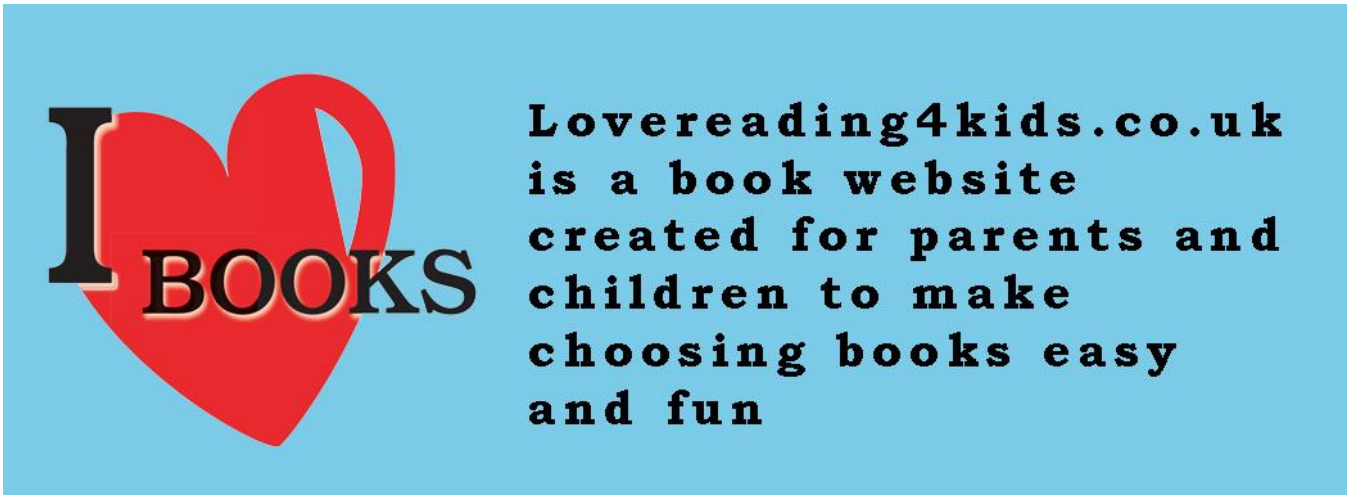


Opening extract from

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Written by

Adam Blade

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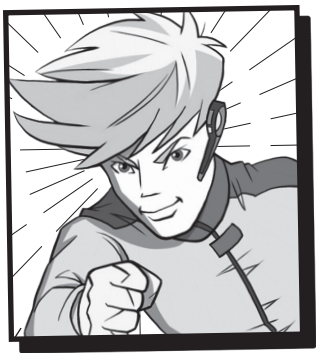


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MEET TEAM HERO ...



