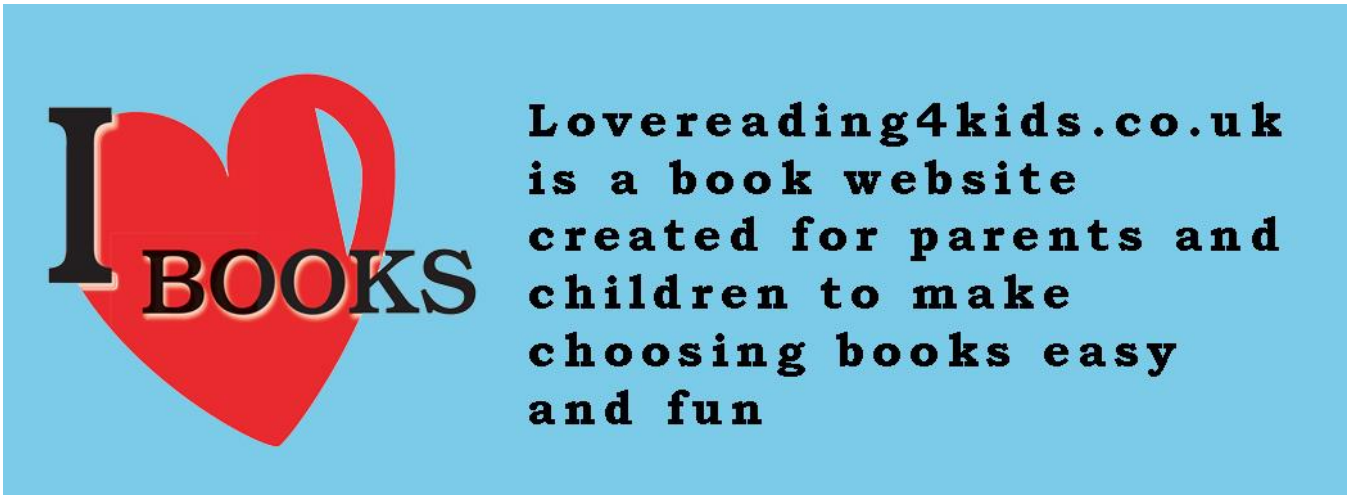


Opening extract from

The Skeleton Warrior

Written by

Adam Blade

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For Danny Stradling

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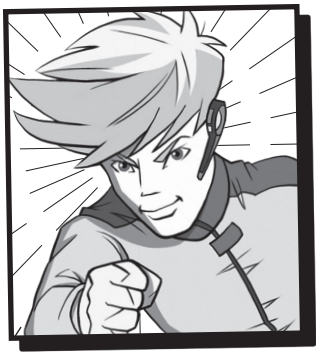


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MEET TEAM HERO ...



JACK

POWER: Super-strength
LIKES: Ventura City FC
DISLIKES: Bullies

RUBY



POWER: Fire vision
LIKES: Comic books
DISLIKES: Small spaces



DANNY

POWER: Super-hearing
LIKES: Pizza
DISLIKES: Thunder

... And Their Greatest Enemy

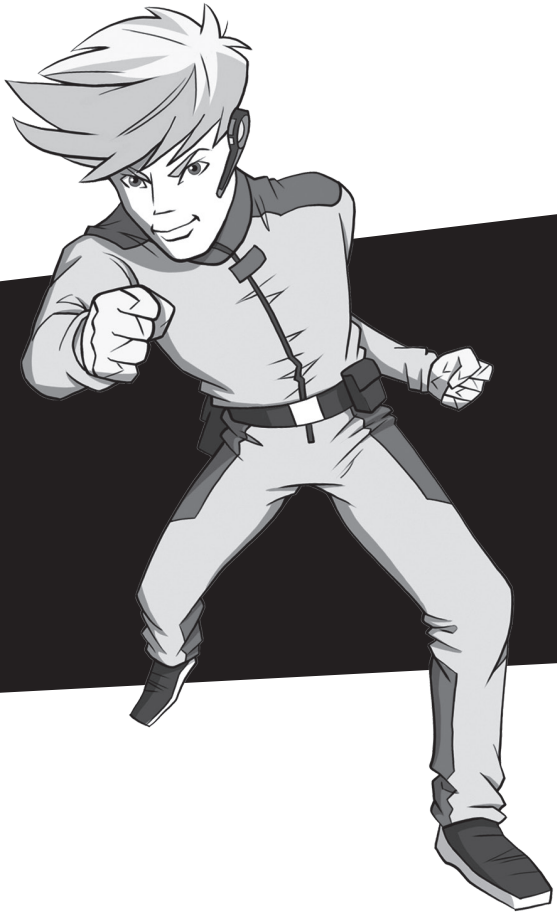


General Gore

Power: Brilliant warrior

Likes: Carnage

Dislikes: Unfaithful minions



PROLOGUE



MS STEEL reached for her mug of tea, but then paused as ripples spread across its surface. She could feel the tremors through her feet.

"Shockwaves, close by," said Professor Rufus, his fingers tapping at a keyboard. "It must be another portal opening."

Ms Steel glanced around the Team Hero Global Command Centre. The room was built into the bedrock beneath Hero Academy, and the pale sandstone flashed with the light of computer screens. Teachers hurried past, speaking in urgent voices. She looked past them to the maps lit up on the walls. Sure enough, a small light blinked on, just off the coast of Ventura City. It joined clusters of others dotted across countries and seas all around the world — each one a portal from Noxx.

