

## **Book I: Serial Dilution**

### **Chapter I: Something Old, Something New...**

In a space between spaces, a world between worlds, one could find a Mysterious Tower in the center of a darkling wood. It was a tall and uneven structure; crooked and jagged, with multiple sections. Each separate tower that jutted from the main point, as well as said primary structure, was topped with a conical roof: colored blue and painted with imagery of moons and stars.

In the dead of the night, a single light could be seen shining from the tallest room in the Mysterious Tower; it was ethereal and shimmering, with a peculiar pale green hue – like the light of a firefly trapped within a green bottle, flickering desperately as they try to escape. The unsettling gleam came from an equally unsettling source: within the Tower, one found a dark chamber, the only light coming from the twinkling stars that shone through the large windows (shaped in much the same way), and the greenish-white light, which came from a candle set upon a human skull. The skull was placed atop a long, oak table, at which was set a huge armchair, more like a throne, with an unusually high back...

...And standing between this plush seat and the great table was a tall and wizened figure, garbed in a long, blue robe, that was lined with crimson fabric. Perched atop his balding gray head was a pointed blue hat, which bore a striking resemblance to the roof of his tower, decorated once more with the imagery of the night sky. A long, gray beard hung from his chin and past his chest, though he bore no moustache to match it. An aquiline nose was matched by two large, dark, piercing eyes of deepest ebony; the irises were such a startling shade of black, you could hardly discern them from the pupils, giving the face an intense, focused, almost hawk-like visage. Bushy gray eyebrows crinkled on a furrowed brow, as long, bony hands waved and curled through the smoke that drifted into the air from the greenish flames of the candle. The wiry fingers and heavy palms seemed to mold the smoke like clay as it drifted higher and higher...

The Sorcerer lifted his old hands higher to match the twisting wisps of smoke; steadily, the smoke began to change color from a greenish-gray that matched the candlelight...to shades of black, red, and gold. Suddenly the smoke seemed to stop in place, as if it had struck an invisible wall about a yard or two over the aging mage's head...then, it began to expand and stretch, the rich colors beginning to reposition and find patterns, taking shape. A small head with pointed ears formed, along with two yellow eyes, and great, scalloped wings...the imagery of a bat. But the bat was only visible for a second or two, for with another dramatic wave of his hand, the Sorcerer mumbled some arcane chant...

...And the bat shifted, becoming fuller, less gaunt and unsettling, the wings sloping downwards and having more roundness, the ears thinning out and stretching, the eyes warping...till, at long last, where once had been a haunting image of a night-dweller, there now, in the shadows of that ancient laboratory, hovered the beautiful picture of a Monarch Butterfly.

The Sorcerer smiled a peaceful yet proud sort of smile, hands relaxing slightly as he admired the beauty he had created...

...But his tranquility was short-lived.

The Sorcerer's expression fell suddenly, and his brow furrowed once more...as if he sensed something was...not quite right. Something was amiss, *unfinished*, perhaps...

ZAM!

The Sorcerer nearly jumped, his hands falling as one arm fell to cover his face, the candlelight suddenly flashing to life like a roaring bonfire, and the smoke suddenly glowing with the intensity of the Sun. He peeked out, teeth gritted and eyes squinting...

...And found the image of the butterfly had been ruined, the wings once again becoming scalloped...but instead of a bat of red and gold, they had taken the shape of a dark and powerful dragon, with black scales and green eyes, surrounded by purple smoke as it roared to the heavens. The dragon flapped its wings, and the image of a Sun appeared over its head: shining with radiant hope and happiness, a symbol of new life, of both power and freedom – the perfect image of purest light.

The dragon snarled, and stretched its great jaws wide. Its long neck snapped out, and it lunged at the Sun...

...And swallowed it in one bite.

Then, the smoke began to swirl violently, like a whirlwind: laughter filled the room, as voices came from the purple tornado; flashes of gold accompanied each voice, as if the light was desperately trying to break free of the darkness that was suffocating it...

