

Heartless Hunter Axel II

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Axel is back on his bike and ready for another adventure.

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1 - Chapter 01

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

-Chapter 1: Destiny Islands-

A week had gone by since King Riku had claimed the throne. The people of Destiny Islands had pretty much gotten used to the young King by now, though a few still claimed he was too young.

Axel had gotten a better motorcycle, one that was black but adorned with flames. It greatly resembled the one that Cloud had been seen riding around back at Radiant Garden. Where Cloud's motorcycle had come from only he knew. According to Aerith's letters, which King Mickey had made sure Riku and Sora received, it greatly annoyed most of the people of Radiant Garden.

There was another problem. With Cloud's return had come the return of Sephiroth. The two men had been locked in a fierce embrace, battling each other over a small bundle that was lodged between the two men, each of whom was determined to possess it.

It was only after Cloud had lost the battle, and Sephiroth had walked off with the small bundle clutched securely in one arm, that Aerith and Leon learned the truth about it.

It was a child. One reborn from the Lifestream. Cloud had called the infant Kadaj.

King Riku smiled as he set down the letter and looked over at Sora.

"You ever think of settling down?"

"Sometimes," Sora admitted. "But there's something that I still don't know how to do."

"And that is?"

"Propose to a King," Sora replied.

"I think King Mickey is happily married, Sora," Riku joked.

"I didn't mean him!" Sora wailed.

"I know," Riku smiled. "I'm a little scared, too, Sora."

"Of what?" Sora asked.

"Of saying 'yes' to the worlds' greatest hero."

“Why would you say ‘yes’ to yourself?”

Riku blushed. He was about to give Sora a soft kiss when Axel’s motorcycle sped down the long room and skidded to a stop just before the throne.

Axel bowed, politely, though he stayed on the motorcycle.

“The Heartless seem fewer these days, but they’re also fiercer,” he told them.

“As is their enemy,” Sora noted.

“Axel,” Riku scolded, “how many times must I ask you not to ride your motorcycle into the throne room?”

Axel shrugged. “Oh, by the way. Demyx finally said ‘yes’.”

“I’m happy for you,” Riku told him.

“So am I,” Sora agreed.

“Have you set a date for the wedding?”

“Next month,” Axel replied. “What did the letter from Aerith say, by the way?”

Axel had known of the letters from Aerith since King Mickey had first started delivering them, since Demyx was the one who actually passed the messages to King Riku once they reached the throne room.

“Apparently Sephiroth is a father now,” Riku replied. “He and Cloud had a major custody battle over the infant and Sephiroth won.”

“I can’t believe anyone would give custody of a child to Sephiroth,” Axel muttered.

“The battle was fought with swords, not with a lawyers,” Riku explained. “And Cloud’s lucky to be alive. Apparently Sephiroth was more interested in obtaining the baby than with finishing off Cloud.”

“Why would Sephiroth want a child?” Axel wondered aloud.

“The same question occurred to me,” Riku admitted. “It does seem strange.”

2 - Chapter 02

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
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-Chapter 2: Destiny Islands Part 2-

Demyx stepped forward and bowed. There was a fresh letter in his hand.

“New tidings from Aerith?” Riku asked.

“No, sir,” Demyx replied. “It’s, from King Mickey.”

“What does it say?” Sora asked Riku as Demyx handed him the letter.

Riku opened the letter and read:

“To King Riku. As you know, Sephiroth has recently taken custody of an infant named Kadaj. Not much is known about this child, or why someone like Sephiroth would want to raise an infant. I ask that you send Sora to Radiant Garden and have Leon check it out. Do not ask Cloud. As you know, he has a past history with Sephiroth that makes it impossible for him to conduct an impartial investigation. I ask you to take on this task, because of a reason I have only just become aware of and must inform you of as well. Radiant Garden, as well as five other realms, falls under your dominion. The seven realms which you hold sway over are: Destiny Islands, Radiant Garden, The World That Never Was, Twilight Town, The Twilight World (the one you were in before you finally returned to Destiny Islands), and Castle Oblivion. Please take good care of them. Best wishes, King Mickey.”

Sora’s eyes were wide. “Wow, Riku! You certainly have a lot of subjects.”

“And some of them are Heartless,” Riku realized, thinking of the World That Never Was. “I have the feeling they’re not going to pay too much heed to the idea of a human king.”

“They don’t even respect us Nobodies,” Axel pointed out. “So you’re probably right about that. What about this Sephiroth you speak of. Is he likely to respect your reign over him?”

“Sephiroth is pretty much a lone wolf when it comes to authority figures from what I’ve been told,” Riku recalled. “It was the reason he was never approached by the Organization. I’m surprised you didn’t know that. But then, you were something of a lone wolf, too. So I guess it’s no surprise that they didn’t trust you.”

