

THE DEVIL'S ENGINE

HELLFIGHTERS

PART I
INSTIGATION

KEEP GOING

Her foster mom had always said that hell was a place you walked to on your own two feet.

It wasn't a lake of fire; it wasn't some fairy-tale land where sinners broiled in their own remorse, poked at by devils. No, it was just where you ended up when you went too far in the wrong direction, when you were too stubborn or too stupid to turn back, to admit you were wrong.

Hell was *right here*, and she was about to walk in through the front door.

Amelia stepped into the road, into the flashing neon lights reflected in the rain-slicked asphalt. The reflections blazed orange and yellow, like flames, but she was shivering as she bolted to the far sidewalk, to the building that sat there. It was a run-down walk-up, hunched against the night like a sleeping beast. The door was red. Bright red. It didn't belong here, the way that nothing belonged here, the way that *she* didn't belong here. She reached out for it and paused, the rain a cold mist that played with her fingers. From somewhere above her came a noise, something that was half shout and half scream. It was cut off with a dull thud, then silence again, like the building was trying to lure her in.

She swallowed and glanced back over her shoulder at the

street, at the lights of Astoria behind her. It was nearly eleven. Her mom wouldn't even know she was missing until the morning. She could sneak back home, curl up under her blankets. Sure, home wasn't heaven or anything, but at least her mom cared.

But *he* was here.

Sniffing against the cold, Amelia turned back to that big red door and pushed gently. It swung open like a crocodile's jaw, too easy, too eager. Inside was a lobby drenched in sulfurous yellow light, mailboxes to one side, a fire extinguisher to the other. A narrow hallway led into darkness, stairs visible at the end of it.

Something detonated with a soft thump, like a distant explosion, and the whole building swayed. Amelia rocked back and forth, and for a moment she understood that she wasn't really here, that she was somewhere else. The lights flickered, the building settled, and suddenly she wasn't alone.

"I knew you'd come."

He stood in the lobby, his eyes gleaming shards of obsidian.

Her stomach lurched like a startled animal, like it meant to bolt right out through her skin. He smoothed his hair back and smiled, holding out his hand. A gold ring glinted in the artificial light, winking at her.

Hell was a place you could get to only on your own two feet, and she used them now, walking toward him as confidently as she could. He opened his arms, slowly, and she thought of a bear trap being set up to spring. The building rocked again, swaying from side to side as if the world was trying to shake her from its back. Then the floor seemed to tilt downward and she slipped, sliding into him. His hands snapped shut around her neck, crushing, choking, and she screamed.

"You're mine now," he said, his lips against her ear. And the

rush of panic that roared through her was like standing in the path of a subway train. She fought him, slapping her hands against his shoulders, but he was an engine of stone and steel, his arms ratcheting tight around her throat.

You're not here, she heard herself say, but the fear was as real as it had ever been. He was going to kill her. Why had she listened to him? Why had she agreed to meet him? Nobody even knew where she was. Nobody would know where to look for her.

She opened her mouth, sought the flesh of his chest, clamped her teeth down. This time he was the one who screamed, and he pushed her away, his face warped by fury. She staggered back, spitting out the wet taste of copper. She wasn't in the lobby anymore, she was inside his apartment. Candles burned, the air was thick with cigarette smoke and something sweeter. Then he was on her, charging like a bull, blood spilling from the open mouth she'd left in his chest.

Hell was a place you walked to on your own two feet. She ducked beneath his sweeping arms, pushed through the ugly smell of him. There was a lamp beside his bed, big and gray. It didn't have a shade, just a dead bulb. She reached for it without thinking, knowing that there was nothing she could do to stop herself, knowing that this had already happened. She might as well try to stop the sun from rising.

"Get—"

It was all he had time to say before she turned, swinging the lamp like a bat. It was almost too heavy for her to lift, but once it was moving she didn't have to do anything, she let momentum work for her. He was running too fast to stop, so blinded by rage that he didn't even see it. They met like colliding trains—

thunk

—the base of the lamp a wrecking ball that stopped him in his tracks—

thunk

—and dropped him to the floor as if he had never truly been alive—

thunkthud

—as if he were a puppet stuffed with sand and sawdust, strings snapped.

Thunkthud

—she watched the lamp hit and she watched him fall, again and again and again—

thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud

—she would be watching it forever—

thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud.

This was hell, after all. She'd walked here on her own two feet.

Thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud.

“Hey.”

The room disintegrated, rocked into rubble and dust. Pan rose from it so fast that she couldn't even scream, burning into darkness like a rocket ship. She sat up, her heart rattling like a tired old motor, trying to open eyes that felt as if they'd been glued shut. Something impossibly hot but icy cold tingled at the ends of her fingers, the air full of the smell of electrical charge.

“Whoa! Pan!”

