

# Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axellngleson

Submitted: September 10, 2008

Updated: September 11, 2008

*Axel returns as a biker to aid Sora, Riku and Kairi in their battle against the Heartless.*

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Axellngleson/54170/Heartless-Hunter-Axel>

<b>Chapter 1 - Chapter 01</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Chapter 02</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Chapter 03</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Chapter 04</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - Chapter 05</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 6 - Chapter 06</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 7 - Chapter 07</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 8 - Chapter 08</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 9 - Chapter 09</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 10 - Chapter 10</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 11 - Chapter 11</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Chapter 12 - Chapter 12</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter 13 - Chapter 13</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Chapter 14 - Chapter 14</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter 15 - Chapter 15</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter 16 - Chapter 16</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Chapter 17 - Chapter 17</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter 18 - Chapter 18</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Chapter 19 - Chapter 19</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Chapter 20 - Chapter 20</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Chapter 21 - Chapter 21</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Chapter 22 - Epilogue</b>	<b>52</b>

# 1 - Chapter 01

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

(Disclaimer: Any recognizable characters belong to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of and with permission by Saveena-001 from DeviantArt.)

-Chapter One-

The afternoon sun beat down on the two Keyblade masters as they relaxed on the beach with their best friend.

Sora, Riku, and Kairi had known each other for as long as they could remember. They had gone out of their way to save each others' lives when the Heartless and the Nobodies had been on the move.

They decided that it was getting close to lunchtime and headed back into town. They were walking down the road together when a large Heartless suddenly appeared in the street, scattering people throughout the area

They moved to manifest their keyblades, but before they could make an attack on the Heartless, a motorcycle sped by, its rider clad in black with a black helmet hiding his face from the trio.

"Watch out!" Sora called to him as he turned his bike toward the Heartless. "That thing is dangerous!"

The cyclist reached out toward the Heartless, a whirling, flaming chakram appearing in his right hand. He raced past the Heartless, hurling the chakram at the Heartless.

The Heartless stumbled, dropping to its knees, only to rise again and turn its attention to the cyclist, who stood up on the seat of his bike, then leapt upon the Heartless, driving his remaining chakram into its neck while retrieving the other from its back.

The Heartless let out a roar of anger as it threw the cyclist off. But by now, Sora, Kairi, and Riku had joined in the fight. As Kairi attacked the feet and legs of the Heartless, Sora and Riku concentrated on its middle, leaving the head to the cyclist, whose identity Sora was already speculating on with amazement.

It took their combined efforts, but eventually they were able to bring down the threatening invader.

The cyclist returned his chakrams to wherever he kept them. Then, he retrieved his bike, which had landed nearby without so much as a dent, and climbed back on. Without looking back, he started the motorcycle and sped off.

Sora watched him speed off in silence for a moment, before a name finally dropped from his lips:

“Axel?”

## 2 - Chapter 02

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Two-

Sora sat on the edge of his bed that evening, unable to sleep.

Had that been Axel who had sped out of who-knows-where to aid them in bringing down the Heartless? If it was, then what? Was Organization XIII going to come back? Or was it just him? If it wasn't Axel, then who was it?

"It has to be him," Sora told himself. "It just has to be. But how? Why?"

He was about to change into his pajamas when there was a knock on his window.

His upstairs window.

Annoyed, he went to the window, and saw Riku hanging there upside down.

"Sorry to bother you, but I really could use a little help," the older keyblade master told his friend.

Then Sora saw what Riku was hanging from. Another Heartless was holding him up by one ankle. It didn't look very comfortable and Sora said so.

"It's not," Riku agreed. "Now stop making stupid comments and get me down from here."

"How come you can't do it?" Sora asked.

"Broken keyblade arm."

That wasn't good. Sora grabbed his keyblade and leapt out of the window, realizing at the last second just how stupid a move this was.

Fortunately, Riku was fast enough to catch him before he fell.

"Nice going, Sora," he said, after he tossed Sora up towards their foe.

Sora sliced the appendage that was holding Riku, causing the lilac-haired youth to topple to the ground and land on his already broken arm.

"Sora!" Riku screamed at his younger friend. "If my arm wasn't broken, I'd ..."

Sora shot Riku an apologetic look, which placated the older of the two friends, then returned to his battle with the Heartless. He moved out of the way just as a chakram zipped past him, the mysterious cyclist having returned.

“Who are you?” Sora asked.

The cyclist did not reply. He was far too busy helping Sora defeat the new threat.

Using Sora to distract the Heartless, their unknown ally threw one chakram at its slender neck, slicing off its head, and burning its neck, cauterizing the wound. Even the fabled Hydra would not have been able to grow a new head in those conditions. Sora was grateful for that. But it brought up a new problem, and Sora voiced it when he and Kairi were in the hospital waiting room waiting for Riku to emerge from the room where they were setting his broken arm.

“That Heartless wasn’t a shadow. It was solid.”

“So, what does that mean?” Kairi asked. “And who was that man with the bike? That’s twice he’s shown up”

“I’m not really sure,” Sora said. “But I think he’s a friend of mine.”

• \* \* \* \*

“Those two Heartless who showed up were bigger than the normal variety,” Sora observed as they stood in line for some sea-salt ice-cream at the local vendor. “And a lot more solid.”

“They’re also smarter,” Riku added, looking down at his arm, which was in a cast and a sling. “That one knew enough to disable my keyblade arm.”

“So, what does that mean?”

“It means you guys are going to need my help,” a voice told them.

They turned and saw the man who had aided them against the two new Heartless. He was leaning against his bike, looking perfectly casual about the situation. His helmet was resting on the handle of the motorcycle, his familiar face revealed to them.

“Axel! It is you!” Sora went to hug Axel, but the fire-mage held out a hand to stop him.

“You’re not on my list of favorite people, Sora,” He told him. “You killed my boyfriend.”

“Your boyfriend?” Sora blurted out. “But you’ve got no heart. How can...? Did he know about you? Did he know what you are?”

“Demyx was a Nobody, too,” Axel replied. “But he was unique. Unlike the rest of us, he never completely lost his heart. And what he retained held an amazing brilliance. He was what kept me alive after I’d lost everything. He arrived shortly after me. I was the one who initiated him in the Organization. We hit it off right away.”

“Demyx?” Kairi asked.

“The water-mage,” Axel explained.

## 3 - Chapter 03

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Three-

Sora frowned as he gazed, listlessly, at his ice-cream.

"It'll melt if you don't start eating it," Axel told him.

"Especially with you glaring at it, the way you are," Sora countered.

"It's not the ice-cream I'm glaring at," Axel said, pointedly. "Remember, I haven't quite forgiven you for killing Demyx."

"If you want me to get on my knees and beg you for your forgiveness, I will," Sora told him.

"It wouldn't bring Demyx back," Axel told him. "And you'd just look like more of an idiot than you already do."

Riku and Kairi heard the almost affectionate tone in Axel's voice and realized that he was a true friend, regardless of how he felt about his boyfriend's demise.

● \* \* \* \*

Yen Sid turned to King Mickey as the two observed the events they had set into motion in the old wizard's crystal ball.

"With the way things stand now, we may not be able to retain our hold on Axel. But I'm not sure that bringing Demyx back as well would be a good thing."

"Demyx never initiated any attacks," King Mickey pointed out. "He's no threat to anyone."

"He's not likely to fight on anyone's side, not even ours," Yen Sid said in a concerned tone.

"But he will be a stabilizing force as far as Axel goes."

Yen Sid sighed. "Perhaps you are right," he said. "So be it."

● \* \* \* \*

The surfer caught the moonlit tide with an ease that was almost inhuman. Most of the others were already indoors, the evening waters notoriously dangerous. Only the most expert of the wave-riders

came out at this time.

The surfer's lilac hair glistened, wetly, in the glow of moonbeams, as he rode the crest of a good sized wave.

The wave crashed upon the shore, depositing the skilled youth as gracefully as the hand of a god.

