, and he would have died. These dreams can seem real, but they aren't. The science behind these dreams says it is the body waking up before the brain, but maybe that is a false answer to put our fears to rest. He feels confined in his own room and stands up to open his door to walk outside. He stands outside in the middle of the night and breaths in the night air. He looks back into his room and can't bring himself to go back in. "What's happening to me? Letting a stupid dream defeat me. There is nothing in my room." He lies down on the ground and looks up at the night sky as he counts the stars to himself.

"Captain? Are you ok sir?" Joseph opens his eyes and looks up at several of his students. It is morning and they are confused why their captain is sleeping on the ground. Joseph sits up and tries to play it off. "Ah I was just expecting the ground for bumps." He pats the ground with his hand. "This is good ground no bumps and the grass is a nice shade of green." He stands up and squeezes between his surprised students. "A captain's work is never done." He says heading back to his room then closing the door behind him. He leans his back against the door, sighs and closes his eyes. "Checking the ground for bumps, what a stupid thing to say."

Joseph sits in the cafeteria with his head down moving food around with his fork. Just then Sonya comes over and sits beside him. "Not hungry?" Joseph glances at her and tries to smile. "Not really." He says pushing the tray away from him. "There is a rumor that you slept outside last night." "Ya, you never heard of camping." "Doesn't that include a tent or at least a sleeping bag?"

“Hah a sleeping bag you are such a girl.” Sonya laughs at his response. *What else can I say? Oh I was sleeping outside because I had a bad dream and I was afraid to be in my bed. She will never stop making fun of me.* Joseph continues thinking to himself. *What if Armaros did escape from me? How, and when? Could he really become a physical demon separated from me? If it is true then it is my fight, I will let no harm come to my friends. I promise, not one of them will get hurt.*

“Joseph, are you ok?” Akina asks snapping Joseph out of his deep thoughts.

“Akina has been trying to talk to you. Why won’t you answer her?” Sonya asks him. He looks at Akina.

“I’m sorry Akina I did not mean to be rude.”

“You seem distant. Why are you worried?” Akina asks. Joseph remembers she can feel other people’s feelings as if they were her own, but he can’t hide it this time.

“I’m sorry I need... to do something.” He says and gets up to leave while thinking. *I need to forget about this dream or it is going to eat me alive, and I can’t let the others find out about this. I’ll deal with whatever crosses my path, if and when it happens. Until that point this is just another dream.*

Joseph trains his students and it takes his mind off of his dream. He stands back and watches as his students battle one another. “Good block Samuel.” He shouts as his students continue. “Don’t hesitate Isaac.” Sonya watches him as she also trains her students. She smiles and thinks to herself. *Well he finally learned their names.* A full day of training has everyone tired but feeling accomplished. Joseph meets Sonya and Kano in the cafeteria as evening approaches. They have the cafeteria all to themselves at this time of day. The table has a pot of tea and several cups in the middle.

“I saw you training your students today.” Sonya says as he sits down across from her and Kano.

“Oh ya, how did I do?”

“Very well, I’m impressed.”

“Thank you.” Joseph says smiling as he pours himself a cup of tea.

“This isn’t salt this time is it?” He says as he pours some sugar in his tea. Sonya laughs.

“No, it’s just sugar. Just then Akina comes over and sits next to Joseph. Everyone looks at her surprised as she puts a plate full of cookies down in front of her.

“Where did you get those?” Joseph asks.

“Oh, I found them, they must be leftovers from today and I thought why waste them.” She says smiling one of her big smiles. “Whoever wants some can have them.”

Sonya and Kano reaches across the table and grabs a hand full.

“Thank you Akina.” They say as Joseph grabs his handful.

“Yes, thank you Akina.” He says.

“Are you feeling better Joseph? You seemed kinda down this morning.”

“Yes I’m fine now Akina. Just one of those mornings I guess.”

“Ah, I’m glad.” The friends continue drinking tea and eating cookies as they talk into the late hours of the night. Akina yawns and Sonya agrees it’s time to call it a night.

“See you in the morning everyone.” Kano says as he and Sonya heads back to their barrack.

“Good night Kano and Sonya.” Joseph says as they walk off.

“Good night Joseph and Akina.” They yell back.

“Do you want me to walk you to your room?” Joseph says. Akina looks at him and speaks.

“I know the way Joseph.”

“Yes, I know you do, but I’m not that tired so maybe a nice walk will help me sleep.” Akina smiles and says.

“Sure, you can walk with me.” They start walking in the direction of squad three’s barrack. Joseph looks at Akina then straight ahead and then back at Akina.

“So, Akina.” Joseph starts; she turns to look at him. “Did you ever find out who the squad three captain is?”

