

INTRODUCTION

For many millennia we were confined—unable to break free from our test-tube world. Through our drive and intelligence, we unlocked the door to another reality. We call it ... the Unison Galaxy.

Four chosen individuals were born with greater destinies than the rest, yet they will struggle to find their purpose. Soren Cutrone, Asuka Akioto, Damonico Damirror, and Amelia Vossler couldn't be more different. Their lives become stifled, forced to go to school on the newest planet in the Unison Galaxy—New Earth. Dragged away from their homes on distant worlds, the battle to adapt is dreadful. Not only do they feel trapped and out of place, but they soon realize that their reasons for attending Unison Grand are crucial.

The journey of four is a phase that will become a part of their lives forever.

Soren Cutrone, a modest genius native to Earth, battles with the unknown to return to his true age, while trying to rid of the one responsible for his sorrows. As a complete outsider to the Unison Galaxy, he has a lot to learn and grow accustomed to.

Asuka Akioto, Princess of the planet Okulis Orbitorium, feels suffocated from her stuffy lifestyle, causing her to rebel. She clashes with the desires of her toxic habits and inability to live the spontaneous life she craves. A single decision is about to change her life for good.

Damonico Damirror, heir to the throne of the planet Wretched Hollows, only has two things on his mind—love and power. His aggressive, heinous ways bring him ultimate praise on his world, but it just isn't enough. More obstacles relentlessly pull him away from the secret love of his life, while at the same time the destructive beast within him is becoming untamable. He doesn't know how much longer he can tolerate his misfortunes.

Amelia Vossler, Lady of the planet Kandy Kingdom, couldn't be any sweeter. All she wants

is acceptance, allowance into the gates of the Royal Kingdom of Kandy. However, there isn't a day that goes by that the civilians of Kandy Kingdom don't flinch in fear of her. She belongs to the only evil family in the world, repulsing the fellow inhabitants. Her character doesn't seem to match her job description, nor the "gift" she soon obtains.

Unaware of why they're connected, their unanswered questions will cause mind-boggling frustration. Some have an urge to ignore the situation, while others are eager to piece together the puzzle. Amongst everyone in the Unison Galaxy—Soren, Asuka, Damonico, and Mia—already have some of the hardest lives to understand, but they're about to get much more harrowing.

When evil forces collide, it poses irrepressible danger within the Unison Galaxy. Malzeria Nieve, queen of the planet Nieve, isn't going to give up on her vengeance, while Divordok Damirror, grand superior of the Infernity Abyss, won't let anything get in the way of his execrable plans. The two team up to birth the most vicious alliance in history. However, a group of four counteracts their plots, becoming their new targets.

Pushing forward will seem too difficult at times, but from a push of a friend, loved one, or enemy, each world will move on. It's up to Soren, Asuka, Damonico, and Mia to restore unity to the Unison Galaxy.

It all began on April 5, 2045, the day we evacuated our beloved planet Earth to our new world, New Earth. With the Unison Galaxy now homing eight life-inhabiting planets, this is when things change far beyond anyone's expectations. Here is where the journey begins...

CHAPTER 1: FORESIGHT OF FOUR

Turning back the clock of youth may seem like a gift to some, but to Soren it was a nightmare. The memories of his previous life on Earth overtook his thoughts. He missed his wife and kids dearly. Mentally, he remained the same forty-five-year-old man he once was—yet trapped inside his sixteen-year-old body. His intellect, the only thing that remained, reminded him of the man he was.

Soren wandered the streets of the newly inhabited utopian world. New Earth flourished in purity, free of contaminants. Everyone and everything followed the ecofriendly guidelines—buildings, manufacturers, and all things relative to nature. The sky exhibited a lighter shade of royal blue, while luminous white clouds encased with yellow auras surrounded the new sun.

Soren sighed, looking to the New Earth castle, its height nestling in the clouds. Even the grand palace was formed entirely from biodegradable materials. He gazed at the beauty of his new home. Fortunately enough, Soren's best friend was the world's new ruler, King Bernard Rich II. Soren's eyes drifted to New Earth's emblem, the world's form of flag. The mascot—a three-dimensional gold lion head—hovered high over a magnetic platform beside the palace.

Regardless of the perfection of his new home, Soren felt empty and confused without his family residing with him. He continued to stroll, his thoughts blurring the surrounding buildings. A strong force coursed through his body, stopping him in his tracks. He did a double take, staring at an out of place gray building. Its architecture and small size made it outlandish.

Soren ambled over to the vase-shaped door, intrigued by its odd appearance. A bundle of colors made his eyes veer off to the only window on the building. Patterned, multi-colored

draperies cloaked the glass, blocking any sunlight. Soren's analytical tendencies allowed him to recognize the carving of a circle hovering in the center of a crescent moon with gusts of wind revolving around them, sandwiched between the door and window. *Hmm ... I wonder the significance behind this symbol.*

He backed up to get a full image of the building, resting his hand on his chin, bewildered. The building showed no signs of operation, as if frozen in a different time. Soren didn't know why he felt a connection between himself and what existed beyond the door. As he pondered, the door crept open, inviting him in. Unable to fight the impulse, he entered.

Once inside, a calming sensation blanketed his body; he felt safe. "What is this place?" he asked himself.

His eyes met with an old man's—his features resembled a Japanese man. The man's face bore skin that didn't match his age; it was almost flawless. A glowing tint amplified him, outlining his body. His white beard and contrasting black hair almost met the ground. He wore a simple white cloak, covering the entirety of his physique with the exception of his hands.

"Soren," the man said in a soft, soothing voice. "Please, follow me."

The man's eyes contained a sense of comfort and wisdom, causing Soren to feel trust in the stranger. Normally, he would never enter an abandoned building, nor would he follow a stranger, but he had nothing else to lose. The absence of his family made him feel utterly empty.