"Not bad," said a voice that the surfer didn't recognize. "Not as good as me, but..." the other surfer shrugged.

"Let's see what you can do," Riku challenged. "Or are you all talk and no action?"

"Why do people think I'm a wimp?!" the other surfer demanded, as he climbed brought out his board and surfed a wave so large that it could be called a tsunami's baby brother. And he didn't just surf it. He performed a dozen or so tricks that were normally associated with skateboarding. Tricks that Riku had never seen anyone do on a wave before. This new surfer seemed to have some kind of control over the wave itself.

Riku went over to him once he'd landed and shook his hand.

"That was impressive!"

"Thanks." The new arrival shook the water from his mulhawk. "I'm not exactly sure who I am, or what I'm doing here, other than surfing which seems to be a lot of fun."

"You certainly seem to be in your element," Riku added.

"My... element?"

Riku saw the contemplative look on the boy's face.

"Tell you what," he suggested. "Why don't you come and stay at my place for a while until we can get you back home?"

"That won't be necessary," Axel called from the far end of the beach as he ran over to the blond surfer and hugged him. "Nice to see you again, Demyx."



## 4 - Chapter 04

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Four-

The blond surfer blinked at the red-haired cyclist.

“Do I know you?”

Axel rolled his eyes. “We’ve only been boyfriends for three years.”

“Boyfriends?” Demyx asked. “I have a boyfriend?”

Axel threw his hands up in resignation. “I give up. Look, my name is Axel. A-X-E-L. Got it memorized?”

“Axel. Right.” Demyx nodded. “Easy to remember.”

“Then how come you don’t?”

“I don’t remember anything except being in a really dark and scary place for a long time.”

Axel’s expression changed to one of sympathy. Whoever had brought Demyx back hadn’t erased his memory of whatever had befallen him in the void. And Axel could tell that, whatever it had been, it hadn’t been good.

Demyx saw the look in the older man’s eyes and decided he was telling the truth about being his boyfriend.

“Tell me about it,” Axel said, concernedly.

“There was this guy there, who was a real jerk,” Demyx told him. “He threw me into this dungeon and wouldn’t let me play any music or sing.”

Axel was horrified. Had Demyx actually been trapped in the Underworld? Abused by Hades? That would certainly explain his amnesia.

Sora felt sorry for the younger Nobody as well. He had been the one who had put Demyx in Hades’ cruel hands to begin with.

“Um, Demyx?”

Axel got between Demyx and Sora. "You have no right to speak to him."

"Sheesh, I just wanted to apologize." Sora said, annoyed.

Demyx peered out from behind Axel. "Sure."

"I do," Sora replied.

"I mean, I accept your apology."

"Oh," Sora smiled, ruffling his own hair and smiling. "Name's Sora." He extended his hand. "I'm sorry I killed you."

"Demyx," Demyx replied, stepping out from behind Axel and shaking Sora's hand. "And what do you mean you killed me?"

"I'm... I killed you." Sora blurted out. Then he looked at Demyx more closely.

"You were alive in that place?"

"I'm not really sure," Demyx admitted. "I just don't remember being killed."

"It's probably just as well that you don't," Axel said, putting a hand on Demyx's shoulder. "Being killed isn't an experience anyone should remember."

"How about you?" Sora asked Axel. "Do you remember your sacrifice?"

"Yes," Axel nodded. "And I wouldn't change it for the world."

Sora smiled. "I'm glad."

## 5 - Chapter 05

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Five-

“So, what do we do about the new Heartless?” Sora asked Axel.

Through some kind of unspoken assent, Axel had become the leader of the group. Most likely it had been his apparent expertise on the new threat which now plagued them.

Axel considered the matter as he leaned against the paopu tree.

“Hey, be careful,” Riku warned. “I’m up here, so try not to set it on fire.”

“I can control my fire, you know.”

“Riku’s just a little superstitious about his favorite tree,” Sora explained. “He thinks he’ll die if it’s destroyed.”

“I will,” Riku retorted. “Its not superstition, its fact.”

“Oh, come on, Riku,” Sora rolled his eyes. “It’s easier to believe that Demyx has a heart than to...”

“I do have a heart!” Demyx whined. “Tell ‘em, Axel!”

“Well, actually,” Axel hemmed.

“Axel!” Demyx whined. “What are you saying?!”

“You have just about as much of a heart as I do,” Axel told Demyx. “Sorry.”

“I don’t believe that,” Demyx shook his head. “I have a heart. It’s in my music. You’ll see! Once I get my sitar back from Hades...”

“Who you’re scared to death of...wimp.” Sora cut in.

Demyx turned at him. “Why must you insist upon calling me a wimp?”

“He’s not a wimp,” Axel corrected. “He’s a pacifist. Believe me, he can be quite a fighter if he’s cornered.”

“That is true,” A voice said from the main island.

Sora looked up. “Donald! Goofy!” He waved.

Donald and Goofy ran down the dock to the mini-island and hugged Sora.

“Looks like the team’s back together,” Axel smiled.

“All five of us,” Sora pointed out, discounting Demyx.

“Six,” Demyx pouted.

“What are you going to do?” Sora asked, sarcastically, “sing really badly until the Heartless run away?”

“I can sing as well as I can play,” Demyx insisted.

“Heartless of the worlds beware!” Sora declared, sarcastically.

Demyx and Axel both glared at him.

“I think we should get back to making our plan,” Axel finally said. “Well, the first thing we need is to find someone who can heal Riku’s arm. Surfing and fighting with a broken arm is impressive and all, but its still impractical.”

“Not to mention dumb,” Sora pointed out. “But then we’re talking about a guy who was dumb enough to accept help from Maleficent.”

“Hey! I was trying to save Kairi.”

“By kidnapping a bunch of Princesses.”

“Hey, he’s a kidnapper, too,” Riku said, pointing at Axel.

“At least he apologized,” Sora retorted.

“Anyway,” Axel cut in. “We need to heal Riku’s arm, and then we need to work on the best plan of attack against these Heartless. To be quite honest, I’m beginning to feel that I’m doing most of the work.”

“And what am I? Chopped liver?” Demyx asked.

“More like minced chicken,” Sora replied.

Demyx glared at him. “I’ll show you,” he complained, getting into Donald and Goofy’s gummi ship and taking off.

“Hey! Come back here!” Donald quacked in aggravation. “That’s our ship!”

But Demyx was already gone.

## 6 - Chapter 06

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Six-

"Nice going, Sora," Axel growled, smacking Sora upside the head. "If he gets hurt..."

"It wasn't my fault! Right, guys?" Sora looked around. Even Donald and Goofy were glaring at him. "Um... guys?"

"You were very rude, Sora," Goofy chided him. "I think you should find Demyx and apologize."

Sora's ego deflated. It was hard to disagree with Goofy.

"Maybe you're right," he decided. "But he's still a wimp."

That insult earned him another thwack upside the head from Axel, who turned and headed back to his bike.

"Where are you going?"

"To save Demyx," Axel replied. "And don't bother following me. I'm not interested in your help."

"How do you intend to get there?" Sora asked.

"I'll find a way that doesn't involve you," Axel told him.

"Look, I said I was sorry," Sora reminded the fire-mage.

"And you insulted him again after you said it," Axel pointed out. "If you ask me, I'd say that was a pretty poor apology. And I thought I was the one with no heart."

Before Sora could offer anything further, Axel climbed onto his motorcycle and sped off.

"There he goes," Riku sighed. "Good job, Sora. Which ally do you plan on losing next?"

"We'd better go find them, then," Sora decided.

"How? Demyx took our gummi ship, remember?"

Sora turned to Kairi, who had been silent up until then.

Riku closed his eyes and seemed to fall into a trance.

~I'm sorry to disturb you, your majesty,~ he reached out to King Mickey. ~But Sora's messed things up again. We need a new gummi ship to go and find Demyx! ~

~I'm afraid there's no other gummi ship available right now,~ King Mickey replied. ~But I'll send someone who has a ship you can use.~

~Who?~

~He calls himself Xirin.~

Riku opened his eyes.

