

**Angelguard**



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Not all the spirits are good

**Ian Acheson**

MONARCH  
BOOKS

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

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*For Fiona*



# Acknowledgments

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# Cast of Characters

## **HUMANS**

### ***In the UK***

Thierry Le Bon  
Ruth, his wife  
Mikey, their son  
Charlotte, Thierry's sister  
Jerome, Charlotte's son (deceased)  
Danny and Joanna Connolly  
Jack, their son, godson of Jack Haines  
Major Bill Lancaster, SAS

### ***In Australia***

Jack Haines  
Sarah Haines, Jack's wife  
Grace and Catherine, Jack's infant daughters  
Jane, Jack's sister  
Louise Haines, Jack's mother

### ***In the USA***

Loren Summers  
Ray Malone, Loren's boss  
Candice Malone, his wife  
Tom Mayer, Loren's ex-husband and Ray's colleague  
Taylor and Luke, Loren's children  
Stephen Haines, Jack's younger brother

### ***In Europe***

Leopold Grosch, Belgian industrialist  
Marie Verheyen, Belgian deputy prime minister and Grosch's mistress  
Zhou Chau, hitman and wireless technology expert  
Vincent and Farkad, Grosch's henchmen

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Pienaar, Swartbooi and du Preez, South African mercenaries  
Colonel Charles Smithson (“Smitty”)  
Mr. Ballack, head of security for the G8 Summit

### **ANGELS**

Tagan, leader of the European region  
Athaniel

#### ***Guarding the Le Bons***

Elijah  
Hannen  
Andola (later redeployed to guard Zhou Chau)  
Jolane (also guarding Zhou Chau)

#### ***Guarding Loren Summers***

Arlia  
Emur  
Landen  
Grindor  
Mylee

#### ***Guarding Jack Haines***

Darius

### **DEMONS**

The Fallen Angel  
General Thrasos, Chief Warlord of the Fallen Angel  
Lord Bacchazar, demon in chief for Europe, the Middle East  
and Africa  
Volkyre, his adviser  
Drakkin  
Chonnggi  
Tetak  
Sergeant Slyzor  
Zeldax  
Agramon, demon in chief for the Americas and Asia  
Grazag, Tom Mayer’s keeper



# Chapter 1

## London, January, the present

“It’s time!”

The voice was resonant, powerful, yet warm. Thierry, rising through the mists of unconsciousness, longed to hear it again.

Yet even as he stirred, the being was gone, the golden glow fading. He felt a pang of sadness. He wanted more time, to draw closer, to soak up the warmth and love...

“Nurse! I need a nurse in here!” A loud male voice jarred.

“Coming, doctor,” a woman’s voice responded. “I’m just finishing up here.”

The doctor was checking Thierry’s body, feeling his arms and legs and opening his shirt to examine his chest. Thierry tried to open his eyes but the light was too bright. What happened? Why was he here? His head was pounding.

He heard a curtain being drawn.

“Good. Nurse... Evans, is it? I need you to clean this head wound before I stitch it.”

“That all?”

“Yes. We’ll get him down for some X-rays as soon as we can. And overnight for observation, if you can find a bed on a ward.”

“That won’t be easy. It’s a madhouse out there.”

“Are they still coming in?”

“No, I think that’s the last of the casualties. They’re still bringing out the dead – the Whittington’s acting as a temporary morgue.”

“Right, I’ll get on. It’s going to be a long night.”

Thierry heard it all, vaguely. Beyond the curtain there were

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hurrying feet, the clatter of trolleys, raised voices. He grimaced from the vise-like pain in his head.

“Can you help me?” he whispered through dry lips. “My head...”

“It’s OK, luv, you’re gonna be all right. Just have a headache for a while.” She was swabbing the side of his head, her touch gentle but firm.

There was a pain in his side, every time he breathed in. Like an iron band round his ribs. Like... his mind went back... like playing football, a few years back, his team against Dartford United, the collision with their number nine, two cracked ribs...

Football! Recollection came flooding back. He’d been watching a football match! Jerome’s Christmas treat – his excited face grinning up at his uncle, yelling for his team. The Blues did well in the first half... then, right on the half-time whistle, the blast knocking him forward – a noise like the end of the world, screams – then nothing. Nothing. Waking up here, in pain.

