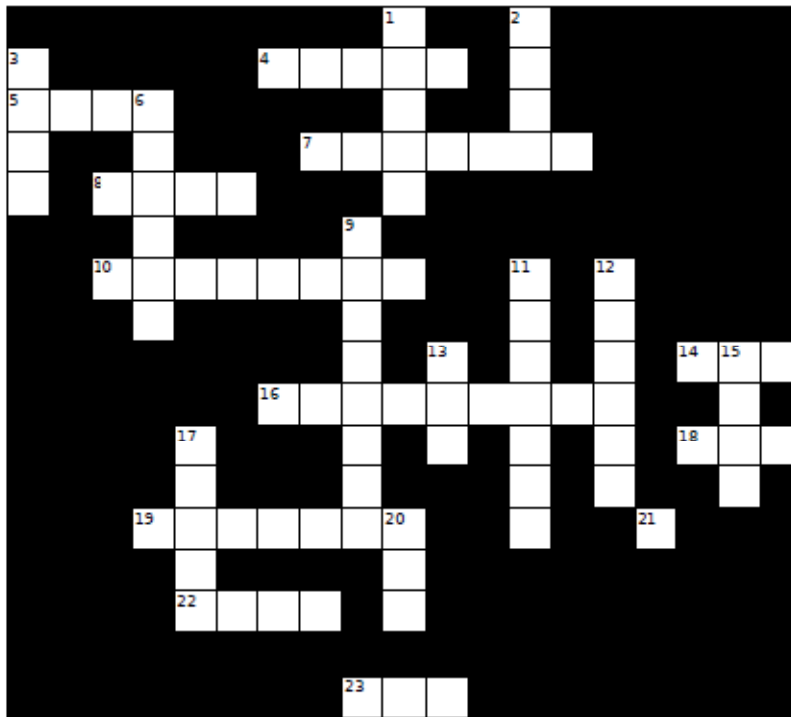


# Tween Heaven and Hell

Sam Cheever

A fun crossword puzzle for fans of Astra Q Phelps.



- | Across  | Down  |
|---|---|
| 4 Incredibly beautiful devil                  | 1 Emo's preferred dress                                 |
| 5 Astra's extra sense                         | 2 Emo's aura  |
| 7 Half angel, half devil                      | 3 Astra's irrational fear                               |
| 8 What happens when a devil gets his blood up | 6 Winning the war so far                                |
| 10 Metal of religious icon                    | 9 Protector angel                                       |
| 14 Emo's skin tone                            | 11 Type of food Astra craves                            |
| 16 Bedeviled or                               | 12 Ominous sound of cracking                            |
| 18 Down six flights and prepared to           | 13 A generally sweet devil                              |
| 19 Heard in Astra's office                    | 15 Used chaos to enter world                            |
| 22 Surprisingly sensitive                     | 17 Stopped the devil in his tracks                      |
| 23 Year that God started using Tweeners       | 20 Sent us his angels, to whisper our names on the wind |
|   | 21 Astra's middle name                                  |

Read the Excerpt provided below to find answers to all the questions in this crossword!

# 'Tween Heaven and Hell

## Book 1 Dancin' With the Devil

### Prologue

*All Hell Breaks Loose*

*'Tween Heaven and Hell the spirits dwell and ply their various trades.  
'Tween Heaven and Hell God's servants quell, the spawn of fiery Hades.*

Sometime around 2060, the world went to war again and opened up a whole new can of worms. Up until then humans thought they had it pretty rough on this Earth, with poverty, crime, disease, your everyday evil forces and the general disintegration of morality.

However when the laser guns and plasma bombs finished smashing a geographic area comprising about 70% of the surface of the Earth into smithereens, something eminently evil used the resulting chaos to slither its way into the world. This evil something hadn't been seen before by human eyes, but had always been there, in a parallel dimension, watching the show and waiting for its turn to join in the fun. And every once in a while, when Earth's defenses were particularly low, this something would reach across that barrier and tweak us a little. Which explains things like Hitler, fruitcake and the IRS.