As Soren followed the interesting man, he wondered how he miraculously knew his name. *Maybe he's some type of higher being—a psychic, perhaps.* Soren studied his surroundings. The ambiance imitated the man's calming nature. Lit candles aided in the moderate lighting throughout. The fruity and earthy aromas of the candles eased his aching heart and soul.

They reached a beaded curtain doorway. The jade beads made whatever was beyond the door indistinguishable. The old man lifted his hand through the beads, as if separating a waterfall. He walked through, somehow pulling Soren with him without contact.

The atmosphere altered—a sacred forest was thriving all around them. Astounded by the shift, Soren's eyes explored. Trees covered the area, their size questioning possibility. Many plants of exotic colors, the likes of which he had never seen before, decorated the forest. The mysterious sanctuary took Soren's mind to new heights, its existence inconceivable. His eyes soared to a lavender stream with a Japanese-inspired bridge arching over it.

The old man strolled towards the bridge. "It's okay," he said. "Just follow me."

Soren didn't say anything; he just followed. As they passed over the bridge, the green grass dissipated, coating with a fluffy soil. As they stepped onto the delicate soil, clouds of mist lifted from their footprints, curling around in various shapes, like magic. The designs mesmerized Soren.

An open, circular area marked their destination. It contained a round tabletop and two chairs, all floating several feet off the ground.

"Whoa," Soren said.

The man smiled. "Please." He held out his hand. "Have a seat."

Although in unfamiliar territory, Soren didn't feel alarmed. He sat in the cement-like chair, facing the man. "Who are you?" he finally asked.

"Well, Mr. Cutrone, I'm here to guide you. It would be quite honorable if you would participate in my acts to help you."

His sentence sounded almost like a question, to which Soren nodded in agreement.

"My name is Kitaro, and this," he looked around, "is my beautiful home. My gift to you is this." Kitaro elevated his hand over the tabletop. One by one, transparent, glowing cards fell from the palm of his hand, forming a stack. Their luminosity faded, becoming solid. He waved his hand over the deck, wind spreading the cards along the table. "If you would, please pick four cards."

Although skeptical, Soren closed his eyes and picked four cards from random spots in the line. He looked up at Kitaro, eager to hear the results. Kitaro took the four blank, white cards from Soren. He set the remaining ones aside and flipped Soren's over in front of him. Colors began revealing themselves.

The first card looked rather disturbing. The background of the card displayed a dark, ashy color. On the bottom left of the card, ink lines drew a man's face angled upwards, with his mouth wide open. The man's eyes wore pure blackness and held great despair. A metallic, light-blue mist emitted from his mouth, entering the mouth of a dreadful creature. *He looks like me.* Two other symbols resided in the corners. In one, ink painted the eyes and mouth of a depressed tragedy mask, with hands grasping its invisible cheeks, and the other occupied a circular symbol burning with fire, enclosing a creepy eye.

"Hmm ... this card illustrates ultimate despair," Kitaro said. "The mist represents your soul. Someone will try to take it from you. If this should happen, you must fight back. You mustn't let the

being hold this great satisfaction.”

Soren looked at Kitaro, confused. *This card must represent the loss of my family and world.*

“What does the eye symbol mean?”

“The eye depicts something far beyond pure. It symbolizes a vast, malevolent group of beings.”

A disturbing image of Soren’s past briefly congested his mind, that of a crazed scientist he used to work with at the Vivacity facility on planet Earth—the woman responsible for all his heartache—Malzeria Nieye.

Worried, he asked, “Well, who are they?”

Kitaro showed compassion. “I’m sorry, Soren, but this I cannot tell you. We must move onto the next card now. We don’t have much time.”

The next card looked alluring. In black-and-white, a girl was shown from the top of her lips, down to the top of her cleavage. Her lips captivated Soren. Shiny hair flowed down from the sides of her face and chest. The main focal point of the card was the colorful necklace she wore. The key-shaped pendant hung from her neck by a thin diamond chain. Carved designs traveled throughout the silver key. A reddish-pink diamond heart, with angel wings stretching out from the sides, rested in the key’s center, an upward sword atop it.

“This card’s purpose is held deep within your soul,” Kitaro said, making direct eye contact. “This card is very important, Soren. This is the young woman who holds the key to your heart. The wings you see attached to the key stands for true, everlasting love. The sword itself signifies the strength she will bring you and the love you both will share.”

Soren thought of his wife—still in disbelief that his family perished with Earth’s demise. “Do I already know the woman in the card?” he asked, hopeful.

“You have not met the woman. She will hold all your strength and love in your new life.”

Soren’s heart sank, coming to the realization that his wife and children no longer existed; they now remained his most cherished memories.

The third card contained a blurred, multi-colored background. A hand, arching upward, surfaced from the corner. A brilliant orange gemstone hovered above it. The ink painted lightning bolts of cobalt blue and cranberry, striking all around the stone’s aura, yet unable to penetrate the stone.

“Now, your third card.” Kitaro hesitated, his hand stroking down his long beard. “This card is the symbol of power and energy.” Soren attempted to ask a question, but Kitaro interrupted. “And it looks as if I cannot say anything further.”

Soren nodded in acceptance. He wished he could have answers to his questions, but he remained thankful for the reading. *Those lightning bolts ... they look like Malzeria's.* He couldn't forget her electric volt that struck him, causing the worst pain he had ever withstood.

Kitaro hovered the last card. Within the metallic-gold background, a jeweled crown of a king rested atop a unity symbol.

“This card signifies great leadership and unity. In your future, you have potential to demonstrate the perfect role model—a tremendous leader.” Kitaro stood. “This concludes your reading, Soren. Just know, occurrences happen for reasons we don't yet understand. However, one thing is irrefutable; your presence belongs where you stand at every moment of every day.”

