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Illidan: World of Warcraft

By William King

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Behind the legend stands a being hungry for justice and vengeance as the adventure, intrigue, and heroism of *World of Warcraft*, the global phenomenon, rise to a new level.

You are not prepared.

Illidan Stormrage is one of the most powerful beings ever to walk the lands of Azeroth. He is also one of the least understood. Behind his legend, beneath his enigmatic mission, lies a brilliant mind whose machinations are comprehended by few—and trusted by even fewer. Illidan’s righteous reign of justice and vengeance has begun.

Long ago, the night elf sorcerer Illidan infiltrated the demonic Burning Legion to ward off its invasion of Azeroth. Instead of hailing him as a hero, his own kind branded him the Betrayer, questioning his intentions after he appeared to aid the demon lords. For ten thousand years, he languished in prison—vilified, isolated, but never forgetting his purpose.

Now the Legion has returned, and there is only one champion who can truly stand against it. Released from his bonds, Illidan prepares for the final confrontation in the alien realm of Outland, gathering an army of grotesque fel orcs, serpentine naga, cunning blood elves, and twisted demon hunters to his side. He alone knows what deeply hidden motives guide his hand; he alone understands the price that must be paid to defeat the enemies of creation. Yet as before, he is assailed by those who see his schemes as a cynical quest for power, including the night elf Maiev Shadowsong, his former jailor. Warden Shadowsong and her Watchers have pursued the Betrayer to Outland to exact retribution for his crimes, and she will not rest until Illidan is in her custody . . . or in his grave.

Praise for *Illidan*

“William King kicks off a great story with *Illidan*.”—***BlizzPro***

“For many people, new and old players alike, this book will be an eye-opening journey.”—***All Things Azeroth***

“I enjoyed *World of Warcraft: Illidan* a great deal.”—***BlizzPlanet***

“Damn fun . . . There’s virtually never a dull moment in *Illidan*.”—***Cineline***

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

William King is the author of more than twenty novels, an Origins Award–winning game designer, and a husband, father, and player of MMOs. His short stories have appeared in *Interzone* and *The Year’s Best Science Fiction: Seventh Annual Collection*. His Warhammer books have sold almost a million copies in English and been translated into eight languages. His novel *Blood of Aenarion* was shortlisted for the 2012 David Gemmell Legend Award.

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Chapter One

Four Years Before the Fall

Green meteors ripped through the dark clouds that perpetually obscured the heavens over Shadowmoon Valley. The ground shook as the monstrously ornate demonic siege engines on the walls of the Black Temple rained death down on the blood elf forces of Prince Kael’tas Sunstrider, strewn the red earth of Outland with their corpses. Despite their losses, the elves pushed forward, determined to take the citadel of Magtheridon, lord of Outland, the Burning Legion’s satrap in this shattered world.

Illidan paused for a moment and studied the Black Temple. To inexperienced eyes, the defenses might look immeasurably strong, but he saw that they had been neglected. There were too few sentries for the span of the towering walls, the warding spells were starting to unravel, and the metal struts of the gates were stained with rust and verdigris. The defenders responded slowly, as if they could not quite believe they were being assaulted by a force so much smaller than their own. Perhaps they expected to be relieved by demonic allies. If so, they were doomed to disappointment. Illidan and his companions had spent the whole long, hot Outland day sealing the gates through which the demons were summoned. No aid was coming from that source.

Illidan glanced over at Prince Kael’tas. “Magtheridon has grown strong over the years, but he has had few real foes to contend with. He has become decadent and complacent. The boisterous cur cannot match our cunning or our will.”

The tall, fair blood elf prince looked up at him. The fierce joy of combat blazed in his eyes. “This will be a glorious battle, master. Though Magtheridon’s forces vastly outnumber ours, your soldiers are prepared to fight to the end.”

Illidan hoped that would not prove necessary. He needed to seize the Black Temple and mastery of Outland quickly if he was to make himself secure against the vengeance of the demon lord Kil'jaeden. Kil'jaeden had set Illidan a task after he rejoined the Burning Legion—to destroy the Frozen Throne and hence eliminate a rebellious servant—and he had not completed it. The Deceiver did not reward failure. Illidan believed that closing the demonic portals could thwart Kil'jaeden's attempts to locate him. Winning this fortress would give him a stronger base of operations for keeping the portals closed.

An elven sorcerer raised his hand and sent a bolt of arcane energy lancing toward the walls. Badly maintained or not, the defenses were enough to prevent it from striking the siege engine. A ball of fire arced down toward the mage, gouging the blood-red earth as the defenders sought his range. A company of Kael'thas's soldiers raced past en route to the shelter of the walls.

Illidan clenched his fists as he sensed the demons within the temple. Here in the foreign world of Outland, he felt the temptation of demonic magic even more strongly than usual, especially after he had consumed the potency within the Skull of Gul'dan. The surge of evil energy from that artifact had transformed him, changing both his physical form and the depth of his power, but it had put him off balance for months. He flexed his newly gained demonic wings, earning a concerned glance from Prince Kael'thas. Illidan took a deep breath and forced himself to be calm.