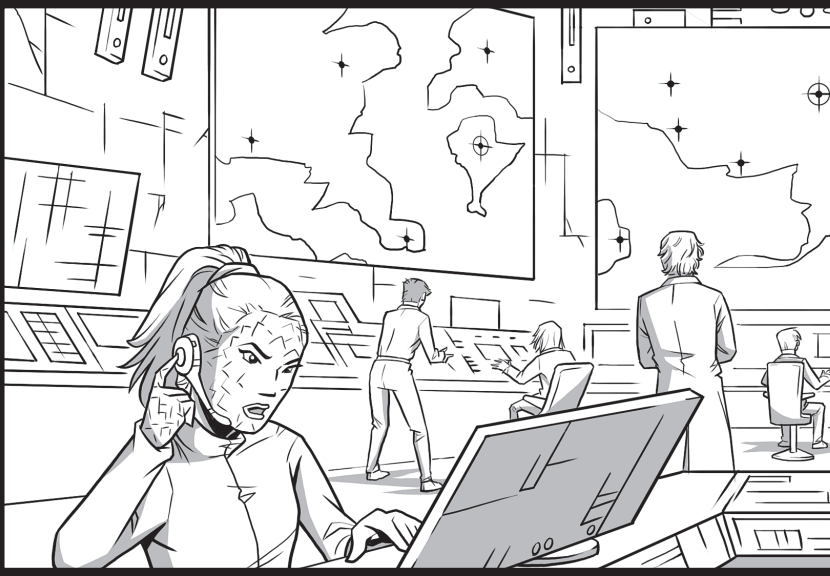
Ms Steel steadied herself against a chair, struck with the full horror

of what was happening. *Noxx is invading the surface. Just like it did a thousand years ago.*

"How many now?" asked a deep voice behind her. Ms Steel shook her purple hair from her eyes and turned to Chancellor Rex. The headmaster's face was wrinkled in a deep frown, and Ms Steel thought he looked older than ever.

"That makes ninety-six so far," said Ms Steel, grimly. *Ninety-six places where the Noxxian armies can enter our world and attack us ...*

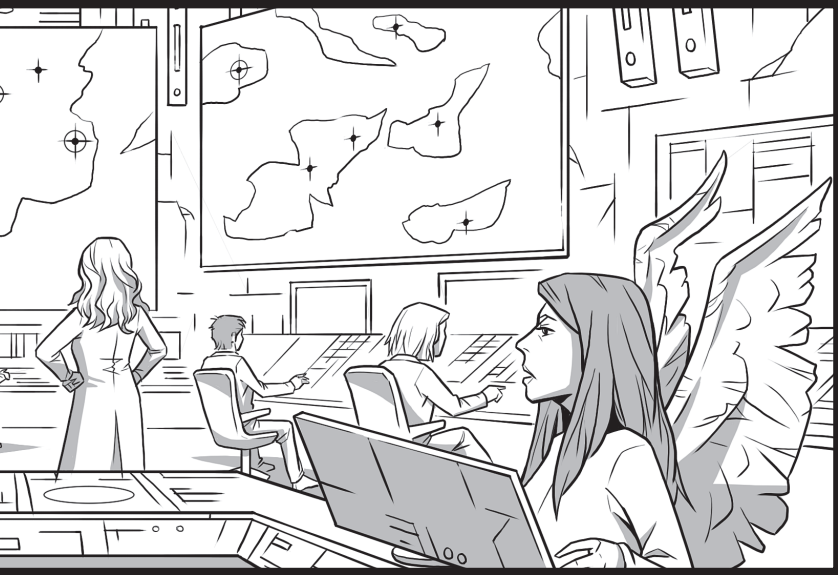
A teacher with diamond-shaped scales on her face swivelled in her



chair. “The students have been armed and readied,” she said.

Chancellor Rex nodded. “Thank you, Mrs Hindmarch.”

A forked tongue flicked nervously across the woman’s lips. “Can anything stand against this?” she



whispered to the headmaster.

"We must try," said Chancellor Rex firmly. "Have we heard from the rest of Team Hero?"

"The final outposts in Australia and China have reported back," said a teacher studying a computer screen.

A pair of white wings sprouted from her shoulder blades. “Every hero around the world is ready to fight, Chancellor.”

“That is something, at least,” said Rex. He walked over to the map of Europe, where two more portals had opened in Germany and the Swiss Alps. His hands closed into fists, blood draining from his knuckles. Ms Steel went over and touched his arm.

“Team Hero defeated General Gore before,” she said. “We can defeat him again.”

“Last time the heroes won because they found a weakness in Gore’s

armies," said Chancellor Rex.

Ms Steel nodded. Gore's forces had been destroyed by sunlight. They could only fight in darkness and shadow. But over the past few weeks Noxxian creatures had come through portals in broad daylight.

The Chancellor closed his eyes. "We must put our trust in the prophecy."

Ms Steel recited the words in her head: *Darkness will rise and conquer light, unless the Chosen One joins the fight.*

"While we have Jack Beacon on our side, there is still hope," she said.

A shout went up from across the

command centre. Several more portals had opened up in Asia, and teachers gathered around the map. The Chancellor hurried over.

Ms Steel watched him go. She bit her lip, holding back the doubts worming themselves into her head. *What if the invasion has come too soon? What if Jack's not ready to face Gore?*

Her jaw set in determination. Whatever happened, she wouldn't let Jack fight without all the help he could get. *It's time. He must have the weapon of light.* It would mean travelling thousands of miles,

across the world, to the desert of her homeland.

But distance was no problem for Ms Steel.

She grabbed her laser lance from where it leaned against a desk, and stowed it in a harness on her back. Standing in the shadows at the back of the chamber, she conjured an image of her destination in her mind. Energy surged through her. For a second she was suspended in bright purple light. The air crackled.

When Chancellor Rex looked over, Ms Steel had vanished.