The world tumbled back into place and she blinked at it, her mouth gaping. Truck was right in front of her, the big guy's bald head gleaming in the light from the train car. He was holding her shoulders with the strength of a bear. She tried to

speak, found that she couldn't, like that part of her brain had been left behind in the dream. Instead she lifted a hand, seeing brilliant blue sparks run back and forth between her blackened fingers like snakes of light, slithering into nothing.

"It's okay, kiddo," Truck said, holding on to her for a moment more before letting go. "Just a nightmare." The whole train seemed to rock as he sat back against the seat. He uttered a soft, almost subsonic laugh. "For a second there I thought you were gonna fry us all."

Pan flexed her fingers, shaking loose another handful of sparks. They drifted away, sputtering out on the floor. Truck was right to be afraid. If she'd lost control in her dream then she might have taken out the entire railcar.

It was the risk you took when you had the power of the devil inside you.

Just like that it came rushing back—everything, every scrap of her life, every single footstep on the road to hell. She saw the guy she'd killed when she was thirteen, back when her name had been Amelia, not Pan. She saw the cops, the cell, the promise that she'd be locked up for life. She saw Herc, the shambling old dude who'd padded through the door. He'd told her all about an army known as the Fist, all about the secretive guy in charge, Sheppel Ostheim. And he'd offered her a choice.

"Come fight for us," he'd said. "You're tough, you've got a good heart, you're a soldier, and right now we need people who can fight. Ostheim has given me permission to recruit, and I want you. Because there is a war raging as we speak. A war you'll never hear about on the news, you'll never read about in the papers. But this war, it will change the world. Change the world, or destroy it. Door number one, I leave you here and you take your chances in lockup on Rikers Island while you

await your trial, and then a prison upstate once you're convicted. Door number two, come with me and save the world."

Door number two had led straight to the Engine.

She saw it now, that madness of moving parts buried deep beneath the streets of Europe. A machine that could not have been built by human hands, a machine that could rewrite the code of the universe and give you anything you asked for. Literally *anything*. She saw herself make her first deal—incredible strength and impossible speed—and felt the joy of it, the knowledge that she was more than human. And the terror that after 666 hours the deal would come to an end, and the Engine would send its demons to collect her soul.

Only the Lawyers kept her safe, the quantum mathematicians who broke into the Engine and cracked the code of the contract. Not that their success was guaranteed, of course. When you used the Engine, there was always a chance you would end up being dragged kicking and screaming into the flames.

Because that's where her foster mom had been wrong. Hell *was* real. Hell *was* a world of fire. And once they took you there, you'd be screaming for the rest of time.

"Pan?" Truck said, pulling her back. She glanced at him, tried to find a smile. When she couldn't, she turned her attention to the window. It was pitch black outside and her reflection stared back at her like a ghost. The train thumped forward on the tracks—*thunkthud, thunkthud, thunkthud*—carving through the night. The big guy sniffed, cleared his throat. "You sure you're okay?"

She snorted at the absurdity of the question. She had never been so far from okay. Her group, the Fist, had been all but wiped out. Their Engine—the only thing that gave them power—had been taken. Their Lawyers had been butchered,

their other Engineers assassinated. Now the dark side in this war—a bunch of world-murdering bastards known as the *Circulus Inferni*—possessed not one but two Engines. Their leader, Mammon, was practically unstoppable. His goal wasn't just to win the war. He wanted to use the Engines to open up the gates to whoever created them. He wanted to bring the Devil back to Earth. It was only a matter of time before he worked out how to do it.

And now that the *Circulus Inferni* had both Engines they would be gunning for the Fist's last four Engineers—her, Marlow, Truck, and Night. And when they found them, there would be hell to pay.

"Where are we?" she said. Truck shrugged, staring at the black canvas of the window.

"No idea. Germany maybe. Europe is bigger than I thought it was."

He stretched, then turned to the shape curled up beside him. Night was fast asleep, almost lost in the folds of Truck's jacket. There was no sign of Marlow.

"I sent him to the café car," Truck said, patting his enormous stomach. "Haven't eaten in like forever."

"You ate five baguettes and all that disgusting liver spread back in Paris," Pan said. "That was a few hours ago. I don't think you're going to starve."

Truck grumbled something back but she ignored it, checking her watch. There was no time there, just a countdown. The sight of it made her blood swim cold, as if the night had leaked into her veins. 586:12:13:58. Twenty-four days and change until her contract ran out and the demons came for her. Usually she wouldn't be concerned. Twenty-four days was enough time to crack half a dozen contracts. But with no Lawyers, and no Engine, she was powerless to escape. These could be her last

twenty-four days on Earth, and what would come after was so, so much worse than death.

“How much longer till we hit Prague?” she asked.

“Few hours yet,” Truck replied. “You might wanna grab some more shuteye.”

Drop down into the past again, into that apartment, into the blood. *Thunkthud. Yeah, no thanks.*

“Nothing from Herc?”

Herc had been inside the Engine when the Circle had breached the door. He'd been the only one to make it out, but they hadn't heard from him since. *Please be alive.* She willed the thought out into the dark, hoping it would find him. *Please be okay.* Truck shook his head, a glimmer of worry passing across his poker face.