“Oh yes I did, I must have forgotten to tell you. I think her name is Violet. Kichi said that she is on a special assignment in the earthly world. I don’t know exactly what she means by that, but I guess she is going to be there for a while.”

“Oh, I see.” Joseph looks down at the ground trying to think of something else to say. He looks at Akina again and then at the sky then back at Akina. She looks at him a bit confused.

“Did you want to ask me something else?” Joseph smiles saying.

“No, I was just thinking what a nice night it is.”

“It is a nice night isn’t it?”

“Yes, I always liked the night, maybe because it’s peaceful.” They reach squad three’s barrack and Joseph walks Akina to her door. She turns the handle and opens the door and smiles at him.

“Well I’m going to get some sleep, see you in the morning.”

“Ok. Good night Akina.” Joseph says not being able to stop smiling.

“Good night Joseph.” Akina says and closes the door, then walks to sit down on the side of her bed. She looks at the floor for a moment before thinking out loud. “Joseph, I wish you knew how much I love you, but Sonya had your heart before me, and I don’t want to get in the way.” She turns off her bed side lamp and lays down pulling the covers to her neck. Joseph walks back to his room smiling. He lays his sword down on the table and falls into bed as he kicks off his shoes. He stares at the ceiling as pictures of Akina run through his mind. He remembers her when they first met and he pictures her smiling face with her squinting eyes. Their moments together run through his head before he falls asleep.

Under the cover of night in the earthly world a demon hides in the forest. It waits until it hears a voice behind him.

“Do whatever it takes Xaphan. Call him out.” It is the voice of Armaros. The demon grins and disappears from view. Armaros growls “Enjoy your last night of sleep Joseph. Tomorrow you will die.”

Chapter 9

It is dawn when Joseph hears pounding on his door. He wakes up and looks outside. The sun is only half showing on the horizon. The pounding continues. “Joseph wake up.” Joseph gets out of bed and opens the door to see Sonya standing in front of him.

“What is it? The sun isn’t even completely up yet.” He says yawning.

“There is a demon in the earthly world causing a lot of damage. Get dressed and hurry. I’ll explain the rest on the way.” Moments later Joseph opens the door and joins Sonya as they start walking. “Malachi received word of a demon setting fires to homes and farms a few minutes ago. He came to wake me up and told me the demon may be Xaphan. This demon is second in command after Lucifer and starting fires is like a hobby for him. Malachi and Kisho don’t consider him a tough opponent so they are only sending me and you.”

“Sounds good let’s kill this bastard.” Sonya looks at him and smiles as the two reach the transport portal. Kisho is standing there pushing buttons on the key pad.

“It is already set to Xaphan’s location. Be careful you two.” He tells them.

“Thank you.” Sonya says.

“We’ll be back in half an hour.” Joseph says a little cocky as they walk through the portal.

Sonya and Joseph enter the earthly world a few yards away from a burning crop field. The villages run back and forth with buckets of water trying to put the fire out. “Xaphan is close.” Sonya warns. After ten minutes of searching the nearby area they see a demon appear several feet in front of them. Sonya and Joseph draw their swords and walk towards him.

“Your kind is so predictable, but I am a little disappointed that you got here so soon. I still wanted to have more fun.” The demon says smiling.

“I’m sorry to say your fun ends right now.” Joseph says.

“You must be Joseph, I heard about you.” Joseph stops at a safe distance from him.

“How do you know of me?” He asks surprised.

“We all know you, we know all of you. Sonya, Kano, Akina...”

“That’s enough!” Joseph shouts at him. The demon likes tormenting just as much as setting fires and it continues.

“Have any dreams lately Joseph? It’s all true, along with that weakness you felt.” Joseph grips his sword and his energy pulse rises as anger and determination flow through his veins.

“Joseph, don’t let this demon get the best of you. Stay focused.” Sonya advises.

“They will all die.” The demon says pushing Joseph over the edge. He yells and runs toward him.

“Joseph, stop you are just giving him what he wants!” Sonya yells after him, but it is no use. Joseph swings his sword down upon the demon, but misses. The sword hits the ground causing a vibration through the land. The people look up from putting out their fire as the ground shakes underneath them. The demon fights back by opening its mouth and blowing fire towards Joseph. He runs out of the way just in time and rushes the demon again. The demon disappears right before his sword is about to slash him and he swings it into the trunk of a tree. The tree splinters from the ground up and Xaphan reappears blowing more fire at Joseph. He frees his sword and rolls out of the way just as the fire engulfs the tree. The confused and scared villagers run inside their homes not knowing what to think.