*"No matter how many times you save the world..."*

*"In Living Color...!"*

*"I'm Almost There...!"*

*"All that I have to say has already crossed your mind..."*

*"I'll save my home and family..."*

*"I'm afraid that most of your conclusions were erroneous..."*

*“You got what you wanted; you lost what you had...!”*

*“We have to find them...!”*

*“Fifteen Years Too Late...”*

Then, the purple smoke unfurled like a cape...and the Sorcerer found himself staring into a giant pair of huge, icy blue eyes: they were filled with pain, fury, insanity...

Darkness.

***“YOU BOTH PROMISED!”***

To stop the madness, the Sorcerer thrust out his hands and flexed his long finger. With a shrill scream, like the howls of a lost soul, the smoke seemed to be drawn back into the candle...which extinguished in an instant, as if it had never been lit at all.

The wise old wizard rose to his feet unsteadily, and breathed heavily as he leaned against his table gripping it tightly...then sighed quietly and closed his eyes.

*“I’m beginning to think I’m getting too old for this...”*

---

The following day, three unusual figures climbed the stairs of the Mysterious Tower, heading towards the Sorcerer’s chambers. To the right stood a short and stout figure, perhaps just clearing four feet in height: it appeared to be an anthropomorphic white duck (of all things), with a yellow-orange bill and webbed feet, and wide, dark blue eyes. He was dressed in a blue jacket with golden lining, and matching golden bracelets, along with a beret-like blue hat, which – for some odd reason – had a silver zipper running across it. In his feathery hands, he carried a crooked black-and-blue staff, topped with an ornament in the shape of a brown wizard’s hat, and with a ruby-studded ferrule at the other end.

To the left stood a much taller figure, with a lean and lanky build, including gangly arms and clear bowlegs that ended in very large feet.. He appeared to be some sort of anthropomorphic floppy-eared canine, with black fur and a tan muzzle, and pronounced buckteeth that gave the bright, happy smile on his face a sort of dopey look. His eyes were dark green, and his long snout ended in a large, black, almost clownish nose. Atop his head was perched a peculiar, tall hat of yellow, with a blue hatband, and goggles wrapped around his crown. On his person, he wore a green turtleneck and black vest, along with white kid gloves, and a pair of yellow and orange pants. His shovel-blade-sized feet were covered by orange shoes with steel toes. Slung about his back was a blue and gold circular shield, about the size of a small sled, with the image of a stylized mouse head in its center.

Taking center stage between these odd animals was the third figure. He was a young man, in his

mid-to-late teenaged years, dressed in an unusual costume of black and red, including a hooded short-sleeved jacket, a tank top shirt, trousers that barely reached past his knees, and fingerless gloves. On his feet were rather heavy-looking yellow-and-black boots. The boy had bright blue eyes, and messy, wavy brown hair that had been styled into a flattened out “spiky” appearance. A silver necklace with a pendant in the shape of a crown was clasped about his throat.

“I wonder what Master Yen Sid wants,” he murmured as he lifted his arms and placed them behind his head, even as he continued to walk.

“Well, Sora,” said the dog, in a voice as dopey as his smile, scratching the side of his head thoughtfully, “He had to have called us here for something.”

“Goofy!” the duck snapped, in a strange, quacking voice, “Of COURSE he called us here for something! He can’t have called us here for NOTHING, after all!”

The dog blinked, as if he hadn’t considered that, then let out a chortling laugh.

“A-Hyuck! Gawrsh, that’s a good point, Donald!”

The duck snorted huffily and continued to march on.

Sora smiled and rolled his eyes at his friends’ antics.

It wasn’t long before they reached the laboratory of Yen Sid. The trio quickly straightened up their appearance, and Sora moved to open the door...

“Sora!” Donald snapped, and the teenager nearly jumped away from the door, startled. “Be polite!”

“Wh-wha...?”

“You should knock first!” Goofy explained cheerfully.

Sora smiled sheepishly.

“Oh. Right, he, uh...might be busy...”

Sora knocked. For a little while, there was silence...then came a voice as old as the tides and as cold as the North Wind.

“Come in.”

Sora pushed open the door and he and the pair entered the room.

Yen Sid was seated at his long table; the gray-bearded sorcerer did not smile as the trio entered, but there was a twinkle in his eye that indicated he was pleased to see them.

“Welcome, my young friends,” intoned Yen Sid. “It has been a while.”