Before Soren could say another word, the same jade-beaded door developed behind Kitaro. He opened a small section, hinting to Soren to go through. *How did that doorway appear in midair? What's going on? This is completely absurd.* Soren stood and looked around. He didn't know whether his experience was a dream or reality. Either way, there was no guarantee he would remember or return to this magical place. Soren promised himself he would sink this memory into his mind forever. Discouraged he didn't get more answers, he did as Kitaro wished and went through the doorway, transporting to the same deserted psychic building.

With an expression of graciousness, Soren said, “Thank you, Kitaro. I greatly appreciate your guidance. I don't know why this happened, but I am grateful.”

Kitaro bowed to Soren, a small grin upon his face. “The journey of four approaches, Mr. Cutrone,” he whispered.

Soren exited the building, mind-boggled. He turned back to see it fully abandoned and undecorated—a structure still undergoing construction. *How strange.* He brushed it off and continued on. He felt as if an angel from the heavens graced his presence—helping to guide him on his new life's destiny. He knew the fate of his journey lay within the choices he would soon have to make. Little did he know, three others were informed of the same journey and would be joining him along the way.

A young girl toured the streets in her luxurious, Fadame W1 transporter (a futuristic limousine)—pretending to enjoy the high life she lived. She felt troubled and ashamed of herself. Her reckless behavior of sneaking out—attending big-shot parties—did not fit the role of being a princess. Her obsession with drugs and alcohol didn't help either. Trying to enjoy the ambiance, she attempted to appreciate the beauty in the high-tech, flower-filled world of Okulis Orbitorium.

Princess Asuka's forehead, pressed up against the window glass, soon went numb. Her bright-blue eyes were the only things illustrating movement on her body—trailing along each silver building of the strip malls. The walls exhibited moving ads of realistic holograms. Flower motifs decked the sidewalks and establishments. Nothing interested her—not even the many groups of civilians on the sidewalks trying to get her attention, shouting her name with affection. Asuka tended to ignore her surroundings. She craved constant adventure and spontaneity. In her mind, the lifestyle she was expected to live equaled a perfect example of a boring and predictable life.

Finally, something caught her attention—something so intriguing she needed to go to it. She removed her head from the window and sat up. “Driver,” she said, “pull over.” Asuka's voice sounded with a slight Oplenese accent (similar sounding to the Japanese language).

Surprised by her request, the driver entered the command, satisfying her wishes. “What is it, Princess Asuka?” the driver asked.

Asuka pushed open the crafted door, rushing out of the transporter. The driver did the same; his job description stated to protect and tend to her every need—he did as directed. She lightly jogged across the sidewalk and faced a narrow staircase leading down to unfamiliar shops.

Without turning around, Asuka put her hand in back of her in a shooing motion. “Stay there,” she told her driver. “I'll be back.”

“But, Princess Asuka, I'm not allowed to leave you unattended.”

Asuka frowned her eyebrows downward, squinting as she looked beyond the staircase. She felt an energy luring her in—forcing her to go. *I must see what's down there.* She darted around, hands clasped in back of her. She spoke in a refined, yet dominant manner. “I order you to go back to your transporter. I see someone down there I know, and I'd appreciate it if you would let me go by myself,” she said untruthfully. “I deserve my own privacy. I'll call you when I'm ready to be

picked up.” She looked around. “Why don’t you go in one of the nearby department stores?”

Around her, hundreds of oklings gathered, screaming her name, wishing to get a capture (a three-dimensional image), handshake, or autograph. By law, the crowd kept their distance of several feet from the princess—oohing and ahing at her distant appearance. Asuka paid no mind to her fans. She loved the oklings who belonged to Okulis Orbitorium, but she opposed the idea of acting like a best friend to a stranger. She focused on her large bodyguard, standing above six feet tall.

Uncertainty rose on his face. “I will certainly give you your privacy, Princess Asuka. I mustn’t leave your side.”

I hate these annoying guards! Asuka’s fists shot to her hips. “I already asked you nicely and I didn’t need to do so. This is my world. My father told me to go shopping today and buy myself something nice. The only shops I want to go to are down there.” She pointed. “My father would not be happy if I came home empty-handed, now would he?”

The anxious guard gulped. “Yes, yes, whatever you wish, Princess Asuka.” He bowed to her in honor. “I’m sorry. I’m just worried about your safety.”

“Please. I will be fine. I’m a warrior.” Asuka crossed her arms, elevating her chin. “Go enjoy yourself.”

The guard bowed. “As you wish, Princess Asuka.”

Asuka watched the transporter drive him away. She hurried down the staircase. *Finally! Something new and exciting.* The buildings captivated her. Although the other shops in the area looked extravagant and glistened with colors and electronic ads, these shops pleased her more. They differed from the advanced technological world she was used to. They all showed a sense of character, having unique display signs and window art. However, none of the shops were in business.

“Huh ... it must be abandoned,” Asuka said. “But why?”

She turned around, realizing the absence of noise from the frantic crowd. *Are my ears playing tricks on me?* The staircase she once sped down vanished, a hoary building taking its place. *Whoa. Now my eyes?* Confused and enthralled by a possible adventure, Asuka continued to mosey on until she reached a dead end.

A shop stood by itself, disconnected from the others. It replicated an Asian temple back on Earth. When Asuka reached the temple she began noticing things more clearly. Old wooden double

doors led into the building. A symbol of a circle, acting as a sun, levitated in the center of a crescent moon, gusts of wind revolving around the shapes, dwelled in the center. Above the door, a blinking neon sign read: *OPEN*.

Asuka grew intrigued by the imprint. She gently pressed her hand against the shape. The wooden doors pushed open, leading into darkness. A smile curled on her face, her eyes glistening. Temptation got the better of her and she entered the building without fear.

