The ancient darkness surrounding him did not stop him from seeing any more than his lack of eyes did. He had been a sorcerer once, a very great one. His spectral sight revealed every inch of his cell with far more clarity than eyes of flesh ever could.

He could navigate this prison even without it. He knew every flagstone on the floor, every enchantment that bound him. He knew them by sight, by touch. He knew the way his footsteps would echo with every one of the nine steps it took him to pace across the chamber. He felt the flows of magic all around. Spell after spell, enchantment after enchantment, their soul-crushing power intended to do only one thing: to make sure he stayed buried here, unremembered, unforgiven.

The ones who incarcerated him intended this place to be his tomb. They had forgotten about him over the long millennia. They should have killed him. It would have been kinder. Instead they let him live, pretending it was mercy. It let those who
had bound him—such as his brother, Malfurion Stormrage, and Tyrande Whisperwind, the woman he loved—feel better about themselves.

Long centuries had dragged by when he never heard the voice of another living thing. Only his jailors, the Watchers, spoke to him occasionally, and he had learned to hate them. Most of all he had come to abhor their leader, Warden Maiev Shadowsong. She visited him more than any other, still afraid he would escape despite all the precautions his captors had taken. Once, she had wanted him dead. Now it was her task in life to ensure he stayed imprisoned, when everyone else had forgotten him.

What was that? A faint tremor in the ring of binding spells?

Impossible. There was no escape from this place. Not even death. Spells healed any harm he might inflict on himself. Magic kept him alive without the need for water or food. Those bonds had been woven by masters, drawn so tight, intertwined so deeply, that they could only be undone by those who had buried him alive. And they would never do that. They were too afraid to let him go free. Justifiably so.

He had brooded for centuries on what he would do to those who had incarcerated him. Time was
the only thing he had. The span of his imprisonment dwarfed all the years he had been free. If he had not been who he was, he would have gone mad.

Perhaps he had. How many thousands of years had it been since he was imprisoned? He had lost track. That was the worst of it. Millennia spent in darkness, trapped in this cage, unable to take more than nine steps in any direction. He who had once hunted demons across the trackless wildernesses of Azeroth had been confined in a place he would not have left an animal.

They had sentenced him to this when all he had done was try to overcome their common foe. He had infiltrated the Burning Legion, his people’s—no, his world’s—sworn enemy. He had tried to undo the harm the demonic invaders had wreaked.

Had he been rewarded for it? No! He had been buried alive. His people had assumed him to be a traitor, a betrayer. They had hailed him as a hero once, but no one did that now. If he was remembered at all, his name would be a curse.

Was that the sound of weapons clashing? He pushed the thought aside. Refused to let hope well up within his breast. There was no one out there who wanted him free. His family and his friends had turned against him when he had tried to re-create the Well of Eternity, the night elves’
ancient fount of magic, on Mount Hyjal. The only ones who might want him to escape were demons. His jailors would kill him rather than let that happen. And as long as the wards remained in place, there was nothing he could do to stop them.

But there it was again. Another tremor in the flows of magic around him. The weaves of power that had bound him all this time were weakening. He raised his hands in front of his face, flexed his fingers, reached out to draw upon the magic. For the first time in millennia, something responded, a trickle so weak that he thought he might be imagining it. He called on his twin blades, the Warglaives of Azzinoth. They had been displayed triumphantly on weapon racks outside his cell, taunting him, but now the ancient soulbindings linking them to him caused the potent weapons to materialize in his hands. Power flowed through them, illuminating the runes on their blades.

His heart beat faster. His mouth felt dry. There was a chance of freedom after all. He clutched the warglaives tight. In the past, they had killed demons. Now they would kill elves. The thought did not disturb him as once it would have. He would even take pleasure in it.

Again his magical shackles flickered. The sounds of combat came closer. Some of the bind-
ings had failed. Perhaps they were desecrated by spilled blood or ruined by the spells he sensed being unleashed in the battle. Energy poured into him as his bonds frayed. His heart pounded. His flesh tingled. He felt as if he might exhale fire. After such long abstinence, the flow of power was almost overwhelming.

He sensed a presence outside the doorway of his cell. He prepared himself to attack. A voice spoke, and it was the last one he had expected to hear.

“Illidan, is that you?” Tyrande Whisperwind asked.

All of his dreams of vengeance, all of his plans for retribution, faded away, as if the long years of his imprisonment had never happened. He was astonished by the feeling, thinking himself hardened against anything and anyone—especially her.

His speech was rusty after decades of disuse. “Tyande . . . it is you! After all these ages spent in darkness, your voice is like the pure light of the moon upon my mind.”

He cursed himself for his weakness. These were not the words he had imagined saying in his dreams of freedom and escape. Yet they rose unbidden to his lips, hope welling in his chest. Perhaps she had seen the error of what she had done. Perhaps she had come to free him, to forgive him.
“The Legion has returned, Illidan. Your people have need of you once more.”

His fists clenched around his weapons. “My people need me? My people left me to rot!” His throat constricted with rage, choking off more words. The demons had returned, as he had always known they would, and his people wanted his aid. Molten anger blazed through him, creating a great void in its wake, and more power flowed in to fill the emptiness.

No doubt about it—the spells binding him were weakened. By her actions, by the loosening of her will, Tyrande had helped undo them.

He concentrated all of his fury and all of his pent-up frustration into one mighty spell of unraveling. For a moment the weakened chains of magic held, but only for a moment. Rivers of power eroded the barriers around him. Slowly at first, but ever faster, the imprisoning spells crumbled. He smashed through the bars of his cell, tearing apart the stone.

Tyrande stood there, beautiful as ever, staring at Illidan. The years had not changed her. She was still tall, with pale violet skin and blue hair, graceful as a temple dancer and lovely as a moonrise over Nordrassil. She reeked of blood and unleashed magic. She must have seen his rage, for she turned
away, unable to meet his gaze. That hurt more than anything, to see her cringe after all the long years since last they’d met.

