



# ILLIDAN

WILLIAM KING



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Four Years Before the Fall*

**G**REEN METEORS RIPPED THROUGH THE DARK clouds that perpetually obscured the heavens over Shadowmoon Valley. The ground shook as the monstrosously 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. 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 blood-red 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 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'thas—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'thas 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,” said Illidan. “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 bellowed 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 dropped 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."

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 supporting 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 oceangoing ship, weighty as a battering ram. Flanking him were two gigantic, batwinged 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 energies 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.

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 followed him. The prince had known all along what was going to happen. So had Lady Vashj. Fortunately, 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 matter 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, illuminating 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 his adversary's surface thoughts. 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 warglaive 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 instantly 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 dismissed 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 must be prepared."

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