“Hey, he saved my life,” Sora argued.

“I know,” Riku smiled. “Sorry, Axel. I didn’t mean to imply that you weren’t worthy of our trust.”

“Quite alright,” Axel smiled. “I don’t care if you trust me or not. All I care about is Demyx’s trust.” That was, of course, untrue. Axel did care a great deal about what young King Riku thought of him. He just wasn’t about to admit it.

Riku knew this, but did not press the issue. Instead he turned to Sora.

“Sora, I’ve read King Mickey’s request, and I’ve decided that it is a reasonable request. Demyx, please take a letter.”

Demyx pulled out a pen and paper and nodded that he was ready.

“To King Mickey. Received your letter. I was a bit surprised about the number of Kingdoms under me. I hope I’ll be able to rule them all fairly and give each one the attention it deserves. Putting that aside for now, I will be glad to send Sora to Radiant Garden to investigate Sephiroth’s sudden interest in fatherhood. I will be sending Axel along with him since his loyalty to us has been proven many times over.”

Demyx looked like he wanted to make a protest, but he held it back.

Riku continued. “Demyx seems a little concerned, but I will reassure him that Axel will be fine and that I’m sure that he and Sora will complete their mission safely. Yours in friendship, King Riku.”

Demyx finished the letter and gave it to Riku to sign. Then, he placed it in its carrier and sent it off to Disney Castle.

“Demyx,” Axel said, taking his fiancée’s hand. “I’ll be alright. I promise. And I’ll be sure to protect Sora, your majesty,” he added, addressing King Riku.

King Riku nodded. “I have every faith in you, Axel. Your mission begins now. There is no reason to wait. You have your orders. As your King, I expect you to follow them. As your friend, I know you will succeed and have every faith in you. Sora, as your fiancé, I will miss you and will await your return with all of my heart.”

“I’ll come back to you as quickly as I can,” Sora promised, wondering how things would go if he actually met Sephiroth, now that the One-Winged Angel was a father, and doubtlessly a very protective one at that.

“Go safely, Sora,” Riku told him.

“Stay with me, Axel!” Demyx pleaded. “Don’t go! You won’t come back if you go!”

“I have to go,” Axel apologized. “But don’t worry. I will come back. I promise you, Demyx. I will come back.” He stepped off his motorcycle long enough to give Demyx a hug. Then, climbed back on and motioned for Sora to join him.

Then, he turned his motorcycle and sped back down the corridor. As he made his way forward, he opened a dark portal in front of them. The motorcycle reached the portal, sped into it, and was gone.

3 - Chapter 03

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II: THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

-Chapter 3: Radiant Garden Part 1-

A single black wing was wrapped snugly around a small silver-haired infant. Silver hair fell in curtains around the face of the one-winged angel who gazed down at his new son.

“We’ll be alright, Kadaj,” he said. “Cloud cannot touch us now. He will not dare risk the life of an infant, and I’m too powerful for him to defeat at any rate. But come. I do not require food at this time, but you must be hungry.” He pulled a bottle from his supply sack and quietly fed it to the tiny bundle in his arms. He didn’t care what anyone thought of this, though he was certain it would’ve raised Cloud’s eyebrows high enough that they would have been hovering over his head.

“Why do I care so much about you?” He asked Kadaj as the infant drank from its bottle, occasionally making little happy noises. “I suppose I’ll never know, will I? Well, it’s not important. All that matters at this point is that we stick together.”

Just behind the last turn in the canyon that led to the plateau on which Sephiroth now played father to the infant Kadaj, Cloud watched and waited. He didn’t know what Sephiroth was up to, nor why he should take a sudden interest in paternity. All he did know was that the baby was in danger as long as it was in the hands of such a vile demon. He would get the child from the ex-General as soon as Sephiroth’s guard was down.

“I know you’re there, Cloud,” Sephiroth said, not bothering to turn in Cloud’s direction. “Don’t you dare try anything. I’ll stop at nothing to protect my son. I mean that.”

Cloud back his motorcycle up, then turned around and sped off back to Merlin’s house.

When he got there, he saw that Sora was present once again.

“Sephiroth is acting all domestic,” he said, as if he didn’t believe what he was seeing for a minute. “Of course it’s all an act. I doubt for a minute that Sephiroth actually cares about what happens to a baby.”

“King Riku has asked that Leon take over the task of watching Sephiroth,” Sora told Cloud. “With all respect.”

“I’m the more logical choice,” Cloud argued.

“Actually, you’re not,” Axel pointed out. “You have a history with Sephiroth which makes it impossible for you to keep an open mind about the situation.”

“There’s nothing to keep an open mind about,” Cloud snarled. “Sephiroth is pure evil. He has no business playing house with a baby.”

