

**Jason Willow 2**

**MY ENEMY'S  
ENEMY...**

**Gareth Mottram**

**PRE-PUBLICATION SAMPLE**

# CHAPTER 1

‘Something’s... different,’ Dad muttered to Ilena as their tiny ferry pulled away from the mainland.

Icy grey water sprayed up through the morning mist and over the gunwales to welcome the eight outsiders to the private island of Mawn on Scotland's bleak, north coast.

‘You're right there, Dad,’ Jason said, ‘Freddy the Ferryman almost hugged Miranda back for once.’

Miranda shook her head at him in her big-sisterly, don’t-you-ever-know-when-to-be-serious way. The wind whipped her long blonde hair out behind her as she turned back to the hunched up bundle of oversized waterproofs beside her that was Violet Grey.

‘Don’t worry, Violet,’ Miranda said, slipping an arm around the girl's shoulders - thin and bony even under all the padding. ‘Dad’s always paranoid. We’ll be safe on Grandfather’s island.’

*Yeah, just like last time when the agent nearly killed us* Jason thought but he kept his mouth shut. He could just see Violet's slate-blue eyes in the depths of her double hood. The moment they had stepped foot on the ferry her legs had buckled and only Miranda's arm around her had stopped her collapsing. Now she sat with her knees drawn up against her chest and arms wrapped around them as if she had the most excruciating stomach ache.

She hadn't made a sound though, not even a moan. Violet hadn't spoken since their escape from the Yorkshire Moors two days ago. Just as she was doing now, she only stared straight ahead, mechanically eating and drinking whatever was put in front of her, allowing herself to be guided from one place to the next.

‘Don’t talk down to her,’ Jason said, ‘she was... is cleverer than both of us put together. Redemption doesn’t get rid of your brain as well...’ He glanced over at his father. ‘... does it, Dad?’

Richard Willow gave a tight smile and shook his head before turning to scan the approaching shore line.

Miranda glared at her brother. ‘I’m not talking down to her, idiot, but she’s in shock – maybe post traumatic stress or something. You need to keep talking to victims... reassuring them of where they are, who they’re with. We haven't a clue what she remembers after... what she's been through.’

Jason held her stare for a moment then gave up. Half an “A” level in psychology and Miranda thought she knew it all. She’d been “reassuring” Violet off and on all the way up to Scotland and nothing short of a bullet to the brain would make her stop.

Miranda flicked a dismissive hand at Jason. ‘So then, to recap, that’s my stropmy brother, Jason and my paranoid father, Richard. Stop me if you remember any of this, okay?’

Violet made no sound, no movement to show anything was going in.

Miranda carried on regardless. ‘Right then, next to Dad, sitting really very close indeed, is the lovely Ilena Russof, his... old friend from a long time ago.’

Jason looked down to hide his smile, glad the heavy diesel engine was drowning out his sister’s conspiratorial tones from the people across the deck. Miranda was nowhere near ready to give up her assumed place as woman of the Willow household to Ilena, despite Dad now actually smiling occasionally for the first time in the year since Mum’s murder.

‘And then we have Ilena’s equally lovely daughter, Louisa.’ Jason kept his head down, determinedly not looking at the deliciously curved, dark bobbed, heart-faced seventeen year old vision of loveliness that was Louisa Russof.

Miranda raised her voice slightly. ‘Jason would like her to be his special friend but hopefully he’ll grow out of falling for such obvious good looks.’

That brought Jason’s head up. He was about to mouth an incredulous “What?” at his Barbie-doll sister when, just for a second, he thought Violet’s eyes focussed on him. Then she was blank again.

Oblivious, Miranda winked at him and carried on.

‘And finally, we have little and large over at the pointy end.’ Miranda nodded at two backs - one long and slim and one stocky and muscular. They were both searching the approaching island just as intently as Dad.

‘The tall one is Sergei Marakoff – he’s what they call a ghost... bit of a sneaky ninja type.’

Jason shook his head. Miranda was such a blonde. “Sneaky ninja type” didn’t get anywhere near to describing Marakoff’s abilities, even with his permanently damaged knee. If Violet ever properly recovered from being possessed, he hoped she would ignore everything Miranda had said to her.

‘And the hunky little guy is Mouse,’ Miranda whispered on, ‘he hits people with sticks but is actually rather... cute.’

She glanced over at Jason who made a little “noted” sign. Miranda pushed her tongue out at him. ‘Sadly, he is another shallow soul caught in the lovely Louisa’s love-net.’