“But I once cared for you, Tyrande, I will hunt down the demons and topple the Legion.” He bared his teeth in a snarl. “But I will never owe our people anything!”

She met his gaze this time. Emotions flickered over her face. Hope. Fear. Was that pity or regret? He was not sure and he despised himself for placing so much value on what she thought. What she felt meant nothing to him! Nothing!

Tyrande said, “Then let us hurry back to the surface! The demons’ corruption spreads with every second we waste.”

And that was it. All the greeting he was going to get after the long, wasted millennia. No apologies. No remorse. She had helped cast him into this dreadful place, and now she needed his aid. And the worst of it was that he would give it.

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Bodies lay strewn outside his cell. It was clear that there had been a mighty battle here and that Tyrande had fought her way in to free him. She must be desperate indeed to perform such an act. Looking down at the massive carcass of the keeper of the grove, he realized that if the Burning Legion
had returned, she had reason to be. The Legion destroyed worlds the way armies destroyed cities.

“Did you slay him?” Illidan asked, pointing at the dead body of Califax.

“I did,” said Tyrande. “The keeper of the grove would not let you loose.”

Illidan laughed. “Maiev will be angry. He was one of her favorites.”

Tyrande’s face flushed. “This is not a reason for laughter,” she said.

“I have had little enough cause for mirth in the thousands of years since you imprisoned me. Forgive me if my sense of humor seems a little warped.”

“Ten thousand,” she said.

“What?”

“It has been more than ten thousand years since you were imprisoned.”

The laughter died on his lips. The weight of her words pressed down on him like the weight of the earth above their heads.

“So long,” he said, his voice soft. He looked at the ancient vault of his prison, traced the weave of the spells that had held him. He lengthened his stride, determined to leave this place and never come back.

“Why did you really set me free?” he asked, still hoping that she might show some shred of remorse about what she had done.
Illidan

“As I said, the Burning Legion has returned. No one knows more about them than you. No one has slain more demons.”

“You do not fear my treachery, then? Remember, I am called ‘the Betrayer.’”

“Betrayer you were, but in the end you chose the right side.”

He gestured at his surroundings with one tattooed hand. “And look what it got me.”

“You could be dead. Like so many others of our people.”

“Our people. You keep harping on about our people. They are not our people. They are your people.”

“Do you hate us so?”

“Yes,” he said. His lip twisted into a sneer. “But fortunately for you, I hate the demons more.”

She nodded as if he had confirmed something she wanted to hear. A suspicion flickered through his mind. He had been imprisoned not from any false act of mercy, but because she had known that one day he would again be needed. He had been stored here like a weapon hung in an armory.

Ahead he sensed a being of enormous—and familiar—power, his brother. He might have known that wherever Tyrande was, her lover, Malfurion, would be close by. Illidan’s whole body tensed, prepared to spring into battle.
His companion sensed it as well. She rushed forward and then halted, barred by the mighty presence of the archdruid Malfurion Stormrage. Illidan’s brother was massive. Antlers protruded from his head. His handsome face held a look of dismay at seeing Illidan free. Clearly the archdruid had not come to aid Tyrande.

Four Druids of the Claw flanked Malfurion, each in the form of a bear. They flexed their claws and growled at Illidan. They had been set here to guard against his escape, and they seemed determined still to prevent it.

Tyrande said, “Mal!”

Illidan fought to keep his anger in check. Here was the brother who had condemned him. His words, when he found them, were bitter. “It has been an eternity, Brother. An eternity spent in darkness!”

Malfurion met his gaze evenly. “You were sentenced to pay for your sins, nothing more.”

The hypocrisy of it was breathtaking. What sort of brother could condemn his own flesh and blood to ten thousand years entombed? “And who were you to judge me? We fought the demons side by side, if you recall!”

Tension crackled in the air between them. In that moment, they were both ready to fight, to kill.
Tyrande shouted, “Enough of this, both of you! What is done is done.”

She focused the full force of her attention on Malfurion. “My love, with Illidan’s help, we will drive the demons back once again and save what is left of our beloved land!”

Malfurion shook his head. “Have you even considered the cost, Tyrande? This betrayer’s aid may doom us all before the end. I will have nothing to do with this.”

Illidan schooled his face to impassivity. His own brother obviously still thought of him as nothing but a monster, a puppet for the Legion. He would show him. He would show them all that the demons had no power over him.

“Cower in your weakness and indecision, then, Brother, but do so elsewhere,” Illidan said. “I have work to do. And little time to do it in.”

Illidan sent forth a burst of energy from the power he’d been steadily regaining, tossing those assembled around him into the stone walls. He strode past the dazed forms and out of his prison, knowing in his heart that before this was over, he would be named “Betrayer” once more, and he would deserve it.

He was never going to be imprisoned again.
CHAPTER ONE
FOUR YEARS BEFORE THE FALL

Green meteors ripped through the dark clouds that perpetually obscured the heavens over Shadowmoon Valley. The ground shook as the monstrously ornate demonic siege engines on the walls of the Black Temple rained death down on the blood elf forces of Prince Kael’thas Sunstrider, strewing the red earth of Outland with their corpses. Despite their losses, the elves pushed forward, determined to take the citadel of Magtheridon, lord of Outland, the Burning Legion’s satrap in this shattered world.

Illidan paused for a moment and studied the Black Temple. To inexperienced eyes, the defenses might look immeasurably strong, but he saw that they had been neglected. There were too few sentries for the span of the towering walls, the warding spells were starting to unravel, and the metal struts of the gates were stained with rust and verdigris. The defenders responded slowly, as if they
could not quite believe they were being assaulted by a force so much smaller than their own. Perhaps they expected to be relieved by demonic allies. If so, they were doomed to disappointment. Illidan and his companions had spent the whole long, hot Outland day sealing the gates through which the demons were summoned. No aid was coming from that source.