"Help is on the way," he told the others.

"Thank the stars for your connection with the King," Donald told Riku.

"So, who's coming?" Kairi asked.

"Someone named Xirin," Riku shrugged.

## 7 - Chapter 07

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Seven-

“Any idea who this Xirin person is?” Sora asked.

“Someone the King trusts,” Riku shrugged. “That’s all I know. Look, perhaps you should sit this one out. Demyx might not come back if you’re with us insulting him. I know I wouldn’t.”

“So, how long do we have to wait for this person?” Kairi asked.

“Not long, I suspect. Though how he’s getting here is as much your guess as it is mine.”

“So we just wait until he gets here,” Axel grumbled. “Gee, Sora. You’re even more of a pain in the backside than Roxas was.”

“Excuse me?” Roxas demanded, stepping forward from within Sora.

Axel grinned. “I always could get a rise out of you.”

Roxas stuck his tongue out at Axel, and then rejoined with Sora.

They were about to speculate further as to how Xirin would appear when a roar from above announced the presence of what was apparently a new threat.

“That’s Xemnas’ ship,” Sora recognized. “What’s it doing here?”

“I thought we destroyed it, and Xemnas,” Riku agreed. “It must be the source of the new Heartless.”

The ship did not attack, however. Instead, it hovered above them, the dragon’s mouth opening to reveal an exact duplicate of Riku.

The group did a double-take between the new arrival and their long-time friend.

“Xirin?” Riku asked.

The other Riku nodded. “Yeah. Hey, are you guys just gonna hang out in the sunshine, or are we going to fix this mess your friend’s got us all in?”

“Well, I don’t feel like hanging about while something terrible happens to Demyx,” Axel said, as he



stepped forward to the dragon's mouth as it descended to ground level. "Come on, you guys," he beckoned.

Everyone stepped into the dragon's mouth. But when Sora tried, Axel blocked him.

"Not you."

"But..."

Axel shook his head. "I don't want Demyx getting hurt again."

"The King said everyone comes on this journey," Xirin told him. "The idiot included."

"Who are you calling an idiot?"

"Hurts, doesn't it?" Axel pointed out.

Sora understood what he meant.

"Um... yeah," he admitted.

"Well. Let's get going, then," Xirin told him. "We've got a friend to rescue."

"How do we find him? Does this ship have some sort of fancy computer for tracking Nobodies?"

"Nope," Xirin replied. "It's got something better. Us."

"That sounds hopeful." Axel rolled his eyes.

## 8 - Chapter 08

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Eight-

Once the dragon ship was under way, Xirin turned to his guests. "Name's Xirin," he told them. He turned to a young girl who looked like she couldn't be more than ten years old. The girl had long red hair and matching eyes. "This is Kajihana. One of Vexen's creations. She's a splice between Axel and Marluxia."

"WHAT?!" Axel cried out. "How dare Vexen create a child based on me without my permission!"

Tears began to well up in Kajihana's young eyes.

"Careful, Axel," Xirin warned. "Your daughter has a heart."

"Demyx won't be happy about this," Axel muttered.

"We'll explain things to him when we see him," Sora promised.

"You keep your mouth shut when we see Demyx," Axel reminded him. "Last thing we need is for him to go running off again."

"Demy's in trouble?" Kajihana asked.

"When is Demyx not in trouble?" Xirin shrugged.

"Demy?" Axel asked, looking down at his unexpected daughter.

"She's got a little bit of a childhood crush on Demyx," Xirin explained. "So nobody say anything bad about him."

Everyone gave Sora a warning look.

"Sheesh, I said I was sorry," he cried out, woefully.

"And then you went and insulted him again right afterward." Axel pointed out. "And you still haven't apologized for that."

"He ran off before I could." Sora argued. "The wimp just took off and..."

"He wanted to prove to you that he isn't a coward," Axel snapped at him.

They both heard a soft female growl off to the side and turned to look.

Kajihana was standing there with both fists clenched. A storm of burning flowers was whirling around her. The flowers in the whirlwind burned brilliantly, but did not wither.

“Kaji, honey,” Xirin soothed her. “It’s okay. Calm down.”

“He called Demyx a wimp,” Kajihana complained.

“Don’t mind him.” Axel told her, “He’s just being stupid.”

Sora wanted to glare at him, but he was beginning to realize just how right they all were. He would have to rethink his opinions of the young sitar-playing water-mage.

Axel saw the change in Sora’s expression and his own relaxed.

Kajihana also relaxed, the whirlwind of burning petals vanishing as quickly as it had appeared.

## 9 - Chapter 09

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

(a/n: This scene was partly inspired by a certain video on YouTube.)

-Chapter Nine-

There was a knock on Sora's cabin door as the young keyblade master contemplated his recent behavior.

"Yeah?"

"It's me," a familiar voice offered, very unhelpfully since there were now two people with the same voice.

"Which one?"

"Riku."

"Come in," Sora invited.

Riku walked in. "You've been quiet since we took off," he said. "Feeling some regret?"

Sora nodded. "I shouldn't have said all that stuff about Demyx. I just don't get why I can't seem to say anything nice when I'm around him. He's not really a bad person."

"No, he isn't," Riku agreed.

"Uncle Riku?" Kajihana asked, sweetly, from the doorway. "I can't sleep."

Riku and Sora turned to the door to see the little girl standing there holding a small blond kitten who looked a lot like Demyx. The kitten looked up as carefree as any kitten, then returned to its favorite hobby of sleeping in Kajihana's arms.

"Cute," Sora praised. "What's his name?"

"Edym," Kajihana told him. "And don't you be mean to him."

"How old is he?"

"He's actually been a kitten for about four years," Xirin said as he joined them. "But that's not the strange part."

“Oh?” Sora asked. “What’s stranger than being a kitten for four years?”

“The reason he’s stuck as a kitten is because poor kitty lost half of himself.” Xirin explained.

“What are you talking about?” Sora asked.

“I guess I have to spell it out for you,” Xirin sighed. “Edym is Demyx’s Somebody.”

“A KITTEN?!” Sora nearly fell over with laughter. “Demyx’s Somebody is a KITTEN?!”

The kitten swatted Sora’s nose, leaving a small but painful scratch, before returning to its interrupted sleep as Axel joined the group.

“So, what about the other members of the Organization? Was there a dog in there? Or a rabbit?” Sora asked.

“Nah,” Axel replied. “Just a jackass named Roxas.”

Sora stuck out his tongue on Roxas’ behalf.

“Look, everyone get some sleep,” Xirin said, firmly. “We’ve got a lot of work to do starting early tomorrow morning.”

## 10 - Chapter 10

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Ten-

Morning was not kind to Sora. He had gone to bed with a headache for several reasons, the least of not was that Edym found his way into Sora's bedroom and spent the whole night treating his hair like a toy mouse.

Edym was still curled up in Sora's hair when he woke up, his little tail twitching sleepily in Sora's face. Sora sat up, glad to get the furry little tail away from his nose since he'd been just about to sneeze.

Little Edym mewed sadly, deprived of his current favorite toy, and then decided that Sora's pillow made an equally fascinating plaything.

"Does that smell like me?" Sora asked, playfully.

"No," Xirin said, "unlike you our pillows don't stink."

"I do not stink," Sora huffed. He knew what everyone was doing. They wanted him to know how Demyx felt. Wanted to make sure that when the time came and they were reunited with the young sitar player.

He grabbed his towel and headed for the shower. When he got there he heard something that caught his curiosity. It sounded like the entire bathroom was on fire.

"Hello?" he asked.

"I'll be out in a moment," Axel called back. "I'm just finishing up."

"You okay in there?"

"Yeah. Just bathing."

"Sounds like the room's on fire."

"You do remember who you're talking to, right?"

"You bathe in fire?!"

Axel opened the door and Sora saw that he was clad only in a towel.