“We don’t know that he’s playing,” Aerith pointed out. “He could be serious. People act very different when dealing with infants. Something tells me that he genuinely care about the child.”

“What do you know of this Kadaj,” Sora asked.

“Only that he came from the Lifestream,” Aerith replied. “Merlin says that he lived before and the name comes from that past life. What interest he holds for Sephiroth we won’t know until Leon completes his investigation.”

“Leon,” Laguna asked. “Are you planning to go?”

“It’s a direct order from the King,” Leon told the older man. “I have no choice.”

“Of course you have a choice,” Sora told him. “Riku will understand if you choose not to go. Sephiroth is very dangerous, and being a protective father will doubtlessly make him more so.”

“No,” Leon shook his head. “I’ll go. I have great respect for King Riku.”

“Thank you,” Sora said, gratefully.

4 - Chapter 04

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
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-Chapter 4: Radiant Garden Part 2-

“What happens if Sephiroth is serious about being a father?” Sora wondered aloud.

“He’s not serious,” Cloud insisted. “The whole thing is nothing but a cruel joke. He cares about as much about the infant as I currently care about him.”

“You have a serious issue with putting the past aside, don’t you?” Axel asked.

“You try forgiving someone who burned down your entire home town.”

“Must you constantly remind me that he was a fire-user like me?” Axel complained.

“He was nothing like you,” Cloud assured him. “You’re not cruel or selfish.”

“I can be if I want to,” Axel pointed out. “And so can you. You’re being that way right now.”

“By trying to save a baby from Sephiroth?”

“What if Sephiroth is the best choice for him as a parent?” Axel asked, taking the part of devil’s advocate.

“Best choice?! How the heck can Sephiroth be the best choice?”

“Did it ever occur to you that this Kadaj may have talents that only Sephiroth can understand?” Axel asked.

“If he turns out to be a fire-mage, I’ll give custody to you.”

“I already have my hands full with Demyx and my own offspring,” Axel explained. “I don’t need another mouth to feed at this time.”

“You would give custody of a child to someone like Sephiroth?” Cloud demanded.

“Take it from someone who knows personally, even a Nobody has strong feelings when it comes to protecting their own child.”

Cloud headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Aerith asked.

"To see what Sephiroth is up to." Cloud replied as he walked through the door and let it close behind him.

"Axel," Sora began.

"I'm on it," Axel nodded, following Cloud out the door and climbing onto his own motorcycle to continue the pursuit, increasing speed to catch up with the blond.

"Stop following me," Cloud said, after a while.

"No can do," Axel told him. "Sora sent me to keep an eye on you."

"Fine," Cloud said, huffily. "But keep out of my way."

"Can't do that either." Axel shrugged. "I have my orders. And you don't want to know what I can do if I'm pushed. So behave yourself."

Cloud glared at Axel. And Axel glared right back, refusing to be cowed by the spiky-haired swordsman.

After a while, they mutually backed down, each one bearing a grudging respect for the other.

"We should be watching Sephiroth, not squabbling," Cloud decided. "We have a baby to protect."

Axel followed Cloud to the plateau where Sephiroth was currently sitting down and holding little Kadaj.

"Looks serious to me," Axel told him. He turned to Leon who had been there for some time. "What's he been up to?"

"Feeding, cuddling, and changing diapers," Leon reported.

Cloud shook his head. "He's got you all believing that he cares about Kadaj," he said. "I don't care how many diapers he changes. He'll never make me believe it."

"Well, I can't believe anyone who wasn't serious about raising a baby would actually change a diaper," Leon argued. "I wouldn't."

"How does Kadaj seem?" Axel asked.

"He's fine," Leon replied. "He seems very happy."

"Looks like Sephiroth is being a good father," Axel decided.

"Sephiroth is good at deceiving people," Cloud warned them.

"Let's not assume anything until we know what's going on," Leon suggested. "Sephiroth may have a

reason for wishing to raise an infant.”

“Such as?” Cloud asked, wondering why he was even entertaining such an idea.

“Maybe he wants an heir?” Axel offered.

Cloud heard a strange sound and looked in the direction it was coming from.

Out on the plateau, Sephiroth was singing a quiet lullaby to Kadaj.

5 - Chapter 05

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

-Chapter 5: Radiant Garden Part 3-

Sora paced Merlin's floor as he waited for news of Cloud and Sephiroth. Both of them were a handful and he wasn't sure which one he was more concerned about.

"Pacing won't help," Laguna offered. "You may as well sit down and relax until they get back. Or go and see for yourself."

Sora nodded. "You're right," he said. "Why didn't I think of that in the first place? I should be there keeping an eye on Cloud. I shouldn't have sent Axel."

"You don't trust Axel?" Aerith asked.