Illidan glanced over at Prince Kael’thas. “Magtheridon has grown strong over the years, but he has had few real foes to contend with. He has become decadent and complacent. The boisterous cur cannot match our cunning or our will.”

The tall, fair blood elf prince looked up at him. The fierce joy of combat blazed in his eyes. “This will be a glorious battle, master. Though Magtheridon’s forces vastly outnumber ours, your soldiers are prepared to fight to the end.”

Illidan hoped that would not prove necessary. He needed to seize the Black Temple and mastery of Outland quickly if he was to make himself secure against the vengeance of the demon lord Kil’jaeden. Kil’jaeden had set Illidan a task after he rejoined the Burning Legion, to destroy the Frozen Throne and hence eliminate a rebellious servant, and he had not completed it. The Deceiver did not reward failure. In addition to cutting off the
Legion’s reinforcements, Illidan believed that closing the demonic portals could thwart Kil’jaeden’s attempts to locate him. Winning this fortress would give him a stronger base of operations for keeping the portals closed.

An elven sorcerer raised his hand and sent a bolt of arcane energy lancing toward the walls. Badly maintained or not, the defenses were enough to prevent it from striking the siege engine. A ball of fire arced down toward the mage, gouging the bloodred earth as the defenders sought his range. A company of Kael’thas’s soldiers raced past en route to the shelter of the walls.

Illidan clenched his fists as he sensed the demons within the temple. Here in the foreign world of Outland, he felt the temptation of demonic magic even more strongly than usual, especially after he had consumed the potency within the Skull of Gul’dan. The surge of evil energy from that artifact had transformed him, changing both his physical form and the depth of his power, but it had put him off balance for months. He flexed his newly gained demonic wings, earning a concerned glance from Prince Kael’thas. Illidan took a deep breath and forced himself to be calm.

It was a long, strange road that had brought him to this pass. Since Tyrande had freed him, he
Illidan had seen the overthrow of the Burning Legion on his homeworld of Azeroth, made a pact with a demon lord, and fled to Outland to evade his enemies, both night elven and demonic. He had been recaptured by his old nemesis, Maiev, and then freed by his allies, the young prince Kael’has—whose allegiance Illidan had earned by pledging to help the blood elves sate their addiction to magic—and Lady Vashj, a leader of the naga. Now he found himself scheming to overthrow the pit lord who ruled this shattered world in the name of the Burning Legion.

Kael’has stared at him, expecting an answer to his promise of loyalty. Illidan said, “I am pleased by your people’s zeal, young Kael. Their spirits and powers have been honed in this harsh wilderness. Their courage alone may be enough to—”

“Lord Illidan, new arrivals come to greet you.” The voice of Lady Vashj cut him off as she slithered into view. Great bands of muscle pulsed and bulged as she moved, twisting the coils of her lower body. Her oddly beautiful face, reminiscent of a night elf’s, contrasted with the horror of her serpentine form.

Illidan turned to look in the direction she indicated. A pack of monstrous figures lumbered into view. Illidan recognized them at once. They were
Broken, corrupted and devolved former members of the draenei race who had inhabited Draenor before it was shattered into Outland. They, too, were part of Illidan’s coalition, bound to him by promises of aid against their common enemy, Magtheridon.

The Broken were hulking, ungraceful monsters, bearing primitive weapons in their huge hands. Illidan’s mystical senses detected that more of them were nearby, potent magic concealing them from those who lacked his spectral sight.

One of the Broken, even more massive and twisted of form than the rest, limped forward on hoofed feet. “We have fought the orcs and their demon masters for generations,” the figure said. His voice rasped from within his chest. It seemed to pain him to speak. “Now, at last, we will end their curse forever. We are yours to command, Lord Illidan.”

It was Akama, leader of the Broken. He was not a reassuring figure. Fangs jutted up from his lower jaw. Tentacles writhed out from the bottom half of his face.

“You have arrived just in time,” Illidan said. “Those machines on the walls must be silenced, and the gate must be opened.”
Akama nodded and gestured. The near-invisible Broken swarmed forward across the open ground and clambered up the walls of the Black Temple. A small force of blood elves and naga took shelter against the monstrous fortifications, beneath the firing arcs of the demonic engines. Illidan, Kael’thas, and Lady Vashj moved to join them, along with Akama and his bodyguards.

Once again, the so-called lord of Outland’s overconfidence was revealed. A properly prepared fortress would have vats of boiling oil or alchemical fire ready to pour down on attackers. The defenders did nothing. Long minutes ticked by. This close to the walls, Illidan could hear the hum of the magical generators that powered the demonic war machines.

Suddenly the sounds of combat came from within the walls, and the great gates of the Black Temple swung open. Akama and his bodyguards raced forward to join the fray. Explosions sounded as the Broken destroyed the generators, and the war machines on the walls fell silent. The main bulk of the naga and blood elf force advanced toward the gate once more.

Akama returned, hideous face jubilant. He had waited a long time for this day. Illidan smiled and
said, “As I promised, your people shall have their vengeance, Akama. By night’s end, we will all be drunk with it. Vashj, Kael, give the final order to strike. The hour of wrath has come!”

Through the open gates, Illidan could see a vast courtyard stacked high with bones. Red-skinned fel orcs milled around in confusion as their leaders bel lowed commands and tried to get them into some semblance of order to repel the invaders.

Within the Black Temple, there were probably ten fel orcs for every one of Illidan’s troops. Each had been twisted by foul magic into something far stronger and fiercer than a normal orc. It counted for nothing now. Illidan’s forces swept into the courtyard, a tight wedge that cleaved through their disorganized enemy as easily as their blades sliced orcish flesh.

Illidan plunged his talons into the chest of a fel orc. Bone crunched as he closed his fingers and ripped open a cavity to pull the heart free. The fel orc roared and lunged forward, jaws snapping in an attempt to tear out Illidan’s throat even as the creature died.