“Stop it Joseph!” Sonya yells at him. “You are being too reckless.” He ignores her and continues attacking using any high energy attacks he can use. The ground starts to crumble and trees fall over as the two continue fighting with the force of a bomb. “You are going to hurt someone innocent!” Sonya yells again, but cannot talk any sense into him. She gets angry at his lack of respect for the damage he is causing to the environment. Sonya tries to spot an opening to attack, but Joseph tends to get in her way every time forcing her to rethink her strategy. Xaphan kicks Joseph down and holds him down to the ground with his foot as he is about to blow fire at him. Sonya takes this opportunity and jumps over Joseph swinging her sword through Xaphan’s belly cutting him in two. The demon catches fire as Joseph backs away. Within moments the demon falls to a pile of ash.

“Are you ok?” She says, but her voice is angry.

“I’m fine.” He says getting to his feet and putting his sword away.

“If it wasn’t for me you would be dead! Look at what your recklessness has done! Everyone here is going to be scared and confused now!”

“Well if I made such a mistake why did you save me?” Sonya glares at him and slaps him across his face.

“I can’t believe you just said that. If you have a death wish try not bringing anyone else into it.” Joseph looks at her a little astonished then looks at the ground.

“I’m sorry Sonya.” Sonya looks at him a little surprised. *He has never apologized this quickly before.* She thinks to herself. She sighs and folds her arms.

“What dream was Xaphan talking about?” Joseph looks at her trying to think of an excuse, but he knows she will see through it.

“That is the reason I was sleeping outside that night.” He says and walks over to a fallen tree to sit down. Sonya walks over to him and stands in front of him. “I... I saw Armaros in a dream. He said that he escaped from me and that he was coming after me. It seemed so real like he was there in my room. He attacked me and I could not get away. He said he will kill you and the others and I don’t want to be responsible for that. I was sleeping outside because...because I was scared!” Sonya sits down beside him and puts her hand on his shoulder.

“If it is true then we will fight him together. He is not strong enough to take all of us.” Joseph shakes his head.

“I can’t let you fight my battle.”

“It’s not just your battle. If he has manifested himself into a physical demon then he is no different than any other demon. And that means it’s our responsibility to get rid of him; that is our job after all.” Joseph smiles at her.

“Well for what it is worth, I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. You have never been wrong for as long as I’ve known you.”

“And you have never listened since I’ve known you, but that doesn’t change the fact that you are my friend. And even though you are hot headed and act before you think; you are someone I can trust and depend on.” They smile and hug each other, but their moment is interrupted. A dark figure flies down from the sky and lands hard on the ground with a loud echoing boom. His dark black wings fold back as it glares at Joseph and Sonya. They quickly stand up and draw their swords. The demon laughs evilly at them. “There is no escape from me Joseph. Now you will know what it feels like to be trapped. And that is where you will stay for all eternity as you watch helplessly as I kill your friends one by one.”

“I will not let that happen.” Sonya says.

“Sonya, it is too bad you will not be joining us.” Armaros says. “I would have liked to see your face when Joseph dies.”

“Joseph is not going to die, and I’m not going anywhere.”

“Yes, you are Sonya.” A voice says behind them. Joseph and Sonya look behind them as Lilith walks towards them. “You have gotten in my way too many times for it to be excusable. Joseph would have been safe in my garden, but you stopped that from happening. Now he will die and I could go so far as to say it’s your fault.” Sonya’s energy pulse rises and anger glows in her eyes. She has forgotten her speech to Joseph and is letting Lilith get to her. That is the power of anger even though one knows better once anger grabs hold of you it blocks out reason. She now understands more clearly than ever before where Joseph was coming from. She holds her ground and thinks to herself. *I know what they are trying to do. I would be a hypocrite if I do what I want too right after I just yelled at Joseph because he did the same thing. No, my place is by Joseph’s side, I will not leave him.*

Meanwhile Kisho runs to the transport portal and picks up a horn attached to the key pad and blows in it. It makes a loud deep sound that echoes throughout the barracks. Within moments everyone runs out of the barracks and cafeteria and towards the transport portal. Kisho raises his hands up and everyone falls silent. “Xaphan turned out to be bait. He has been defeated, but a greater threat is now upon us. Armaros has manifested himself into a physical demon and has formed a partnership with Lilith.” The transport portal show the image Kisho was just taking about. Akina runs up to the front of the crowd.

“Akina.” Kano calls out and runs after her. They reach the portal just as Malachi grabs their sleeves.

Back in the earthly world Sonya takes a step closer to Joseph. “If you want to fight us you will fight us together.”

“Not acceptable.” Armaros says. Sonya takes her eyes off of Lilith for a moment to look at him and Lilith takes this opportunity to grab her arm as the two disappear from view.

“Sonya!” Joseph yells out while he looks around him.

“Now it’s your turn.” Armaros says as he reaches for Joseph. He looks onto a large hand racing towards him before blackness covers his eyes and he too also disappears with Armaros.