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

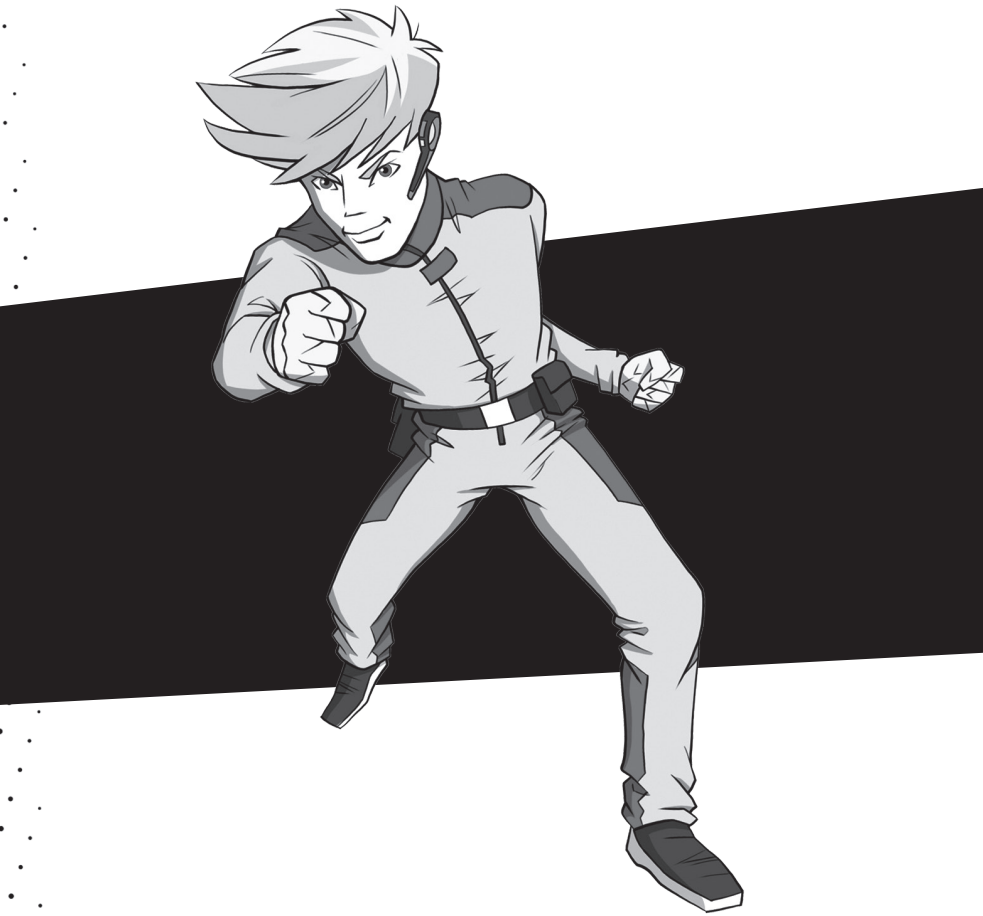


General Gore

Power: Brilliant warrior

Likes: Carnage

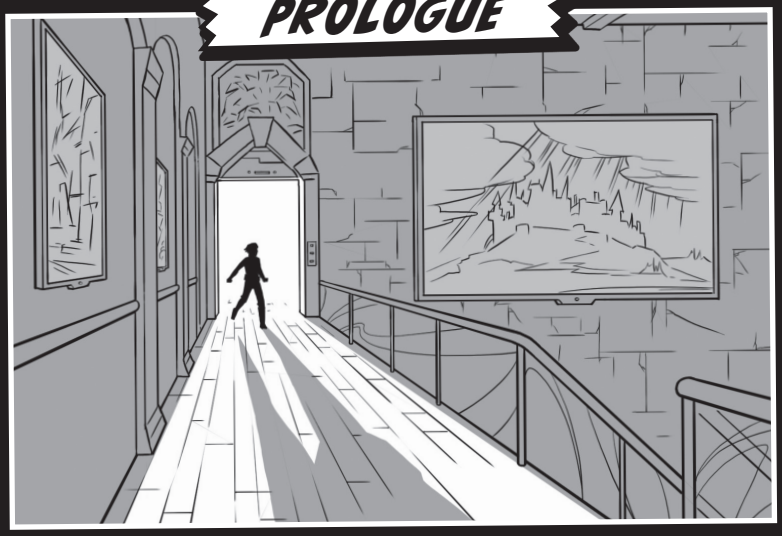
Dislikes: Unfaithful minions



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PROLOGUE



SHADOWS SURROUNDED the boy as he stumbled down the corridor. It was past midnight and Hero Academy was silent. Shadows filled the doorways to the empty classrooms, too, and shrouded the rough stone walls of the school. But the darkest shadow of all lurked within the boy's mind. It was telling him to follow the creature

flying ahead of him.

The terrawing, he thought. He'd never seen one before, but somehow he knew what it was. The creature was the size of a small eagle, with bat-like wings that rustled as it flapped ahead. Its feet hung down, ending in sharp claws. Its beak was long and curved. On its back was a metal barrel.



Some kind of weapon, the boy

thought, his spine tingling with fear.

The terrawing glided down a flight of steps, and the boy shuffled after it, trying to keep up. It swooped through a set of doors, out into the cobbled courtyard. When the boy saw the great blackened circle in the centre, he stopped, struck with terror.

The portal.

Inside, frozen stone monsters wielded swords and axes. Skeleton creatures raised spears above their heads. They were horrifying, but the boy had seen them many times before. What really frightened him was the swirl of black shadow rising

from the edge of the portal.

The terrawing hovered beside him. It screeched angrily, jabbing its beak towards the portal. The boy knew it was telling him to go closer.

Helplessly, he stumbled forward.

The shadow rising from the portal shimmered until it had turned into a tall figure. He wore a helmet and a long cloak that flowed like smoke over his broad shoulders. Beyond the figure, the boy could make out a gloomy landscape, dotted with nightmarish figures tending fire pits and forging weapons. A fortress of twisted towers loomed in the distance.



The boy knew that this was the underground realm of Noxx and that the tall man was its leader, General Gore.

"How weak you humans are," said

the General. His red eyes were locked on the boy's. "So easy to control."

Horrified, the boy started to back away. *I won't listen to him*, he thought. *I've got to fight the shadow inside me …*

General Gore's eyes flashed and he lifted a hand. A blast of darkness flowed from his palm and surrounded the boy, who felt the shadow in his mind growing larger. Suddenly he knew that he would do whatever General Gore asked.

"That's better," said the General in menacing tones. "You will make a fine servant of Noxx yet."

The boy nodded helplessly. “What is your bidding, Master?”

“The Shadow Sword,” the General said. “Where is it?”

The sword had been lost by General Gore hundreds of years ago, when he had last tried to invade the surface of the earth. Only Gore could use the sword — until now …

“The Chosen One has got it,” said the boy.

General Gore flinched. “And just who is this Chosen One?” he hissed.

The prophecy surfaced within the boy’s memory: *Darkness will rise and conquer light, unless the Chosen One*

joins the fight. For a moment, the words made him want to fight the shadow, to defeat General Gore and his Noxxian army for ever …

The moment passed.

"His name's Jack Beacon," the boy said. "He's a student at Hero Academy."

General Gore narrowed his red eyes. "Jack Beacon," he repeated. He clenched his gloved fists. "Soon this Chosen One will be destroyed! And Hero Academy too!"

The image of General Gore and Noxx swirled and vanished. With a beat of its wings, the terrawing flew

away into the night. The boy was alone in the courtyard, shivering in the darkness.