Illidan raised the corpse above his head and tossed it into the onrushing squad of red-skinned defenders. Its weight bowled them over, sending them tumbling to the ground. He leapt amid them,
freeing his warglaives from their sheaths. He lashed out, striking to left and right with irresistible force. His enemies fell, decapitated, limbless, mutilated. Blood covered him. He licked it from his lips and moved forward, slashing and slicing as he went.

All around, the dying screamed. Magic thundered as Prince Kael’thas and Lady Vashj unleashed their spells. Illidan was tempted to do so himself, but he wanted to preserve his strength for the final conflict with Magtheridon.

Part of him took pleasure in the clash of arms. There was nothing quite like shedding the blood of your foes with your own hands. Deep within him, the chained demon part of his nature enjoyed feeding this way.

The fel orcs fought well, but they were no match for Illidan and his comrades. The naga were much larger and more physically powerful. They wrapped their enemies within their serpentine coils and squeezed the life out of them.

The blood elves were masters of sorcery and swords. They might not be as strong as the fel orcs, but they were faster and more agile, and bonds of loyalty stronger than life itself drove them to defend their prince.

The Broken fought with the determination of a people driven to free their homeland from the
grip of demons. The howls of dying fel orcs rose to the heavens in protest as they fell before the hungry blades of their enemies. Within minutes the courtyard was cleared, the fel orcs were routed, and the way into the Black Temple’s inner citadel and Magtheridon’s chambers lay open.

“Victory is ours,” said Akama. “The Temple of Karabor will belong to my people once again.”

“The temple will be returned to your people,” Illidan said. He replaced his warglaives in their sheaths. “In good time.” It was true. He fully intended to give back the Black Temple to the Broken. Once he had achieved his goals.

Akama looked at him with rheumy eyes. He interlaced his stubby fingers and bobbed his head, his need to believe etched on his face. The Temple of Karabor had been the most sacred site of his people before Magtheridon’s desecration turned it into the Black Temple. Illidan sensed it had a deep personal significance to the Broken himself. That was a string that could be tugged to make him dance, if the need arose. Not that what Akama wanted counted for anything. Illidan’s purpose far outweighed the desires of any Broken. He had planned too long to let scruples stand in his way.

“When we overcome the pit lord, most of his fel orc lieutenants will support us,” Illidan said. “They
follow the strongest, and we will have shown that their faith in Magtheridon was misplaced. Such summoned demons as remain within the temple will be bound in fealty to me, or they will die their final death.”

Vashj nodded. “Cut off the head and the body falls,” she said.

“You will slay Magtheridon, Lord?” Akama asked. Illidan allowed himself a cruel smile.

“We shall do much worse than that,” he said.

“And what would that be?” Akama spoke slowly. Illidan heard the doubt in his voice. Clearly, Akama had reservations about what they were doing.

“You will need to wait and see,” Illidan said.

“As you wish, Lord,” Akama said. “So shall it be.”

“Then let us be about our business,” said Illidan. “We have a world to conquer.”

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The doorway to the throne room slid open. The stench of demon assaulted Illidan’s nostrils. Flames leapt around Magtheridon’s throne of bones. The pit lord loomed more than five times the height of a blood elf, a centaur-like creature with two arms and a quadruped lower half, as massive as a dragon. Magtheridon’s legs were like the columns support-
ing the roof of some ancient temple. They lifted his underbelly so high that an elf could walk beneath it. In one huge hand, he held a glaive as long as the mast of an ocean-going ship, weighty as a battering ram. Flanking him were two gigantic, bat-winged doomguard, each almost as tall as their master, and a force of lesser demons. Illidan sensed their power and their hostility.

The pit lord turned his burning eyes upon Illidan. When he spoke, his voice was deep and guttural. “I do not know you, stranger, but your power is vast. Are you an agent of the Legion? Have you been sent here to test me?”

Illidan laughed. “I have come to replace you. You are a relic, Magtheridon, a ghost of a past age. The future is mine. From this moment on, Outland and all its denizens will bow to me.”

The pit lord lumbered forward, raising his gigantic glaive. The earth shook beneath his tread. “I will crush you like the insect you are. I will feast upon your pulped flesh and devour your soul with it.”

He spoke with the overweening self-confidence of one who thought his might was unchallengeable. His demonic bodyguards advanced. Illidan sprang, warglaives scything through the air to bite into demon flesh. His blow slashed the arm from
a felguard, forcing the creature to drop his axe. A heartbeat later Illidan’s left-hand warglaive sliced his opponent open from neck to groin.

Illidan’s own forces advanced into the fray. The doomguard were mighty, but they were few. Buffeted by the spells of Kael’thas and Vashj and surrounded by assailants, the doomguard were slain like bears being dragged down by a pack of hounds.

Illidan bounded forward to confront Magtheridon himself. The pit lord’s huge glaive crashed down, biting into the stone where Illidan had stood. He was already away, rolling between the lord of Outland’s columnar legs, hamstringing each of the front ones with a double swipe of his blades. The pit lord roared with fury and struck again. Illidan tumbled forward under his foe’s belly, drawing forth ichor with his strikes. He vaulted onto Magtheridon’s massive tail, ran up his spine, and drove his blades into the demon’s thick neck.

From Illidan’s vantage point, he could see that his forces had felled the pit lord’s bodyguards. The demons were finished. Illidan raised his hands high and chanted the spell of binding. A wave of unleashed magical energy hit the pit lord. Magtheridon flinched as the spell began to bite.

Illidan’s heart thundered as he exerted his will. He felt as if he were engaged in a tug-of-war with
a giant. Magtheridon’s advance slowed. His face twisted as if he, too, felt the strain.

“You are strong—for a mortal,” the pit lord said.

“I am not a mortal,” said Illidan.

“Anything that can be killed is mortal.”