"Do you mind letting me bathe in peace?" he asked.

“Um, no,” Sora stammered, seeing that the tub was filled with flames. “I... Sorry. I was just curious.”

Axel gave a curt nod, and closed the door again.

Sora sighed and headed back to his room. He would just have to wait and hope that Axel's little fire-bath didn't wreck the shower.

He had been there for about fifteen minutes when there was a knock on his door. It sounded like whoever was doing it was slightly annoyed.

“Hello?”

“You can take your shower now,” Axel said from the other side of the door.

“Thanks,” Sora replied, gathering up his towel and heading into the bathroom.

Twenty minutes later, showered and refreshed, Sora headed down to breakfast. He'd been unable to wash his hair because Axel had forgotten to remove the bottle from the bathtub before he'd got in, and it was currently melted and stuck to the rim.

“Thanks, Axel,” Riku (or was it Xirin?) was saying. “That's the third time this week that the stove hasn't worked properly. “Good thing we've got a fire-mage on board, huh?”

“Just don't expect me to be your cook everyday, Xirin,” Axel replied, clearing up the matter of the first speaker's identity. “I've got better things to do with my abilities than cooking breakfast.”

“Like bathing,” Sora cut in.

“I don't rant about your baths,” Axel shot back.

“My baths don't melt the shampoo bottle.” Sora retorted.

“Oops,” Axel grinned. “Sorry 'bout that.”

“So, which world do we head to first?” Riku asked as he joined the group.

“I've been giving it some thought,” Xirin replied. “And I think...”

But suddenly, the ship changed course. Everyone ran onto the bridge, wondering what the heck had just happened.

They were all quite relieved to find Edym scampering around on the controls.

“How'd he get up there?” Axel asked, carefully putting the little kitten back on the floor.

“Kajihana must've put him there,” Xirin decided. “Well, we can either try to get back on course, or see

which world this leads us to.”

“Hm...” Riku considered. “Well, since we’re already going this way, why not see where we end up?”

“Agreed,” Sora added.

Xirin scanned the vastness of space before them on the dragon ship’s instrument panel, then found what he was looking for.

“There,” he said, “I found one.”

Sora looked at it carefully, but did not recognize it.

“That’s one I’ve never been to,” he told the others.

“Well, then,” Xirin asked, “shall we check it out?”

“Yes,” Everyone else agreed.



## 11 - Chapter 11

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL

By Axel Ingleson

-Chapter Eleven-

Sora was about to step off of the dragon ship when Axel pulled him back.

“Look,” he said, “I know we’ve all agreed that you are the leader, but you don’t have to take the role so seriously.”

“You said yourself that you’ve never been here before,” Axel pointed out. “So, I personally think we should have a look around with monitors before we go out and get ourselves killed.”

“Axel’s right,” Xirin agreed. “Let’s keep our heads, everyone. We won’t do any good to Demyx if we’re all dead.”

“We don’t even know if Demyx is here,” Axel added.

“I was about to say that,” Xirin told the fire-mage as Kajihana joined them. “And, Kaji’, be a good girl and take Edym back to your room where he belongs.”

“Yes, Xirin,” Kajihana replied, picking up the kitten and leaving the bridge.

“It seems like a simple enough little town,” Axel observed after a while.

Sora was the first to notice the large Ferris wheel off in the distance. “Hey! A carnival!” he laughed, rushing off before anyone could stop him.

“I’d better go after him,” Riku sighed, running after Sora.

“Axel?” Xirin asked.

“I’ll check the town, see if I can get any leads on Demyx,” Axel replied. “Kairi will come with me.”

“Like I trust you after you nearly kidnapped me,” Kairi rolled her eyes.

“I thought we were past that,” Axel shook his head. “I told you I was sorry, and unlike Sora, I meant it.”

“I know,” Kairi apologized. “I’m sorry, too. I should be more trusting. You’ve saved us twice already.”

“Well, let’s go,” Axel suggested.

● \* \* \* \*

Sora was disappointed when he arrived at the site of the apparent carnival. Rather than a variety of bright sights and sweet music, there was nothing but an almost morbid arrangement of abandoned funhouses and derelict tents. It looked like the carnival was over and the entertainers had gone home.

“Pity,” a voice said, coolly. “You missed a brilliant show.”

Sora turned and saw a bearded man standing there with a top hat and well-kept coat and tie. Despite the up-kept look of his appearance, he seemed older than his apparent age of about forty. He reminded Sora, in short, of an antique statue of a man, dusty with age.

“My name’s Dark,” he said, shaking Sora’s hand, though Sora hadn’t offered it. “Of Dark’s Pandemonium Carnival.”

## 12 - Chapter 12

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(a/n: Saveena-001 has asked me to ad Seraphine to this story in exchange for a picture she is kindly drawing for me.)

-Chapter 12-

Axel walked quietly into the town library, which he was sure he would not be allowed in if they knew the type of person he was.

"Can I help you?" Asked a man, who looked old beyond his years.

"My name's Axel," the fire mage replied. "Got it memorized?"

"I'm Charles Holloway, and there's nothing wrong with my memory, thank you," the old man replied, curtly. "Now, what is your business in our town?"

"My friends and I are searching for a friend of ours that got lost," Axel explained. "Have you seen any young men around here with unusual hair?"

The other man looked pointedly at Axel.

"Other than me." Axel added.

"Nope," the man told him. "Though that carnival's got some interesting folk in it. I wouldn't go near it though. If your friend's in there, I feel very sorry for him. Very sorry, indeed."

"Sounds like a bad scene," Axel commented.

"Oh, it's bad alright. Nothing good ever comes from the Autumn People."

"The Autumn People," Axel pondered. "Tell me what you know about them."

"Well," Holloway recalled, "my grandfather told me about them when I was younger than you are. He said that the Autumn People were a band of spirits who came to this town to steal the souls of the people by granting them their fondest wish."

"Not much different from the Heartless," Axel observed. "Except that the Heartless take people's hearts."

"Sounds to me like you and I are of a similar cloth," Holloway told Axel. "Though something tells me you're not showing me all that you are."

"Perhaps not," Axel admitted as he departed from the library and headed in the direction of the Autumn People.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sora had long since pulled his hand out of Dark's grasp.

Riku decided he didn't like the man at all. There was something about him that reminded him of Xehanort. He wondered if the two might be related.

"Tell me," Dark asked. "Have you, by any chance, come across two boys? They would be about your age. Not much different from yourselves in how they differ from each other. One dark haired, one fair. Their names are Will Holloway and Jim Nightshade. You see, I am seeking them out."

"Why?" Riku asked, already determined not to believe whatever answer the man gave.

"They've won prizes," Dark replied. "And I wish to give them what they so richly deserve."

"Well, I for one have no desire to receive any kind of prize you might have to offer," Riku scoffed. "Come Sora. We've got no further use for a man such as this."

"Use?" Dark asked, viciously. "Mind your tongue, young one. Or perhaps you would like to ride the carousel. I could age you until you were in your forties. Or even older."

"Been there. Done that." Riku scoffed. "I was possessed by a man far more deserving of the name Dark than you are."

"Riku," Sora warned. "This man is dangerous."

Riku decided to back off for once. "It's a good thing for you that my friend is here," he told Dark.

Dark chuckled. "Indeed. Or perhaps not!" he turned to the man at his side. "Mr. Cooger," he said. "See to it that these boys enjoy a ride on our carousel. Perhaps in reverse, until they disappear."

Cooger stepped forward to grab Sora and Riku.

But Sora and Riku were not the everyday small town boys that Cooger and Dark had anticipated.

Drawing their keyblades, they dodged and struck, leaving Cooger senseless, and Dark fuming with rage as they ran to find someone who could help them find Demyx.

"Maybe in there," Sora suggested, pointing to a square building not far off in the distance.

"In a House of Mirrors," Riku shook his head. But Sora was once again already running off. And Riku, reminded of himself in more ways than he would have liked to admit, followed after.