It was a long, strange road that had brought him to this pass. Since Tyrande had freed him, he had seen the overthrow of the Burning Legion on his homeworld of Azeroth, made a pact with a demon lord, and fled to Outland to evade his enemies, both night elven and demonic. He had been recaptured by his old nemesis, Maiev, and then freed by his allies, the young prince Kael'thas—whose allegiance Illidan had earned by pledging to help the blood elves sate their addiction to magic—and Lady Vashj, a leader of the naga. Now he found himself scheming to overthrow the pit lord who ruled this shattered world in the name of the Burning Legion.

Kael'thas stared at him, expecting an answer to his promise of loyalty. Illidan said, "I am pleased by your people's zeal, young Kael. Their spirits and powers have been honed in this harsh wilderness. Their courage alone may be enough to—"

"Lord Illidan, new arrivals come to greet you." The voice of Lady Vashj cut him off as she slithered into view. Great bands of muscle pulsed and bulged as she moved, twisting the coils of her lower body. Her oddly beautiful face, reminiscent of a night elf's, contrasted with the horror of her serpentine form.

Illidan turned to look in the direction she indicated. A pack of monstrous figures lumbered into view. Illidan recognized them at once. They were Broken, corrupted and devolved former members of the draenei race who had inhabited Draenor before it was shattered into Outland. They, too, were part of Illidan's coalition, bound to him by promises of aid against their common enemy, Magtheridon.

The Broken were hulking, ungraceful monsters, bearing primitive weapons in their huge hands. Illidan's mystical senses detected that more of them were nearby, potent magic concealing them from those who lacked his spectral sight.

One of the Broken, even more massive and twisted of form than the rest, limped forward on hooved feet. "We have fought the orcs and their demon masters for generations," the figure said. His voice rasped from within his chest. It seemed to pain him to speak. "Now, at last, we will end their curse forever. We are yours to command, Lord Illidan."

It was Akama, leader of the Broken. He was not a reassuring figure. Fangs jutted up from his lower jaw. Tentacles writhed out from the bottom half of his face.

“You have arrived just in time,” said Illidan. “Those machines on the walls must be silenced, and the gate must be opened.”

Akama nodded and gestured. The near-invisible Broken swarmed forward across the open ground and clambered up the walls of the Black Temple. A small force of blood elves and naga took shelter against the monstrous fortifications, beneath the firing arcs of the demonic engines. Illidan, Kael'thas, and Lady Vashj moved to join them, along with Akama and his bodyguards.

Once again, the so-called lord of Outland's overconfidence was revealed. A properly prepared fortress would have vats of boiling oil or alchemical fire ready to pour down on attackers. The defenders did nothing. Long minutes ticked by. This close to the walls, Illidan could hear the hum of the magical generators that powered the demonic war machines.

Suddenly the sounds of combat came from within the walls, and the great gates of the Black Temple swung open. Akama and his bodyguards raced forward to join the fray. Explosions sounded as the Broken destroyed the generators, and the war machines on the walls fell silent. The main bulk of the naga and blood elf force advanced toward the gate once more.

Akama returned, hideous face jubilant. He had waited a long time for this day. Illidan smiled and said, “As I promised, your people shall have their vengeance, Akama. By night's end, we will all be drunk with it. Vashj, Kael, give the final order to strike. The hour of wrath has come!”

Through the open gates, Illidan could see a vast courtyard stacked high with bones. Red-skinned fel orcs milled around in confusion as their leaders bellowed commands and tried to get them into some semblance of order to repel the invaders.

Within the Black Temple, there were probably ten fel orcs for every one of Illidan's troops. Each had been twisted by foul magic into something far stronger and fiercer than a normal orc. It counted for nothing now. Illidan's forces swept into the courtyard, a tight wedge that cleaved through their disorganized enemy as easily as their blades sliced orcish flesh.

Illidan plunged his talons into the chest of a fel orc. Bone crunched as he closed his fingers and ripped open a cavity to pull the heart free. The fel orc roared and lunged forward, jaws snapping in an attempt to tear out Illidan's throat even as the creature died.

Illidan raised the corpse above his head and tossed it into the onrushing squad of red-skinned defenders. Its weight bowled them over, sending them tumbling to the ground. He leapt amid them, freeing his warglaives from their sheaths. He lashed out, striking to left and right with irresistible force. His enemies fell, decapitated, limbless, mutilated. Blood covered him. He licked it from his lips and moved forward, slashing and slicing as he went.

All around, the dying screamed. Magic thundered as Prince Kael'thas and Lady Vashj unleashed their spells. Illidan was tempted to do so himself, but he wanted to preserve his strength for the final conflict with Magtheridon.

Part of him took pleasure in the clash of arms. There was nothing quite like shedding the blood of your foes

with your own hands. Deep within him, the chained demon part of his nature enjoyed feeding this way.

