



# Opening the Door

There were two men in the graveyard, under the stars.

Both were very tall and unnaturally thin, and wore black suits and long black coats. They walked through the oldest parts of the church grounds among overgrown weeds and tombstones so decayed that the names of those buried beneath had been lost forever.

“This way,” said the first man, who was bald and had a large crooked nose. He led the way through a tangle of trees to a wild patch of ground covered by long grass. “Here.”

The second man had a face full of sharp features and a head of straggly dark hair. “You’re sure?”

“Positive,” said the bald-headed man. “Unconsecrated ground. There’s witches here. I can smell ’em. Have you ever known my nose to be wrong?”

The dark-haired man looked around, and smiled. "I do like a good graveyard," he said. "Don't you just *love* a good graveyard, Brother Swan?"

Brother Swan, the bald man, rubbed his hands together. "I do indeed, Brother Swift. Reminds me of the old days."

"Quite so," said Brother Swift. "I mean, I remember a time when we had the power to turn countries and kings against one another just by whispering in their ears. How I long for the days when we sent plagues crawling around the world just by blowing into the wind."

"All that lovely red blood," said Brother Swan. "All that delicious pain and suffering." He licked his lips. "But look at us now, brother – reduced to sneaking about in the shadows. Mother would be turning in her grave. If she had one."

"We won't be sneaking much longer." Brother Swift shook his greasy head. "No. Soon we'll stand proud, and we'll unleash hell."

"Lovely." Brother Swan stepped forward, reached into his long black coat and pulled out three black candles. He crouched down and twisted each waxy stem into the ground. Next he struck a match and lit them, casting a soft yellow light on the surrounding trees.

Then, together, the brothers began to speak.

If you had been there, in the darkness of the graveyard, you would not have understood what they were saying. The words they spoke were a strange collection of sounds, some soft and hissing, others sharp and cutting. All of the words were ancient.

As Brothers Swan and Swift spoke, the air around them became heavy and crackled with static. The yellow flames flickered and danced and turned blue, then green, then red, bright as a flare. And then the red flames changed to black. If you could burn a shadow, this would be the colour of its flames.

They waited.

They did not move, did not speak.

The candles went out.

In front of Brother Swan and Brother Swift a long, thin crack appeared. Not a crack in the earth, in the mud and the stone. No. A crack in the *world*. A crack in *everything*. And on the other side was a faraway darkness so deep it made the night in the graveyard grow heavier. Thousands of creatures scuttled out of the crack in the world, tiny and inky-black, as if someone had lifted a stone and disturbed them.

And then the witches came.

Three shadows dragged themselves up and out of the fissure, and stood in the moonlight in front of the two brothers.

Brother Swift twisted a lock of greasy hair around a skinny finger. "You'll do," he said. "You'll do nicely."

Brother Swan looked the shadows up and down. Their shapes shifted and warped in the dim light of the moon. "Be still, my dears," he said. "Be easy. We've brought you back. Back to the world that didn't want you, the world that tormented and killed you."

One of the witches tried to speak, but her voice was nothing more than the sound of the night breeze in the long grass.

"Be calm," said Brother Swift. "Your strength will come back. And when it does it will be your turn. Your turn to get revenge, to make them suffer."

"We have a job for you," Brother Swan told the shadows. He smiled. "Now listen carefully, my dears, while I tell you all about the Shadowsmith..."