As they made their way through the maze of their own reflections, they came upon a girl who was sitting on the floor, looking into a mirror with sad eyes. To their utter amazement, they saw in the mirror, not the girl's reflection, but Edym!

"Edym..." the girl was weeping. "Where are you, Edym?"

The girl looked starved and they wondered how long she had been sitting there pining for her lost cat.

"You say you've lost a cat named Edym?" Sora asked her.

She looked up in surprise. "Yes. Yes," she told them. "Do you know where he is?"

Riku glared at Sora who realized, too late, that he shouldn't have said anything. Well, he had, and now there was nothing for it but to confide in the girl. Perhaps she would take it better than they were expecting her to.

"Your cat was found on a world quite far from this one," Sora told her, much to Riku's annoyance.

"My cat was on a spaceship?" the girl asked in a disbelieving tone. It was a more innocent time, but even the people of that day weren't stupid enough to believe such a ridiculous tale.

"Something like that, I guess," Sora scratched his hair. "My name's Sora, by the way. And this is my friend, Riku."

"Mine's Seraphine," the girl introduced herself. "Can you really take me to see my kitten?"

"Sure," Sora said, before Riku could protest.

Seraphine gave them a not quite trusting look. But before she could say a word, about a dozen Soldier Heartless came crashing through the mirrors.

Riku and Sora drew their keyblades.

One of the Heartless tried to grab Seraphine. Riku and Sora moved to defend her, but before they got to her side, she had wiped out two Heartless with a long black cat o' nine tails.

"You got some sort of cat thing going?" Riku asked once they had fought their way back out of the House of Mirrors.

"Why do you ask?" Seraphine asked, as she continued to battle their foe alongside them. "And just what are these things anyhow. I'm sure I've seen them before. Somewhere. But not here."

"Perhaps you've been on a spaceship, too?" Sora suggested.

The thought stirred a memory in Seraphine. "Perhaps," she agreed as the last Heartless fell.

Axel came running up. "We've got big problems." He told them. "The Heartless are overrunning the town. Any sign of Demyx?"

"None," Sora admitted.

"Who?" Seraphine asked.

"Your kitten's Nobody," Sora replied. "I'll explain later."

"Explain now," Seraphine demanded as she followed them.

"A Nobody is the being who is created when someone loses their heart." Riku told her.

"Oh no!" Seraphine gasped. "My kitten lost his heart! How dreadful. Is he...?"

"No," Riku assured her. "Your kitten is alive and doing quite well. But because he lost his heart, he cannot grow up to become a cat."

"Well, there are worse things than remaining a kitten." Seraphine replied.

"Like that, you mean?" Riku asked, pointing at a giant Heartless which looked much the same as the one Sora had encountered in Wonderland.

"I can handle him," Axel told them. Then, seeing the worried look on Sora's face, he added. "Don't worry. I don't intend to go that far."

Axel summoned his chakrams and hurled one at the middle of the Heartless which burst into flame.

"Oh, that really helped," Seraphine remarked sarcastically as the Heartless took a swipe at her. But she smiled when her whip scattered the charred and ashen remains of the creature's arm.

The touch seemed to have a domino effect. As soon as the arm was gone, the rest of the burnt Heartless crumbled to dust and blew away.

"Now," Sora said, to Seraphine. "Let's go see your kitten."

## 13 - Chapter 13

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 13-

“Sora,” King Mickey said, disapprovingly, as Seraphine hugged Edym, “you know that people are not supposed to be made aware of other worlds.”

“She’s Edym’s owner,” Sora explained. “She must already know that there are other worlds. I don’t think she’s from here.”

“Hm,” Mickey considered. “If that’s the case, then someone has been tampering with the boundaries between worlds.”

“Or she may have simply been abducted by Dark,” Riku suggested. “He does seem the type.”

“That would fit what I’ve been told about the Autumn People,” Axel agreed. “The town librarian said they were a group of people who went around stealing souls. I expect they would follow the same pattern of behavior that the Heartless do.”

“So, does she come or does she stay?” Riku asked.

“Well, we can’t leave her here if this isn’t her home,” King Mickey decided, looking over at Seraphine who was playing with her long lost kitten. “We’ll have to take her with us.”

Sora sighed with relief, then watched as little Edym leapt in the air, following Seraphine’s fingers as she wiggled them for his amusement.

The lost Nobody looked around at the world he had landed on. Whatever it was, it certainly wasn’t the Underworld. The Underworld wasn’t this sunny, nor were there this many flowers.

“What an ugly flower,” a dandelion said, startling the Nobody. “It must be a weed.”

“I’m not a weed, nor a flower,” the cloaked figure said. “I’m a Nobody. My name is Demyx.”

“Hmph,” a rose huffed, waving its leaves and thorns. It would’ve added more, but a shadow blocked out the sunshine and it looked up, hoping for a refreshing rain.

But it was no rain. Nor was the sight it beheld refreshing in any way. It pointed behind Demyx with a leaf.

The Nobody looked behind himself and saw a large insectoid Heartless looming over him.

"I am so the wrong person for this..." he muttered. Then he narrowed his eyes, and glared at the Heartless. "I'm not a wimp. I'm not going to run away this time."

Demyx sized up the Heartless, looked at himself, and decided that though he wasn't a wimp, he also wasn't an idiot.

So, having no effective weapon, he started running. But the Heartless blocked his way. He ran the other way, only to be blocked again.

There was no way around it. He would have to fight. He wished he still had his sitar. He needed it for his attacks.

A voice that was vaguely familiar whispered a single word in the back of his mind:

~Keyblade.~

Before he could work out why he was being offered a Keyblade, it appeared in his hand. Grateful for it, he narrowed his eyes and prepared for battle.

The Heartless leapt forward. Demyx countered with his new Keyblade, not exactly thrilled with the position he was in. He hated fighting. But he realized, now, as he battled the Heartless, that he'd pretty much signed up for it when he had gone to retrieve his sitar.

He brought the Keyblade down upon and through the creature's neck. Then he watched as both the creature and the Keyblade vanished.



## 14 - Chapter 14

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 14-

Aerith looked up as Sora walked into Merlin's house with the others. "Welcome back, Sora! Donald! Goofy! It's good to see you all. Who are your friends?"

"Nice to see you, too, Aerith," Sora replied. "This is Riku, Axel, Kairi, Kajihana and Xirin. The kitten is Edym."

"We're glad to meet all of you. We could really use your help. Those Heartless are back. Not quite as great a variety as last time. But..."

"Where are Merlin and the others?" Donald asked.

"They went off to find a way to defeat the Heartless," Aerith told him. "What brings you back this way?"

"We're looking for a friend of ours," Sora explained. "You haven't seen a young man with a mulhawk, have you?"

"No, I'm sorry," Aerith replied.

"You sure do misplace a lot of friends," Leon remarked, casually.

"Cloud's back," Aerith told them. "He's off fighting an old enemy at the moment."

The sound of a motorcycle could be heard just outside. Aerith and the others didn't seem bothered by it, so Sora decided all was fine.

The door opened and a silver-haired man who greatly resembled Riku, save for the difference in how his hair was parted, walked in.

"This is my son, Kadaj," Aerith told them. "I adopted him," she explained, seeing the looks on their faces,

"Pleased to meet you," Riku said, offering his hand, which Kadaj shook.

"Why didn't you come to the Reunion?" Kadaj asked.

“What are you talking about?” Riku wondered aloud.

“The Reunion,” Kadaj repeated. “Why weren’t you there? The others came.”

“I didn’t get an invitation,” Riku explained. “I’m sorry I missed it. Though even if I had got one, I’d have had to refuse it. I was not myself. Literally.”

“I can sympathize,” Kadaj admitted.

“You ever been possessed?”

“Yes,” Kadaj replied. “By Sephiroth.”

“Then you can sympathize,” Riku smiled. “I’m glad. I felt so alone. Even Sora can’t understand. Though he tries to.”