The fel orcs fought well, but they were no match for Illidan and his comrades. The naga were much larger and more physically powerful. They wrapped their enemies within their serpentine coils and squeezed the life out of them.

The blood elves were masters of sorcery and swords. They might not be as strong as the fel orcs, but they were faster and more agile, and bonds of loyalty stronger than life itself drove them to defend their prince.

The Broken fought with the determination of a people driven to free their homeland from the grip of demons. The howls of dying fel orcs rose to the heavens in protest as they dropped before the hungry blades of their enemies. Within minutes the courtyard was cleared, the fel orcs were routed, and the way into the Black Temple's inner citadel and Magtheridon's chambers lay open.

"Victory is ours," said Akama. "The Temple of Karabor will belong to my people once again."

"The temple will be returned to your people," Illidan said. He replaced his warglaives in their sheaths. "In good time." It was true. He fully intended to give back the Black Temple to the Broken. Once he had achieved his goals.

Akama looked at him with rheumy eyes. He interlaced his stubby fingers and bobbed his head, his need to believe etched on his face. The Temple of Karabor had been the most sacred site of his people before Magtheridon's desecration turned it into the Black Temple. Illidan sensed it had a deep personal significance to the Broken himself. That was a string that could be tugged to make him dance, if the need arose. Not that what Akama wanted counted for anything. Illidan's purpose far outweighed the desires of any Broken. He had planned too long to let scruples stand in his way.

"When we overcome the pit lord, most of his fel orc lieutenants will support us," Illidan said. "They follow the strongest, and we will have shown that their faith in Magtheridon was misplaced. Such summoned demons as remain within the temple will be bound in fealty to me, or they will die their final death."

Vashj nodded. "Cut off the head and the body falls," she said.

"You will slay Magtheridon, Lord?" Akama asked.

Illidan allowed himself a cruel smile. "We shall do much worse than that," he said.

"And what would that be?" Akama spoke slowly. Illidan heard the doubt in his voice. Clearly, Akama had reservations about what they were doing.

"You will need to wait and see," Illidan said.

"As you wish, Lord," Akama said. "So shall it be."

"Then let us be about our business," said Illidan. "We have a world to conquer."

The doorway to the throne room slid open. The stench of demon assaulted Illidan's nostrils. Flames leapt around Magtheridon's throne of bones. The pit lord loomed more than five times the height of a blood elf, a centaur-like creature with two arms and a quadruped lower half, as massive as a dragon. Magtheridon's legs

were like the columns supporting the roof of some ancient temple. They lifted his underbelly so high that an elf could walk beneath it. In one huge hand, he held a glaive as long as the mast of an oceangoing ship, weighty as a battering ram. Flanking him were two gigantic, batwinged doomguard, each almost as tall as their master, and a force of lesser demons. Illidan sensed their power and their hostility.

The pit lord turned his burning eyes upon Illidan. When he spoke, his voice was deep and guttural. “I do not know you, stranger, but your power is vast. Are you an agent of the Legion? Have you been sent here to test me?”

Illidan laughed. “I have come to replace you. You are a relic, Magtheridon, a ghost of a past age. The future is mine. From this moment on, Outland and all its denizens will bow to me.”

The pit lord lumbered forward, raising his gigantic glaive. The earth shook beneath his tread. “I will crush you like the insect you are. I will feast upon your pulped flesh and devour your soul with it.”

He spoke with the overweening self-confidence of one who thought his might was unchallengeable. His demonic bodyguards advanced. Illidan sprang, warglaives scything through the air to bite into demon flesh. His blow slashed the arm from a felguard, forcing the creature to drop his axe. A heartbeat later Illidan’s left-hand warglaive sliced his opponent open from neck to groin.

Illidan’s own forces advanced into the fray. The doomguard were mighty, but they were few. Buffeted by the spells of Kael’tas and Vashj and surrounded by assailants, the doomguard were slain like bears being dragged down by a pack of hounds.

Illidan bounded forward to confront Magtheridon himself. The pit lord’s huge glaive crashed down, biting into the stone where Illidan had stood. He was already away, rolling between the lord of Outland’s columnar legs, hamstringing each of the front ones with a double swipe of his blades. The pit lord roared with fury and struck again. Illidan tumbled forward under his foe’s belly, drawing forth ichor with his strikes. He vaulted onto Magtheridon’s massive tail, ran up his spine, and drove his blades into the demon’s thick neck.

From Illidan’s vantage point, he could see that his forces had felled the pit lord’s bodyguards. The demons were finished. Illidan raised his hands high and chanted the spell of binding. A wave of unleashed magical energy hit the pit lord. Magtheridon flinched as the spell began to bite.

Illidan’s heart thundered as he exerted his will. He felt as if he were engaged in a tug-of-war with a giant. Magtheridon’s advance slowed. His face twisted as if he, too, felt the strain.

“You are strong—for a mortal,” the pit lord said.

“I am not a mortal,” said Illidan.

“Anything that can be killed is mortal.”

Users Review

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