"I trust him," Sora told her. "I just..."

"If you trust Axel," Laguna told him, "then stop pacing and let him do his job."

"Have you ever had experience with keeping an eye on people?"

"I was President of Esthar before my world was destroyed by the Heartless." Laguna replied. "It was the largest country there. So the answer to your question is 'yes'."

"How well do you know Leon?" Sora asked, deciding to try and relax for a bit.

"Better than most," Laguna smiled. "He spent a little time in my head when I was a Galbadian Soldier."

"Huh?" Sora blinked.

"It's a long story," Laguna shrugged. "There's also another reason, but I'm not ready to tell it yet."

Sora nodded understandingly and turned to Aerith.

"Do you think Sephiroth is being serious?" he asked.

"Something tells me he is," Aerith decided. "I'm not sure why I believe it, but I do."

Sora took a deep breath and let it back out. "I wonder what a child raised by Sephiroth will turn out like."

"We'll just have to wait and see," Laguna decided.

"I'm going to go retrieve them," Sora told them. "It's getting a bit late."

"I don't think they'll appreciate a curfew from someone who's a bit younger than they are." Laguna offered. "Let them be. They'll come home when they're hungry."

"I doubt it," Yuffie spoke up. "Cloud is obsessed with Sephiroth to the point of starvation. And I have the feeling that Axel won't abandon his mission."

"That still leaves Leon," Sora shrugged. "He has no reason to stay and watch."

"My son would never abandon an assignment without being called back in," Laguna blurted out, unintentionally giving out his secret.

"Your son?!" the rest of the room exclaimed.

Laguna covered his mouth in horror for a moment. Then in a panic he begged: "Please don't tell him! I'm not ready to let him know yet!"

"Don't worry," Aerith reassured him. "Your secret's safe with us, right?"

Everyone else nodded, except for Yuffie.

"Yuffie..." Aerith prompted.

"Right," Yuffie sighed. "I won't breathe a word. Ninja's honor."

"Thank you," Laguna sighed in relief.

It wasn't much later that Leon, Axel, and Cloud finally returned home.

"I wish he would show his hand," Cloud sounded exasperated. "I've got better things to do than watch Sephiroth play 'daddy'."

"Maybe he's already showing it?" Sora offered.

"He did change some diapers," Leon offered.

Yuffie snickered at this. Obviously the idea of the former General involved in such a messy domestic task amused her, as it did Aerith who was also laughing softly.

"Well, it sounds to me like Sephiroth is very serious about being a father," Sora decided. "Until there is new evidence to the contrary, I see no reason not to let him retain custody of Kadaj."

"Are you out of your mind?" Cloud demanded. "There's no way he's being serious. I've said it before and I'll say it again. I don't care how many diapers he changes or how many bottles he prepares. He's dangerous. Don't you get it? This is Sephiroth we're talking about."

“We understand,” Aerith said.

“So we’re just going to wait until he kills the kid?” Cloud demanded.

“If he was going to kill Kadaj, I don’t think he’d bother feeding him.” Axel pointed out.

Cloud shook his head. “Somehow, I doubt he’s decided to suddenly settle down and raise a family. I mean what’s next? A wife? Who would have him anyhow?”

“As I recall there was a time when you would,” Tifa offered from the doorway.

“Well, he cured me of that notion when he destroyed my home,” Cloud said, pointedly.

“Maleficent might have him,” Aerith offered.

“Now I feel even sorrier for Kadaj,” Cloud sighed, shaking his head.

“Maleficent’s alive?” Sora asked in amazement.

Cloud nodded. “She’s changed a bit. Seems less evil somehow. But she’s still a bit of a…”

“Cloud!” Aerith scolded, cutting him off before he could finish his sentence. “She claims that she was inspired by Riku’s ascent from the darkness. She figured if a simple boy could pull off such a feat, then so could she.”

“I’m glad,” Sora smiled. “She did seem a lot nicer when I last saw her.”

6 - Chapter 06

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 6: Back To Destiny Islands-

"Take care, Sora," Aerith said, as Sora climbed onto the back of Axel's bike. Axel was already sitting astride the bike, revving the motor with an air of impatience.

"Come on," he said. "I made a promise to Demyx and it's time to fulfill it."

Sora nodded. "I need to get back to Riku as well."

"You're always welcome back," Cloud determined. "Who knows? Perhaps by the time you come back I'll have custody of little Kadaj?"

"Would you stop obsessing about that?" Aerith shook her head. "I don't know why, but my heart tells me he's perfectly safe with Sephiroth."

"Until things change, you're to leave Sephiroth alone," Sora told Cloud. "The last thing we need is someone antagonizing him."

"That won't be easy," Cloud admitted. "Sephiroth and I have been enemies for many years."