“Man, I wish Marlow would get a move on,” he said. “I'm gonna waste away over here. You'll have to stop calling me Truck and start calling me, I don't know, Smart car. Or Scooter.”

Despite everything, Pan almost smiled.

“Shut up, Scooter,” she said.

She stood, stretching, hearing her joints pop like Bubble Wrap. The car was pretty empty, a handful of men and women in suits and a bunch of guys at the far end who'd been drunk and merry when they'd joined the train but who were now all fast asleep and snoring. A young guy two booths over looked up at her, smiling, and she threw a scowl back at him until he turned away.

“I'm gonna go stretch my legs,” she said. “Going mad sitting here.”

“Well, if you reach the food car grab me a Coke and a Snickers, yeah?” said Truck, shifting his weight. “Big one. Keep me going until Marlow gets back.”

She threw him a tired smile. Her entire body ached—partly

from the battle in New York, partly because it's what the Engine did, drained you of everything other than what you had dealt for.

"You ever think maybe it's not the Engine you need to worry about, it's the cholesterol that will kill you?"

"We all got our demons," he said.

"Amen to that," she said, holding on to the back of her seat as the train rocked.

"Hey, kid," Truck called out. "You be careful out there. Don't go far. Never know what you might find."

Only she *did* know.

"Hell," she said.

"Huh?" said Truck.

"Nothing." She pushed away from the chair, set off for the car door.

Hell was out there.

And once again she was walking into it on her own two feet.

DEAD MAN WALKING

Marlow wasn't sure how it was possible to get lost on a train, but somehow he'd managed it.

He reached the end of yet another car, the door sliding open automatically. The train felt like it was going at three hundred miles an hour, bucking so hard that twice now he'd almost spilled into the laps of other passengers. He pushed through into the next car, scanning the handful of people there. Nobody looked familiar.

He was positive he'd set off against the direction of travel. But he'd reached the end of the train with no sign of a café car, and now that he'd doubled back it felt like he'd come too far. But he would have noticed if he'd passed the others, wouldn't he?

Bracing himself against the restroom cubicle, he scrunched his eyes closed and rubbed them with his fingers. *Christ*, he was tired. Everything still ached from the battle in New York. His body felt like it had gone through a meat grinder then been fed to a pack of dogs. Not to mention the fact that the Engine was still sapping every ounce of energy that wasn't being used to fuel his powers.

He opened the restroom door and stepped inside, the overzealous air freshener punching him in the nostrils. The face

that stared back at him from the graffiti-etched mirror was a corpse's—too gaunt, too bruised. It was like he'd been buried for a month before clawing up from his grave.

Dead man walking.

Which wasn't too far from the truth, was it?

He didn't even know how he'd ended up here, a soldier in a secret war. It didn't make any sense. His brother had been the hero—blown up while serving his country in the Marines. Danny had always been the brave one, the one who walked fearlessly toward chaos. Their mom had always made it clear that Marlow was nothing like his brother, that he didn't deserve to live under the same roof. And that was true, wasn't it? After all, here he was, hiding in the restroom and wishing he never had to leave.

He perched on the toilet, reaching for the metal sink and grasping it. He took a breath and then squeezed. The metal buckled like it was tinfoil, and when he pulled his hand away the imprint of his fingers was left, a sculpture in steel. He still had the powers the Engine had given him—the strength of ten men, the ability to run faster than sound—but for how much longer? The Circle would break his contract as soon as they could, then he'd have nothing. Mammon and his soldiers could crush him and the other Engineers as easily as a kid stamping on ants.

Not Pan, though. Pan had been promised a different fate. Her contract would be left to expire, and once that happened the demons would come for her.

That's the price you paid when you pissed off the bad guys.

The train lurched from side to side hard enough to crack his head off the wall. He grunted, bracing himself until the rocking calmed. A storm was brewing in his gut, but it wasn't as if there was anything left in there. He'd emptied himself out on

the plane journey over. Plane *journeys*. They'd chartered a ride out of Pennsylvania, a tiny propeller plane that kicked like a rodeo bull and didn't have a restroom. They'd had to fork out another hundred bucks when they landed in Kentucky just for the cleanup. From there they'd taken another jet-prop to Chicago, then bought their way onto a cargo plane heading to Paris. Somewhere in those fourteen hours in the air Marlow was pretty sure he'd chucked up every major organ in his body.

The train wasn't much better, but at least they were on solid ground.

He stood up, took a leak while he was here, then washed his hands in the buckled sink. When he opened the door there was an old man waiting, tutting impatiently, and Marlow muttered an apology as he edged past him. He carried on walking the way he'd been going, wondering if he was going to hit the tail end of the train, if somehow his friends had just vanished. The thought of it, of being alone as he tore his way toward the dark heart of Europe, was enough to make him want to collapse into a seat and curl up tight.