Jason quickly checked Louisa hadn’t heard his sister’s last comment. Luckily she had her back to them as well, her bob of perfect, glossy hair only ruffled slightly by the wind as they now closed in on Mawn’s small harbour.

They docked against a tiny stone jetty. Half a dozen brightly painted cottages were scattered down a steep hillside beyond. Marakoff leapt off first, only a slight dip betraying his injured leg.

The rest of them followed quickly, Miranda guiding Violet off the boat and along the narrow jetty. Ilena came last, ever watchful, true to her shield training.

‘Bye, Freddy darling, see you...’ Miranda began, turning back to the ferryman. Her voice drifted away - Freddy had already cast off and was turning back to the mainland.

‘...soon,’ Miranda finished.

‘Your natives are not very friendly, I see,’ Mouse said in his Romanian accent. Jason still thought he sounded like an old movie Dracula but Mouse’s irrepressible grin and wild, curly brown hair kind of ruined the image. Louisa, standing a head and a half taller behind him, shrugged sympathetically at Miranda.

‘Miserable sod,’ Jason said. ‘Grandfather’s probably been banging on to all his people about how we let ourselves be followed by that agent.’

Mouse looked over at them. ‘A Brethren agent followed you here?’

‘Long story,’ Jason mumbled. ‘Let’s see if we get the cold shoulder with this one.’ He nodded ahead where a Land Rover was slewing down the hillside track to the harbour. ‘Old Duncan, Grandfather's gamekeeper, is a bit more chatty than Frederick...’ Jason began to explain but no one was listening to him any more.

‘Is it always so quiet on this island?’ Marakoff asked, his eyes scanning every inch of the hamlet.

At that moment, one of the cottage doors opened and an old woman who must have been in her seventies edged outside. She waved once, hesitated, then went back inside.

‘Ah,’ Mouse said, ‘there we have famous warm Scottish welcome at last.’

The Land Rover reached them and slowed to a halt, its engine growling impatiently. Old Duncan, his skin turned to tanned leather by seventy odd years of Mawn's harsh climate, wound down the window. ‘The back’s all full, I’ve only room for the Darillians. I’ll be back for the rest of ye in the while.’

‘Nice to see you, too,’ Jason mumbled, ‘I’m sure you’re really glad we’re all still alive after every last Brethren in Britain had a crack at us and the one person who was meant to keep us safe tried to possess me.’

Miranda elbowed him to keep quiet.

Dad brushed a hand back through his thick, dark hair, but the wind just blew it back across his almost permanently stressed-out features. ‘I’m not sure about splitting up,’ he said to Ilena and Marakoff.

‘I’ve a full load of barbed-wire fencing in the back - it's the devils own job to get it out,’ Old Duncan said. ‘And your father wants to see you right away, Richard,’ he added, revving the engine.

Ilena leant in towards Dad ‘You know this man well, don’t you?’ she whispered. ‘And the ferryman also - you trust them both?’

Dad nodded. ‘They’ve been working for my father for decades.’

‘Then there should be no problems – you take Jason, Miranda and Violet. We will follow on foot until the vehicle returns for us.’

Dad glanced at Marakoff who nodded. He had already walked around the Land Rover to check inside.

‘Okay,’ Dad said, gently taking Violet’s arm from Miranda, ‘let’s go.’

The moment they were inside and the doors were shut, Duncan started back up the hill.

‘How are things at the castle, Duncan?’ Dad asked, riding shotgun in the front.

‘Nothing is different.’ Duncan said, winding up his window and concentrating on the track ahead.

Jason turned to look through the barbed wire fencing coiled between and over the rear bench seats. Through the mud-splattered rear window, Marakoff, Ilena, Louisa and Mouse were quickly falling behind them and the ferry was already half way back to the mainland. For the first time in his life, he felt a twinge of isolation on this island which had been the one constant in his fifteen years of running from one part of the country to another.

Louisa raised a hand, a tight smile flashing across her lovely face. Jason waved back awkwardly then twisted back around, accidentally nudging Violet as he did so.

‘Sorry,’ he said.

Violet just stared straight ahead. Miranda glanced across at him from the other side of her then they both turned back to watching their life-long retreat bump past outside.

It was mid-morning in early June but Mawn still clung on to her thin shroud of cold mist. Heather and hillsides rolled down to a rocky shoreline, but the vibrant purples and greens were washed over in shadow-black from the slow moving clouds above.