"That much is clear," Axel nodded. "But it's time to put that aside and consider what is best for little Kadaj."

"Well," Sora decided. "It's time we got going."

"Take care of yourselves," Aerith told them.

"Say 'hi' to all your friends for us," Yuffie added.

"We will," Sora promised as Axel pointed his motorcycle for a new dark portal leading back to Destiny Islands.

They raced through a swarm of Heartless, wiping out several of them with Keyblade and Chakrams, until they reached the other end of the portal and came out in the throne room of Riku's castle.

"Axel!"

“Sorry,” Axel apologized, though Riku doubted he seriously meant it.

Demyx ran into the room and smiled widely.

“Why don’t we head off into the kitchen?” Riku suggested. “I’m sure if we ask her nicely, the Reluctant Chef will whip up something tasty.”

“Or we can have Axel make something…” Demyx suggested.

“No!” the others shouted in mock-horror.

“I’ll ask Seraphine to do it,” Sora offered.

“Hey, I’m the messenger!” Demyx pointed out.

Riku nodded to Demyx. “Go on, then.”

Demyx nodded in reply and made his way to the kitchen to convey the King’s request.

“Has King Riku found a chef yet?” Seraphine asked when Demyx walked in.

“Not yet,” Demyx admitted. “Sorry.”

Seraphine rolled her eyes. “How often must I remind him that I am a warrior, not a housewife. So what does bring you here?”

“Never mind,” Demyx replied, timidly. “I’ll make lunch.”

Seraphine shook her head. “No, I’ll do it.”

“Thanks,” Demyx smiled.

“It was nice of you to offer,” Seraphine told him as she began making lunch. “How’s Axel? Is he back yet?”

Demyx nodded. “He and Sora just got back. I’m a bit relieved, actually. Here, let me help you with that. It’ll get done faster if we both work on it.”

“Thank you, Demyx,” Seraphine smiled. “That’s very thoughtful of you.”

“You’re welcome,” Demyx replied, blushing just a little as Seraphine gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“AHEM!” a voice came from the doorway.

Demyx turned and stared at the doorway in horror.

“Axel!”

7 - Chapter 07

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 7: Flames of Love-

Axel approached Demyx, giving Seraphine a look that was a mixture of amusement and slight jealousy.

"Demyx," he said. "Don't forget..." he lifted Demyx's hand and kissed the engagement ring the water-mage wore as a reminder that it was there, smiling into Demyx's eyes as he did so.

"I could never forget," a smile of relief and happiness spread across Demyx's face as he said this. "I can't help it if I used to belong to her as a kitten."

"And what a cute kitten you were," Axel said, playfully, as he remembered Edym.

"Axel!" Demyx laughed as Axel hugged him close. What he said next, however, was more solemn. "Take me with you next time."

"And what happens to Kajihana if we both die," Axel asked. "Look, I know you're not her mother. I wish you were."

"I'm more of a mother to her than Marluxia ever was," Demyx said, pointedly.

"I'm glad you feel that way," Axel smiled. "She needs you, Demyx. I won't be around forever."

"Don't say that!" Demyx protested. "You'll be around for a long time."

"That depends on Sephiroth," Axel said. "We're still keeping an eye on him. It's possible we'll be called back to Radiant Garden to fight him."

"Don't go," Demyx said, pointedly. "Stay with me. Stay safe."

"I can't ignore an order from the King."

Demyx frowned. "I don't care about orders. I just care about you."

"Shh," Axel held him. "Don't worry. I'm sure I won't be going for a long time."

"There's just one thing that confuses me," Demyx told him. "I thought you said that Aerith's adopted son was named Kadaj."

"That's true," Axel replied.

"But Sephiroth's son is also named Kadaj?"

"Apparently," Axel shrugged. "We'll have to figure that one out later."

"Just write a letter to that Cloud guy and ask him," Demyx suggested. "Then you won't have to leave me again."

"Demyx," Axel said, "we can't always be together."

"Why not?" Demyx demanded. "Why do you always have to go away? You don't care anymore, do you?"

"That's not true!" Axel exclaimed, wondering what had come over the water mage. "I care very much about you. Demyx! I love you!"

"I'm beginning to find that hard to believe," Demyx grumbled as he literally stormed away, leaving Axel drenched to the bone on his hands and knees looking very pale.

"Demyx..." Axel whispered, sadly. "Why...?"

Then he shivered, as if some inner fire had gone out, and lay there as if dead.

8 - chapter 08

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 8: To Rekindle The Flame-

Seraphine rushed over to Axel and tried to revive him. But the drenched fire mage did not respond to her words, or to being shaken by her. Worried, she summoned the castle physician.

"It doesn't look too good," the doctor said, once Axel was abed. "Unless we can rekindle his inner flame somehow, Axel will die."