His eyes flew open and he tried to raise himself on one elbow, only to fall back with a strangled gasp of pain.

“Jerome! Where’s Jerome?”

“It’s OK, calm down.” He squinted against the light and saw the nurse, a solidly built West Indian, bending over him.

“You’ve taken a bad knock on the head. I’ll get you something for the pain. The doc’s just coming back to stitch your head.”

Thierry closed his eyes and waited, his mind probing at the muddled memories. He remembered walking to the stadium, Jerome skipping alongside him. He remembered parts of the game. Then a noise like thunder, then nothing.

“Now then, Mr. Le Bon.” It was the doctor’s voice. Thierry looked up.

“What happened to me?”

“Hold still.” The doctor was expertly suturing the head wound, which gaped pink against Thierry’s dark-brown skin. “It was a bomb – a big one. Blew the stand apart, killed nearly everyone in it, lots of others injured. You’re one of the lucky ones. Someone must be looking out for you. Only a handful got out of the West Stand alive.”

“Jerome – my nephew...”

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“I’ll ask the nurse to see if he’s on our lists anywhere. If not, I’m afraid you’ll have to wait for police reports. Everyone’s pretty busy tonight. We’ll see if we can get you a bed on the ward. You’ve had a nasty knock on the head.” The doctor spoke rapidly, and pushed the curtain aside as he hurried away.

Thierry was drifting in and out of consciousness. He had no strength to call for help as he fell sideways and vomited over the side of the bed.

\* \* \*

“How’s our patient?” The voice was concerned. A tall blond angel gazed in through the window of the hospital room, unseen by the hurrying medical staff and the victims lying on trolleys. Over eight feet tall with snow-white hair and piercing blue eyes, he wore a silver cloak, which swung back to reveal a three-foot scabbard hanging from his belt.

“Lucky to be alive, Tagan, sir,” reported a second angel, as dark as the first was fair. “His head struck a concrete ledge, and his ribs were broken when an advertising hoarding landed on him.” He clenched his fists. “Hannen did a tremendous job – he moved the hoarding to cover Thierry and protect him. He took a bad knock himself, from a demon who tried to stop him. He’s nursing his sword arm as we speak.” Both knew their comrade would heal fast. Angels did, as a rule.

“And Thierry?”

“His body will take a little longer to mend. But his spirit...”

“I know, Athaniel. Losing his nephew will cause him more pain. How that affects him remains to be seen. It could turn him further away. And he is vital to our purpose.” The angel paced up and down by the window, deep in thought. “He needs guidance as well as protection. I will order Elijah to join Hannen as his guard.”

“Yes, sir.” Athaniel hesitated. “Did you know Lord Bacchazar himself appeared at the scene?”

“His presence did not go unnoticed. I cannot recall when last the old warlord supervised an attack in person. Today’s events must be important to him.” Tagan looked heavenward.

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“Gabriel and Michael have called a conference of all the leaders of the continents. I must speak to Elijah and Hannen and get their views.”

“Elijah was in the stand opposite and saw it all. There were over a thousand demons to our one hundred knights, and we had no intelligence of their plan, so we could not prevent it. But we will have our revenge!”

The dark angel drew his sword and raised it menacingly. It shone with a brilliant radiance, which did not come from the leaden January sky. It was a huge weapon, fit for an angelguard of Athaniel’s standing – right hand to one of the most senior in the angel kingdom.

“You will have your day, my friend.” Tagan smiled briefly at his subordinate’s intensity. “But for now we must be vigilant if we are to prevent another attack, and lay our plans with care. I will seek out Hannen and Elijah. Stay here till they relieve you.”

Tagan turned, took two paces and sprang silently into the air, white wings opening out of his back to carry him swiftly into the sky above.

Athaniel returned to his duty at the window with renewed diligence.

\* \* \*

It was dark when Thierry awoke, and the silence told him that he had been moved to another room. He tried to lever himself up on his elbows. *Wow! That hurt! Must be time for more painkillers.*

In the gloom he could make out three other beds, and a light coming from a half-open door. He pressed the call button. Where was Ruthie? Did she know what had happened to him? His head felt clearer suddenly. When the nurse appeared he was ready with questions.

“What’s the time? Does my wife know where I am? Can you find out about my nephew? Jerome Sanders – he’s six.”