He passed a young couple watching a TV show on an iPad, then a table with a family of three kids, all fast asleep. The next door slid open to let him through and he crossed between the cars. A woman was walking toward him and he stepped into an empty seat to let her pass, staring at the window. All it revealed was the reflection of the train interior, and his own miserable expression, but the bone-yellow face of the moon hung overhead, watching. He thought he could make out mountains there, too, lined up against the horizon. Their jagged mass made him think of the hulking wrecks of ruined ships.

"*Danke*," the woman said.

"No problem," Marlow said. "I think."

He stepped through the next door. Up ahead was a group

of young men, maybe half a dozen of them sprawled over twice as many seats. They were drunk, and they were loud, and they were all wearing Bayern Munich soccer shirts. One of the guys, lying across a bank of seats, stuck his foot out to block the aisle. He fixed Marlow with dark, red-flecked eyes.

"Was ist das Passwort, Arschgesicht?"

Marlow kept his head down, sighing. He was too tired for this. He pushed against the guy's leg but his tormentor held firm. Another of the men hopped down from the table he'd been sitting on, swigging from a bottle. The whole car stank of alcohol.

"Passwort," the first man said.

"Look," said Marlow. "It's late, I'm tired. I—"

"Er ist ein Amerikan Dummkopf!" shouted another of the men, obviously delighted. They were all getting up now, crowding the aisle. Marlow flexed his fists, knowing that one blow could knock them clear through the wall of the train. So why was his heart machine-gunning in his chest?

The train rocked hard and Marlow lost his balance, lunging to the side and almost falling into the foot well. The men howled with laughter and one of them threw a bottle at him. It bounced off his hip and rolled on the floor, the last dregs of vodka glugging into the carpet.

"Hey, just leave it, yeah?" Marlow said. He looked back, wondering if he should just walk away. *Run* away. It was what he did best, after all. He'd spent his whole life running. If he took flight now he'd move faster than sound, he'd be at the other end of the car in less than the blink of an eye. He'd done enough fighting this week to last a lifetime, a hundred lifetimes, and with creatures infinitely worse than this group of drunken douche bags.

"Hosenscheisser," said one of the guys.

Marlow turned to them. The first guy was on his feet now and close, close enough that Marlow could smell his breath. The reek of it made his eyes water but there was something else there, something worse than the sting of alcohol. It smelled like bad eggs, like something rotting. His stomach rolled into a cramp and he pressed a hand to it, grimacing.

"You really don't want to do this," Marlow said. "You have no idea."

He wondered if they would understand him, then the first guy smiled, smoothing back long, greasy hair.

"Poor little American boy, lost in the woods," he said in a heavy accent. His hands snapped out and caught Marlow in the chest, driving him back. One of the other guys was scrabbling over the back of the chairs, leaping to the floor behind Marlow, penning him in.

"*Mach es*," the guy said.

"*Ja!*" said another guy. "*Er hat es verdient, die Arschgeige.*"

"Ass violin?" came a voice from behind the group, one that was beautifully familiar. "Did you seriously just call him an *ass violin*?"

The men twisted around, and in the gap between them Marlow caught sight of Pan. She was leaning against a seat, so exhausted she could have been a hundred years old. But the relief of seeing her still made him feel like a kid whose mom has shown up just as he's about to get his head dunked in the can.

She said something else but it was drowned out by a serenade of wolf whistles from the other members of the group. They were shuffling toward her like the walking dead. Pan rolled her eyes and looked at Marlow.

"You really know how to make friends," she said.

"Hey," he replied, shrugging. "What can I say? I'm a popular guy."

“*Die Klappe halten!*” said the first guy, jabbing a finger at Marlow. “You shut it right up if you know what is good for you.”

There it was again, that stench of moldering food, of burning. It was enough to make him gag, and Pan must have smelled it, too, because she put a hand to her mouth.

“Jesus,” he heard her say. “What the hell is that?”

The first guy lunged at Pan, grabbing her free hand.

Bad idea.

“Hey, baby—” was all he had time to say before Pan let loose a short blast of electrostatic energy from her fingers. An explosion of light and a pistol shot rocked the train, and the guy thumped into the roof like he’d stuck a fork into a power outlet. He landed on the back of a seat, then flopped onto the floor, his whole body spasming. He farted loudly, the smell filling the car and making Marlow’s eyes water.

“Now that’s what I call an ass violin,” Pan said. “Anyone else?”

The guys were spilling back into their seats, gibbering like idiots. Pan just yawned, shaking the last of the charge from her fingers. Every light in the car was in a tizz, sparks raining down.

“*Schwein!*” yelled one of the men. He looked like he was about to charge at Pan, so Marlow placed a hand on his shoulder and flicked gently, like he was swiping his fingers over an iPad. The man slammed into the window hard enough to crack it, falling to the floor with a groan.

The four remaining guys were panicking, caught between him and Pan. The lights flickered off, the world outside etched in moonlight, perfectly visible. A second later they burned on again, trapping the car inside its own reflection. Marlow ducked into a seat, held out his hand.