"Couldn't we just set him on fire or something?" Kajihana asked.

"It doesn't work that way," the doctor told her.

"Then why did the rain Demyx caused do this?"

"The kind of rain that Demyx, or any water mage, creates is not the same as that which falls from the sky during a normal storm," the doctor explained. "It's more like the spirit of rain. It has an ethereal quality that can permeate a person's inner being. Not just their skin."

"And that's what made papa sick?" Kajihana asked.

The doctor nodded. "I'm afraid so."

Kajihana felt torn. She liked Demyx a lot. But she loved her papa, and Demyx had made him sick.

With tears in her eyes, she rushed to find Demyx, hoping she could talk him into at least visiting Axel at his sickbed.

She found Demyx in the castle garden sitting on a stone bench and staring, distractedly, at a flower.

"Papa is dying," she told him, with tears in her eyes. "Please, Demy. Please help him. Don't let my papa die!"

Demyx leapt to his feet. "Take me to him!" he cried out.

Kajihana led the way to the castle infirmary and into the room where Axel was resting.

"Axel!" Demyx cried out in alarm. "Axel, I'm sorry. Come on! You're going to be alright."

“No,” the doctor shook his head. “He’s not. Unless we can rekindle his inner flame somehow, he will die in two days.”

“How do we cure him?” Demyx asked. “Please? There must be some way.”

“We have to find ethereal flame. Only that can save him,” the doctor explained. “You must find a world where it exists.”

“I’ll ask the King,” Demyx decided as he left the room and made his way to the throne room.

9 - Chapter 09

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 9:

King Riku was in the castle library looking over Ansem's old notes when Demyx approached him.

"I've done something horrible," Demyx confessed. "Because of me Axel is going to die unless I can find ethereal flame. Trouble is, I don't know where to look. I don't want to go to the Underworld. Something in my heart tells me that even if there is ethereal flame there, it would enslave Axel to Hades, and I'd rather have Axel dead than suffer such a fate."

Riku considered the matter. "No," he agreed. "The Underworld is not the place to look. I've only been King of my worlds for a short time, so I don't know which places might have it. Let me ask King Mickey."

Riku closed his eyes and reached out to his friend.

~Your majesty,~ he thought, ~I need to know which of the worlds I have sovereignty over contains ethereal fire. Axel has been injured and his inner flame needs to be rekindled soon.~

There was a long silence before King Mickey finally replied.

~There is a small island off the coast of Destiny Islands,~ he told Riku. ~There you will find the remnants of a small tribe of elementalists.~

~The Kajizuko,~ Riku remembered from his schooling. ~But I thought they were extinct.~

~Then you don't know.~

~Know what?~ Riku asked. ~Nobody's ever seen a Kajizuko. They pretty much keep to themselves.~

~But you have seen one,~ King Mickey told him.

~Who?~ Riku asked.

~Axel.~

~Of course!~ Riku exclaimed. ~I should have known! I assume then that his marks are of a tribal nature?~

~He received them at his coming of age ceremony just before he became a Nobody.~

~What happened to the rest of the tribe?~

~Axel was hunting at the time, so the Heartless never found the rest of his people.~ King Mickey explained.

~I'll let Demyx know,~ King Riku told King Mickey. ~Thank you.~

Demyx watched restlessly as Riku sat there with his eyes closed. When King Riku finally opened his eyes, he felt a moment of relief.

"I hope you have good news for me," he said.

"I believe I do," Riku told him. "You can find the ethereal fire on this world, on an unnamed island just off the coast of Destiny Islands. There you will find a group of people called the Kajizuko. You might be interested to know that they are Axel's tribe."

Demyx nodded, quietly. "Thank you," he said, gratefully.

"You'll find the island off the Southern Coast," Riku told him. "Hurry. You don't have much time."

Demyx took a deep breath, then turned and left for the coast. When he got there, he spotted the island in question. He steeled himself for the journey, then opened a dark portal and made his way to the unnamed island.

10 - Chapter 10

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 10: In The Land of the Kajizuko-

Demyx stepped onto the shore of the unnamed island. He looked around, but could find no sign of life, except for the occasional animal that peeked out from the foliage at the edge of the beach.

Beyond the foliage was a range of mountains which seemed to span the entire island. Demyx was tempted to simply travel by portal and bypass them entirely. But he decided that he didn't dare risk a sudden appearance in the middle of an unknown tribe. They might not take too kindly to such an abrupt arrival.

He considered simply reappearing just out of their line of vision. But there was no guarantee that he wouldn't accidentally end up coming out of the portal just in front of a hunter. So the best course of action, he decided, was to just put up with the mountains and hope it didn't too long to navigate them.

He made his way, carefully, through the mountains, grateful for the path that seemed to lead all the way through them.

