

CHAPTER TWO: A BELIEF SO STRONG (THE FAITHFUL)



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The pencil flies out of her hands, involuntarily. The big book slams shut. Aziza can't see them but she knows they are there. They always have a way of finding her.

"Hello, girl." A breath in her ear, like a fireplace crackling, slowly consuming dry wood.

"Go away!" The girl's voice comes out harsher than intended. A boy at another table looks at her, strangely.

"You cannot wish us away."

"We always will find you." A second voice, even deeper than the first. Darker. Bigger. Aziza closes her eyes and takes three slow breaths. Her fingers grasp for the polished stone around her neck. She feels the curves of the golden aum inscribed on it.

"They cannot help you here. They cannot see us."

"And when you leave, we will be waiting."

The monsters speak together, their voices overlapping. One voice becomes dominant while the other fades and then vice versa. The words echo like the principal's microphone during a pep rally.

Aziza imagines a peaceful place. A field of bright green grass and beautiful flowers. She imagines herself in that field, smelling the honey-sweet air and feeling the warm dirt beneath her bare feet.

"She's going somewhere," one of them says.

"We'll bring her back," the other answers, its voice even deeper and darker than before.

Yellow light flickers from Aziza's eyes. Her lids rise slowly. She is no longer in control. Words tumble from her throat. Her lips but not her voice. Chairs scrape against the library floor as others take notice. Aziza raises her hands, holds them in the air for a second, and then brings them down hard on the table's fake-wood surface.

The entire table bursts into light. The monsters screech and wail in agony. The girl's words grow louder, looping, becoming a mantra.

The monsters scramble, invisible in the daylight, but Aziza finds them. One hand each around their throats. Their voices are rougher now, gasping for air. With a twitch, the monsters burst into nothing. Not even the faintest wisp of smoke.

The teenagers at the next table over gawk at the girl, like they're watching someone have a fit or some kind of breakdown. Aziza doesn't see them.

All Aziza sees is a field of flowers, the summer sun, and a smiling, gentle face on the other side of the prairie.

The Faithful

A faithful character has a strong belief that someone or something exists above humans, a being or force or some other entity that has influence on our lives and who rewards servitude. For most faithful, this being is God or Allah. Many children are raised in the Judeo-Christian and Muslim faiths and taught early on that He is watching and guiding them. Some kids go through the motions—attending church, saying Grace—but a few find a true connection to this faith. They are the faithful.

PART ONE: HOW THEY'RE DIFFERENT

Lots of people believe in something greater, including many children. But the faithful feel something deep down in their bones—no, deeper than that. The feeling of something else reaches through them and clutches their very soul. And by focusing on that connection, the faithful can unleash strange powers and take advantage of their Spirit in ways other kids cannot.

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Deep Abiding Faith

This is the number one differentiator. This is what separates the faithful from the others in the biggest way. This is not to say kids who aren't technically "faithful" are heathens or can't be Christians or anything like that. It's just that the faithful have a deeply profound connection with their beliefs that most people in this world will never truly understand.

Now, what that truly means depends on the family and culture the faithful belongs to. It's probably no big shock to anybody that most faithful come from homes build on a strong religious foundation. But that's not always the case. Some start along their path through exposure from friends or extended family. They may hear the good word through afterschool activities at a local community center. Most of those routes lead to a formalized belief of some sort. If not a set of absolute dogmatic truths, at least a general philosophy.

Some kids, though, they find a connection to a higher power on their own. They observe the world around them, see connections, generate ideas and questions, and build their own answers and conclusions.

While that belief structure may seem strange to those who adhere to the more common tenants, it's no less real to the child and the belief can be just as strong.

When we're talking about faithful, it's not what you believe that matters but how strongly you believe.

PART TWO: HOW THAT'S GOOD

The faithful are often the wall upon which their friends lean. They have an aura about them that makes the bedrock of many friendships.

Sympathetic

Faithful have the best shoulders to cry on. They're always there with a hug or a handshake (depending on which you need), a word of encouragement, a pat on the back, or whatever you need to feel better or like you just took on the world and won. The faithful are deeply sympathetic to others, both their failures and successes, and have no problems showing it. The faithful get an automatic Passing Grade if they succeed in a Care roll.

At Peace

The faithful are slow to anger, loath to get into people's faces, and are otherwise generally laid back. They let off a very calm, serene vibe most of the time. While this may seem put-upon, it's actually quite sincere. The connection that the faithful feel gives them peace. They have, in at least some small way, given themselves to another power.

PART THREE: HOW THAT'S BAD

Would anyone really say having two souls is great? Probably not. But the downside of this condition may not be readily apparent. The gifted

Social Outcast

Most of the modern world is quite friendly to religion, especially in America. You see churches of different denominations throughout most US towns. References to "God" appear in the current Pledge of Allegiance, all over the news, and even on money. But

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that doesn't mean the kids on the playground are really all that keen on listening to their classmate recite her favored passages from the Book of John or the weirdo from Mrs. Skarka's class go on and on about the Sky Man and his Cloud Army.

There is, in most of society, a bit of a stigma about being really into, well, *anything* but especially religion where people generally don't like having their own faiths challenged.

This isn't to say that the faithful proselytize non-stop to their Nature Scout troop and anyone not wearing earbuds on the bus. A lot of faithful are quite reserved, partially because they feel their connection to what they believe is fragile. Like the powers they have are a gift reserved for those who aren't showy about it. Other faithful wear their belief on their sleeve—or at least around their necks. Or on their shirts. Throughout history, different faiths have used symbols to identify each other, and that hasn't changed. The downside to broadcasting a religious affiliation, though, is that others who like to pick on folks because of what those people believe can more easily find their targets.

So, whether by introversion or outward display, the faithful often must deal with being on the outside of social circles.

Loneliness Hurts

Faith has a hidden cost in Little Fears: it's draining. Putting out that much empathy, care, and concern into the world takes its toll. In order to not be driven into a deep funk, the faithful must connect with others. They have to spend playing with kids, talking with adults, going to social functions, doing homework with friends.

That isn't to say all faithful kids are extroverts. Far from it. That is why they always do better when attentive friends help them crawl out of their shells, when parents push them to go do “fun stuff,” and when some kind soul reaches for them at the school dance.

Allowed to withdraw into themselves, the faithful start to exhibit signs of depression, they start to have “bad thoughts,” and they may even be at risk for madness. Now, it's not their faith doing that to them but isolation.

All that caring, consoling, and comforting the faithful are known for? It takes a lot out of them.

PART FOUR: WHAT YOU CAN DO

The faithful, like the rest of the blessed, have abilities beyond your regular kid. That's what every type of blessed has in common: the ability to do stuff. Stuff that other kids can't do—even using Belief. The blessed can use their very soul in the fight against monsters. Here's what the gifted can do.

Countering Terror

Using their faith to bolster them, a faithful child can use their Spirit to directly damage a monster's Terror. It goes like this: the child must have an object or focus for their faith in their hands or, at the very least, in their heart. This can be a totem, symbol, book, or other object related to an organized religion or a clear mental image of whatever the child believes in. By focusing, the child stirs up their soul into a reckoning force. By then directing that faith toward a target, the monster must make a successful Fight check against a 15 in order to not lose a point of Terror. If the faithful child wants to boost that even further, they can risk a check. Rolling Care against a target of 15, the child may attempt to increase the strength of their faith. Succeeding increases the monster's target