Devils and demons were never meant to walk among us. But once they had found a way to get through, God had no choice but to send his angels in to keep an eye on them. Several minor skirmishes have already been fought between the forces of good and evil, since that time thirty years ago when the first devil snuck through Earth's defenses. The angels, with the Big Guy at their backs, are winning the battles so far, but the outcome of the war is still uncertain.

About ten years ago God started using Tweeners to help the good side out. The only problem with Tweeners is that, by their very make-up they are some portion devil. That's why they understand and know how to defeat the forces of evil. But it is also what has made them a little bit unpredictable to the good guys.

What exactly is a Tweener you ask? A Tweener is a non-human. They have neither wings nor horns, but generally have both angel and devil in their family forests. Which is probably why they enjoy a higher sensitivity to spectral influence than regular human people.

My name is Astra Q. Phelps. Don't ask me what the Q stands for because that little piece of info will go with me to the crematorium. I've had all printed documentation of the name destroyed and though a lot of my enemies have tried to dig it out, no one will ever know what it stands for. A girl has to have some secrets. Especially when the truth would cause her some serious embarrassment.

I run a business called the Angel Network, which is the only devil and demon locating and destroying business in the universe. In other words, I kick serious evil butt for a living. I am a Tweener. But I digress. You were interested in my story weren't you? Well here we go.

## Chapter One

*BeDeviled, Or BeDemoned?*

*God, in his wisdom, sent us his angels, to whisper our names on the wind.*

*God, in his anger, released his devils, to pester our souls to the end.*

I mentally cursed myself and forced my mind back to the present. My mind always wanders during training. Especially when my training partner is Emo, my long time partner and fellow perfectionist in thuggery. Like me, Emo takes our little training sessions very seriously. Unlike me however, Emo doesn't have any trouble concentrating on what he's doing. I have a lot of trouble concentrating unless my life is in peril. Which certainly happens often enough, since I make my living hunting devils and demons.

Closing off my wayward thoughts, I cocked my head and tried to focus all of my energies into sensing Emo in the pitch-black space. I heard tiny pattering feet to the left, skittering along the wall that stretched across my back. My head swiveled just in time to spot the shimmering red aura of a large, black rat that was returning to his den with a tiny chunk of bread. I watched him closely to make sure he didn't even think about coming my way. I really hate rats.

When the rat was safely tucked into his little rat shack in the wall, I made a conscious effort to refocus my attention to the task at hand. I took a deep breath, tilted my head back and expanded my nostrils to scent Emo, but he was apparently using his masking power and I couldn't get a fix on him.

Unfortunately, I did get a pretty good whiff of the Chinese takeout place on the corner up the street and I suddenly remembered that I hadn't eaten any lunch and it was well past dinnertime. I closed my eyes and took a deep cleansing breath, shaking my head in an effort to regain my concentration. I focused on sensitizing my power to overcome the block Emo was apparently using. My power slid around the room, searching, but not finding my skulking partner. I clutched the object I held in my hand a little more tightly as my nose began to tingle and the skin on my back started to crawl.

I suddenly realized there was something standing just behind me. I jerked my head around but it was too late. A big, leathery paw with long, sharp claws clamped itself around my upper arm and tore me off my feet.

Realizing too late that I'd allowed him to sneak up on me, I used the momentum of his attack to turn my body so that I faced the wall. Then I pushed my feet into the wall and launched

myself backward, flipping over his head and landing on the balls of my feet a couple of feet behind him. He turned with a snarl and dove toward my legs, tackling me to the ground and covering me with his thick, solid body. The wind left me in a rush but I managed to jam my knee deeply into the spot between his legs where he would least like me to wedge my bony limb. He growled as I connected with something squishy and heavy and one of his club-like arms jerked toward the ceiling and started to come down toward my head. It stopped in mid-air as I pushed the object I held in my hand into the middle of his chest. The object gave off burning sparks as it hit his leathery skin. He yelped and sprang off me.