But just when he thought he would get through with no problems, he came upon a large mountain which blocked his path.

He stood there for several long moments, wondering how he would get beyond this last obstacle.

Then, remembering why he was there, he began to scale the mountain, hoping that the way down would be as easy as the way up appeared to be.

He was on his way down the mountain when he slipped and skidded to the bottom. Fortunately, he hadn't been far up the mountain when he'd lost his footing, and all he got for injuries was a badly twisted ankle.

He limped toward a column of smoke until he spotted the tribe's encampment.

He paused to work out the best strategy for introducing himself to the Kajizuko. Then decided to just make himself known and hope for the best.

But before he could take a step, a hand tapped him on the shoulder.

"Why have you come here?" a man asked. He had marks under his eyes that were the same as Axel's,

and his hair was just as red, but with streaks of grey throughout.

"I seek the ethereal flame," Demyx explained. "I need it to cure a dear friend of mine. Please. Unless I find it, Axel will die."

"Axel?" the man asked. "My Axel?"

"Your Axel?" Demyx asked. "Excuse me? But what do you mean your Axel?"

"He is my son," the man explained.

11 - Chapter 11

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 11: Test Of The Water Mage-

"My name is Kasai," the tribesman told Demyx.

"You and your son have the same marks," Demyx noticed.

"They are bestowed upon the members of my family when they reach adulthood." Kasai told the water mage. "You said earlier that my son was dying. You also said he needed ethereal flame to survive. Do you know what ethereal flame does to a human being?"

"Your son isn't exactly human anymore," Demyx explained. "He's a fire mage."

Kasai smiled grimly. "What weapon does he wield?" he asked, showing Demyx a long dagger which had signs of having been alit many times.

"Chakrams," Demyx replied.

"Come, let me show you something."

Kasai led Demyx down a long passage through the woods until they reached a clearing wherein sat a temple. He motioned for Demyx to follow him inside.

There in the middle of the temple, stood a statue of a man. He had waist-length hair fanned out like flames and marks like flames framing the sides of his eyes. In his hands was a pair of chakrams identical to the ones that Axel favored.

"His name is Kajikaze," Kasai told Demyx. "The legends say that he was the first of the Kajizuko tribe. He ascended to godhood because of his courage and loyalty, and it was he who provided the tribe with the ethereal flame. It was he who ascribed to us our rite of passage and the tests we give to those who seek to attain the flame."

"And I must pass this test or Axel will die." Demyx realized. "His inner flame is fading. I can't let it go out."

"You care for my son," Kasai guessed correctly. He stood there for a moment, and Demyx worried that he had decided that Axel wasn't worthy of saving. Finally, Kasai spoke. "I can't say I approve of such... relationships. But I do care about Axel. So for his sake, I will recommend to the elders that you be

allowed to undergo the test.”

“Thank you,” Demyx said, gratefully.

“Come, then,” Kasai said as he led Demyx from the temple and back to the Kajizuko village.

Demyx followed the older man until they reached the village.

He marveled at the small village, which consisted mainly of small stone houses arranged in a circle. He watched a weaver woman at work for a moment, impressed by the patterns she created in her craft.

Nearby, a man sharpened daggers with a smooth stone. He looked up at Demyx with a stare of mild distrust.

“You’re a stranger here,” Kasai explained. “Our people don’t meet a lot of outsiders, so we’re not inclined to trust them.”

He led Demyx to a man who bore the same eye marks as those of the statue.

“This is Hisochi, our tribal elder.” He said. He bowed before Hisochi then spoke.

“My elder,” he said, quietly. “Axel has been given the Chakrams. But he is ill. This young man has come to acquire the ethereal flame to cure him.”

“Will you undergo our test?” Hisochi asked, sternly.

“Whatever it takes to save Axel,” Demyx vowed.

“Then rest up. The test is rather grueling. It will take all of your strength and courage.”

12 - Chapter 12

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 12: Test Of The Water Mage 2: Demyx's Trial-

Demyx was awakened after a couple of hours. A tribeswoman was crouching beside him. Her eyes were marked in the same way as the tribal elder's, but she was much younger.

"I'm Hisochiko," she said. "I am the granddaughter of the tribal elder. He has asked me to tell you that it is time for you to begin your test."

Demyx got up from the mat, which he realized was what the weaver woman had been making. He followed Hisochiko a cave where the tribal elder and Kasai were awaiting him. The cave seemed normal enough.

"You must enter the cave and bring me one of the rubies from the rear wall for my granddaughter's necklace," Hisochi told Demyx. "Do this, and you will be given a portion of ethereal fire for Axel. Fail, and you will not live to see him die."