When Asuka's feet stepped into the temple, it altered. She stood in a forest. Startled, her head oscillated. Her angst dissipated—the fantasy forest gave Asuka the best feeling imaginable. Her sorrows and heart filled with guilt drifted beyond her. The sore muscles she acquired from her fight training evaporated. She felt capable of doing anything, her health and spirit impeccable. Light winds twirled around her limbs and brushed through her light-lavender hair. She took in a breath whilst closing her eyes. The purest air encompassed her lungs, effortlessly flowing throughout her body, carrying away the last of her troubles.

“What is this place?” Asuka murmured.

She sauntered, her eyes wandering uncontrollably. The texture of the ground felt delicate—as if never stepped on before. The trees and plants didn't exist to her before this moment. *I've never seen plants like this in Oplence*. They showed vivid colors and patterns. The slight breeze gave way to nature's movements.

Kitaro leaned on a tree that had achieved a seemingly unreachable size. His eyes connected to Asuka's. He strode towards her, practically gliding over the grass. “Hello, Asuka.” He held out his hand.

The stranger mystified Asuka. Her brows furrowed as she looked down at the man's gleaming hand. She looked back into his narrow eyes; hesitant, her hand linked with his. When they touched, a tingling sensation met her skin, spreading throughout her body.

Asuka let go. “Why did you bring me here?”

Kitaro smiled at her. “I wish to help you.” He made sure not to pause to let her speak. “Follow me,” he said, turning around.

Still baffled, Asuka decided to follow him. She spun her head around to notice that the building she'd come from disappeared, leaving only the hovering double doors. *This man must be my only way out*.

They ambled through the forest. Everything looked united. The animals flew and crowded around her and the man—not showing an ounce of alarm. Asuka smiled. *Everything is so peaceful here.* They walked over a curved bridge, lavender water flowing beneath it. Asuka gaped at its beauty. Her eyes wanted to stay in place while her feet kept moving.

They reached a circular area. It contained a floating, circular tabletop and two chairs. The shape of the chairs reminded Asuka of bongo drums. She noticed the soft texture of the soil as she stepped foot into the circle. *This place is on another level of spirituality—this can't be real.*

Asuka and the old man sat at the cement-like table. A blank deck of cards sat in the center. A gust of wind brushed up the cards, now hovering in a line in front of her.

“Please,” he said, a kind grin on his face, “pick four cards from the line presented before you.”

Without question, Asuka chose her four cards and handed them over. The remaining cards sunk into the table as Kitaro held her hand-chosen cards. *Who is this strange fellow? He has to be a sorcerer or something.* He rested the four cards in front of her. Asuka’s impatient temperament drove her to lean over the table to see her results. The first card showed a girl floating, tears falling from her face, in front of a shining figure.

“This card represents complete sorrow and failure—not being able to keep your feet on the ground,” he said, sympathy in his voice. “In other words, you will seek guidance in life ... a friend, possibly. The friend is the one who will keep you grounded.”

Emri ... of course. “What’s my depression from?”

“I cannot answer any of your questions.”

“What? Not any?” Asuka said, slamming her hands on the table. “You can’t do that! Explain to me the reasoning behind the card.”

“Asuka, please.”

Asuka’s hasty emotions carried away as a breeze kissed her face. She relaxed her tense body, feeling foolish for her outspoken behavior.

Kitaro pulled the second card. It revealed an anti-possession symbol. Behind the evil image a mouth screamed, exposing a marking on its tongue. It looked similar to an inverted spade; a circle was in the center and another one within it. Nine swirling figures connected the circles. “Your second card.” He paused, taken aback by what he witnessed. “This card is very bad, Asuka.” He

looked deep into her eyes, connecting with her. “This card means you will lose all self-control.”

Asuka looked amused. *Apparently this man doesn't know me very well. I wonder why the tongue has a Mephistic symbol.* She wanted to ask Kitaro many questions, but knew he wouldn't budge. This frustrated her. She had no idea how she got to this mystical place or why she yearned to stay. Usually she would never listen to someone else's demands, but she wanted nothing more than to comply. She didn't underestimate his powers.

Kitaro put aside her second card and picked up the third one. A grin coiled along his face, discovering what it held. He turned it toward Asuka. The card showed a key scattered with gems and motifs. “The sacred key of life.” He put it down, reaching for her last card.

Asuka interrupted the old man's actions. “Wait! What does it mean?” She lurched over the table and held onto his wrist. Her eyes caged distress. “Please ... I shut up about the others.”

He rested his hand over hers. “Asuka.” His smile only brought comfort to her. “You already know.”

Asuka analyzed his face. Somehow she trusted what he said. She felt his confidence in her and it reassured her anxious thoughts. She sat back in her seat and nodded—her way of telling him she trusted his words of wisdom.

The fourth card he pulled exposed the image of a white dove carrying an olive branch in its mouth. Above the dove's head hovered a gold peace symbol.

“This is the card of peace. Your future could hold ultimate contentment. Not many get this card.” Kitaro tossed the card in the air and all of the other cards followed; they vaporized into the wind and became one with nature. “Asuka, I know you're troubled.” He cupped his hands together, setting them on the table. “I can see you have many questions.”

As Asuka listened to the man speak, she knew he was not an ordinary being. She realized his presence made her stronger. *He's no sorcerer. He's something much greater.*

“There is no doubt that you will go through more than you think you can handle. You will want to give up, but you can't. You have the ability to keep on going, and keep on going you shall.” He smiled at her. “You see, I brought you here because, as you might have suspected, you aren't exactly normal. You are very unique with a purpose larger than life. But more than one thing stands in your way.” His eyes wilted with sadness. “Desires and needs are far different; don't confuse the two.” Kitaro's mouth opened, words fighting to get out, but silence won the battle. “This is all I can

tell you at this point, and I hope you can understand that.” He rose from the table.

Asuka could sense his urges, as if waiting for a lifetime to meet her. *You can't be serious. Thanks for torturing me with your powers!* She followed him, playing the part of his shadow.

