



THE AXEMAN'S ENCORE

Based on true events

A novel by
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Chapter 6

Wednesday, January 8th, 2025 – 2:33 PM

“Welcome to your new fixer-upper,” Joey said, pulling the van up in front of Threshold and killing the engine with a wheeze.

The whole band had come along this time. Rage hopped out first, looking up at the facade with mild awe. Kayla followed, drumsticks tucked in her hoodie pocket like cigarettes. She squinted up at the faded sign.

“This is it?” she asked. “Doesn’t look like much.”

“That’s the point,” Hub said, pulling a ring of keys from his jacket pocket. “We make it ours.”

The heavy chain on the double doors clanked as Hub worked the key into the rusted padlock. It popped open with a sound that echoed down the street.

Inside, Threshold greeted them with a blast of musty air, thick with mildew, rot, and something older. The light from the door sliced through decades of dust. The main room was massive, bigger than any of them had expected. A sunken stage loomed at the far end, its wooden boards warped but intact. Torn velvet curtains hung like limp tongues.

“Okay...” Rage stepped inside slowly, turning a full circle. “This is actually kinda sick.”

“It’s like a horror movie set,” Joey said, kicking aside an old beer bottle.

Kayla wrinkled her nose. “I was expecting abandoned... not apocalypse.”

Hub flipped on a flashlight and moved toward the stage, casting light across forgotten tables, some still upright, others collapsed under their own legs. All across the floor were strange grayish piles, small mounds of what looked

like disturbed dust or ash.

"Think someone had a fireplace in here?" Rage asked.

"No chimney," Hub muttered, already making a mental note.

They explored further, finding a back hallway that led to a small office. Inside, a wall safe sat flush in the plaster, its metal surface streaked with grime. No one said anything at first, just stared at it.

"We need to get that open," Joey said.

"I'll working on it," Hub replied. "There might be a combination hidden in the stuff from Joseph's armoire. I'll go digging tonight."

Back in the main room, Kayla called out from near the stage.

"There's a trapdoor here," she said. "Probably goes to a basement or storage."

Hub walked over, crouched to examine the ring handle.

Then something strange happened.

The room vanished.

Threshold was still there, but not this Threshold. Not abandoned. Not silent. This version breathed. Candles flickered in smoky sconces. Velvet curtains swayed with invisible movement. The air pulsed with warmth and noise and people, crowds that didn't exist a moment ago.

Music surged around him, jazz, wild, unhinged, and almost violent. Notes hit like fists. Brass howled. Drums rolled like thunder. And at the piano, a younger man, Joseph, unmistakably, his face locked in fierce concentration, hands a blur on the keys.

The song wasn't performance. It was ritual. Urgent. Defensive.

Then the air shifted.

The room darkened, not dimmed, darkened, like shadows crawling in from the corners. The crowd vanished. A low hum crept through the floorboards, crawling into Hub's bones.

A shape appeared, massive, wrong, more sensed than seen. A silhouette in the smoke. Looming. Eyes, or something like eyes, glowed from the dark.

Hub tried to back away, but couldn't move. The sound twisted, jazz notes unraveling into discordant noise. A high-pitched screech tore through the club, as if the saxophone itself was screaming.

Then: a flash of light.

The wind howled. Curtains snapped. Tables flipped.

Hub clutched his head, something inside him buzzing like feedback cranked too loud.

And then everything stopped.

He was back.

Threshold was empty again. Still. Cold.

The band stared at him like he'd just passed out.

"Dude," Joey said, voice tinged with worry, "you good?"

"You zoned out hard," Rage added. "Like, possessed hard."

Hub blinked. His mouth was dry. His heart pounded.

"I... think I saw him," he said.

"Who?" Kayla asked.

Hub stood slowly, brushing dust from his jeans.

"My papa. It was like some sort of weird daydream and I saw my papa playing piano."

"Did you drink anything from behind the bar? Because if so, which one, I wanna try." Rage asked.

"Knock it off, something happened to him. Are you okay?" Kayla asked

"Yeah, yeah. I'm fine now. That was just weird." He said shaking it off.

They unloaded what looked like a janitor's closet worth of cleaning supplies. Hub grabbed a push broom and started sweeping the dusty piles toward the center of the room. "Man... I don't know what this stuff is, but there's a lot of it. Weird little mounds everywhere."

"Probably squatters," Rage said, dragging a mop bucket behind him. "Might've been burning trash to stay warm. We should check for broken windows, board up anything that looks sketchy."

Hub and Joey found one in the back, a jagged pane barely hanging on. They patched it up and made a pass around the building, sealing what they could. It was enough to keep people out.

But something told Hub that keeping people from getting in wasn't the real problem.

It was what might be trying to get out.