Sweat beaded on Illidan’s brow. His breath rasped from his chest. He spread his wings and rose into the air above Magtheridon, signaling the others. It was time. Lady Vashj nodded, raised her hands, and began to chant. Lines of fire blazed across Illidan’s sight, forming intricate patterns around the pit lord. Magtheridon roared as he understood what was happening.

Illidan fed more power into the spell. The pit lord stood transfixed, unable to proceed. His tombstone-sized fangs glistened, reflecting the light of magical energy. He reared up, fighting against the magic as much with his huge strength as with his own sorcerous might.

Illidan strained against him and glanced at Prince Kael’thas. The blood elf licked his lips like an epicure catching sight of a feast. All this unleashed magic clearly aroused something within him.

“Kael’thas,” Illidan croaked. His words carried to the elf’s ears. Kael’thas spread his arms and added his voice to the spell. Colossal magical ener-
gies smashed down. The spell locked into place. The pit lord screamed his rage and defiance, but to no avail. He was held by bindings so strong, not even he could overcome them. Illidan smiled. Victory was his. The first stage of his long-dreamed plan was complete.

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Akama listened as Lord Illidan howled the final words of binding. Magtheridon stood frozen, impotent, and full of baffled rage. He flexed his mighty body, but he was held.

It was done. The pit lord was vanquished. The defeat of Akama’s people had been avenged. The Temple of Karabor would be free of the demon’s baleful influence.

Akama allowed himself a moment of triumph. His strength, combined with that of the outworld sorcerers, had been enough to overcome even so potent a demon as Magtheridon.

Illidan descended to the ground. His wings snapped closed and slumped around his shoulders, and the glow faded from his magical tattoos. His arms dropped. Akama rushed to his side.

“Victory is ours, oh lord,” Akama said.

“Yes, faithful Akama, it is,” Illidan said. Was there a note of mockery in the way he stressed the word faithful? It mattered not.
“You have freed the Temple of Karabor.”
“We have freed the Temple of Karabor.”
“May I ask when I may begin, Lord?”
“Begin what?”

A cold hand clutched at Akama’s heart. He looked up at Illidan’s face. He could not read the expression there. The demon hunter’s features were a mask. A strip of runecloth concealed his empty eye sockets. Perhaps it was to be as Akama had feared all along.

“We must purify the temple, Lord, and prepare it to be returned to holiness. My brethren and I will work day and night to finish the required rituals. It will be as if Magtheridon’s vile touch never tainted this place.”

Illidan nodded slowly. “There will be time for that afterward.”

“Afterward, Lord Illidan?”

“After my business is concluded. There is much to do before Outland is freed.”

“But the temple is free now, is it not, Lord?”

“Nowhere is free while the Burning Legion reaches out for conquest. We must fortify this place. It must become a beacon to all who oppose the demons.”

Akama swallowed his disappointment. He had been half expecting something like this. He let none
of his thoughts show on his face. Instead he cast
his eyes down and said, “It is, no doubt, as you say,
Lord Illidan. May I withdraw and share the glad
news with my people?”

“You may,” said Illidan. He paused for a
moment and said, “The temple will be returned to
the Broken, Akama. Just not today.”

“Of course, Lord. I do not doubt it.” Akama
hurried out of Magtheridon’s throne room. He
must prepare to travel. He had business with one
who might be able to help. As he departed, he
noticed that Prince Kael’thas’s mocking gaze fol-
lowed him. The prince had known all along what
was going to happen. So had Lady Vashj. Fortu-
nately, the Broken had not entirely trusted Illidan’s
benevolence. Akama had laid such contingency
plans as had seemed wise when entering into any
agreement with one known as “the Betrayer.”

If the hunter of demons would not help him
regain the Temple of Karabor, there were those
who would. It was time to seek new allies. The holy
place of Akama’s people would be purified no mat-
ter what Illidan wanted.

Illidan stood with Kael’thas and Vashj on the
highest rooftop of the Black Temple, looking out
over the bleak landscape of Shadowmoon Valley.
The demon hunter had proclaimed his victory to the world of Outland from the battlements, but now he was restless. He did not feel as triumphant as he had expected. Instead he felt a sense of growing dread.

In the distance the sky was red as blood. Crimson clouds raced toward the Black Temple. Powerful winds plucked at Illidan’s wings. Rivers of reddish dust flowed through the air. Illidan’s skin tingled, and he noticed motes of fel magic all around.

Prince Kael’thas shouted, “What is this, Vashj? Where did this storm come from?”

The naga matron replied, “Keep your head down, fool! Something terrible is drawing near!”

The motes of magic grew brighter. A shimmering aura formed in the air near the roof, coalescing into a gigantic glowing figure. It hovered above them, large as a fortress tower. Something about its shape reminded Illidan of the Broken, of the draenei. It was horned. Its skin burned and flames flickered around its hooves, underlighting its whole body. It radiated power that dwarfed even that of the pit lord. Illidan knew he was once more in the presence of Kil’jaeden, the demon lord who commanded much of the Burning Legion.

Kil’jaeden glared down at Illidan. “Foolish little mongrel. You failed to destroy the Frozen
Throne as I commanded. And still you thought to hide from me in this forsaken backwater! I thought you to be more cunning, Illidan.”

It was impossible to do anything but meet Kil’jaeden’s gaze. The Deceiver’s eyes were magnetic. They compelled adoration and awe. They held an infinity of promises and an eternity of terrors.

A link was established between them. The thrill of contact was electric. Illidan felt Kil’jaeden’s cruel mind inspect his own. He caught flickers of the surface thoughts of his adversary. He saw worlds laid to waste, empires become playthings, ultimate power answer to the will of this mighty being and his servants. It was all part of the Deceiver’s technique of seduction. This, too, can be yours, those eyes promised, and they left no doubt about the truth of that pledge. Obey Kil’jaeden, and your enemies would be destroyed, your dreams of dominion fulfilled. Whatever you wished could be yours. Disobey Kil’jaeden, and . . .