In silence, they walked back to where they started. Asuka wondered if she would ever return to this mysterious place, and, for some reason, she felt she would. She looked around at the scenery. Asuka closed her eyes and took in the pure air, the wind hugging her. The exuberant wildlife was a vision she would never forget. She looked up at the never-ending sky. *I wonder what else is out here.*

Asuka wanted to explore and see what else the magical place offered. Sounds of the wind breezing through leaves, along with chirping made from the exotic birds nuzzled in her eardrums. She grinned. *This is where I want to be.* It made her feel safe and welcome. As Asuka looked ahead at the old man, she didn't want to leave. She belonged here.

Kitaro stood in front of the double doors. He faced her and placed his hand on the door handle.

“Wait!” Asuka shouted, stopping him.

“What is it, Asuka?” He looked down at her.

“Can you please just answer one question?” she asked with a smile on her face.

He could not deny her. “What is it?”

“I kept quiet with the list of questions I had for you during my reading. In that respect ... could you please ... tell me your name?”

He grinned. “My name is Kitaro.” Kitaro thrust open the door; a white light beamed from the outside world Asuka had to return to. He cupped his hand on her shoulder. “The journey of four approaches,” he whispered.

The magenta and violet-colored sunset, ignited by the blood-red sun, almost concealed the frightening atmosphere of Wretched Hollows. In reality, nothing could mask its true colors—it was the most feared, malicious world in the galaxy.

The day gave way to a perfect summer evening. Damonico Damirror and his two best

friends wandered the dark, desolate sidewalks, looking for something electrifying to do before they lost their minds. Damonico's designer clothing swayed as the cooling summer breeze brushed against him.

"This weather is marv!" Kysa exclaimed, holding hands with Darrow. Damonico walked ahead of the two lovebirds as they flirted with each other. Ignoring his lifelong friends, as usual, Damonico drifted off on a different train of thought. His family title brought him a lot of notoriety and responsibility, which he relished. Still, it placed a great deal of pressure on him. He didn't know how much more he could fit on his plate before cracking to pieces. Damonico wondered what the next school year would bring him. Although he knew he could handle any obstacle trying to bring him failure, he never felt so lost and anxious in his life. For the last few months he sensed ominous vibes heading his way—something he couldn't control.

With his hands in his pockets, Damonico continued to ponder his future. The sunset radiating down on him brought out his one red and one green eye. As striking as the sunset seemed it blinded him, coercing him to look downward. Damonico's heedful eyes caught a glimpse of an old, wrinkled ad. It was strange to see trash on the streets with all the worlds constantly sanitized. Trash and imperfections were diseases to the worlds.

Damonico pinched his eyes in curiosity, raising a brow. He picked up the ad. "Hey, guys," he said, getting Darrow and Kysa's attention. "Check this out. Forrrrtune rrrreadings!" he said in a spooky, sarcastic manner, shaking the ad.

Darrow grabbed the paper. He let out a deep, throaty laugh. "This is cracked." He handed it back to Damonico. "We should go to the address so we can mutilate who's responsible for this act of careless law-breaking." He smirked.

"Lemme see!" Kysa said, snatching the paper from Damonico and quickly glimpsed over it. "Who made this? This looks ancient. We're definitely going!" She began walking.

"For what reason?" Damonico asked, trailing behind her with Darrow. "To kill them or for the reading?"

Kysa turned around, walking backwards. "You guys, we're bored, and this is our ticket to excitement!" she said in her usual lively manner.

Damonico and Darrow snickered as Kysa led them to the destination.

"Seriously, that thing must be prehistoric," Damonico said. "No one uses paper anymore.

It's probably from one of those Homo sapiens from Earth. They're crying for a killing."

The presence of a small, old house altered Damonico's scathing approach. The house looked long since deserted, with evidence of its outdated architectural setup, chipped paint, and too many open holes to count.

Kysa placed her hands on her waist, smiling at the building. They both stared at her—Darrow with a headshake and Damonico with a look of dissatisfaction.

Kysa's face twisted. "What?"

"What're you doing?" Damonico asked.

"What's wrong with you two? We'll go in for a reading, have our fun, and then we'll slay the undeserving behind this."

Damonico and Darrow stared at Kysa, unresponsive.

"We walked all the way over here," Kysa said. "We're going in!" She stepped forward.

The old home lit up with a gleaming light of energy. Startled, Kysa took a step back.

Damonico and Darrow laughed.

Kysa twisted around. "Don't laugh at me! I'm a prepared powerhouse, trained for the unexpected. I'm not afraid. You guys go in."

"There's no need for me to know my future when I already know you'll be in it," Darrow said to his girlfriend.

Damonico rolled his eyes, watching Kysa's face fall into desire. Damonico knew the direction they were headed in. *Oh no, I'm not gonna stand here and make myself watch this.* Annoyed, Damonico maneuvered around them as they began kissing each other. "Well, I'd rather go in there than be out here with you two."

Damonico marched up the old stairs leading to the shack. Uncertain whether to enter, he turned around to realize Darrow and Kysa no longer knew he existed. Confident, he reached for the doorknob, crafted by a glowing turquoise crystal. When his hand leveled with the knob, the atmosphere morphed into something unimaginable. The house disappeared. To Damonico's surprise, he stood in a dark forest. He looked around, now cautious for danger. Turquoise crystals, bigger than him, shot up from the ground in every direction.

A comforting hand rested upon Damonico's shoulder, ridding the alertness within him. The figure suavely moved around to face him. To Damonico's perception, the tall man gazed out

through scintillating turquoise eyes. He had short hair and a square face. The shadows from the darkness nestled into parts of his face, making it difficult to see him clearly.

The unrevealed man shook Damonico's hand. He stared deeply into Damonico's eyes, as if searching for his soul. "Hi, Mr. Damirror. My name is Mazin." His voice sounded prince-like. The darkness covering his face dissipated. "Do you remember me?"