“Speaking of Sephiroth,” Sora asked, “what’s his obsession with Cloud. I don’t buy that he’s part of Cloud.”

“He’s not,” Aerith told him. “He’s Tifa’s rival.”

“Tifa’s?” Sora asked. “So why does he fight Cloud?”

“It’s the only way Cloud will let him get that close.” Leon explained. “From what I can make out, Sephiroth secretly cares for Cloud. But Cloud refuses to reciprocate. He’s never forgiven Sephiroth for burning his hometown to the ground.”

“Ouch,” Axel winced, momentarily regretting his ability.

Kajihana put her hand on her father’s shoulder, understandingly.

“So, you haven’t seen Demyx,” Axel said, sounding disappointed.

“Your friend with the mulhawk? No,” Leon apologized. “Sorry.”

“How did you and he get separated?” Tifa asked.

“Sora insulted him and he went to find his sitar to prove he wasn’t a wimp,” Axel explained. “We would have gone directly to the Underworld, except that we’re not sure he’s there yet.”

“That wasn’t very nice, Sora,” Aerith chastised him.

Sora had the decency to bow his head in shame.

“I just hope Demyx is alright,” Axel said, gazing out the window at the darkening sky.

## 15 - Chapter 15

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 15-

Having defeated a large Heartless, Demyx was feeling confident enough to go and explore the strange world he now found himself in. He heard voices just beyond a hedge and went to investigate.

There, seated at a table, was a trio so odd it made his head spin just to watch them. The girl looked up at him and motioned for him to sit with them in one of the vacant chairs.

"No, no, no," the man in the large hat told her. "No room. No room."

"But there's plenty of room," the girl insisted. "Please, have a seat. My name is Alice."

"I'm Demyx," Demyx replied, taking a chair and sitting down. "Thank you."

Alice's two companions did not introduce themselves to Demyx, who watched them chatter amongst themselves until he was quite fed up with the pair of them.

"Are they always this rude?" he asked Alice, deliberately making sure they could hear him.

"As far as I know, yes," Alice replied.

"Well, nobody invited either of you," the hatter said, matter-of-factly.

The hare merely sipped his tea and took a bite of his biscuit.

"Fine," Demyx huffed. "Be that way. The tea's probably cold by now anyhow. And I doubt that you made the biscuits today, too. No doubt they're hard as rocks."

Alice smirked as Demyx got up and walked away.

Demyx soon found his way into a beautiful garden. He gazed at the flowers, and then found a rose so red it reminded him of Axel's hair. He decided he would keep the flower and plucked it gently from the rosebush.

Just then, he heard a voice from about five feet behind him.

“How dare you defile the royal rosebush?”

Demyx gulped, then sighed. “I knew I should’ve left this place as soon as I got here.”

“And what, may I ask, brings you here to my kingdom?” the Queen of Hearts demanded a short time later, as she peered down at Demyx from the judge’s podium.

“I got lost,” Demyx apologized. “I was trying to find my sitar and I somehow ended up here.”

“Your sitar. Hm,” the Queen considered. “A likely story. Guards! Off with his head!”

Demyx summoned his keyblade and fought for his life. Escaping the Queen’s guards, he ran as fast as he could to where the gummi ship was parked and got inside quickly. Starting it up, he left the oddities of Wonderland safely behind him and made his way to what he hoped would be the Olympus Coliseum and the Underworld.

## 16 - Chapter 16

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 16-

Seraphine walked into Merlin's house, looking exhausted. She had been fighting about a dozen Heartless and was ready to fall over. Of course, she would never admit that to the others.

"Heartless," she panted.

Edym bounded over to her and purred as he rubbed his head against her shin and moved in a figure-eight around her legs.

"Seraphine," she introduced herself.

"Nice to meet you," Aerith replied "I'm Aerith. This is Leon, Tifa, and Kadaj."

"Nice to meet you all," Seraphine told them, taking note of how much Kadaj resembled Riku and Xirin.

Kadaj nodded, slightly. Tifa sized her up, wondering if she had another rival for Cloud's attentions, and Leon crossed his arms as usual, giving a small wave.

"I got the supplies," Seraphine told the others. "Took longer than I expected since I had to fight off about two dozen Heartless on the way there and on the way here. But otherwise all went pretty much according to plan."

"So what now?" Sora asked. "Do we fight them off or...?"

"I'll stay here and fight them off," Riku told them. "You guys go find Demyx."

"No," Sora refused. "I won't lose you again. We stick together."

Riku smiled at Sora. "If I did know better, I'd think you cared for me."

"Of course I care for you... I mean about you..." Sora stumbled.

Riku smiled. "It's alright, Sora," he said, gently. "I care for you, too."

Sora blushed a little, but kept his composure.

“We’ll come back to help,” Sora promised. “But our friend is on his way to the Underworld and he’s going to need all the help he can get.”

Leon nodded. “Go,” he said, “find your friend. We can handle these guys.”

“Thanks,” Axel said, “we’ll be back with Demyx. Then we’ll wipe out those Heartless for you.” He reached behind himself and opened the door.

The color drained from Leon’s face. He stammered as he pointed. “La- La-...”

“Laguna.” The dark haired man finished. “Your King has requested you head to Disney Castle. I’ll help out here.”

Sora nodded, then gathered his team and headed back to their ship.

## 17 - Chapter 17

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 17-

"I wonder who that man was," Sora mused as they resumed their search. "Anyone know?"

"Nope," Axel shrugged, casually.

"Beats me," Riku added. "All I know is that the King has requested our presence at the Castle."

"But why now? In the middle of our quest?"

Sora turned to Seraphine, who had asked the question. "It must be something important. He might even know where Demyx is."

"Then, I think we should go and find out." Seraphine decided. "At the very least we can drop off Kajihana and Edym if it's a safe place."

"It's very safe," Sora told her. "And I think you're right. It would be a perfect place to leave them while we're searching all the dangerous places we're likely to arrive at."

It didn't take long for the dragon ship to arrive at Disney Castle. When they got there, they were surprised to find an elderly man speaking with the King. He looked to be about ninety-something with dark blue eyes and grey hair that was sparse upon his leathery brow.

"My name is Ansem," he told them. "I am the grandfather of the man you knew as Ansem the Wise, as well as the advisor to ancient line of Kings that once ruled the Destiny Islands."

"Ansem," Sora noted.

"Why are you here?" Riku asked.

"To bring you your birthright, Riku," Ansem replied. "You see, you are the last descendant of the Kings I spoke of, and heir to the throne, if you chose to claim it."

"So," King Mickey added, "we think it best that you stay clear of the upcoming battle, your majesty."

"No," Riku shook his head. "I will not leave my friends to fight alone. King or not, I'm standing by

them.”

“You will make a very splendid King, your majesty,” Ansem bowed.

“I do have one request, your majesty,” Riku asked of Mickey, “would you and the Queen watch over Kajihana and Edym until we’ve found Demyx?”

“We’d be very happy to,” King Mickey agreed.

“Thank you,” Riku replied. “It makes me feel better knowing that they’re both safe.”

“Your majesty,” Axel added, “thank you for looking after my little girl.”

“Thank you for helping Sora and Riku,” King Mickey replied. “And good luck finding your friend. You might try searching the Underworld. I have the feeling that Demyx will find his way there very soon. And when he gets there, he’ll need all the help he can get.”

“Thank you, your majesty,” Riku said, gratefully.

“Keep safe, your majesty,” King Mickey replied, as Riku and the others made their way back to the dragon ship.



## 18 - Chapter 18

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 18-

~I've finally made it,~ Demyx thought to himself as he stood at the gates of the Underworld. ~I'm here. But now that I'm here, I don't think I can go through with it. What was I thinking? Letting him goad me into this. But it's more than that. I want my sitar back. But, do I want it badly enough to face Hades alone?~

He looked up at the gate which loomed before him for a long time before finally steeling himself and nodding.

"Yes," he said, aloud.

"Talking to yourself?" Sora asked, playfully.

Demyx jumped about a foot and spun around in mid-air. "You!"