The transport portal shows Sonya and Joseph disappear. “What happened to them? Where did they go?” Akina says concerned. Kisho pushes several buttons on the keypad before speaking.

“They separated Joseph and Sonya from each other. I can’t pinpoint their exact location, but I can get you within a twenty mile radius.”

“Twenty miles!?” Malachi says. “Ok do it.” Erika runs up from the crowd and stands next to Malachi.

“I’ll go with them.” Kisho nods.

“I’ll separate you into two groups. Akina and Kano and Malachi and Erika. I will also put you on either side of the radius. That will give you a chance to either find Joseph or Sonya. They both will need your assistance. Akina and Kano you can go through.” They run through the portal without a moment’s hesitation. Kisho pushes more buttons and then nods to Malachi. Malachi and Erika runs through the portal. But can the teams find Joseph and Sonya before it’s too late?

Chapter 10

Armaros stands in front of Joseph as he draws his large serrated sword. Joseph adjusts his footing and holds his position with his feet firmly planted on the ground. *This is the final battle between us.* Joseph thinks to himself. Armaros raises his sword and swings it at Joseph. He jumps into the air as the blade swings under him. He feels calm and not afraid. Joseph does not return his attack he looks for his opening. Armaros swings again and Joseph moves out of the way and towards Armaros. He cuts Armaros's side and then backs away just before Armaros's arm swings to hit him.

"You landed the first cut, but it does not matter you can't win."

"How did you escape?" Joseph says as he puts his sword up to stop Armaros's sword from reaching him.

"I escaped when you died." Joseph's eyes widen.

"I never died."

"When the poison from the scorpion entered in your blood stream. Your heart stopped for less than a second before Akina saved you, but it was long enough for me to break free. After a few hours I regained my full power and all my strength to kill you. Armaros runs at him, but Joseph dodges his attack and then brings his sword down fast, but Armaros's sword clings against Joseph's sword as he blocks his attack.

Meanwhile Sonya and Lilith circle each other as Sonya holds her sword out in front of her.

"The tricks you used on Joseph won't work on me; your scent is disgusting to me."

"Scent was not my only weapon against Joseph." She smiles. Sonya narrows her eyes and clutches her jaw.

"Doesn't matter, nothing you have can be used against me."

"You think you can defeat me? When I fought Joseph I never used my full power. My intention was never to kill him, but I have no use for you. You can die!" Lilith's claws extend and her eyes become those of a reptile. She opens her mouth revealing two fangs and a forked tongue. And her skin becomes scaly with green and black patterns. Sonya gets ready as Lilith lashes at her. She jumps up into the air and pushes off a large rock as Lilith chases her. Lilith is faster than Sonya thought. She

jumps over Lilith's head and kicks her in the face before landing back on her feet. Lilith strikes at her again, but Sonya swings her sword in her direction. Lilith quickly changes her direction and only the tip of Sonya's sword scrapes against her cheek leaving a little cut.

Somewhere nearby Akina and Kano run hoping to find either Sonya or Joseph. They stop when they approach two paths. One path leads up around a mountain the other leads down a hill.

"Great which way do we go?" Kano asks.

"We need to split up." Akina says.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"If we both go the wrong way then either Joseph or Sonya could be killed. If at least one of us finds them they might have a chance." Akina says determined. Kano finally sighs.

"Fine I'll go up and you go down. Good luck Akina."

"Good luck to you also." She says and runs down the hill.

Erika and Malachi run side by side through a forest.

"Can you feel their presence?" Erika asks.

"Not yet, but we will find them." He reassures her.

Meanwhile Joseph continues fighting Armaros, but Armaros keeps him on the defense as Joseph blocks attack after attack. Armaros flies up and tries to land on him, but Joseph moves to safety. "You are becoming quite annoying." Armaros says.

"I'm sorry that you are too slow." Joseph says sarcastically. Armaros growls and swings his sword again at him Joseph moves to the side close enough for Armaros to swing his fist and punch Joseph ten feet backwards. Joseph falls to the ground and gets to his feet before Armaros reaches him. He cuts Armaros's other side with his sword as he runs from his spot.

"These small cuts will not take me down." Armaros roars. He raises his sword and hits the ground. The earth splits towards Joseph and explodes up at his feet just as he dives to his side. He rolls and gets back on his feet. Armaros shows no sign of weakening and Joseph is getting exhausted and he starts breathing heavier.

Lilith picks up a rock and tosses it at Sonya, but she dives out of the way into the path of Lilith as she charges her. Lilith puts both hands in front of her with all her claws pointing to Sonya. Sonya swings her sword in front of her as she's falling and knocks Lilith's claws away breaking two of them off. Sonya pushes off the ground with one hand

and flips around in the air landing back on her feet. Lilith yells and looks at her hand that is two claws short. "You will pay for that." Sonya starts to glow and her blue flares shoot out towards Lilith and up into the sky. Lilith cart wheels through the flares, but one of them hits her shoulder and she starts bleeding. Lilith screams a high pitched scream. "I'm going to kill you!"