Damonico grew speechless, recollecting an unexpected flashback of his first encounter with him. The flashback reminded him of Mazin helping him out of trouble at the age of six. Grueling thoughts came back to him—a well-kept secret. Damonico could almost feel the unexplainable pain he suffered from the notorious purple heloxious spider. The scar on his forearm began to sting, causing him to rush his hand downward. "I remember you," Damonico said. "You saved my life. I remember you telling me that you were sent to protect me. If you hadn't done what you did ... the bite would've killed me."

"That is not necessarily true."

"Are you kidding me? No one can survive that bite. It's impossible. You were the one that got the poison out. I remember."

"You were pretty young." Mazin smirked.

Damonico analyzed Mazin's thirty-year-old face. "How are you so old? You're ... nineteen. I know you are. I go to school with you. But you look the same as I remember when I was six ... how are you changing your age? Why am I only recognizing you now?"

"I look the same as you remember because I'm holding the same appearance. Due to my powers, I have the ability to alter time. In that sense, I have manipulated my life expectancy—remaining at whichever stage I want. I've seen my future and lived all sections of my life already. However, I am choosing to live at age thirty-one at this time for this moment. The same goes for when you see me in my everyday life."

Damonico flickered his eyes—his head aching from confusion. "What?"

Mazin's lips formed a smile. "It's a lot for your mind to comprehend, I know. Let's go."

"Wait. Don't try to change the subject. Who was the man who forced the heloxious spider to bite me? After he cut my arm, the spider crawled into my skin and never came out."

"I didn't bring you here to talk about that incident. That calls for another time." Mazin strolled down a path, guided by the crystals.

Damonico followed behind, frustrated by Mazin's careless behavior. "What in the pits are you talking about? I've been thinking about that day my whole life. Tell me what happened. Who attacked me?"

The atmosphere altered. Walls grew from the rocky ground to enclose them in a room. In sequence, dark stone flooring slapped down. Damonico leaped up as the wavy tiles set under his shoes. The supernatural construction distracted him from his past. He looked around as the room furnished itself. At the front of the room sat a throne-like chair and a small chair facing it. Although the room lacked light fixtures, the crystals emanated turquoise light. Damonico could only see the path, everything else looked black.

"I brought you here for another reason," Mazin said, ambling towards the big chair.

A strip of thin carpet unrolled down their pathway. Mazin and Damonico stepped to the side, letting the carpet set in place. The room looked like a king's. Mazin took a seat in the chair and directed Damonico to sit in the seat across from him. As Mazin sat down, his face camouflaged with the shadows. "Damonico, I know you've been troubled for quite some time now. I will ease your burdens, but not the known ones at this point."

Hostility showed on Damonico's face. "What do you mean?"

"There are other things of importance to address—things I must warn you about. You're nearing a dark future. You will go through things that will put you through so much stress and agony, but that is only the beginning of the journey of four."

Damonico showed concern. "Journey?"

Mazin put his hand up. "But you will also go through the best feelings you have ever felt in your life, all at the same time. This will be primarily the only thing that will keep you sane."

Damonico's tension eased. He knew those feelings came from his hidden relationship with Haylia. *Maybe we can actually spend more time together.* "Why are you telling me this?"

"I promised you before that I would always help you. I thought you remembered that." Mazin smirked again.

Damonico shunned Mazin's smug tone of voice. He crossed his arms to his chest, flexing his muscles. His face arched in fury.

"Nonetheless, as I was explaining earlier, I have powers of higher abilities. I can tell the future, the past, and the present," Mazin said, leaning forward. "You are in dire need of a reading for

your future, Damonico.”

Four radiant turquoise cards emerged, floating near Damonico.

Damonico moved forward in his seat to get a closer look. “What’re these?”

“These are the four cards you would have picked if we went through the actual process, but of course I already knew which ones were for you.”

Damonico looked at Mazin as if he were crazy. “You can really see into the future?”

“Yes.” The way Mazin spoke reassured truth; Damonico’s doubts vanished. “Your first card is rather somber.”

The card displayed an eye crying in the corner. The rest of it contained an open-palmed hand, a heart shape cupped in it. The heart looked round and full, yet it flooded the hand with blood, oozing down the forearm.

“Well, to make it short, with every exceptionally great thing that happens to you, horrific aftermaths with follow.”

Damonico’s existing anxiety escalated, thinking of the dangers his life foresaw. “Wait. Tell me what this means.”

“I cannot go into explicit detail for you at this time. As you grow, I will be able to tell you much more—eventually, everything.”

The card vanished. Damonico’s face tumbled into despair. He never imaged his life getting worse, but Mazin’s reading foretold greater misery.

Mazin poked the second card forward, amplifying it. “Your second card isn’t too bright either.”

The second card showed a mighty demon holding its arms out with supremacy. A boy knelt before the demon in pain. It seemed the demon was sucking out the boy’s soul, consuming it for his own power.

“What does it mean? Is that supposed to be me?”

“This card represents confusion and lack of total control.”

That seems about right. The card turned into turquoise vapor and disappeared.

Damonico set his eyes to the third card. It revealed a crown full of jewels and color. Below the crown rested an ankh symbol, a bluebird beside it.

“You see, Damonico, in essence, this card represents happiness. The crown carries a sense of

leadership and heroic qualities. The symbol you see is referred to as the ankh, which represents all life and immortality. The little bluebird on the other side is known as the bluebird of happiness, which, of course, brings happiness, along with fulfillment.”

Damonico looked intrigued. “Huh.” He paused, while grinning. “So this card is good?”

“As long as you think happiness is good. Just remember, it might not be what you expect.”