"Hi," Sora waved. "Hey, look. You don't have to prove anything."

"I want my sitar back," Demyx told him. "And I'm going to get it."

"Demyx," Axel said, putting a hand on his boyfriend's shoulder, "at least let us go with you. You can't do this alone. Even I can't."

"He's right," Hercules told him, as he joined the group. "I saw a shooting star, and I knew you had come back. It was just like the last two times you visited. And it looks like you've made some new friends."

"The rash one is Demyx," Sora introduced the blond Nobody, "the red-head is Axel. The girl is Seraphine."

"Please, I am not a girl," Seraphine said, pointedly.

"Sorry, I mean the young lady," Sora corrected, wishing he could stop putting his foot in his mouth. "And the best looking one of the bunch is Riku... I mean King Riku."

"Not officially," Riku reminded him. "I still have to go through the coronation and all that stuff."

"You sound thrilled," Sora remarked.

"I wish there wasn't so much formality," Riku sighed. "It's so boring."

"Look, I hate to interrupt his majesty," Demyx said, softly, "but I really would like to get my sitar back."

"Looks like we've got a new mission, guys," Riku decided.

Xirin nodded in agreement. "Let's go."

"Hold on," Hercules said, "first you all should get in some training. I know you're good, but Hades will have the upper hand unless you get in some practice."

"He's right," Riku decided. "You all could use a little practice."

"You too, your majesty," Sora pointed out.

Riku smiled. "I guess it couldn't hurt."

They made their way to the training arena where Phil awaited them.

"Hey, if it isn't the heroes," he said. "And what's this I see before me?" he examined Riku carefully. "I sense both light and darkness in you. A rarity, indeed, especially for one as young as you. A hero, indeed."

"I'm no hero," Riku shook his head. "I once betrayed my best friend. That's hardly heroic."

"I assume you've made up for it," Phil asked.

"I'm still making up for it," Riku replied. "I owe Sora my life."

"Then you're a hero," Phil told him. "Nice to meet ya." He extended his hand, which Riku shook.

"You're a lot stronger than you look," Riku smiled. "Care to join us in our quest?"

"Sorry, kid," Phil apologized. "I'm no hero. I just train 'em."

"We all have our parts to play," Riku observed.

"So, what now?" Xirin asked. "What are we supposed to do, paint these urns?"

"Nope," Phil replied. "Break 'em. But you only have three minutes to do it. So, who's first?"

Xirin readied his weapon. "Set 'em up."

Phil indicated the urns. "Let's see what you've got."

Xirin attacked the urns, and managed to smash about sixty out of a hundred before the timer ended.

“Riku?” Sora prompted.

“What are the rules?” Riku asked. “No use of magic? What?”

“Use your talents,” Phil replied. “Let’s see what you’re made of.”

Riku drew Way To The Dawn and rushed into the midst of the newly set up urns, smashing all of them in less than two minutes.

“Well done!” Phil praised. “You, the red-head. Let’s see what you can do.”

Axel leapt into the middle of the urns and sent his chakrams flying, breaking the last urn just as the clock hit the three minute mark.

“Not too shabby,” Phil decided. “Work on your time, kid.” He nodded to Seraphine who took her cat-o-nine-tails and used it to draw the urns together, smashing a majority of them before the timer ended.

“Clever,” Phil smiled. “But you’ve got a way to go.”

“So,” Demyx asked. “Are we ready?”

“Not yet,” Phil replied. “Let’s see what you’re capable of.”

“I can’t show you my true power without my sitar,” Demyx sighed.

“Let’s see what you can do with what you’ve got,” Phil prompted.

Demyx took a deep breath, then used his Keyblade to eliminate two thirds of the urns before the timer ran out.

“Hm,” Phil shook his head. “Well, it was a nice try. I look forward to seeing how you perform with your sitar.”

“You will,” Demyx promised.

“Okay, we’re ready,” Riku decided. “Demyx, you think you can handle this?”

Demyx nodded. “I think I can manage it now that my friends are with me.”

## 19 - Chapter 19

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 19-

The door to the Underworld loomed before Demyx once again. But this time, with Axel and the others alongside him, it didn't seem quite so large.

"Well," he said, mostly to himself. "Let's get this over with. The sooner I'm reunited with my sitar, the better."

"Scared?" Sora asked, without a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"I'd be stupid if I wasn't," Demyx replied. "But I'm going in anyhow. I've got a sitar to rescue."

Demyx stepped forward and the gates to the Underworld swung open.

"So, where to from here?" he asked Sora. "You've been here before."

"So have you," Demyx replied.

"Not from this point," Demyx admitted. "I came in somewhere in the middle."

Sora thought about it, then remembered. "Follow the river. All rivers in the Underworld flow toward Hades."

Demyx took a deep breath and passed through the gate with Axel and the others close behind.

It didn't take long for them to find their way into a glaring trap. Literally glaring.

"I don't remember this being here before," Demyx confessed, squinting against the brightness.

"Neither do I," Sora admitted, his eyes stinging. "So, what do we do?"

"Take my hand," Riku replied, casting a veil of shadows before his eyes. "I'll lead you out."

Sora took Riku's hand, then offered his hand to Axel, who in turn grabbed Demyx's hand. Demyx took Seraphine's hand and she took Xirin's.

“Don’t let go,” Riku warned as he moved forward and toward the exit, hoping he was not leading his friends into another trap.

“The Twilight Child,” Hades realized, his voice dark with anger at his trap being so easily escaped. “I should have realized you were around. I wondered when I would meet you.”

“Give me back my sitar,” Demyx demanded.

Hades waved his hand and Demyx’s sitar appeared before them, suspended in mid-air too far up for them to reach.

“Come and get it,” Hades laughed.

Demyx leapt up to grab the sitar, only to fall short. After several tries, he turned to the others. “I can’t get it.”

Riku considered the problem, then crouched down. “Stand on my shoulders. You can jump high enough from there.”

“No,” Axel said. “With all respect, your majesty, I’m taller.”

“You’re right,” Riku admitted, standing back up. “Okay, Demyx. Stand on Axel’s shoulders and jump from there.”

Demyx got up on Axel’s shoulders and tried once more. He grabbed the sitar and felt a sudden surge of energy as he and his weapon, if a sitar could be called a weapon, were reunited.

Dropping gently to the ground, he turned and grinned at his friends. “Let’s get out of this place,” he suggested. “It gives me the creeps.”

“Me, too,” Sora admitted.

They headed back to the gates, finding the way back much simpler than the way in. There were still Heartless and Nobodies to contend with. But with Demyx back in full form, they were easily dispensed with.

They arrived at the gates and were just about to pass through, when Hades appeared once more and blocked their way.

“I’m afraid I can’t let you take my favorite instrument,” he told Demyx. He grabbed for the sitar, but this time Demyx was not afraid.

“Dance, water! Dance!” the water-mage cried out as he began to play the instrument.

Water-clones surrounded Hades, but he easily swept them aside.

Demyx tried a geyser attack, but Hades merely laughed it off.

It was enough to distract the Lord of the Underworld, however, and in the split second that he wasn't paying attention, Riku and Sora launched a double Keyblade attack which brought Hades to his knees.

Defeated, Hades got to his feet. "You cannot escape me forever, musician." He told Demyx. "That's all you are and all you'll ever be. Just a musician."

"There are worse things to be." Demyx replied.

"Come on, Demyx," Axel said, putting an arm around the water-mage. "Let's go home."

## 20 - Chapter 20

Heartless Hunter Axel  
By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 20-

The first thing that Demyx did when he saw Seraphine was to give her a gentle kiss on the cheek. He didn't know why. He just felt compelled to do it.

Axel glared at him.

"I'm sorry," Demyx apologized. "I just felt the urge to kiss her."

"Well, at least it wasn't on the lips." Axel allowed, begrudgingly. "Besides, I think I know why you did it. It's because part of you remembers."

"Remembers what?" Demyx asked.