Jason chewed at his bottom lip - he and Miranda used to dream of living here, safely away from the outside world and never again having to totally abandon one life and start all over again.

The Land Rover gear-ground to the top of the track and dropped down into the island's main settlement. The single street was deserted as they drove through in silence. Only one door opened – the Northern Star pub – and Les the landlord stepped out to wave stiffly at them. Normally rotund and flushed, this morning the island's most jovial character looked pale and drawn.

'He's never waved to us before,' Miranda said, raising a tentative hand in return.

Les stayed at the door, staring at them as they pulled up out of the hamlet.

Watching him through the back window, Jason's eyes drifted over to a small cottage on the right - Laura McKenzie's home. He and Laura had grown up together during years of school holidays and bolt-hole periods while a new life was being arranged for them.

Since hitting his teenage years, he had begun to hope something more than friendship might happen between the two of them. Perhaps he could have moved here, had a real home, stay at the same school, keep his friends, actually go out with a girl.

Those dreams were gone now. He had things to do now - a war to join, demons to destroy.

People to kill.

Hell - he was planning to kill real people.

Dad cut into his thoughts. 'No problems after the agent attack then, Duncan? My father hasn't been replying to my letters again.'

'No – all's well,' Duncan said, still concentrating hard on the road. 'Likely Mr Darillian was just too busy for writing letters.'

They crested another hill and Grandfather's castle of Isla Doone appeared, rising up from a small loch below them. Dark cloud shadows ran over her squat stone turrets and over the tiny island that barely held her above the choppy waters. Her arrow-slit windows watched them approach, dark and empty.

'Looks quiet – no visitors this week?' Dad said.

Duncan glanced across at him but didn't answer.

Jason caught his sister's eye. She looked as puzzled as he felt. Duncan was typically dour but he would usually take any opportunity for a rant about the relatively few rich hikers, writers and artists who stayed at Grandfather's exclusive retreat. At least half of the dozen or so rooms would normally be taken by now, even this early in the summer.

They pulled up in front of the narrow stone bridge that led across to the castle. Miranda touched Violet's arm and, compliant as ever, Violet allowed herself to be guided out of the Land Rover.

They had no baggage to unload. They were here to check Grandfather was safe, warn him about Alan Brash being a summoner and leave for Romania.

Romania - the Carpathian Mountains - where there was a weakness in the Veil between this world and the Abyss. This was where the most powerful demons could come through.

The four of them headed straight for the bridge.

'Be careful,' Duncan suddenly hissed. His squinting old eyes shot a look up at the castle and he quickly added, a little louder 'the bridge is slick this morning.'

'We will,' Dad answered, 'thank you.' He paused for a moment. 'Please warn the others when you bring them... about the bridge, I mean.'

Duncan held Dad's eyes for a moment, then reversed away to turn around for the return journey.

'Take Violet's other side, Jason,' Dad said quietly. 'Passing over water is obviously still very difficult for her.'

Sure enough, Violet's legs buckled again the moment they set foot on the narrow bridge.

'Quick,' Miranda said, 'it hurts her.' The two of them scooped Violet up and ran over the slick stone then stumbled to a halt on the tiny islet with the castle looming over them.

Four storeys up, a silhouette waved a hand in greeting then pulled back from the window.

'Waving's not exactly Grandfather's style,' Jason said.

'Mmm,' Miranda said, 'they're all at it. Maybe Grandfather's actually glad we're back in one piece.'

'He won't know anything about the abbey attack,' Dad said, starting Violet walking forward again with a gentle hand on her back. 'It's not the sort of thing I could phone through to Strayfele post office to pass on, is it?'

'Grandfather would just be disappointed that we didn't slaughter every last Brethren anyway,' Jason said. He gave a cedar tree a slap as he passed it. It was the second of a pair on the castle island and for the first time since they could both walk, he and Miranda hadn't raced each other to reach it.

A huge, iron studded door barred their way. Dad twisted the iron ring and it eased open into a deserted entrance hall beyond. They stepped inside and Miranda pushed the door shut against the wind. Silence fell down around them.

Nothing moved.

Centuries old coats-of-arms lay flat on deathly still tapestries, the small dark reception desk stood clear of any paperwork or computer monitor and the halberds, dirks and heavy-bladed claymores hung heavy over the great, grey stones of the wall. The doors to the dining room and kitchens were shut tight leaving only the grand staircase to invite them further in.

'Let's get this over with,' Dad said, starting up the stairs.