A moment that Illidan had long dreaded and long planned for had finally arrived. He could not afford to let the Deceiver read his true thoughts. There were things he did not want Kil’jaeden to see, schemes the demon lord must not uncover until it was too late.
He felt the enormous force of Kil’jaeden’s will being brought to bear. The demon lord’s power crashed down on him like a tidal wave. He braced himself against it, held it in check, then allowed the outer walls of his mind’s defenses to collapse. Illidan reinforced the second layer of protection and slowly, carefully, let it crumble as if it were beyond his strength to resist. As he did so he invoked the spells he had prepared for this moment. Subtly and near imperceptibly his secrets vanished, buried deep within the vaults of his mind. At the same time, he allowed Kil’jaeden’s probe to smash through the final barrier and invade what appeared to be his innermost thoughts.

He felt the colossal intrusive presence of the demon lord. It riffled through his memories. It inspected the web of his recollections, searching, searching, searching . . .

Illidan kept parts of his mind sealed, as any sorcerer would. Everyone had dark secrets and longings that they wanted no one to see. Kil’jaeden understood such things, as he understood the weaknesses of all living beings. Illidan had left him some tempting morsels while shielding entire levels of his mind behind wards of misdirection.

The probe did not seek his hidden secrets. Instead it went directly to the memories of recent
events. Images flickered through Illidan’s mind, pulled to the surface by Kil’jaeden’s curiosity.

Illidan once again entered the corrupted forest of Felwood, keen to prove to his brother he was no tool of the demons. He heard the ring of warblaive against ancient enchanted blade as he battled the human traitor prince Arthas, servant of the Lich King, the being who led the undead army known as the Scourge. They fought to a standstill. Arthas tempted him with knowledge of the location of the Skull of Gul’dan. Illidan knew he had to seek it out . . .

He felt once more the surge of ecstatic power as he broke the seals on the skull and transformed into a demon. He used the artifact’s unleashed might to overcome the dreadlord Tichondrius—who had taken command of the Scourge—and his host, but even in the moment of victory, Illidan knew defeat, for his brother and Tyrande saw his transformation and turned from him. He understood again there was nothing left for him but exile.

He sensed Kil’jaeden’s malevolent amusement as Illidan relived his most recent meeting with the Deceiver. Kil’jaeden offered him a chance to rejoin the Legion if he would destroy the Frozen Throne and break the power of the rebellious Lich King. Malfurion thwarted Illidan’s attempt, dooming
him to flee Kil’jaeden’s wrath. He felt Kil’jaeden pause as he assessed the sincerity of Illidan’s effort.

He relived his flight to Outland, only to be recaptured by Maiev. Luckily, aid came in the form of Kael’thas and Vashj. Even the triumph of this very day and his overthrow of Magtheridon were scrutinized. He knew this time that Kil’jaeden was with him, watching the pit lord’s defeat. The Deceiver did not care who ruled Outland, so long as they ruled in the Legion’s name.

As suddenly as it had begun, the contact broke. The demon lord withdrew from Illidan’s mind. He realized that what had felt like long hours passing had been the space between two heartbeats.

Illidan’s heart pounded against his ribs. He was instants from destruction. At this moment, not even he could stand against the might of Kil’jaeden. If he was slain here, all his schemes and sacrifices would come to naught. He searched for the right words—they were the only weapons that could save him now. He put the appropriate note of pleading into his voice, knowing it would flatter the demon’s vanity to think Illidan abased himself. “Kil’jaeden! I was merely set back. I am attempting to bolster my forces here. The Lich King will be destroyed, I promise you!”
The demon’s gaze turned from Illidan to Vashj and then settled on Prince Kael’thas. Illidan knew that all of their lives hung in the balance. There was a moment of silence that seemed to stretch into an eternity before the demon spoke again. “Indeed? Still, these servitors you’ve gathered show some promise. I will give you one last chance, Illidan. Destroy the Frozen Throne, or face my eternal wrath!”

Fel energy surged. The blaze of light around Kil’jaeden intensified to the point of being unbearable, and when it faded, the demon lord was gone. Illidan exhaled a long breath. Had he done it? Had he concealed his true intentions from Kil’jaeden? Had he deceived the Deceiver? He supposed he would find out soon enough.

His fists clenched in rage at the thought of the way Kil’jaeden had treated him. Like a puppet. He fought his anger down. The time was coming when he would make his enemies pay for what they had done, even Kil’jaeden. Illidan just needed to wear the mask of obedience for a bit longer. To buy himself some time, he had to do what the Deceiver asked.

He glanced at his companions. They looked back at him with doubt in their eyes. Briefly he
considered telling them of his plans, but he dis-
missed the idea. They, too, had been examined as he had been. They, too, had felt the demon lord’s threats and blandishments. Who knew how they had responded in their secret hearts?

Illidan said, “Perhaps hiding here was not the most prudent decision. Still, the quest lies before us. Will you follow me into the cold heart of death itself?”

Lady Vashj coiled her serpent body beneath her and stretched her torso to its full height. “The naga are yours to command, Lord Illidan. Where you go, we follow.”

Prince Kael’thas looked dazed, as was only natural after having caught the full attention of a demon lord. He pulled himself together and said, “The blood elves are yours as well, master. We will drive the Scourge before us and shatter the Frozen Throne as you command.”

“We have some time yet,” Illidan said. “There are things that I must do before we go. We have to be prepared.”
Maiev Shadowsong studied the parched land, shielding her eyes from the blaze of the huge Outland sun with one gauntleted hand. Her gaze shifted from the dusty road to the hillside. She caught the scuttling movement of one of their alien pursuers as it ducked out of sight behind a boulder on the slope above them.

“I see our insectoid friends are still following us,” Anyndra said.