The three stood before the sorcerer’s desk, and snapped to attention like a trio of soldiers.

“Always an honor, Master,” Goofy nodded, stiffly.

“A pleasure, too,” added Donald.

“How can we help?” Sora asked...trembling slightly, a constant mantra of *Respect, Respect, Respect* playing in his head.

This actually did illicit a small smirk from the former Keyblade Master, who rolled his eyes and waved his hands in a placating gesture. The three immediately relaxed into an “at ease” position.

“I wish I could say I simply called to check on you all and your wellbeing,” Master Yen Sid said. “But I am afraid nothing quite so simple or pleasant is on my mind.”

He paused impressively...then folded his hands in his lap, and bowed his head, eyes closed; a troubled look crossed the old wizard’s face.

“I have had a vision,” he said, his voice barely a murmur, hissing through the room. “A vision of the darkness once more attempting to consume the light.”

“Oh, not again,” mumbled Sora, sounding more annoyed than anything else. Donald and Goofy nudged his sides and he flinched, then smiled somewhat sheepishly.

Yen Sid could only chuckle, but there was little mirth to it.

“I know I ask far too much of you all,” he went on, “But your experience in these matters, and with our particular foe, makes you the finest group to deal with the problem at hand.”

He paused again, and took a breath.

“I believe that Maleficent has returned once more.”

Donald and Goofy gulped.

Sora’s fists clenched.

“What does she want this time?” he asked, quietly, in a slightly shaky voice.

“I cannot say,” admitted Yen Sid, then glanced towards the skull and candle on his table. “My vision was...unclear.”

The trio looked to one another, rather concerned, then back to the Sorcerer.

“There is something stirring in the worlds beyond. Something that is old and yet new at the same time; Maleficent is a threat you have all dealt with before, but there is more to this...a new threat on the horizon.”

“Who is it?” Sora asked.

“What is it?” Goofy thought to add.

Yen Sid shook his head slowly, looking almost troubled by his own uncertainty.

“There is but one thing I can gleam from my vision; one thing that I know must be the focus of your investigation...”

He looked back towards the three.

“...Your journey must begin in the Kingdom of the Sun.”

Goofy and Donald looked to each other.

“Kingdom...”

“...Of the Sun?”

“Do you mean Corona?” Sora thought to ask. “Where we met Rapunzel?”

Yen Sid nodded.

“Then Maleficent must know about the New Hearts of Light!” the teen exclaimed. “Do you think she could be trying to gather them, like the first time she tried to take over?”

“Perhaps. Perhaps not. Whatever she is planning, whoever you must meet there, that is where your travels must start. Seek a shadow in a world of sunlight. Follow your heart from there,” Yen Sid answered, cryptically, then rose to his feet and waved a hand imperiously. “Go forth; I will not lie to you, but warn you this adventure may be one of the most dangerous you’ve yet to undertake.”

“After Xehanort,” mumbled Donald, “I doubt that.”

He went quiet at a look from Sora and Goofy.

“We won’t fail you, Master,” Sora said with a nod. “We’ll stop that witch!”

And without another word, the three turned away and began to walk out of the Tower...

“Sora!”

Sora paused and turned back as Yen Sid called back to him. The great mage once again focused on the skull-candle, even as he spoke to the lad.

“I have one last thing to warn you of: Beware of Promises You Cannot Keep.”

Sora blinked and tilted his head.

“Why wouldn’t I keep a promise?” he asked, plainly.

“Why wouldn’t anyone?” Yen Sid responded, and it was hard to tell if he was trying to clue Sora in, or simply speaking rhetorically. He did not elaborate further, but simply waved his hand again.

Sora, still confused, shut the door to his laboratory, and hurried to catch up with Donald and Goofy.

“Well, all that was kinda vague,” muttered Goofy, scratching his head again.

“What do you think Maleficent is up to?” Sora asked. “I thought she and Pete were still looking for that Black Box.”

“Maybe they found it,” Donald quacked, grimly.

“Gawrsh, I hope not,” Goffy shuddered.

“Well, we won’t find out what’s going on standing around here,” Sora said, and waved his friends to follow him as he began to pick up the pace. “Looks like we have another quest, guys! Corona, Here We Come!”