Gasping to refill my lungs, I tucked my feet beneath my butt and launched myself off the floor. As soon as my toes hit the floor again, I pushed off and sprang toward the retreating devil. I hit him hard, knocking him back against the wall and holding him there with the cross. It began to vibrate in my hand and give off tiny, stinging, electric shocks that I forced myself to ignore.

Emo became incredibly and completely still, as only his kind can do and stopped breathing. The only sound in the lightless space came from my panting breath in his ear.

“You give?”

Emo gave a slight nod and slowly dropped his arms in surrender. I lowered the cross reluctantly, knowing all too well that devils weren't to be trusted. Even if they were part angel.

I moved across the room on the balls of my feet, stepping sideways so I could keep an eye on his aura. When I'd managed to put about twenty feet between us, his icy, blue aura suddenly flickered and disappeared and I felt a whoosh of hot air as he moved, with a speed I hadn't known he possessed, to a spot somewhere behind me. I turned to meet him head on, but he was faster. He hit me with a full body block that dropped us to the floor with me on the bottom, knocking all of the wind out of my lungs and sending us both skittering across the floor. I ended up with my head just inches from the rat hole and, like a reluctant gawker at a particularly grizzly air bus accident, I tipped my head back to see if the rat was anywhere near and came eyeball to eyeball with the disgusting thing. It opened its pointed, disease ridden mouth and hissed at me, lunging toward my face as if it would attack.

I screamed and leaped to my feet, dislodging a hilarious devil and jumping around like a moron as I convulsed in hysterical disgust. I did the revulsion dance across the room until there was a lot of space between me and that twitchy nosed, red-eyed attack rodent.

Emo lay in a giggling puddle on the floor as I commanded lights on full and returned the cross I'd used against him to my pocket. He finally wound down and, taking a deep breath, reached up to rub the spot on his scaled chest where the cross had rested and stood up. "Damn, Astra. You promised me you wouldn't use the platinum cross anymore. That sonofabitch hurts like hell!"

Forgetting my near death experience with the rat for a moment, I narrowed my eyes at him and grinned. "You would know."

Emo showed his fangs and stepped menacingly toward me. Unconsciously, my hand moved toward the cross again and he stopped dead in his tracks, throwing his thick, red arms into the air in surrender.

I dropped my hand again but kept a watchful eye on him none-the-less. Emo is generally a very sweet, very dependable devil, but when you get his blood up in battle he can forget his manners and get pretty ugly. I'd seen first hand what ugly from a devil looked like and I wasn't interested in being on the receiving end of it if I could avoid it.

I leaned back against the wall and grinned at him. He stood where I'd left him, his large feet braced wide apart and his corded, red arms arcing away from his short, muscular body. Devils are generally not very tall, but what they lack in height they more than make up for in girth. Every muscle in Emo's body was on red alert, pun intended and I do mean *every* muscle.

Emo saw where I was looking and grinned back at me, his wide, handsome, red face dimpling at the corners of his mouth. "Interested?"

I snorted unbecomingly. "You wish, bud."

Devils, whose thick leathery skin is surprisingly sensitive, always prefer to be naked if they can get away with it. The general public, which frowns on devils anyway, doesn't really appreciate it if Emo walks around *au natural* so he usually forces himself into clothes when he's out and about. Here at the office, however, I let him be comfortable. As long as I have no clients coming in.

Shaking my head with a wistful smile I pushed away from the wall and started for my office. "That'll do for tonight. I have to meet a client later. I'm gonna go grab a bite. Want something?"

Emo cocked an eyebrow at me and grinned mischievously. "A bite? Of whom?"

“Ha, ha.” I left him standing there and retreated to my small corner office to grab my coat. As usual, my well-worn, brown, leather coat was thrown carelessly across the extra chair in my office. I started to reach for the coat and had a sudden thought. Turning back, I returned to my office door and called down the hallway to Emo, “Put another one of those rat traps in that damn hole too. I want that little asshole killed and hacked into about a million pieces.”