“Go on,” he said. “Just leave it, yeah? Just go.”

The train rocked on, oblivious, and the window cracked

further. A jagged scar splintered it from corner to corner, the car filled with the deafening whistle of the wind. Marlow looked at it, studying the reflection of the men in the dark glass. Five of them, huddled in a group like frightened dogs.

Five of them?

That stench again, rolling through the car like the train had just plowed into a garbage dump. Marlow clutched at his mouth, pinching his nose. He looked at the men, holding up their hands in surrender. Four of them, standing right there in front of him. Then he turned to the window to see that fifth face, as faint as a phantom's until the lights cut out.

Not a reflection. It was somebody on the other side of the glass.

Somebody clinging to the side of the train.

Somebody grinning right at him.

The world flipped in a sickening twist of vertigo and he screamed Pan's name, pointing. The lights strobed, turning the world into chaos, a mirror maze gone mad. Pan followed his finger, and he saw the moment she understood, saw the expression on her face morph from tiredness to uncertainty to panic to full-blown terror—all in the space of a single heartbeat. She opened her mouth, but only a groan spilled out, low and awful. She didn't need to speak, though. He knew exactly what she was thinking.

They've found us.

UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE CENTURY

It had happened.

The Circle had found them.

Pan barely had time to acknowledge the grinning face at the window before it moved, *fast*. She saw a hand draw back, something glinting against the distant mountains. The same hand jabbed forward like a snake, puncturing the broken window.

She didn't understand what happened next, because what happened next was impossible.

The window stretched into the car, the glass bending like it was molten. Where the tip of the knife was it began to change shape, the point morphing into a snout, the glass beneath fracturing into a mouth, edged with gleaming teeth. It was as if a bear were pushing itself through the window. The translucent face uttered a bestial howl and Pan fell back against the seat, her legs no longer strong enough to hold her.

Whatever it was, it kept coming, a hand shattering free, swiping through the air and turning one chair to splinters and foam. It grabbed at another seat, trying to haul itself into the train. The glass formed shoulders, then a torso, ripping itself from the frame and filling the car with wind and thunder.

The drunken men were screaming, falling over themselves as they tried to escape. They weren't quick enough: the creature—*no, say its name, Pan, it's a demon, how could it be anything else?*—opened its jaws impossibly wide and lunged, clamping them shut around one guy's head. It sounded like somebody crunching an ice cube, and through the glass she saw his skull crushed like porcelain, an explosion of brain and bone. His body fell to the floor, twitching, gushing like a fountain.

"Pan!" It was Marlow, pushing against the tide of men as he tried to get to her. The demon glanced at him, dismissed him with a snort, then twisted its head to her. It had no eyes, and yet she could feel it studying her, trying to work out who she was. But it couldn't be here, it couldn't have come for her. She checked her watch. She had time, *she still had time*.

She lifted her other hand, feeling the electrostatic charge build up in every fiber of her body. The demon screeched, the sound primeval, and it threw itself at her, as big as a tiger, its glass body making it almost invisible as it shredded through chairs and tables.

She braced herself, forced the charge up her arm. Before she had a chance to fire, though, the demon exploded, detonating like it was packed with C-4. Shrapnel tore through the car and she threw up a hand to protect her face, crying out as glass embedded itself in her skin. When she looked again the demon was gone but a teenage girl was vaulting in through the missing window. The wind turned her short, red hair into a tornado, one that half concealed her face. But Pan still knew her.

The girl who'd been in Budapest with Patrick Rebarre, the enemy Engineer. The Circle had kidnapped Charlie, Marlow's friend, and dragged him to Europe, tried to use him as leverage

to get Marlow to talk. And this girl had shot him in cold blood. It had been the beginning of the end—because Charlie had been working with the Circle all along.

The girl grinned.

“Thought you could hide from u—”

Pan opened her fist, the electrostatic charge like an unleashed dog. A fork of lightning crossed the car in a booming flash, hard enough to blow out another two windows. The girl was fast, though, twisting behind a chair. The charge blistered past her and caught the retreating men, lifting them up and tossing them down the car like they were rag dolls. Had Marlow been there, too?

No time to check. The redhead was back on her feet, a blade in one hand, that crap-eating grin plastered over her face.

“That all you got?” she said, then drove the knife into the top of the nearest table.

As soon as she pulled the blade free the table came to life, the surface folding like origami, one section splitting into a gaping maw while the legs wrenched themselves from the wall. It was another demon, made up of the table and a section of the train floor. It shook itself like a wet dog, its noseless face sniffing at the air. The train groaned in protest, the raging tracks visible through the hole the demon had left.

What the hell?

Pan fell back through the sliding door into the darkness between cars. The creature was there in a heartbeat, too big to fit, its snapping jaws loud enough to make her ears ring. Then, just like the last one, it blew apart in a hail of lethal pieces that threw Pan along the floor and into the door of the next car.