Chapter 7

Wednesday, January 8th, 2025 – 7:53 PM

Dinner had been one of Lydia's greatest hits, smothered pork chops with dirty rice and cornbread so buttery it could've doubled as a dessert. Hub was full, content, and still quietly haunted by whatever the hell had happened back at Threshold.

The image had stuck with him. The sound of screaming wind tangled with jazz chords. It had felt real. Too real. And the worst part? It didn't feel over.

He wandered back into the hallway and stared at the armoire again. Something about it kept tugging at him, like it was more than a keepsake closet. He opened the doors, scanning the same shelves he'd already torn through twice.

Then he saw it. A thin strip of dried-out masking tape up near the top frame. Beneath it, a tiny brass key had been hidden.

"You sneaky bastard," Hub muttered, plucking it loose.

He knelt and tried the key on the lower cabinet. It clicked, slow and stubborn, like the wood hadn't been opened in years.

Inside was a small collection of locked-away clutter: a cigar box filled with matchbooks from long-gone nightclubs, an old metronome, and a battered folder with a cracked leather spine.

Hub flipped the folder open and started leafing through its contents. Most of it was the usual clutter, scribbled notes, torn gig fliers, half-finished set-lists from a century ago. Receipts from clubs that probably didn't exist anymore. But then, tucked behind a stack of brittle pages, he found something different.

A drawing.

Charcoal on thick, yellowed paper. Smudged, a little warped with time, but clear enough to make his pulse slow.

It was a figure. Tall. Misshapen. Horns curling from its head. One hand gripped what looked like an axe. The other arm looked cracked, like lightning was stitched through it. The face was barely detailed, mostly shadow, but the eyes...

They burned. Even on paper.

Hub sat down on the floor without thinking.

It was familiar. Too familiar.

This was it.

Not in exact form, but in feeling.

The shape, the presence, the way the air seemed to tighten around it...

Hub didn't know how, but he knew:

This was what the thing in the vision had felt like.

Below the drawing was a single word, written in faded pencil:

TARTAREL

He said it under his breath and didn't like the way it felt.

The rest of the folder wasn't much clearer. More notes. Scribbled references to dates, March 18 showed up more than once. Weird phrases like "the veil thins" and "hold the line" were repeated over and over.

None of it made sense.

He closed the folder and let it rest on his knees, staring at nothing for a few seconds.

Something wasn't right here.

The drawing. The weirdness at Threshold. The strange jazz notes. All of it... felt connected. Like pieces of a puzzle he didn't even know he was holding.

Hub leaned back against the wall, surrounded by papers, drawings, and questions a hundred years in the making.

He pulled out his phone and hovered over the contact for *Dad*.

A deep breath.

Then he tapped the screen.

It rang.

Once. Twice. Then,

“Hey, kiddo. Everything alright?”

“I need to ask you something,” Hub said, skipping the small talk. “Why didn’t anyone ever tell me Great Grandpa Joseph was murdered?”

A pause. Then, a slow exhale. “That was... a long time ago, Hub. We didn’t think it mattered anymore.”

“Murdered with an axe kind of *matters*, don’t you think?”

His dad went quiet for a moment. “He was already old. And, well... he’d been saying some pretty strange stuff near the end. Talking about demons, rituals. Said he had a responsibility, like he was keeping something sealed away. He asked me to take over for him.”

Hub’s eyebrows knit. “Wait, he asked *you* to carry on whatever he was doing?”

“Yeah. Said it was important. That it had to stay in the family. I thought he’d gone off the deep end. So I asked *my* dad about it, Grandpa Ben, and he said papa told him the same thing, like it was some family legacy. Honestly, I just figured it was dementia. Something he made up to give meaning to getting old.”

Hub didn’t say anything at first. He stared at the drawing in his lap, those glowing eyes. The name *Tartarel* written beneath it.

His dad cleared his throat on the other end. “Look, I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you carrying that weight. It sounded like madness. And honestly... I don’t believe it myself.”

Hub’s voice was quieter now. “Right. Yeah. Thanks.”

“You okay?”

“I will be,” Hub said, “Love you.” Then ended the call.

He sat there a moment longer, the silence feeling heavier than before. The drawing stared up at him from the folder. The lines somehow looked sharper now.

Hub exhaled and rubbed his temples. “Okay... okay.”

He stared down at the drawing again. At the glowing eyes. The axe. The name.

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Then something clicked.

That article, days ago, when he first looked up Joseph's murder. One of the experts quoted had stuck in his brain.

Martin Dupré.

Jazz historian. Bit of a crank, sure. But the only one talking about demons, jazz, and murder in the same sentence.

Hub opened a new browser tab.

"Alright, Dupré. Let's see what you've got."