Damonico raised his eyebrows, glaring at Mazin. *I’ve had it with this guy’s ... audacious sarcasm.* Damonico was not used to beings messing with him. On Wretched Hollows, citizens felt terrified to look at the Damirrors, let alone talk to them.

Mazin released a mild chuckle. “It can’t be that easy to make you upset.”

Damonico tried to relax himself, realizing the harmless intent of Mazin’s trials. Normally, Damonico would make someone regret making him displeased. However, he didn’t want to hurt Mazin like he did the others. He felt friendship between them due to their history. “Sorry,” Damonico said, brushing off the situation. “It’s not hard to reach my boiling point,” he murmured, tightening his crossed arms.

“You’d better be careful. That’ll get you into trouble.”

Mazin continued with his reading, exposing the fourth card. It showed a flamboyant key, an aura encircling it.

Damonico’s eyes gleamed with satisfaction. “Now, this one has to be good.”

“This is the sacred key of life.” Mazin paused, his tone making the situation more serious. “Just like decisions in life, it can go either way. The sacred key of life is your ticket to either path.”

“But this card is for me. Which path do I end up choosing?”

“I cannot tell you that, Damonico.”

“I thought you said you could see the future.”

“I can.”

“Then you already know everything that’ll happen to me? You already know how I will end up?”

Mazin grinned. “And in time you will, too. Keep in mind, the future is always subject to change.”

Although irritated, Damonico couldn’t ask Mazin any more questions; he found it useless.

“After you leave you will not remember this reading fully,” Mazin said. “You will remember

the information that was given to you, but I will slowly turn into a mystery. I won't allow you to see my face again for some time ... until I'm ready to help you with the problems of your past. Get ready for a challenging year." Mazin gazed at a nearby crystal. "The contentment on the outside is a facade of the brokenness inside. It will only last for so long."

Before Damonico could say one word, he transferred back to the sidewalk with Darrow and Kysa. They trailed behind him, acting playful and flirty, just as he remembered before. The blinding red sun shone on his eyes again, forcing him to look down. He saw the same wrinkled paper on the ground, though it advertised an unaccustomed yard sale.

Damonico's eyes widened—his heart stopped. *It's like I went back in time. Did he alter my future?* Damonico looked back at the distracted couple. He stomped on the ad, dissolving it in the road. Damonico continued on his path, pretending nothing happened.

Outcast. Unwanted. Displaced. All words that describe Amelia Vossler and her family. Amelia, also known as Mia, lives on the smallest planet in the Unison Galaxy, Kandy Kingdom. It is notorious as a wondrous planet that one could only dream of—mostly made up of healthy kandy packed with all the vital vitamins and nutrients that its inhabitants survive on. The sweet and savory kandy produces no negative side effects, resulting in nourishing lives. The ingredients used to produce such delectable foods remain Kandy Kingdom's greatest secret.

In addition to its own, the edible world's kandy mimics treats from each world to create everything in the Royal Kingdom of Kandy. From gingerbread roads and rizpri roofs to ice cream mountains and trollie rollie trees, Kandy Kingdom has it all. The Kandy Castle is home to the royals and inventors of the factory that produce and maintain the confectionery world. Everything in Kandy Kingdom is connected to the secretive, underground factory—constantly producing new, edible wildlife and sweets.

The ooxies on Kandy Kingdom are unlike any other beings in the galaxy, naturally born with a benevolent nature. Even the smallest things, like swatting a bug, are known as sins to them. They value love at its purest, happiness, and ultimate serenity. Nonetheless, Mia's family is far different from an ordinary Kandy Kingdom inhabitant.

Mia's family is greatly feared, as the Vosslers are renowned as the only evil, abnormal family in all of Kandy Kingdom. Her parents, Lord Licoren and Lady Tricella, reside in their private manor on the outskirts of the world. The rulers of Kandy Kingdom, King Jollico and Queen Tartivia Ploom, banished the Vosslers, whilst granting Licoren a part of the world outside the gates where he built his manor. The king and queen knighted Licoren a lord in return for never entering the gates of the Royal Kingdom of Kandy. Outside the gates lies the small part of the world disconnected from the kingdom's giant factory, resembling ordinary, clean surroundings without kandy.

Unlike her parents, Amelia shares the same pure-heartedness as the rest in Kandy Kingdom—she is unmistakably loving and kind. Yet nobody gives her a chance to prove she is different from her parents.

“Ameeliaaa!” Licoren exclaimed.

“Yes, Father?” Mia said.

Licoren was dressed in his usual black and red licorice attire, which resembled a royal's style from Earth's eighteenth century. He held his sorcerer's staff securely at his side. His shoulder-length, black hair was slicked back and tied in place. He always changed his wardrobe and hairstyle—all resembling periods of the past. His dark, arched eyebrows sharpened his red eyes as he looked at her. “Dooo run back into the royal city,” Licoren said, rolling his *r*'s. “I need some more supplies for my factory.” Licoren stared off, dazed and wide-eyed while handing Mia a list. “I'm on the VERGE of another breakthrough!” He jumped up, clicking his heels together and veered off into the hallway.

Mia giggled at her dad's usual, odd behavior. She grabbed her basket before leaving her parents' grim, castle-like manor and made her way down the hill it topped. Her home remained the second-largest abode in the world, the Kandy Castle holding the first place. Onion dome shapes topped the Vossler manor with Licoren's favorite colors of red, black, and white. Never-ending storms towered over Mia's home, due to her father's fixation with his weather machine. Mia always had her umbrella handy, which her father decorated in his favorite colors as well. She meandered down the curvy stone pathway leading to the Royal Kingdom of Kandy.

Cheerfulness embraced Mia's radiant face. “Hello, how are you today?” she asked the two guards in front of her.

The royal guards looked unlike the average Kandy Kingdom citizen. All of them stood at precisely seven-feet. Their abnormally wide shoulders and long limbs made their normal-sized heads look tiny. Two ribbons hung from the shoulders of the colorful uniforms. Different kandies symbolizing their awards and efforts to the kingdom decorated the ribbons.

