Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Demon Trappers: Forsaken

Written by

Jana Oliver

Published by

Macmillan Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

‘Hell is empty, and all the devils are here’ – *William Shakespeare*

CHAPTER ONE

Atlanta, Georgia

Riley Blackthorne rolled her eyes.

‘Libraries and demons,’ she muttered. ‘What *is* the attraction?’

At the sound of her voice the fiend hissed from its perch on top of the book stack. Then it gave her the finger.

The librarian chuckled at its antics. ‘It’s been doing that ever since we found it.’

They were on the second floor of the university law library, surrounded by weighty books and industrious students. Well, they’d been industrious until Riley showed up and now most of them were watching her every move. *Trapping with an audience* is what her dad called it. It made her painfully aware that her work clothes – denim jacket, jeans and pale blue T-shirt – looked totally Third World compared to the librarian’s sombre navy suit.

The woman brandished a laminated sheet – librarians were always into cataloguing things, even Hellspawn. She scrutinized the demon and then consulted the sheet. ‘About three inches tall, burnt mocha skin and peaked ears. Definitely a Biblio-Fiend. Sometimes I get them confused with the Klepto-Fiends. We’ve had both in here before.’

Riley nodded her understanding. ‘Biblios are into destroying books. Rather than stealing stuff they like to pee on things. That’s the big difference.’

As if on cue the Offending Minion of Hell promptly sent an arc of phosphorescent green urine in their direction. Luckily, demons of this size had equally small equipment, which meant limited range, but they both took a cautious step backward.

The stench of old gym shoes bloomed around them.

'Supposed to do wonders for acne,' Riley joked as she waved a hand to clear the smell.

The librarian grinned. 'That's why your face is so clear.'

Usually the clients bitched about how young she was and whether she was really qualified to do the job, even after she showed them her Apprentice Demon Trappers licence. She'd hoped some of that would stop when she'd turned seventeen, but no such luck. At least the librarian was taking her seriously.

'How long has it been here?' she asked.

'Not long. I called right away, so it hasn't done any real damage,' the librarian reported. 'Your dad's removed them for us in the past. I'm glad to see you're following in his footsteps.'

Yeah, right. As if anyone could fill Paul Blackthorne's shoes.

Riley shoved a stray lock of dark brown hair behind an ear. It swung free immediately. Undoing her denim hairclip she rewound her long hair and secured it so the little demon wouldn't tie it in knots. Besides, she needed time to think.

It wasn't as if she was a complete noob. She'd trapped Biblio-Fiends before, just not in a *university* law library full of professors and students, including a couple of seriously cute guys. One of them looked up at her, and she regretted being dressed for the job rather than for the scrutiny. She nervously twisted the strap of her denim messenger bag. Her eyes flicked towards a closed door a short distance away. *Rare Book Room.* A demon could do a lot of damage in there.

'You see our concern,' the librarian whispered.

'Sure do.' Biblio-Fiends hated books. They found immense joy rampaging through the stacks, peeing, ripping and shredding. To be able to reduce a room full of priceless books and manuscripts to compost would be a demon's wildest dream. Probably even get the fiend a promotion, if Hell had such a thing.

Confidence is everything. At least that's what her dad always said. It worked a lot better when he was standing next to her.

‘I can get it out of here, no problem,’ she said. Another torrent of swear words came her way. The demon’s high-pitched voice mimicked a mouse being slowly squashed by an anvil. It always made her ears ache.

Ignoring the fiend, Riley cleared her suddenly dry throat and launched into a list of potential consequences of her actions. It was the standard demon-trapper boilerplate. She began with the usual disclaimers required before extracting a Minion of Hell from a public location, including the clauses about unanticipated structural damage and the threat of demonic possession.

The librarian actually paid attention, unlike most clients.

‘This demonic possession thing. Does that really happen?’ she asked, her eyes widening.

‘Oh no, not with the little ones. Bigger demons, yeah.’ It was one of the reasons Riley liked trapping the small dudes. They could scratch and bite and pee on you, but they couldn’t suck out your soul and use it as a hockey puck for eternity.

If all the demons were like these guys, no big deal. But they weren’t. The Demon Trappers Guild graded Hellfiends according to cunning and lethality. This demon was a Grade One: nasty, but not truly dangerous. There were Grade Threes, carnivorous eating machines with wicked claws and teeth. And at the top end was a Grade Five, a Geo-Fiend which could create freak windstorms in the middle of shopping malls and cause earthquakes with a flick of a wrist. And that didn’t include the Archdemons who made your worst nightmares look tame.

Riley turned her mind to the job at hand. The best way to render a Biblio-Fiend incapable of harm was to read to it. The older and more dense the prose, the better. Romance novels just stirred them up, so it was best to pick something really boring. She dug in her messenger bag and extracted her ultimate weapon: *Moby Dick*. The book fell open to a green-stained page.

The librarian peered at the text. ‘Melville?’