"That you used to be my kitten," Seraphine told him.

Demyx stared at her. "I was a WHAT?!"

Seraphine held up little Edym. "This is Edym," she introduced. "Your Somebody."

"My... Somebody?" Demyx asked.

"It's up to you," Axel said, softly. "You can return to your Somebody and be her kitten. And you'll be whole again. Or you can marry me and remain a Nobody. The choice is yours to make, Demyx. Nobody else can make it for you."

"I need time to think it over," Demyx told them. "Give me a day or two. It's a big decision and I don't want to make a mistake."

"Take all the time you need," Seraphine told him.

"I'm afraid you're all out of time," Xirin said, drawing his Keyblade. "Especially you, your majesty."

Riku turned to Xirin, glaring angrily at him. "You traitor!"

"I take after my big brother," Xirin shot back.

Riku bowed his head in shame.

Xirin smiled and raised his Keyblade, preparing to cut off Riku's head.

"Don't listen to him, Riku," Sora told his boyfriend. "You're nothing like him. You were trying to help Kairi."

Riku knew there was no way he could dodge the blow. But before it could connect with his neck, Demyx blocked it with his newly retrieved sitar.

Riku took the opportunity to draw Way To The Dawn and countered the next swing effortlessly, rising to his feet and beating back Xirin's attack.

But Xirin was Riku's replica, and he had the same abilities as his twin.

Sora started forward, but Axel put a hand on his shoulder.

"This is Riku's battle," the fire-mage said, solemnly. "He must fight it alone."

They circled, dodged, lunged, and parried. The others watched, cheering Riku on as the two combatants fought.

It took a long time for the fight to come to an end. But eventually, Xirin's pride got the better of him, and he got sloppy enough for Riku to slip past his defenses and bring him to the ground.

"Go ahead," Xirin said as Way To The Dawn touched his throat. "Kill me."

Riku shook his head. "No. I will not kill you." He said, rising to his feet and helping Xirin to his.

"However, though it pains me to do so, I must banish you from my homeworld. You will never set foot on Destiny Islands."

"Then neither will you," Xirin replied. "It's my ship, and you won't get anywhere without it."

He raced to the controls and set the ship's coordinates for the World That Never Was.

"Now the fun really begins," he laughed, insanely.



## 21 - Chapter 21

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 21-

The ship raced along the dark paths that led to the World That Never Was. Most of the crew could not see in the darkness. But both Riku and Xirin watched as the home world of the Nobodies and the Heartless loomed before them.

Soon the ship touched down.

"I've brought them, my lord," Xirin said, bowing to a hooded figure who stood before the opened mouth of the dragon ship.

"Well done, Xirin," a familiar voice laughed. "You've done well." The cloaked figure turned his still-hooded head toward Sora and his friends. "Ah, the Keyblade Masters and the two traitors. Welcome home, Axel and Demyx."

"This is no longer our home," Demyx retorted. "I stopped calling it that when you tried to have me killed."

"Well, well," Xemnas said, removing his hood. "Looks like the kitten his claws after all."

"You knew I was a kitten?" Demyx demanded.

"Of course I knew," Xemnas laughed. "I was the one who made you a Nobody in the first place."

Seraphine, Axel and Demyx attacked Xemnas, but he easily tossed them aside with his abilities.

"We can't fight him separately," Riku said. "We must fight him together."

A gunshot barely missed Xirin. Looking up in the direction it had come from, they found themselves looking at a man with a patch over one eye who was standing on the ceiling, glaring down at them.

"Did you think he would be alone?" the man laughed.

"Hey! Watch where you're pointing that!" Xirin demanded. "He's Riku!"

"Sorry," Xigbar laughed. "But I can't be sure. So it's best that I kill you both. You understand."

"I..." Xirin stared in horror. "No! You promised me a heart! You liar!"

"Have you forgotten," Xemnas scoffed. "You've had a heart from the beginning. You gave it up when you betrayed your brother."

"No!" Xirin shook his head. "I'm not listening to you. You lied to me! You made me betray him."

"Your betrayal was your choice," Xemnas laughed. "I only planted the seed in your mind. You're the one who chose to nurture it. Blame yourself if you're looking for someone to blame."

"You were planning this from day one," Riku realized. "Xirin, how could you? We were your friends! I treated you like a brother!"

"I had to," Xirin replied. "And yes, I did plan it from day one. I would've brought you here, sooner. But I wanted the reward for the capture of both traitors."

"And reward you shall have," Xemnas promised, giving a slight nod.

Xigbar fired another shot. And there was no almost about it. It hit Xirin square in the chest, throwing him to the ground.

"No!" Riku shouted, racing to Xirin and lifting him gently from the pavement. Cradling Xirin in his arms, he looked down at the replica.

"Why?" Xirin asked. "After what I did to you, why do you still care so much?"

"Because, you're my little brother," Riku reminded him. A tear fell upon Xirin's cheek as the young replica finally died.

Then, setting Xirin's body down upon the ground as gently as he had lifted it up, Riku turned and drew his keyblade to do battle with Xemnas and Xigbar.

Seeing that their King was ready to fight, Sora and the others readied their own weapons; chakrams, Keyblades, and sitar.

Axel hurled his chakrams at Xigbar, knocking the gun from the Sharpshooter's hand. Xigbar countered with a second gun, Axel barely deflecting the bullet with his chakrams as they returned in the nick of time.

While Axel and Xigbar battled each other, the others took on Xemnas. Demyx used his water clones to launch an attack on the Superior. But Xemnas used his own water clones to counter the sitar player's attack.

It was enough to distract Xemnas, however, from Riku and Sora as they prepared a joint assault on him along with Seraphine, who wrapped her whips around Xemnas's feet and pulled them out from under him.

Riku and Sora crossed their Keyblades over Xemnas, just as Axel drove one of his chakrams through Xigbar's chest, the Sharpshooter firing one final bullet, which struck the arm of the Flurry of Dancing Flames too late to stop the red-head's attack.

"It's over," Riku told Xemnas, plunging Way To The Dawn through his chest.

Xemnas's body vanished into darkness as Riku and Sora got to their feet.

"How do we get home?" Sora asked. "Xirin was the only one who knew the codes to start the dragon ship."

"I can't open doors through darkness any more," Riku regretted. "But maybe I can open a different door." He held up a hand and a softly shimmering portal appeared before them.

"A twilight portal," Sora recognized. "But to where?"

"Home." Riku replied.

## 22 - Epilogue

Heartless Hunter Axel

By Axel Ingleson

(disclaimer: Kingdom Hearts belongs to SquareEnix and Disney. Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Epilogue-

The Destiny Islands were all abuzz with excitement. The royal family was coming back into power. Their last descendant had decided to take the throne. There was speculation as to who the King might be. The guesses ranged from a man of fifty to a man of eighty. Nobody dreamt it might be a young man of nineteen.

As the crowd watched and waited for the new King to be crowned, they spotted a rare sight amongst themselves. A young man with spiked hair so red it looked like it was on fire. With him stood a man of about the same age whose hair was styled in a mulhawk. With them stood a little girl who was clearly the redhead's daughter. The two men were holding hands and there was no doubt in anyone's mind how they felt about each other.

The crowd would have looked upon the situation a little differently had they known that the two young men had no hearts.

The royal procession began and everyone turned to watch the entrance of the King. The voices that had been murmuring fell silent as Riku entered the room. He was clad in the same clothes he had worn in his battle against Xemnas, but the crowd knew nothing of that. All they knew was that the new King was a lot younger than they expected.

The murmuring started again. This time the buzz was about the King's age and whether someone so young could handle running an entire kingdom.

"There's something odd about that boy," one man said.

"He's barely more than a child," his wife added.

"But look how regal he looks," their daughter pointed out.

Moreover, Riku indeed did look regal as the royal diadem was placed upon his brow.

There was a deep silence for a moment. Then a cheer erupted from the crowd.

A young man with spiky brown hair and blue eyes applauded loudest of all.