“Hold on a minute, one at a time,” said the nurse, switching on a dim light above his bed.

“Pain relief first.” She turned him expertly and administered an injection.

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“It’s a quarter past ten. You’ve been here for about four hours. I don’t know about the boy, but your wife’s outside. I’ll fetch her.”

Thierry’s heart leapt. Ruthie!

A woman in a black leather coat appeared in the doorway, glanced around the room and came swiftly over to the bed. In the dim light he could see that her eyes were swollen with crying, and tear tracks marked her smooth brown skin. To Thierry she had never looked more beautiful. She bent and kissed him tenderly.

“Hi, baby,” she said, touching his face gently. “How’re you feeling? Sorry it took me so long to get here. I had to get a sitter for Mikey. And then it took forever to find out which hospital you were in, and the traffic’s chaos. They said I had to wait till you woke up—” The words tumbled out and she stopped to draw breath. “Oh, thank God you’re alive!” Tears sprang to her eyes again. She clung to his hand as if she would never let it go.

“Ruthie – where’s Jerome?”

Ruth hesitated and Thierry saw the answer in her eyes.

“Oh, no... Charlotte...”

His sister. She would never forgive him. He’d promised to take care of her little boy. Thierry felt as though he was drowning in an ocean of guilt. He wanted to cry out but he didn’t have the strength. The pain in his head and his side faded away as the drug-induced mists closed over him again.

“I’m sorry, babe.” Ruth’s quiet sobbing was the last thing he heard before he lost consciousness once more.

\* \* \*

Hours passed. He was dimly aware of Ruth leaving. Nurses came and went. He drifted in and out of sleep.

Then suddenly he was wide awake, and struggling to breathe. It was pitch black – where had the lighted doorway gone? Where were the other beds? He seemed to be caught in a nightmare, blind, deaf, unable to escape, yet writhing under a weight, which crushed the air from his lungs. His whole body was in agony. A chill ran up his spine. *Where am I? Am I dying?*

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A sulfurous smell stung his nostrils, and he felt hot breath on his face. Something was looming over him, threatening him, enveloping him in darkness.

Then right on the edge of audibility he seemed to hear faintly a distant screeching sound, a crash, and the weight lifted. He drew a shuddering breath and it was clean, cool air, free of foul odors. Something touched his brow gently, and he relaxed, sighing, as peaceful, dreamless sleep received him again.

Like a lightning bolt, three white knights had crashed into the black cloud surrounding Thierry's bed. The demons screeched and hissed, furious at being taken unawares, as the bright blades slashed at them. Athaniel and Elijah forced four of them back, while Hannen darted forward and grabbed the last by the throat as he crouched over Thierry's sleeping body. The demon twisted in the air and drew his own sword, but Hannen smashed it from his grasp, leaving him defenseless. Black wings unfolded and the demons fled, disappearing through the ceiling like smoke in the wind.

Athaniel sheathed his sword. "You two arrived at the right moment. I couldn't have taken all of them."

Elijah's sword was still glowing with the heat of battle. "Let's finish them!"

"No, Elijah," said Hannen, placing a restraining hand on his arm. "Our task is to guard Thierry. Athaniel will report to Tagan."

The dark angel nodded his understanding and left. Hannen laid a gentle hand on Thierry's brow. "Sleep peacefully, my friend. You are safe."

\* \* \*

A week later Thierry was at home, though his head still ached intermittently, his ribs were healing and the livid bruise on his left shoulder made movement painful.

Ruth was taking a phone call in the hall, though she didn't seem to be doing much talking. When she came back into the room he could see she'd been crying again.

"How are they?" he asked.

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“Your mum’s really struggling, but she’s holding it together for Charlotte. Troy is doing it tough too.” Troy was Charlotte’s ex. “They know what happened to Jerome now. They found him under a pile of rubble. Darling, he would have died instantly – a huge piece of concrete struck his head. He wouldn’t have known anything about it.”

Ruth put her arms round Thierry, holding him gingerly because of his bruises. To Thierry the pain in his body was trivial compared to the pain in his heart. Why couldn’t he have saved him? Why did Jerome have to die while he lived? Why had he even suggested the trip in the first place – a little boy’s first live football match, watching his beloved team play at home? It was all his fault.