She groaned, shaking the blotches of light from her vision. She could hear screams behind her as the rest of the train

caught on that something was wrong. The redheaded girl was marching leisurely down the aisle, using the tip of the blade to pick at a fingernail. She looked at Pan and shook her head.

“Finding you was too easy,” she shouted over the howling wind. “Mammon knew exactly where you would be. He wants—”

The girl’s head snapped forward and she dropped to her knees. Marlow was right behind her and he hit her again, driving her into the floor. He scooped her up and tossed her out the window like she was a bag of trash, dusting his hands off. Pan picked herself up, her flesh glinting with flecks of broken glass and steel.

“She won’t be dead,” she said as Marlow reached her. “And she won’t be alone.”

“How’d they find us?” he said, following her through the sliding door. The car was full of frightened faces, and the sight of Pan with her injuries didn’t do much to calm them. She ignored the stares. They needed to get to Truck and Night, needed to get the hell off this train.

“Had to happen eventually,” she said. “It’s the Engine. Can’t have it inside you without kicking out a homing beacon. Mammon probably didn’t even have to look for us. As soon as we landed in Europe it would have been like a siren going off in his skull.”

“So what do we do?”

She thumped past an old guy gesticulating at her and spouting French, walked through the next set of doors to see Truck right ahead. The big guy did the perfect double take when he saw her, hauling his massive bulk up from the seat.

“Ah, crap,” he said. “Already?”

“Already,” she replied. “Night, wake up.”

Truck reached down and shook the girl gently until her head emerged from the coat, dark eyes blinking.

“Already?” she said in her Spanish accent.

“Yeah,” said Pan. “That bitch from Budapest.”

“Any others?” Night said as she hopped off the chair, as graceful as ever.

“Yeah,” Pan said.

“What are we going to do?” Marlow asked, looking back, then out the window, then at her. “We’ve beaten them before, we can do it again.”

Maybe, but something told her that Mammon wouldn’t underestimate them twice.

“We crush ass,” said Truck, slamming a fist into his palm with a dull slap. He frowned, stared at his hands. “Oh,” he said.

“What?” Pan asked, but she already knew. Now that she was paying attention she saw that Truck looked different. Smaller, somehow. His skin looked healthier, more color in his eyes. “No, Truck. Don’t you dare.”

He thumped the window with his fist, grunting in pain. Then he looked down at Pan with an expression that belonged to a lost child.

“Circle cracked my contract,” he said.

So he was the first. They could crack only one contract at a time, and each one might take days. It made sense to take Truck out of the game. His strength was legendary, and he was an experienced soldier, too. Pan swore beneath her breath. This was bad. Without his powers, Truck was about as useful against the Circle as a baby hippo against armed poachers. He’d be as vulnerable as any of the normals on the train.

“No,” said Night, throwing herself on him, her arms not even making it halfway around his gut.

“Hide,” Pan said. “They’ll be coming for you, Truck. They’ll know you won’t be able to fight back.”

“No way,” he said. “I’m not leaving you guys, I’m not running. Can still knock some teeth out.”

“Truck,” said Night, letting go of him. “Don’t argue. You can’t win this one.”

“Listen to her,” Pan said.

“Screw you both,” he said. “You’re forgetting my other powers.”

He lifted both hands and proceeded to extend his middle fingers, wagging them in front of Pan’s face.

“Boom. Now what’s the plan? We fight?”

She shook her head and opened her mouth to speak, only to be cut off as the sliding door opened and a crowd of people appeared in a surge of panic.

“Come on,” she said. She didn’t want to find out what they were running from. She squeezed a burst of crackling electricity up to the ceiling, holding the crowd by the door, then led the way down the aisle and into the next car. It was the restaurant car, half a dozen people eating a late dinner.

“You have to be kidding me,” said Truck, aiming a scowl at Marlow. “You couldn’t find the goddamned café in *the next car down*?”

“I went the wrong way!” Marlow protested.

“Not the time,” Pan said. She spotted what she was looking for, pulling the emergency brake lever on the wall.

Nothing.

She tried again. Whatever happened next, it would be safer for everyone if the train wasn’t moving. But the lever was useless. If anything, she thought, they seemed to be going even faster, plates and glasses juddering across tables and spilling

to the floor. The diners were growing concerned, standing, crying out. Pan cursed again, pushing through the car until she reached the next emergency alarm. She pulled it hard enough to snap it free. Still nothing.

"They've got control of the train," she said.

"You serious?" asked Truck. He reached down and grabbed a handful of fries from an old man's plate. "It's an emergency," he spat as an explanation.

"Why?" asked Marlow, looking at her. He answered his own question. "They're going to crash it."

"What better way to kill a handful of Engineers?" she replied, setting off again. "We need to get to the driver."

She shouldered her way past the diners, all of whom were on their feet. One of them grabbed at her arm and she turned to see a middle-aged guy in an expensive suit. A younger woman—who could have been a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit model—stood beside him, looking just about as sick with fear as anyone Pan had ever seen.

"*Qu'est-ce qui se passe?*" the man asked, his fingers gouging trenches in her flesh. She tugged loose, practically hissing at him.