"Shut up, you talk too much." Sonya says.

Malachi and Erika look into the sky and see the blue flares. "It's Sonya, hurry." Malachi says as the two runs in the direction of the flares.

Kano reaches the top of the mountain and looks around, there is no one here, a dead end. He walks to the side of the mountain and looks down to see if he can see anything, but he can't. "Damn it, I have to go all the way back down. I hope Akina is having better luck, maybe I can pick up her trail." He says as he runs back down the mountain side.

Armaros swings his sword in the air then slams his sword against the ground as both a shockwave and the exploding ground travels towards Joseph. He doesn't have enough time to dodge both attacks. He ducks as the shockwave passes overhead, but the ground explodes up underneath him throwing him up into the air. His sword flies away from him and he lands on the ground a few feet away. Joseph looks up as Armaros raises his sword to bring it down on him. The blade reflects the sunlight as it falls. Just then a lightening ball hits Armaros's chest making him take a step back and fail to finish his attack. Joseph quickly gets out of the way and grabs his sword then looks in the direction of the lightening.

"Akina." Joseph says relieved to see her, but he also fears that Armaros might go after her. "Don't get involved in this one." Akina has a determined look on her face and narrows her eyes.

"Sorry Joseph, but I already made my choice."

"Akina I mean it. Get away from here."

"No! You try so hard to save everyone around you, but you don't allow anyone to help you. Don't you care about your life? Do you care enough about our feelings if something happens to you? You keep no strength for yourself, but I can be your strength, if you would let me. Why do you try so hard to save everyone else except for yourself?!"

"Akina I am sorry about how I may have acted in the past, but this is different."

“No Joseph, it isn’t different. You need me.” Akina activates a shield around Joseph. *I guess it’s impossible to make her change her mind. It’s unavoidable.* Joseph thinks to himself before speaking.

“Ok Akina, but stay back.” Armaros goes in for his attack, but as soon as his sword gets within six inches from Joseph it bounces off. Akina’s shields are very good. Joseph counter attacks and slashes Armaros across the chest.

Lilith goes to grab Sonya, but Sonya raises her sword and Lilith grabs hold of it instead. Sonya kicks her hard in the stomach pushing her away. Lilith and Sonya circle each other again. Sonya waits for her to make her move. Lilith finally leaps at her and lands a successful kick to Sonya’s shoulder knocking her off balance. She hits the ground on her back and lifts up her feet and bends her knees, she kicks Lilith backwards as Lilith charges her again. Sonya stands to her feet just as an arrow hits Lilith’s back. Sonya looks past her and sees Erika and Malachi walking towards her. “Sorry we took so long.” Erika says while placing another arrow in her bow and shoots it again into Lilith’s back. Sonya smiles at them as Lilith yells out trying to reach the arrows with her hand. She turns around and sees Malachi withdrawing his sword and Erika placing another arrow on her bow. She knows she can’t fight all three of them together and she starts to fade. Sonya grabs Lilith’s arm.

“Not this time bitch.” She says drawing back her sword. Lilith screeches at her as Sonya thrusts her sword into Lilith’s mouth having it exist through the back of her head. Lilith falls backwards with the sword still in her mouth. She hits the ground and starts to transform. Within moments the sword falls to the ground and a dead python lies at their feet. Sonya picks up her sword and puts it away. She takes a few deep breaths and puts her hand to her chest.

“Are you ok Sonya?” Erika asks.

“Yes, just catching me breath. Did you find Joseph?”

“No, hopefully Akina and Kano has.” Malachi says. Sonya looks concerned.

“You mean you don’t know.”

“We have twenty miles between us. Take my hands I will use my energy to get us there as fast as I can.” Malachi says holding out his hands. Erika grabs one and Sonya grabs the other as Malachi teleports around the radius trying to find Joseph.

Akina puts another shield around Joseph as he cuts Armaros's arm. Armaros swings his sword at Joseph multiple times back to back, but every time the sword bounces off. He growls and roars in frustration. The shield finally wears off and Armaros kicks Joseph backwards. "No more shields little girl." He says and throws his sword towards Akina. As Joseph is flying back he sees the sword glide towards him, but it is too high for it to be meant for him. He drops his sword deliberately and tries to catch Armaros's sword, he starts falling to the ground as it glides past him and out of his reach. Akina's eyes are on Joseph and only notice the sword after he starts to descend. She moves to the right, but isn't fast enough. The sword tears through her side and ribs. The blood soaked sword lands blade down in the grass behind her as she cries out and falls to the ground.