His arms tightened around Ruth, and then he pulled away to look at her.

“It was strange, Ruthie,” he said. “I remember looking up, just before half time. The sky was really black – as if all the clouds had gathered over the stadium. I could see blue sky all around it – just this one big black cloud over us. It felt menacing – as if something was going to happen.”

Ruth looked at him doubtfully.

“I know, it sounds crazy. But it was real. Then the ref blew the whistle and – wham! Everything just went blank. I didn’t have time to grab Jerome or anything.”

Tears were streaming down his face.

Ruth kissed him. “It’s good to talk about it, babe. Let it all out. It’ll help.” She held him for a while longer, and then left him to rest. He still slept a lot during the day, and often Ruth would sit beside him, holding his hand, ready for the moment when he would wake up shouting for Jerome, reliving the explosion and his fear. Sometimes as he slept he half-heard her murmured prayers – for him, for Charlotte and his mum, and for all the other families who mourned.

He dozed and woke to the same anguished thoughts. I survived – why not Jerome? Anger welled up inside him. God! You could have stopped this pain, this heartache! Why take such a little boy away from his mum, whose life is already so tough?

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He found he was beating his fist on the arm of the sofa. If I could get hold of the person who did this, I'd kill them with my bare hands!

His fury exhausted him. If only I'd never taken him there. If only...

His clenched fist relaxed. If only...

Healing sleep claimed him again, and Hannen gently withdrew his hand from Thierry's arm.

The angelguard was watchful.

\* \* \*

Not far away, in a disused warehouse, a meeting was taking place.

The building had been empty for years, and to human eyes it was dark and deserted now. But in a far corner a huddle of black creatures were arguing noisily. Suddenly the group scattered as one of their number was thrown bodily across the building and crashed against a wall. A second followed, landing on the first. Raucous laughter and hissing broke out among their fellows. Then a misshapen form hobbled out of the group, waving a crooked walking-stick.

"Spineless cowards!" he croaked. There was another burst of laughter, quickly hushed as another creature stepped out of the shadows. This one dwarfed the others, standing eight feet tall, and wielded a huge sword with a muscular arm. He let out an ear-splitting roar, which caused the two ejected beasts to cower against the wall.

"I don't want to see you two cowards again, until you each present me with the hide of a white knight!" snarled the demon lord. The scars that disfigured his face throbbled a deep crimson. "If another mission is interrupted by the haloed ones, do not think to return unless in victory. If you fail, then die fighting the enemy, not in fleeing. Do I make myself clear? Now go, before I feed you to the monsters of hell myself!"

The two struggled to their feet and shakily took flight through the warehouse roof.

Others flew up beside them, mocking and crowing.

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“Be silent!” bellowed the huge demon. “Let this be a lesson to you all. Failure will not be tolerated. We must not let the white knights prevail. We tasted victory at the football stadium. Let us savor it again.” He sheathed his blade.

“We have noted the presence of the angelguards around one survivor – a man named Le Bon. He or his family may be of some importance to the enemy. We do not yet know why. But we should do away with them before the white knights can awaken their spirits. I want them under attack by every means – mentally, physically, and emotionally. Do you hear me?”

There was a mumble of agreement.

“We must outwit the white knights. I have battled with them often enough to know they are not easily deterred. Away with you! Drakkin has a base in a vacant shop close to Le Bon’s house. Go and keep watch.”

The remaining demons took flight, passing through the physical barrier of the roof as though it were mist. Only two remained: the powerful monster and the elderly one with the walking-stick.

The huge beast spoke first. “Volkyre, wise old sorcerer. Why the white knight interest in Le Bon, do you think? What role does he play in their plans?”

“Lord Bacchazar, take my counsel. Their presence around Le Bon is only small. He may just be wavering on the brink of belief, and the white knights are encouraging that. I would not concern yourself, my lord. More significantly, I hear that the plans for Los Angeles and Sydney are now in place. Both will be marvelous victories. And it is time for us to plan for the biggest strike of all. More and more will suffer, more will come to doubt, to fear, to succumb to evil.”

Volkyre’s voice rose to a quavering shout, flecks of black spittle flying from his curling lips. “And, Lord, what a great day that will be. You will stand alongside the Most Evil One, as commander of this earth-shattering victory!”

Bacchazar merely smiled.