Maiev glanced at her second-in-command. Like all night elves, Anyndra was tall and slender. The sweat-stained tabard of a Watcher clung to her. A red scarf held her green hair from her eyes. Anyndra would not have been Maiev’s first choice as a lieutenant, but she had to work with what she had. The thirty troops strung out along the road behind her were the only survivors of the ambush that had ripped Illidan from her grasp mere weeks before. Lady Vashj and Prince Kael’thas would
answer for the deaths they had caused freeing the Betrayer.

“The ravagers will not give up,” Maiev said. “They are hungry.”

“I have heard they take captives to feed to their hatchlings,” Anyndra said. It did not surprise Maiev. Outland was a hideous place inhabited by monstrous creatures. Even her spell-woven armor could not entirely neutralize the heat. She wished she could wipe away the perspiration trickling down her brow, but her full-face helm prevented that. Instead she squinted at the ridge again. There were more of the scuttlers up there, a lot of them. Their movements reminded her of gigantic spiders.

In the distance she heard the blaring foghorn roar of a fel reaver, one of the titanic war machines that thundered across these parched wastes with earth-shaking strides. Two days ago the Watchers had barely managed to escape one. It had threatened to reduce them to a bloody pulp beneath its enormous demon-metal feet.

Maiev’s nightsaber let out a fierce roar as if responding to the challenge. The other riding cats echoed the sound. Upslope, a ravager scuttled into view to investigate the source of the noise.

“I could put an arrow through that ravager’s eye,” said Anyndra, producing an arrow with her
distinctive green-and-red fletching. She was proud of her skill with a bow and liked to display it every chance she got.

Maiev gave her a tight-lipped smile. “Why bother? There are thousands more of the creatures.” She nudged her nightsaber into its long, loping stride. “Let them follow us if they wish. If they attack, we will teach them the folly of their ways. Otherwise, do not waste precious arrows.”

The troops fell into line behind her, surveying their surroundings warily. Maiev knew she was going to have to keep a close watch on them. Back on Azeroth, she would never have doubted their commitment to the hunt, but here things were different. A few of her soldiers had had a wild look in their eyes ever since they had passed through the magical portal in pursuit of Illidan.

She took in another breath of the dry air. She had been places on Azeroth that were just as parched, but something about Hellfire Peninsula made her feel more thirsty than she had been even in the desert of Tanaris. At least there, she had known the ocean was near. So far they had found no evidence that this place had a sea. As far as she could tell, Outland floated in a great void. Water was scarce.

“He will not escape us, Warden,” Anyndra said.
Maiev shook her head, clearing it of her mus-
ings. She refocused on her lieutenant and the task at hand. “Of course he will not. I have not crossed the gap between worlds to let the Betrayer elude justice.”

“He has powerful allies here.” Anyndra’s voice was soft and held a hint of doubt. The other members of the company had fallen silent. They were listening to hear what Maiev had to say.

“No matter how powerful his allies are, he will not get away,” Maiev said. She decided to address her troops’ unspoken questions head-on. “We captured Illidan once. We will capture him again.”

Anyndra’s face froze into a mask. She glanced toward the ridge as if seeking to hide from her leader any doubts she might feel. The scuttling ravagers still kept pace with them. Maiev looked to the right. Scores of the insect-like beasts carpeted the other slope, flanking the road. If there were more ravagers ahead, Maiev and her people were riding into a trap. It would not be the first one they had fallen into here.

“He was not with Kael’thas or Lady Vashj when we first captured him,” Anyndra said. Clearly the way the two powerful sorcerers had rescued Illidan and slaughtered her fellow Watchers was on her mind.
Maiev said, “Prince Kael’thas is a treacherous renegade. Lady Vashj is a twisted abomination. If they get in our way, we will kill them.”

Maiev was not entirely sure how she would make good on that threat. She pushed that thought aside as a distraction. The blood elf prince and the naga matron were not important. Illidan was. She had not spent ten thousand years of her life making sure his evil was contained just so he could take the opportunity to work his wickedness now.

“You think this Broken sage will be able to help us against them? This Akama?” Anyndra asked.

“I do not know, Anyndra,” she said. “He may be of use to us. He may not. In the long run, it does not matter. We will triumph. We always have. We always will.”

Anyndra looked away. Maiev let the silence hold and gave her attention to their surroundings once more. The landscape of Outland had been torn apart by magic. It was a terrible warning of what dealing with those forces could unleash. She had seen its like before.

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Although it had happened more than ten thousand years ago, Maiev remembered it as if it were yesterday. No, as if it had happened only hours ago . . . the day when she had first seen the Burning
Legion. Her memories of that terrible time were as fresh as they had been when newly minted.

No one had understood what they faced back then, not really. They had thought the Legion was merely a temporary threat spawned by uncontrolled magic. They had thought Illidan was merely a misguided sorcerer. At least the others had. She had always known different.

The ozone scent in the Outland air brought back the memory of her first encounter with an infernal. She recalled the stench of the near-mindless thing as vividly as the night blossoms blooming amid the pavilions of Darnassus. It had seemed too big and too filled with magic to be opposed. The leaves shriveled as it passed, turned autumn-sere by the backwash of its blazing body. She called on the power of Elune, and the moon goddess destroyed the demon, shattering it into scorching fragments, leaving Maiev free to heal the seared flesh of its victims.

That had been only one of a thousand skirmishes. She had witnessed horrors during the War of the Ancients. Forests had burned and nations had died. It had taught her that there could be no compromise with those who sought power through the use of perverted magic. They needed to be stamped out, crushed, slain before they could
unleash destruction upon the innocent, before they could corrupt all that was natural and good.

Maiev had seen that from the very beginning. It was a pity that others had not shared her clarity of vision. If only they had heeded her back then, there would be no need for this hunt now. If they had slain Illidan when his wickedness had first been revealed, countless innocent lives would have been saved.

Instead they had followed the counsel of Illidan’s twin, Malfurion, and Tyrande Whisperwind. Time and again the pair had spared his life, even after his wickedness was plain for all to see. At the end of the War of the Ancients, when Maiev was set to end the Betrayer’s life, had they not granted him mercy and argued for his imprisonment rather than his death?