"Akina!!" Joseph yells and runs to her side. Akina lies nearly upon death as she struggles to breathe. Joseph kneels down as tears roll down his cheeks. He puts his hands underneath her and looks into her eyes and says.

"Akina, I'm so sorry. I promised myself no one was going to get hurt." Joseph lays his head on hers as he holds her tight against his body. "I will not let you die, you will live. I swear this on my very soul. I will save you, I will protect you, forever." Akina wraps her arms around him not wanting to ever let go. "This will end with me."

"Joseph." Akina says in almost a whisper. He whispers into her ear the words she longed to hear for so long.

"I love you." He squeezes her tight and kisses her cheek. Akina's eyes widen and swell up with tears as Joseph lies her down gently. He stands up and grabs his sword. He walks slowly building his power. The wind surrounds him and light consumes him. He absorbs all the power in his sword and runs towards Armaros. With all his might he swings his sword upwards and slashes Armaros's waist all the way up to his shoulder. The force is so great that it knocks him up into the air. Joseph jumps into the air after him. "I told you if you seek me out I will kill you!" Joseph swings his sword again just as Armaros shoves his claws into Joseph's stomach. The claws exist through his back, but they do not stop him from finishing his attack. His sword cuts through the demon's neck and the head flies off of its body spinning in the air several times. A split second later the entire body of Armaros explodes in the sky creating a blast radius of fire and lightening and a loud thunder like

boom that echoes throughout the world. Fire and lightening extends outward as it engulfs Joseph as he falls to the ground. When the sky finally clears there is no trace of the demon. Akina watches horrified as Joseph falls out of the sky backwards. To Akina everything appears to be happening in slow motion. His sword falls from his grip and hits the ground. Moments later Joseph's back smashes into the earth. Akina crawls towards him using the last of her energy and strength. She puts her hand on his chest and cries. Joseph opens his eyes and smiles.

"I can't heal you." She sobs.

"Akina, you already did, thank you. Thank you for saving me." Tears run from her face and falls on Joseph's cheek. She puts her hand on his cheek and rubs his face. She cries as she looks into his eyes and lifts him up onto her lap and embarrasses him as she speaks.

"Why did you wait so long to tell me? We could have been together at least for a little while, if I knew."

"I'm sorry, I wanted too. I always thought of you as my guardian angel. I did not want my feelings to change the way we looked at each other. You saved me so many times. I think I fell in love with you the first time I saw you. I admired your strength and courage. You never gave up on me, not even when I had. You were even willing to fight Armaros. I will always remember you, and I will always love you."

"I wish we could have had a life together. I loved you for so long. I never want to stop holding you." She says squeezing him tighter and crying. She holds him close to her as Joseph holds her hand and wipes her tears away. Akina continues, "I fell in love with you every day I saw you. And I would wish that you would fall in love with me every day. Today my dream has come true, so you can't die!" She slowly leans her head in closer to his and closes her eyes. She feels his lips against hers and pretends they are happy together living out her dream, in love forever. She does not open her eyes or take her lips off of his; she does not want it to end. She can feel him kissing her back as she listens to Joseph's heart beat after beat until she hears it stop. Joseph's hand slowly falls from her face and lands on the ground. She continues embracing him and cries uncontrollably.

Kano finally arrives and runs towards them, and kneels down beside Joseph. He puts his forehead in the palm of his hand when he realizes that Joseph is dead. One by one the others find them. Sonya runs over and kneels beside Akina who is leaning over Joseph holding him.

Sonya grabs Joseph's hand and cries on Akina's shoulder. Erika puts her face in her hands and begins to sob as Malachi puts his arm around her, when they see him. He tries to remain brave and strong, but a tear escapes from his control and rolls down his cheek. They all surround him; they all have him in their memories. They remember him from their past and the battles they fought as well as the happier moments. Saying goodbye is not an easy thing to do especially when there were more experiences that they could have shared together and things that were found out too late. It is not always fair, but it is what it is. Today a hero dies, but his actions and sacrifices will be remembered forever.

25 years later

A man walks through a city and opens the door to a tavern. Everyone looks at him as he walks and grabs a chair to sit down at a table. A waitress walks over and takes his order then walks away. He is just another traveler with no home of his own, and no family. He appears to be just another drifter passing from town to town, but today is different. A girl looks up from her meal and stares at him from another table. She has moved to this town a few months ago and also has no living family. Usually shy in nature; today she has a feeling that she needs to talk to him. She gets up and approaches his table.

"Excuse me, have we met? You look very familiar to me." The man looks at her and smiles. He has a kind face and their eyes meet.