The woman by his side doubled over, gagging, and the man turned his attention to her. All Pan wanted to do was keep walking but something about the woman rooted her to the spot. She sounded like she was choking, and when she straightened up again there was a baseball-sized lump in her throat.

"Peekaboo."

The voice came from the woman, but not from her mouth. It sounded like it was being spoken from deep inside her throat, like a ventriloquist. She made a noise like a cat trying to cough up a hair ball. Her whole face was bulging, like something was

pushing against it from inside. Beads of blood were forming on her ballooning lips. The man in the suit staggered away, falling on his ass, and the woman lurched from the booth. More muffled words came from her ballooning throat: "I found you."

"Ah, jeez," said Pan, feeling the pins and needles in her arm as she prepared to unleash another charge. "This is gonna be bad."

Understatement of the century.

ONE FOR SORROW

The woman grabbed a handful of her own face and ripped it away, tossing the bloody mess onto her dinner plate, where it sat like a glistening steak.

Beneath was another face, a man's face, his grinning teeth the brightest thing in the world.

What the—

He lunged across the table, wrapping red-painted nails around Marlow's throat and squeezing. It was like being suddenly underwater, Marlow's lungs spasming so hard he thought his ribs were going to snap. The woman's skin was sloughing off as if the man were wearing a suit, the flesh beneath smeared with blood and dotted with tattoos. Panic drove Marlow's fist out before he even knew it, his knuckles ripping off another chunk of loose flesh. One of the woman's dead eyeballs rolled out and there was another beneath, burning with fury.

"Marlow," the thing mumbled, teeth pattering onto the table as new ones pushed through. "Mammon sends his—"

Something smashed into the creature's face with a sound like a cathedral bell. The pressure on Marlow's throat vanished and he clawed in a breath, reaching instinctively for the asthma inhaler he didn't have.

"Move!" yelled Truck, barging past Marlow, a fire

extinguisher gripped in his hands. He drove it into the man's face, knocking him against the window, then again, and again, the sound of it making Marlow's stomach shrivel. When he pulled it free there was nothing left of the creature but a cowl of loose skin, drenched in blood.

"What was that?" Marlow said, still gasping for air.

"A Magpie," said Pan, pushing through the screaming crowd. She was trying not to show it but Marlow could see the fear there, in every movement. "The power to put yourself in somebody else's body. I don't know who first thought of it but it's just about the worst thing you can do."

"Good way to travel long distances, though," said Night, hopping along beside. "You can leapfrog continents, so long as there's somebody to leap into."

"So he's—" Marlow didn't even have time to finish the question before a man at the back of the restaurant car started choking, putting a hand to his bulging throat.

"Nope," said Pan. "They're really, *really* hard to kill. Come on."

She jogged through the door and Marlow followed, swallowing the fear down into his churning stomach. The whole train was in an uproar now, the aisles blocked with terrified passengers. Pan swore, grasping at her hair.

"This isn't going to work," she said. "Night, you think you can get up top?"

"Of the train?" she said, one eyebrow just about launching itself into orbit. "Sure, *de nada*."

"Get to the front, try to stop the train. We'll fight our way through and meet you there."

"I'll go with her," said Marlow before he could even think about it. "I can keep up."

Pan nodded, wiping a shaking hand over her mouth.

"Watch out for that redhead," she said. "I don't know what

kind of powers she traded for but I've never seen anyone be able to conjure demons like that. Never. Not even the Pentarchy."

Something roared in the railcar behind them, unleashing a current of screams. Pan glanced over Marlow's shoulder and he could see it in her eyes—not just fear but something else, something that sent a bolt of panic up Marlow's spine.

Resignation.

He reached out and grabbed her shoulders, careful not to squeeze too hard.

"Pan, we can do this," he said. "We *will* do this."

She offered him a weak smile, one that quickly took flight. She pushed him away, turning and plowing down the aisle.

"Just get to the front," she shouted back. "And if you can kill that bitch on the way then nobody is going to complain. Come on, Truck."

"Good luck," the big guy said, rolling after her with the gore-smeared fire extinguisher still gripped in his fingers.

"Yo y tu, *amigo*," said Night, standing to one side and gesturing at a window. Marlow took one last look at Pan then jumped onto the seat, placing both hands on the glass and pushing gently. The pane exploded from its panel and the sudden rush and roar grabbed Marlow by the stomach and threatened to pull him out with it. He choked back a scream and grabbed the top of the window, his fingers squeezing the metal like it was dough. The world flashed past in shades of black and gray, too fast.

"I'm not sure if I can do this," he yelled, his words swallowed whole by the wind.

"It's easy," said Night, appearing by his side. She stretched, grabbing the side of the train and pulling herself up, vanishing in a flash. "Just don't look down."

He looked down.

Beneath him the ground seemed to thrash and churn as if it were an ocean. Even with the power of the Engine inside him he wasn't sure if he'd survive that fall. Maybe it would be better if he stayed inside the train? Yeah, Pan and Truck would need his help, he should *definitely* head back inside.