Demyx stepped forward toward the cave. But before he could enter, a wall of fire rose up before him. Just beyond it, another rose a little bit later. Demyx watched them for a few minutes, then he realized that they must rise and fall in a pattern. If he could work out the pattern, he could achieve his goal. He watched and timed each flare up, until he was sure he knew when each fire would arise.

He moved forward, timing his steps until he was at the mouth of the cave. He wouldn't have time to stop between flare ups. The firewalls rose up too fast for that. He would simply have to slow down and speed up in time with them and hope for the best. When the first wall of flames lowered, he began to run. He made it through until he reached the last wall. It flared up before he could pass through. There was nothing for it but to dive through the flames and hope that his speed through them would be enough to prevent him from being burned alive.

He made it through a bit singed but alive. The rubies were embedded in the wall. He selected one and removed it from the wall. As he did so, the walls of flame all rose up simultaneously. He waited for them to lower, but they did not. Realizing that there was no way out but to run through each wall of flame and hope for the best, he drew a breath and steeled himself for the dangerous run back out of the cave. Nodding to himself, he ran as fast he could through each wall of flame, fearing with each passage that he would be set alight.

Somehow, he passed through with only minor burns.

The tribal elder nodded approvingly as Demyx handed him the ruby. "Well done."
He motioned for Demyx to follow him.

Demyx followed him back to the temple.

"Great Kajikaze," Hisochi beseeched the statue. "This outsider has completed the trial set before him. Please grant him a portion of the ethereal fire."

He closed his eyes in prayer. A moment later, he opened a hidden door in the floor of the temple and descended into it. Demyx realized that he was not meant to follow and awaited his return.

Several minutes later, the tribal elder returned with a clear ball within which danced flames which seemed almost transparent one moment, then brilliant red the next.

"Take this to Axel," he told Demyx. "This will cure him. When he is cured, tell him he must return to the tribe. The outside world is no place for a Kajizuko."

Demyx thanked the tribal elder for the ethereal flame, and began his journey back to Riku's castle.

13 - Chapter 13

HEARTLESS HUNTER AXEL II:
THE 7 REALMS OF KING RIKU

(A/N: Seraphine appears courtesy of Saveena-001.)

-Chapter 13: Return To Riku's Castle-

Once Demyx was far enough away from the Kajizuko village, he opened a dark portal and stepped through it, coming out the other side just in front of Riku's castle. Without a moment to waste, he made his way to the infirmary and into Axel's room.

"Here," he said, handing the ethereal fire to the castle physician.

The doctor placed the sphere on Axel's chest and carefully opened it. The flames sank slowly into Axel, leaving his skin slightly warmer but unmarked.

Those in attendance watched this in amazement until the tip of the last flame vanished into the fire mage's skin.

Axel's breathing slowly returned to normal. Demyx breathed a sigh of relief when he finally opened his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Axel," the water mage apologized. "Please, don't be mad."

"I'm not," Axel told him. "Demyx, I've told you before, I'll always come back to you."

"You might not after what I have to tell you," Demyx sighed. He'd been debating about whether or not he wanted to deliver Kasai's message to his son. At first he hadn't wanted to. But the more he thought about it, the more he decided it would be best if he did. If Axel found out without him telling, the fire mage might become angry.

"Why?" Axel asked. "What could you possibly say to me that could ever separate us?"

"Your father wants you to return to your village."

"When did you go to my village? How did you even find out about it?"

"Your island is just off the South Coast," Demyx explained.

"I had no idea we were so close to my original home," Axel said in wonder. "When I grew up there, we never passed the mountains."

“Do you want to go back?” Demyx asked him. “I mean your father’s there and all.”

Axel was silent for a long time, lost in thought. Finally he looked up at Demyx.

“No,” he decided. “After being out here in the outside world, I don’t think I could be happy living in an isolated community any more. Besides, they would never let us be together. They’ve been too cut off from the modern world. They’re not exactly what one would call open-minded. Us both being men aside, they would no doubt have you executed if they knew what you were.”

“You mean a water mage,” Demyx guessed.

Axel nodded. “I can’t go back to what I was. I’ve seen too much and love you too dearly to do that. By the way, how did you know about them?”

“I had to retrieve the ethereal flame to save your life,” Demyx explained. “King Riku sent me to their island, your home island, to get it from them.”

“You underwent the cave of fire trial?” Axel asked.

Demyx nodded. “And I saw the statue of your tribe’s founder. Your chakrams are just like his.”

Axel nodded, but didn’t go into it. Instead he smiled.

“I’m proud of you,” he told Demyx. “That was extremely brave of you to face that task.” He kissed Demyx on the forehead, the tip of his nose, and finally on his lips.

“That,” he said, softly, “is why I have no wish to return home.”

“I’m glad,” Demyx sighed as he snuggled up to Axel and closed his eyes peacefully.