"No, I don't believe we have. I am new to this area, but something about you does seem like we knew each other. Please sit down." He says holding his hand out towards a chair near him. The girl sits down and looks at him, she extends her hand.

"My name is Akina."

"I'm Joseph." He says and shakes her hand. They spend hours talking as if they were old friends separated for a long time.

Sonya watches through the transport portal and smiles as Kano stands next to her along with Malachi, Keiko, Ishi, Erika, Nara, and Kisho.

"They finally found each other." Keiko says.

"I'm glad Akina was allowed to be born into that world at the same time as Joseph." Sonya says.

“We felt they deserve a chance at a normal life. They did much for us and never had that opportunity.” Malachi says. “They will live their life to the fullest and experience the love they were missing. And when they have lived their life, they will come back here and regain their positions in their squads.” Everyone notices something at that point and looks at Kisho, he has what appears to be a smile on his face. When he discovers he had been caught he straightens his face again and starts to walk away saying.

“Well back to work and training everyone. After all, the world will still be there tomorrow.” Slowly Malachi and the others start to walk away from the transport portal except for Sonya.

A man in a white and black cloak is walking towards the group as they walk away from the portal. “Where’s Joseph? And I haven’t seen Akina in a while either.” Sonya looks behind her to see Isaac, one of Joseph’s students. Ishi smiles at him and puts her arm around him turning him away from looking at the image in the portal while saying. “They are on a special assignment. They will be back, but not for a while.” Sonya looks back at Joseph and Akina. As the moments go by Akina finally pulls Joseph towards her and kisses him. Sonya can’t stop smiling and says.

“Take care you two, and I will see you again in the future.”

Appendix

15 groups total. Groups 3-14 are present, but not identified.

Group 9 was sent to Russia.

Group 11 was sent to New Zealand.

Group 1 (Japan)

Kin – Squad 1

Geert – Squad 1

Genji – Squad 2

Ishi – Squad 3

Group 2 (Germany)

Takoda – Squad 1

Alric – Squad 2

Kita – Squad 3

Group 15 (USA) Before war ~ After war

Malachi – Squad 1 Captain ~ Squad 1 General

Erika – Squad 2 Lieutenant ~ Squad 2 Captain

Kano – Squad 1 Champion ~ Squad 1 Lieutenant

Nara – Squad 2 Champion ~ Squad 2 Lieutenant

Akina – Squad 3 Champion ~ Squad 3 Lieutenant

Other Characters

Kisho – General ~ Ruler over all the Squads

Koko – Squad 2 Captain ~ Squad 2 General

Kichi – Squad 3 Captain ~ Squad 3 General

Razi – Squad 1 Group 9

Sonya – Squad 1 Lieutenant ~ Squad 1 Captain

Joseph – Sonya's companion; becomes a guardian. ~ Squad 4 Captain

Keiko – Younger sister of Kiska; Joins Malachi after her sister's death ~

Training in squad 1

Kiska – Older sister of Keiko

Gabriel – Archangel
Michael – Archangel
Darius -- Alchemist; Colors: Purple/Black
Violet – Squad 3 Captain (On assignment no appearance.)
Isaac – Training in squad 4
Samuel -- Training in squad 4

Enemies (their purpose in the story)

Lucifer/Satan/Beelzebub – The Devil
Armaros – Demon Joseph becomes
Alastor – Executioner of Hell; Kills Sonya
Lilith – Pretty woman that hires Alastor to kidnap Joseph and kill Sonya
Sonneillon – Temps Joseph to become Armaros
Xaphan – The demon that caused enough destruction to bring Joseph out so Armaros can kill him.
Oni General – The general of the Oni tribe
Sea Snake (Leviathan)
Legion
Hell Dogs (Black Dog)
Goblins
Demon Birds (Rocs or Harpies)
Scorpion Men

Words that appear

Reinforcements – Regular people with special abilities to aid in the fight against evil such as Keiko. Joseph is not considered one because he never had abilities until after he came back from death.

Kanabo – Large iron and wood club of the Oni general.

Energy Pulse – A presence that some can sense, letting them know whether the emitter is good or bad and how strong they are. An evil energy pulse is felt like bold heavy lines pushing against you. The stronger the evil the harder the lines push, possibly causing you harm. If the presence is good it feels like light wavy lines. The stronger the good the more lines seem to be in the air, but it will never harm you.

The Squads

Squad 1 Warriors

General: Malachi

Captain: Sonya

Lieutenant: Kano

Colors: Red/Black

Purpose: Main melee sword attacks. To make sure they make sure no enemies gets past them.

Squad 2 Rouges

General: Koko

Captain: Erika

Lieutenant: Nara

Colors: Yellow/Black

Purpose: Bow and spear attacks fight from a distance.