He heard the sound of the sliding door, looked down to see the Magpie stride into the car, peeling scraps of a stranger's face from his own. The man scanned the crowd then found Marlow, spitting out a slab of pink tongue before grinning.

Screw this.

Marlow braced his foot on the edge of the window and reached up, gouging a handhold in the roof of the train. Then Night's slender hands were wrapped around his, pulling him up. It was like being caught by a tornado, the strength of the wind unbelievable, making him slide along the smooth roof. He ducked down and rooted himself in place, tears turning Night into a blur.

"Come on," he thought she said, his ears full of thunder. "It's not far."

He blinked, staring past her to where the head of the train coiled into the mountains, everything painted silver by the light of the moon. How many cars? Four? Night turned and vanished as she broke into full speed.

It's not far.

Marlow lowered himself into a sprinter's start, took a deep breath of freezing air, then started to run. Instantly the world slowed into blissful stillness, the wind dropping to a breeze, the world sliding past like a lazy river. Night shuddered back into view, leaping onto the next car. Marlow followed, careful not to trip on the vents. He propelled himself over the gap, the rush of it almost enough to make him smile.

He landed, sliding on the smooth metal, and for a second he thought he was going off the side. He collapsed onto one knee and time snapped back on, full of fury, the wind so powerful it actually lifted him off the roof for a second. He punched downward with enough force to put a hole in the metal, clinging on until the vertigo had passed.

A voice behind him, whisper thin. He turned to see *her*, the redhead, two cars back. She wasn't holding a knife this time, she was holding a gun. A *big* gun.

Marlow pushed himself up, hearing the *crack crack crack* as she fired. He started to run again, the wind snatching the breath from his lungs. One bullet passed him, as slow as a paper plane, red hot. Then something caught him in the shoulder, not fast but relentless, burrowing into his skin.

He fell back into real time, landing hard, his shoulder on fire. The wind tried again to snatch him, dragging him toward the edge of the train, and he only just managed to stop himself tumbling over into death. He steadied himself, grabbed at his shoulder, and saw blood on his fingers.

I've been shot.

And even as the horror of it was sinking in he looked back, saw the girl leap over the gap between cars, saw her aim her gun and fire.

He rolled, trying to get back to the middle of the train. The bullet pinged off the roof, another searing just over his head. The coldness in his shoulder was fast becoming pain, the fingers of his right hand numbing—*ohcrapohcrapohcrap*—and she was still advancing, her hair a blazing pyre, her grin brighter than the moon. She leveled the gun again.

"Hey, *puta!*"

Night fizzed into view beside Marlow, waving her arms. Then she was gone again, the girl firing one more round into

nothing. She chucked the gun, pulled out a knife, then lurched to one side like she'd been hit by an invisible sledgehammer.

Marlow clambered to his feet, tested his shoulder again. It was bleeding, but there was no entry wound. It had grazed him. He started running, back the way he'd come, gritting his teeth against the agony. The world slowed and he saw Night skid to a halt, spin around, then start back. The redhead was moving impossibly slowly, twisting the blade earthward, stabbing it toward the roof. Marlow saw that it was made of old metal. It reminded him of the bolts Pan had used in her crossbows.

He leaped the gap onto the next train car, running at the redhead from one direction while Night converged from the other. Night got there first, shoving the girl with everything she had. The redhead teetered back in slow motion and almost fell, managing to get one foot behind her to brace herself.

Then Marlow was there, skidding to a halt, the roar of the wind like a building had just exploded next to him. He punched, the redhead weaving out of the way with expert grace. She ducked under his arm and deflected Night's kick, twisting her body and planting a big black boot in Marlow's gut. He staggered back, wheezing. The redhead crunched an elbow into Night's neck then started to drive her toward the side of the train.

"No!" Marlow yelled, throwing himself at the redhead, unleashing a punch. She saw it coming, jabbing out her other elbow so that Marlow's fingers crunched into it. He cried out, feeling like he'd plunged his knuckles into broken glass. Then that same elbow connected with his nose, once, twice, in an explosion of light and agony, another kick lifting him off the roof. The wind got under him, tossing him down the train car like he was made of paper.

He didn't stop for long enough to let the pain in, running

back the way he'd come, fast, fast enough to slow time again. Night was teetering on the edge now, almost over, and Marlow lashed out with everything he had, feeling the whole force of time as it crunched back to normal, all that power clenched inside his fist. It struck the side of the girl's head like a cannonball and she dropped, rolling into the wind. Marlow used his momentum, stamping hard. She wormed back, his foot leaving a crater in the roof where her head had been. Then she flipped, landing on her haunches, the blade still gripped in her fingers.

"You guys just don't get it, do you?" she said, shaking blood from her nose, from her mouth. She looked groggy, but she was still smiling. The Engine was already starting to heal her. "It's over."

Then she plunged the knife into the roof, and all hell broke loose.