

DAN † E

CHARLES WHI † E

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CHAPTER 1

Torture

In a location of Hell known as the Black Wilderness, demons encircled a creature bound in chains. Although the creature was also a demon, he was being treated like a heinous criminal. It was darker than usual that night, but a strangely brilliant haze illuminated the area so that all the witnesses could see.

The devil appeared and ordered his selected executioner to tie the chained demon to a nearby tree. All the bloodthirsty observers looked on but one did not have an appetite for such extreme violence. That one was Dante Brimstone.

Dante sat on a branch suspended over the tied victim, the best seat in the house. He was enamored by the sight of the God of Hell, Satan. He couldn't take his eyes off him as he observed his boots, cloak and the charisma, which seemed to engulf everyone present. The only thing that eventually pried his gaze away from "God" was the blood-curdling screams coming from the demon tied to the tree as he was whipped.

The executioner was a frightening sight. At least eight feet tall, he wore a black mask made of leather and strange distorted metal. The head gear was odd. Were the dents related to past battles where enemies had struck with weapons? Dante wasn't sure.

"Raul, I'm going to ask you one more time. Who is your god? Who is the one you worship?" the devil said.

By now, Raul appeared to be spent. Twelve lashes from the executioner's merciless whip seemed to have sucked the life out of what was left of his whipped back.

"I serve the true God in Heaven." The one and only who created you, Satan," Raul said.

The devil smiled, "All right. I guess you've made your decision loud and clear."

Satan turned to the executioner. By now, his smile had turned to a frown of rage. "Untie him, turn him around and whip him from the front. I want

you to whip him until he's unrecognizable, but don't kill him."

The executioner loosed Raul. The victim dropped to the ground in a pool of his own urine and blood, amid chunks of his own flesh. The onlookers laughed. Dante didn't. Tears of horror flowed down his pudgy cheeks. He shook in pure terror as he continued to watch.

Raul sank his teeth into the executioner's left calf. The masked giant doubled over in pain. Raul threw a fistful of purple dirt into the masked behemoth's red eyes. As the executioner fell to the ground, Raul rose to his feet and ran for his life.

The devil's command was so loud it shook the purple ground and twisted black trees. "Get him, don't let him get away."

Raul ran as fast as he could despite the blood running into his eyes. Dante observed the devil as everyone ran after Raul. He saw the giant executioner staggering, trying to stand to face his master.

The devil looked into the huge henchman's eyes and spoke with ultimate disdain. "How dare you embarrass me in front of my followers?"

The behemoth, nervous, stuttered as he pled his case. Before he could finish his first statement, the devil ripped his head off his shoulders with his bare hands. Dante screamed at the top of his lungs and fell out of the tree. He landed inches from the devil's feet. He looked up and watched the devil stare into the wide-open eyes of the decapitated head. Then he stared at the ring. *Thank you, Professor, for giving me the power to be unseen as well as unheard.*

The devil threw the head into the deep crimson sky. *I think the crowd caught Raul.* He observed. Then he vanished.

Dante, teleported toward the distant sounds of celebration, thanks to the ring's power. He appeared in a far different terrain. He now found himself in thick green fog as the dark red sky began to cry tears of the same color. It was raining blood. As the wind swirled, it carried sounds of crying and screaming, as if countless beings were being tortured. Despite the rain and fog, Dante saw with clarity, maybe too much clarity.

Raul was engulfed by the angry mob. This time, they formed an inescapable circle around him.

Satan appeared with a smile on his face. *Of course his demeanor outshined the scary weather,* Dante thought.

Satan addressed his demon, "You thought you could escape me, Jesus pet?"

Raul stared at Satan, refusing to show fear. Dante wondered. *Who's Jesus?*

Of a sudden, a round object descended in a blur out of the sky. It was the executioner's head, and it landed on Raul's. Now Raul wore the masked head. Raul struggled with all his might to pry the head off as the onlookers roared with laughter. The devil looked around, not sure if he should bow or speak. He chose the former. The impact of the fallen head planted Raul into the green mud that reeked beyond description. Dante knew the soil well, not from personal experience but his Hell's Terrain class at the academy. The mud was feces from rodents the size of adult potbelly pigs. These rodents feasted on all forms of plant life, smaller animals and the carrion of condemned humans.

Raul was not amused by everyone laughing at his expense. He boldly rose to his feet, at last, as he managed to rip the masked head off and threw it at Satan. "That's why according to the *real* God, you're going to burn."

The devil laughed and said, "Not before you."

He blew in Raul's direction and a huge flame escaped his mouth. Raul was set ablaze on impact as well as paralyzed. Even in pain, he managed to scream, "God of Heaven, thank You for The New Breed who has made a way for me in Your precious Kingdom." The devil followed Raul's last words by asking the demonic mob a spirited question. "Who am I, my children?"

The demonic mob screamed, "You are God. You are God. You are God."

The devil turned 360 degrees with outstretched arms. "Yes. I am God."

Dante's mind raced with extreme confusion. His chief questions among many were; *Who is Jesus? Who is God in Heaven? Who is The New Breed?* Dante had never heard of them in the teachings at the academy.

The chants grew louder but the noise faded away for Dante as his pronounced thoughts pushed them into the background of his mind. He stared in wonder at the ring on his pudgy middle finger, reminiscing on an old friend's dying statement concerning a peculiar word called Truth.

Dante realized he had been away from the academy for some time. He worried about being in trouble. Surely, by now, the teachers would be combing the dormitories looking for him. As he teleported back to school, he wished, in vain, it was the same time it had been when he left.

Dante found himself in his dorm room, bracing himself for reprimand. It never came. As he looked at the clock, it showed midnight, the thirteenth hour. *The same time I left Professor Judas?* Dante pondered how could this be then he looked at the ring with a big smile on his face. *My old friend didn't have enough life to reveal the ring possesses the power to manipulate time.*

As usual, Dante fell asleep with a snarl on his face because his two roommates partook in an intense snoring contest every night. This night was different. They snored as usual but Dante was preoccupied with disappointment. His hero and idol wasn't who he thought. Satan, the God of love, had proved to be far from what he portrayed. Before Dante dozed off, he replayed the scenario of how he came into the fortune of receiving the ring, which had given him the power to see the real God of Hell. *The ring. The gift. The truth.* Dante thought, *The New Breed? The real God in Heaven who made Satan?*

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