Emo’s mumbled response was particularly unsatisfying. I was quickly becoming convinced that my devilish partner enjoyed watching me freak out over the rodent. He didn’t seem at all motivated to get rid of the disgusting thing. Shaking my head I turned back toward my office. My legs stopped their forward motion about two steps into the room. The air felt somehow thicker and very strange to me. And I could have sworn I’d heard a low moaning sound. I stood very still for a moment, listening, but heard nothing. I did a mental shoulder shrug and went to get my coat. I figured it must have been the wind outside my window.

As I reached for the coat, my skin suddenly prickled and I watched the hair on my arms stand straight up like a battalion of Intergalactic Marines at attention. I dropped the coat and rubbed at my forearms, looking around the room and flaring my nostrils with alarm. I couldn’t sense anything though, except a cold draft that seemed to come from the windows. The breeze was strong enough to ruffle my long, straight, auburn-colored hair and it smelled like rotting earthworms. Since the heat in the old warehouse building I was using for an office wasn’t very dependable at its best, I didn’t panic over the sudden plunge in temperature, but a sense of impending doom still prickled between my shoulder blades. I retrieved the dropped coat and shrugged into it, shivering.

As I turned to leave the room, something powerful slammed into my chest. My feet were wrenched off the floor by the invisible force and I flew through the air. Thinking fast, I considered my range of options. It didn’t take long because I didn’t have any. Well, that wasn’t exactly true. I had the option of slamming against the window behind me.

My body slammed against the window behind me. As I slid painfully toward the floor, gasping to regain the air that had been pounded out of me, I heard the ominous sound of cracking glass behind and above me. Plunging my hand into my coat pocket, I felt around frantically for my cross.

I had the platinum cross out of my pocket and was holding it in front of my face as my butt hit the floor. Determinedly ignoring the throbbing pain in my tailbone, I sprang immediately

back up onto my feet. As the cross began to vibrate, I heard the moaning again. It seemed to come from every corner of the room. My eyes moved quickly around the space, searching for an aura to glom onto. Whatever this thing was, though, it wasn't visible either spectrally or physically.

The moaning increased as I felt the air that my body occupied pull away from me with a sucking sound, threatening for a second to take me with it. I braced my feet and leaned away from the pulling force. The entity seemed to be retreating from the cross, which was now making a humming noise in my hand and vibrating frantically.

I swallowed hard and realized I didn't have any spit in my mouth. Besides my dust-dry tongue and teeth, the only other thing in there was my heartbeat. Casting about in my memory for information on the various types of spirits and demons I knew about, I couldn't come up with any knowledge that would help me understand what I was dealing with in that room at that moment. All I knew was that the thing was damned powerful if it could get past Emo and sneak up on me without being sensed. It couldn't be a devil because Emo can smell another devil from a mile away and no demon I'd ever encountered had this effect on my platinum cross. The thing was humming so loudly I was amazed Emo didn't hear it and come running. I had to wrap both hands around the cross as it tried to jump right out of my hand.

"Emo!" The muscles in my arms began to scream and shake with the effort of holding the cross against the force so I risked lowering it just a couple of inches and I felt the thing move in again. Before I could raise the cross back up, the invisible power surged forward and pounded into me. I flew backward again and slammed into the edge of my desk hard enough to crack several ribs. As I fought to regain my equilibrium, my invisible enemy wrapped me in its sucking arms and pulled me off the floor in a crushing embrace. I wrinkled my nose against the thing's dead, moldy smell.

By gathering all of my strength and pushing the cross into it, I bought myself enough space to expand my chest. I screamed Emo's name again and concentrated on holding onto the cross as the thing dangled me several feet off the floor and then flung me toward the window with a huge, roaring sound.

My body met splintered glass and the window gave out with a sharp, biting sound. The glass followed me out into the cold, black night and danced toward the ground far below with a musical tinkling sound. My hands grabbed frantically at the building as I left it but the force of



my exit took me too far out into the bottomless night and I was left grasping at nothing but frigid air. For several, long seconds, I hung there, suspended in the black air by an invisible thread of power. Then the string snapped and I started to fall.

The last thing I saw as I began the descent down six flights was Emo's red, angry face at the window. Then I closed my eyes and prepared to die.