Squad 3 Protectors

General: Kichi

Captain: Violet (on assignment)

Lieutenant: Akina

Colors: Green/Black

Purpose: to create shields around their allies and to heal them. They also can cast ball lightning.

Squad 4 Reinforcements

General: None

Captain: Joseph

Lieutenant: None

Colors: White/Black

Purpose: To aid when they are most needed. All members of this squad are strong willed and can take any role of the first three squads if they need to.

Generals

Colors: Blue/Black

Believed to be the highest rank one could achieve. They are capable of the most powerful attacks. Fights alone most of the time, but after the war every squad has a general to fight with them.

Patches:



Captain



Lieutenant



Champion

Before the War

60 soldiers, 20 in each squad.

1 Captain and 1 Lieutenant in each squad.

After the War

No limit on how many soldiers can be in a squad.

1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant and 1 General in each squad.

Heroes and Enemies meanings and purpose outside the story

Heroes (Males)

Alric – A Ruler (German)

Darius – Wealthy (Greek)

Gabriel – God is my Strength; one of the archangels (Hebrew)

Geert – Brave Strength (Germanic)

Isaac – Laughter, the Laughing One (Hebrew)

Joseph – God shall add (Hebrew)

Kano – The God of the Waters (Japanese)

Kin – Golden (Japanese)

Kisho – One who knows his own Mind (Japanese)

Malachi – The Messenger of the Lord (Hebrew)

Michael – Like the Lord; one of the archangels (Hebrew)

Razi – Secret (African)

Samuel – Asked of God (Hebrew)

Takoda – The friend of all (Native American)

Heroes (Females)

Akina – A Spring Flower (Japanese)

Erika – A Powerful Ruler (German/Scandinavian)

Genji – Gold (Chinese)

Ishi – A Stone (Japanese)

Keiko – The Beloved or Adored One (Japanese)

Kichi – Fortunate (Japanese)

Kiska – Pure (Russian)

Kita – North (Japanese)

Koko – A Stork (Japanese) Of the Night (Native American)

Nara – The Nearest and Dearest one (Old English) An Oak Tree
(Japanese) A Companion (Aboriginal)

Sonya – Wisdom (Russian)

Violet – Named after the Flower (Latin)

Primary Enemies (Demons)

Alastor – Avenger (Greek) The destroying angel and was known as The Executioner. He was exceptionally cruel.

Armaros -- Cursed one or Accursed one. (Greek) He was the 11th on a list of 20 leaders of a group of 200 fallen angels.

Lilith -- Dark, A woman of the night (Arabic/Hebrew). She is known to be highly sexually predatory towards men appearing in their erotic dreams. She is said to be Adam's first wife before Eve. She left him when he wouldn't allow her to be "above him". She is said to be Queen of all Succubus.

Lucifer -- Light Bearer (Latin)

Satan -- Adversary (Hebrew)

Beelzebub -- Translated in Hebrew as Lord of things that fly.

Lucifer is a fallen angel who is Satan, the embodiment of evil and an enemy of God. He led a revolution against God. When the rebellion failed, Lucifer was cast out of heaven.

Sonneillon -- is the Demon of Hate, and he tempts men with hatred against their enemies.

Xaphan -- (Za-FAN) One of the fallen angels that rebelled with Satan; and is 2nd in rank. Came up with the idea to set fire to heaven and fans the flames of the abyss with his mouth and hands.

Secondary Enemies (Monsters)

Demon Birds – May refer to rocs (Persian), or possibly harpies (Greek).

Goblins – They are evil and mischievous; grotesquely disfigured and constant annoying little creatures.

Hell Dogs – Are also known as black dogs they are essentially nocturnal. It is generally supposed to be larger than a physical dog and often has large glowing eyes. Black dogs are malevolent and associated with the Devil. (British folklore)

Legion -- Translated as Lots. (Possessive demons) Jesus met a man possessed by evil spirits. When asked what was its name it answered “we are legion, for we are many.”

Oni (General) -- Are creatures from Japanese folklore, sometimes translated as demons, ogres or trolls. They are hideous gigantic humanoids with sharp claws, wild hair, and two long horns growing from their heads.

Scorpion Men – Found in Babylonian myths and are said to stand guard outside the gates of the sun god Shamash. Their heads touch the sky and their terror is awesome; their glance is death. They are said to fight with a bow and arrow.

Sea Snake – Refers to the Leviathan. Twisted or Coiled (Hebrew).



While I worked at my 3rd shift job pushing wood through a computerized saw in the middle of summer. I thought what if the world ended today. Would anyone see it coming or would it come quickly? Would the day start out normal? I also am a fan of a Japanese anime show called Bleach. I combined some elements I saw in this show along with my thoughts on how the world could possibly end and what could be on the other side. And from that Army of Heroes was born.