‘Yeah. Dad prefers Dickens or Chaucer. For me it’s Herman Melville. He bored the . . . crap out of me in lit class. Put me to sleep every time.’ She pointed upward at the demon. ‘It’ll do the same to this one.’

‘Grant thee boon, Blackthorne’s daughter!’ the demon wheedled as it cast its eyes around, looking for a place to hide.

Riley knew how this worked: if she accepted a favour she’d be obligated to set the demon free. Accepting favours from fiends was *so* against the rules. Like potato chips – you couldn’t just stop at one – then you’d find yourself at Hell’s front door trying to explain why your soul had a big brand on it that said *Property of Lucifer*.

‘No way,’ Riley muttered. After clearing her throat, she began reading. ‘*Call me Ishmael.*’ An audible groan came from the stack above her. ‘Some years ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.’

She continued the torture, trying hard not to snicker. There was another moan, then a cry of anguish. By now the demon would be pulling out its hair, if it had any. ‘*It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul . . .*’

There was a pronounced thump as the fiend keeled over in a dead faint on the metal shelf.

‘Trapper scores!’ she crowed. After a quick glance towards a cute guy at a nearby table, Riley dropped the book and pulled a cup out of her bag. It had the picture of a dancing bear on the side of it.

‘Is that a . . . sippy cup?’ the librarian asked.

‘Yup. They’re great for this kind of thing. There’s holes in the top so the demon can breathe and it’s very hard for them to unscrew the lids.’ She grinned. ‘Most of all, they really hate them.’

Riley popped up on her tiptoes and picked the demon up by a clawed foot, watching it carefully. Sometimes they just pretended to be asleep in order to escape.

This one was out cold.

‘Well done. I’ll go sign the requisition for you,’ the librarian said and headed towards her desk.

Riley allowed herself a self-satisfied grin. This had gone just fine. Her dad would be really proud of her. As she positioned the demon over the top of the cup, she heard a laugh, low and creepy. A second later a puff of air hit her face, making her blink. Papers ruffled on tables. Remembering her father's advice, Riley kept her attention on the demon. It would revive quickly and when it did, the Biblio would go into a frenzy. As she lowered it inside the container, the demon began to twitch.

'Oh no you don't,' she said.

The breeze grew stronger. Papers no longer rustled, but were caught up and spun around the room like rectangular white leaves.

'Hey, what's going on?' a student demanded.

There was a curious shifting sound. Riley gave a quick look upward and watched as books began to dislodge themselves from the shelves one by one. They hung in the air like helicopters then veered off at sharp tangents. One whizzed right over the head of a student and he banged his chin on the table to avoid being hit.

The breeze grew, swirling through the stacks like the night wind in a forest. There were shouts and the muffled sound of running feet on carpet as students scurried for the exits.

The Biblio stirred, spewing obscenities, flailing his arms in all directions. Just as Riley began to recite the one Melville passage she'd memorized, the fire alarm blared to life, drowning her out. A heavy book glanced off her shoulder, ramming her into the stack. Dazed, she shook her head to clear it. The cup and the cap were on the floor at her feet. The demon was gone.

'No! Don't do this!'

Panic stricken, she searched for it. In a maelstrom of books, papers and flying notebooks she finally spied the fiend navigating his way towards a closed door, the one that led to the Rare Book Room. Ducking to avoid a flight of reference books swooping down on her like a pack of enraged seagulls, Riley grabbed the plastic cup and stashed it in her jacket pocket.

She had to get it into the container.

To her horror, the Rare Book Room door swung open and a confused student peered outwards into the melee. As if realizing nothing stood in his way, the demon took on additional speed. It leaped on a chair recently vacated by a terrified occupant, and then on to the top of the reference desk. Small feet pounding it dove off the desk, executed a roll, and lined himself up for the final dash to the open door, a tiny football player headed for a field goal.

Riley barrelled through everyone in her way, eyes riveted on the small figure scurrying across the floor. As she vaulted over the reference desk something slammed into her back, knocking her off balance. She went down in a sea of pencils, paper and wire trays. There was a ripping sound – her jeans had taken one for the team.

Scrambling on all fours she lunged forward, stretching as far as her arms could possibly reach. The fingers of her right hand caught the fiend by the waist and she dragged it towards her. It screamed and twisted and peed, but she didn't loosen her grip. Riley pulled the cup from her pocket and jammed the demon inside. Ramming her palm over the top of the cup, she lay on her back staring up at the ceiling. Around her lights flashed and the alarm brayed. Her breath came in gasps and her head ached. Both knees burned where she'd skinned them.

The alarm cut out abruptly and she sighed with relief. There was another chilling laugh. She hunted for the source, but couldn't find it. A low groaning came from the massive bookshelves to her right. On instinct, Riley rolled in the opposite direction, and kept rolling until she rammed into a table leg. With a strained cry of metal the entire bookshelf fell in a perfect arc and hit the carpeted floor where she'd been seconds before, sending books, pages and broken spines outwards in a wave. Suddenly all the debris in the room began to settle, like someone had shut off a giant wind machine.