Since then, Tyrande had gone even further, slaying the Watchers guarding Illidan’s prison. She claimed she had freed him in order to gain his aid in the fight against the Burning Legion. At first it seemed that she had been right. Illidan had aided them, but then his true nature had revealed itself. He had absorbed the power of the Skull of Gul’dan and transformed himself into a demon, his body mutated to mirror the inner monstrousness of his soul. Even then, his brother had only banished him from the forests rather than striking him dead.
Maiev snorted. Illidan was but a tool of the Burning Legion. He always had been and always would be. Because of those fools, Maiev had spent ten thousand years guarding the wretched sorcerer. And for what?

Maiev ground her teeth in fury. Tyrande should have spent the long centuries imprisoned beside Illidan. She had proved that when, with a folly exceeded only by her arrogance, she had freed him. She had made a mockery of all the oaths that Maiev had sworn. She had turned ten thousand years of vigilance into a cruel joke. Even if she was now the ruler of the night elves, she had no right to do that.

A sound from the right drew Maiev’s attention. The ravagers were edging closer. They held their bodies low as they moved along on all fours, taking advantage of the undulations of the land to keep out of the line of fire from ranged weapons and magic. Perhaps they were more intelligent than Maiev had thought.

Given their numbers, it would not really matter. If they got close enough, they would pull down what remained of her force. She did not have enough troops left to be able to afford the loss of one. She raised her hand and gave the signal to ride at double time. With impeccable discipline, the
Watchers’ pace increased. Their great cat mounts stretched their long limbs and raced forward.

Anyndra rode up alongside Maiev, a questioning look on her face. She was wondering if Maiev would give the order to turn and fight. Now was not the time to senselessly throw away lives, not when the trail of the Betrayer lay before them and they had the scent of their prey in their nostrils.

She thought about Illidan—he was no longer an elf. She shuddered when she recalled what he had become. Horned and hooved and bat-winged, as much a demon as the eredar he had worshipped and then betrayed.

If he really had betrayed them . . .

That was the eternal problem with trying to comprehend the mind of Illidan. No sane individual could. Who knew what that maniac truly thought? His mind was so twisted by the dark forces of the magic he lusted after that his reasoning was impossible to follow. And that was a problem, for a hunter needed to understand her prey. It was the one sure way of trapping it.

It troubled Maiev sometimes. She had heard the whispers. She knew what was said behind her back. There were those who claimed that she had become as warped as the foe she had spent so long guarding. She laughed at the bitter humor of it.
Weaklings! All of them. They were not prepared to deal with the evil that had taken root so deeply among them. They feared those who had the strength to do what needed to be done. They made compromises with the demons that would destroy them, and fooled themselves into believing it was wisdom. Well, she knew better. She would never compromise. She would not rest until Illidan was dead or once again bound within his prison. She knew her duty. She would keep her oaths. She did not care what others thought of her. She would not be distracted from her quest.

“Warden Shadowsong!” Anyndra’s voice broke into her reverie.

“What is it?”

Her second-in-command flinched at the coldness in Maiev’s tone. “There!”

Maiev’s gaze followed Anyndra’s pointing finger. A host of ravagers lined the hillsides above them. The Watchers rode over the rise and looked down the long valley through which the road wound. Ahead of them, more of the four-legged monsters blocked their path. Maiev had not noticed the trap quickly enough, lost in her musings on Illidan. She cursed the Betrayer once again.

“Prepare for battle!” Maiev shouted.
Maiev and her Watchers drew themselves up in line abreast. The warden studied her people, noting whose glances darted around in panic and who stared at the enemy with cold, killing calm. It made her proud that far more eyes held the latter emotion. The night elves were surrounded and outnum-bered. Even facing hundreds of the alien monsters, they were not afraid.

Some of them produced their bows and glaives. Responding to the mood of their riders, the night-sabers roared defiance. The druid Sarius dis-mounted and transformed into a monstrous bear, his fur branded with mystical markings. Maiev considered her options.

To stand and fight was to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of the ravagers. Something had clearly stirred up the creatures.

She glanced behind her, at the way she had come. The long, dusty road lay empty. They could retreat with little resistance, but that would set them back to where they had started. She needed to thrust ahead, down into the land the natives called Zangarmarsh, if she was to make contact with Akama.

She had to admit she was curious. The Broken’s message hinted that he knew something of Illidan’s plans, and all she had managed to find out about
Akama from the draenei at the Temple of Telhamat was that he was a leader in a faction known as the Ashtongue tribe. He had access to troops, and he knew this land. He was the only one who had seen fit to contact her. How had his agents known where to find her? Why did he choose to reach out to her? Was it a trap?

Ahead of her the sky darkened, as if low hills or perhaps huge trees glowered on the horizon. The air carried a strange tang. The wind bore hints of rot and putrefaction and something else she could not quite place. There was just the faintest trace of moisture on the breeze blowing toward them.

Zangarmarsh was a monstrous place, a boggy fenland filled with alien horrors. Maiev took a deep breath and stared down at her foes. There were many of the beasts, but they lacked discipline. There were weak points in their massed ranks. If she concentrated all her forces, they could puncture the enemy line and ride like the wind down the road. She doubted the scuttling monsters would follow into the swamplands. These dry hills appeared to be their home.

“Form up in a flying wedge behind me. We will cut down these animals and smash our way clear.”

The Watchers nodded their understanding. Anyndra raised her horn and sounded one long,
silvery note. The night elves charged downslope.

A smile twisted Maiev’s lips as she drew her umbra crescent. Just for a moment, she could lose herself in the fury of combat and let her mind rest. The nightsaber roared. The elves crashed into the ravagers in an avalanche of fur, claw, muscle, and blade.

She slashed the nearest scuttler with her weapon, wishing it were Illidan. What is the Betrayer up to now? she wondered.