Mia could see the guards' eyes tremble, as did their hands. "H-hello, Miss Vossler, we are doing fine, thanks," one guard said.

Mia reached into her basket and held out two muffins. The guards jumped back and gasped.

"No, it's okay," Mia said. "I'm just trying to give you some homemade muffins that I baked." She beamed.

"P-p-p-please, we don't want any trouble, miss. Just enter, get your supplies, and kindly leave," the other guard said in a wobbly tone.

Upon entering, Mia felt the same isolation she experienced every day—shunned by the other ooxies. After gathering her supplies, Mia made her way back towards the royal gates, trudging with her head down. She stopped in her tracks, clenching her red and black basket's handle, which carried her supplies.

"Why does everyone treat me like I'm some monster?" Mia said to herself. "I just want everyone to see how I really am. No one will ever eat the foods I make at this rate." Her eyes coated with tears.

A breeze caressed her, blowing her shiny black hair in the wind. A wind chime sang behind her. She looked back to see an unfamiliar building. *I don't remember passing that.* No other buildings were around, especially that close to the royal gates. The architecture resembled a bakery, made out of the treats it would sell.

Enchanted by the building, Mia pranced towards it. A turquoise crystal doorknob acted as a sweet candy on the gingerbread door. Without thinking, Mia reached out and grasped the luminous doorknob. It felt unbearably cold. Mia gasped and backed away. The door flew open, showing only darkness beyond it. A gust of wind guided her in.

When Mia entered the room, she noticed shining turquoise crystals sticking up from the floor. The room, dark and mysterious, gave her a sense of allurement.

"Mia," a male voice said, appearing before her.

Practically hypnotized, Mia tried to analyze the man's shadowy face. She felt expectant.

“Please,” he said in a modulated voice, “do not be alarmed. I am here to help guide you, Mia.” He motioned his hand for her to sit in a vacant chair.

Mia obeyed his wishes, showing signs of uneasiness.

“The journey of four approaches, so I brought you here to give foresight of the obstacles that lie ahead.”

Mia looked down, clutching the side of her arm nervously. She looked back up and asked in a hushed tone, “Who are you?”

“Mazin,” he said, showing off a grin.

A deck of cards floated around Mia, which startled her. They aligned in a stack within her reach. “What do you mean by journey of four?”

“Please, pick the four cards you desire,” Mazin said while gazing at her flawless, porcelain doll-like face.

He must be a man of power ... like Dad. Mia could feel great energy in the room. She stared deeply at the cards, closed her eyes, and carefully selected four. The remaining cards faded away. Her hand-chosen cards flew from her grasp. While levitating in front of her, the cards gradually revealed themselves, like the development of an old Polaroid snapshot.

In the first card’s center, a skull with crossbones stared back at her. She noticed a metallic, cranberry hint in its eyes. A warning symbol encased the skull, while a biohazard symbol rested below.

“Your first card represents a threatening force approaching. I cannot give you much detail, Miss Vossler, but be cautious of your surroundings.”

Mia felt like she dry-swallowed a horse pill. “Does this mean someone’s going to kill me?”

“Do not doubt yourself; you are stronger than you know.”

The second card shocked Mia, for she saw herself. The girl’s face appeared identical to hers, but sat on a different body. Above the girl floated a harmony symbol, crafted intricately with vivid colors. A thin beam of sparkling white light shone down the center of the girl. The beam separated the card into two sides, one good and one bad. To the right, the card was colored with a dark, royal blue background. Gusts of wind pushed the girl’s hair and body downwards. A devil’s horn stuck out from her blackish-blue hair, while a devil tail curved out from her side. A raven perched on the girl’s shoulder. Bright-pink colored the background of the left side of the card. A halo hovered above

the pink half of her hair, which flowed gracefully upwards. A white dove was being released from the girl's raised hand.

"This is the good versus evil card. It shows that you will have to make a decision to find balance and harmony in your life."

Mia assumed it meant following in her parents' footsteps or choosing to live the positive life she longed for.

The next card showed a brain with a computer chip in its center. The computer chip contained a carving of an evil eye—similar to her boss's symbol. The right side of the brain crawled with electrical currents, blue and cranberry in color. *Malzeria. That looks like her power.* The left side of the brain looked healthy and normal. The top left corner exhibited an image of a perfectly healthy heart. The bottom right corner displayed a bleeding heart, split down the middle by a giant thorn.

"This is the card of control. No matter how strong this force may seem, it cannot overtake you without you allowing it to. You are stronger and smarter than that, but you need to have confidence in your strength ... or the entity will consume you."

"What does this mean? I think I recognize that symbol. It's ... connected to my family and work. How could this be a bad thing?"

"Things are not always as they seem, Mia."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot say any more. Let us move on to your final card."

Mia looked unsatisfied with Mazin's answer, but asked no further questions. She could hear the sympathy in his voice. She wondered how someone could care for her when only just meeting her.

The final card exposed itself. A butterfly flew in the center of the card—full of bright colors, with a whitish-yellow light around it. Mia noticed a circular, swirling symbol located on each corner.

"This is an excellent card. The beautiful butterfly represents metamorphosis and positive change. The symbols you see represent purity in life and in the soul."

Mia could finally breathe. "Finally, a good card."

Mazin smiled and let out a quiet chuckle. "While times may seem difficult, your future

foresees a positive turnaround ... but only if you allow it. Stop trying to find strength; it's already inside of you. The fate of your destiny rests in your hands, Amelia. I will be with you again soon.”

Mazin's wisdom blanketed Mia with comfort. She involuntarily closed her eyes and took in a deep breath of air. When she opened her eyes, she found herself standing outside on the kandy walkway. She looked around to see that the bakery she'd entered didn't exist.