A sharp pain in her palm caused her to shoot bolt upright, connecting her head with the side of the table.

'Dammit!' she swore, grimacing. The demon had bitten her. She shook the cup, disorienting the thing, then gingerly got to her feet. The world spun as she leaned against the table, trying to

get her bearings. Faces began to appear around her from under desks and behind stacks of books. A few of the girls were crying and one of the hunky boys held his head and moaned. Every eye was on her.

Then she realized why they were staring – her hands were spotted with green pee and her favourite T-shirt splashed as well. There was blood on her blue jeans and she'd lost one of her tennis shoes. Her hair hung in a knotted mass over one shoulder.

Heat bloomed in Riley's cheeks. *Trapper fails.*

When the demon tried to bite her again, she angrily shook the cup taking her frustration out on the fiend who'd make her look like an idiot.

It just laughed at her.

The librarian cleared her throat. 'You dropped this,' she said, offering the lid. The woman's hair looked like it had been styled by a wind tunnel and she had a yellow sticky note plastered to her cheek that said *Dentist, 10 a.m. Monday.*

Riley took the lid in a shaking hand and sealed the demon inside the cup.

It shouted obscenities and used both hands to give her the finger.

Same to you, jerk.

The librarian surveyed the chaos and sighed. 'And to think we used to worry about silverfish.'

Riley grimly watched the paramedics haul two students out on stretchers: one had a neck brace and the other babbled incoherently about the end of the world. Cellphones periodically erupted in a confused chorus of ringtones as parents got wind of the disaster. Riley heard snippets of the conversations – some kids were jazzed, telling Mom or Dad just how cool it had been and that they were posting videos on the Internet. Others were frightened out of their minds.

Like me.

It wasn't fair. She'd done everything right. Well, not everything, but Biblios weren't supposed to be psychokinetic. No Grade One demon would have the power to cause a windstorm, but somehow it had. There could have been another demon in the library but they never work as a team.

So who laughed at me? Her eyes slowly tracked over the remaining students one at a time. No clue. One of the cute guys was stuffing books in his backpack. When she caught his eye, he just shook his head in disapproval as if she was a naughty five-year-old.

Rich creep. He had to be if he was still in college.

Digging in her messenger bag she pulled out a warm soda and took several long gulps. It didn't cut the taste of old paper in the back of her throat. As she jammed the bottle into her bag the demon bite flared in pain. It was starting to swell and made the arm throb all the way to the elbow. She knew she should treat it with Holy Water but the cops had told her not to move and she didn't think the library would appreciate her getting their carpet wet.

At least the cops weren't asking her questions any more. One of them had tried to bully her into making a statement, but that had only made her mad. To shut him up she'd called her father. She'd told him that something had gone wrong and handed the phone to the cop.

'Mr Blackthorne? We got a situation here,' he huffed.

Riley shut her eyes. She tried not to listen to the conversation, but that proved impossible. When the cop started with the attitude, her father responded with his *you don't want to go there* voice. He'd perfected it as a high-school teacher when facing down mouthy teens. Apparently campus cops were also susceptible to *the voice* – the officer murmured an apology and handed her the phone.

'Dad? I'm so sorry . . .' Tears began to build. No way she'd cry in front of the cop, so Riley turned her back to him. 'I don't know what happened.'

There was total silence on the other end of the phone. *Why isn't he saying anything? God, he must be furious. I'm so dead.*

‘Riley . . .’ Her father took in a long breath. ‘You sure you’re not hurt?’

‘Yeah.’ No point in telling him about the bite – he’d see that soon enough.

‘As long as you’re OK that’s all that matters.’

Somehow Riley didn’t think the university would be so forgiving.

‘I can’t get free here so I’ll send someone for you. I don’t want you taking the bus, not after this.’

‘OK.’

More silence as the moments ticked by. She felt her heart tighten.

‘Riley, no matter what happens, I love you. Remember that.’

The phone went dead. Blinking her eyes to keep the tears in check, Riley stowed it in her messenger bag. She knew what her father was thinking – her apprentice licence was history.

But I didn’t do anything wrong.

The librarian knelt next to her chair. Her hair was brushed back in place and her clothes tidy. Riley envied her. The world could end and she’d always look neat. Maybe it was a librarian thing, something they taught them in school.

‘Sign this, will you?’ the woman said.

Riley expected a lengthy list of damages and how she’d be responsible for paying them. Instead, it was the requisition for payment of demon removal. The one a trapper signed when the job was done.

‘But—’ Riley began.

‘You caught him,’ the librarian said, pointing towards the cup resting on the table. ‘Besides, I looked at the demon chart. This wasn’t just one of the little guys, was it?’

Riley shook her head and signed the form though her fingers were numb

‘Good.’ The librarian pushed back a strand of Riley’s tangled hair and gave her a tentative smile. ‘Don’t worry, it’ll be OK.’ Then she was gone.

Riley's mom had said that right before she died. So had her dad after their condo burned to the ground. Adults always acted like they could fix everything.

But they can't. And they know it.