Throne of Divinity

*It’s time, isn’t it?*

*For what?*

*For the next bloodletting.*

# **Selection**

“It’s time to begin class!” Were the words that my professor started the day with. The same words that made everyone in the room let out a collective sigh in unison, me included.

“What are we going to learn today, Dr. Thirston?” I asked. I asked him every day, and every day he would respond with, “You’ll see soon enough.” But that wasn’t the answer I got today.

He ignored me for a second and stood in front of the class, arms crossed. As he turned to look at me, a glint of light from the open windows made his glasses white and eyes invisible. I couldn’t tell, but he looked almost depressed.

“The Chancellor would like to see you, Gabriel” He said in a rather quiet voice, “immediately.”

I grabbed my bag and made my way out of the room. I turned back at the door only to see my best friend Randy mouth the words “Gabriel’s in trouble”. I pulled my bottom eyelid down and stuck my tongue out at him, which made him laugh.

“Immediately.” Dr. Thirston repeated in a harsher tone.

I shut the door behind me and ran to the Chancellors office. The halls were clean and lights were bright. My mouth watered at the smell of waffles as I passed a classroom. Must have been a culinary arts class. As I approached the door to the Chancellors office, I heard some interesting dialogue coming from his room.

“Jonathan, now really isn’t the time.” A woman’s voice was heard through the door.

“It’s always the right time, Emily.” The man responded. It was the Chancellor.

“Listen, I really have to get back to the nurse’s office.” Emily nervously said. Her shaking voice was obviously obvious.

“I know you’ve been suffering alone all this time. After Luke’s death, you must have been in so much pain. Let my love bring you back. Please, Emily.” It sounded like the Chancellor was getting closer to the nurse. I leaned my ear in closer. This is definitely interesting.

“No!” I heard a loud smack. Footsteps approached at lightning speed and before I knew it, the door slammed into my head and I went flying onto the hard floor.

I got up, brushed my rear and walked into the Chancellor’s room. He was standing there with his glasses hanging from one ear and a clearly red left side of his face. “I didn’t know you were such a player, Chancellor.” I said with a smirk.

He looked at me with menacing eyes, “You speak of this to anyone and your time at Louisiana Goliath University is over.”

I backed down into one of the cheap folding chairs he kept in his room. “Gotcha.”

He went back around to his desk and threw a bunch of papers into a bin. He sat in his chair and pulled out a key from his pocket, which he used to open a drawer. I thought he was going to share some top secret information or perhaps discuss some opportunities for furthering my education but what he pulled out was something I would never have expected in a million years.

“You keep shrimp flavored minute noodles in that drawer?” I asked, surprised.

“Yeah, you want some?” The Chancellor filled up the cup with some water from a bottle on his desk.

“No thank you. The other students and I always thought that there would be some sort of secret documents or something there.”

The Chancellor turned and put his ramen into the microwave on a stand behind his desk. He set it to a minute and looked me straight in the eye. “Why do you say that?”

The look was enough to send a young child running. “Well, considering the history of this building and all.” I quieted down toward the end.

“Just because this university is inside of an old CIA facility doesn’t mean that I would have super important files in my room. And what makes you think I’d leave them where you all could easily sneak in and get them if I did have files?” He sat back down and softened his gaze.

I shrugged.

“Honestly how you kids develop these conspiracies will always be a mystery to me.” The microwave went off and he quickly retrieved his noodles.

“So why did you call me here?” I asked.

He sat down and took a whiff of his noodles. He smiled, “These are some high quality noodles!” He pulled a fork out from a drawer on his left side and promptly began eating. As soon as he put the first bit of noodles in his mouth, he swiftly swallowed the noodles and threw the fork into the cup. He stared me straight in the eyes. “You must be wondering why I called you here. That doesn’t matter right now. What matters is that you bring me a nurse.”

“Why?” I asked him, rather confused.

“I burned my tongue.” He responded with an embarrassed look.

“My mother always said to put sugar on your tongue or ice on it when you have a burnt tongue.” I said.

He smiled and pulled out a packet of sugar from his pocket and poured the contents into his mouth.

“You’re a rather eccentric man.” I stated.

“So I’m told. I’m feeling a bit better already, thank you. Now, back to why I called you here.” He looked into his noodles, “Gabriel, do you believe in God?”

I leaned back into my chair, rather confused, “God?”

“Yes, God. The omnipotent, omnipresent being who controls everything? That’s the one.”

“I suppose I believe in the concept of him, but the whole concept of religion is a hassle.” I said, stroking my nonexistent beard.

“Interesting. And how do you feel about this world? In the sense of humanity overall.”

“We’re rather despicable creatures in need of a culling. We have tainted the earth and must return this world into a world of equality where the mechanized reality of humans and the natural beauty of life can live in peace.”

“You separated humans and life. That is as if to say you equate humanity as a whole with death.”

“In the broadest sense. Only useless members of society have no need to be as privileged as those who contribute.”

“Some may argue that all life is valuable and that we should work to save as many as we can. What about them?”

“I agree. Life is valuable. However, too much of one thing causes an imbalance. That very imbalance of humans and nature is what is causing the earth to plummet into darkness.”

“If you had the power, how would you change this world?”

“Chancellor, what is up with these questions? What did you call me here for?”

“Answer the question.” He said in a deep and demanding voice.

“If I had the power to, I would use the gift of the earth to take back everything that has been stolen from this planet. I would probably use plants to cover up everything we did. I’d use vining plants to cover up the tallest skyscrapers and other plants to cover up useless buildings. Fruits and vegetables would be spread throughout and life would flourish everywhere I went.”

“You have a rather unique point of view. You live as a human and hate humanity, you view members of your own species as the embodiment of death, and despite these harsh extremes in your train of thought, you seem like a person who chooses the middle path. You’re a rather idiosyncratic person, if I must say.”

“May I ask why you’re asking me so many questions?” I looked at him.

“Let me ask you one more question.” He said.

“Would you like to become God?”

I looked at him, confused. “God?” I laughed. “I mean, sure.” I hadn’t thought about what I said. “I’ll become God if that’s what you’re suggesting. But what kind of game is this?”

“The sad thing is this isn’t a game. Return to your class, that is all for our discussion today.” He began eating his noodles, which had probably gotten cold.

I grabbed my stuff and got up. *What a weird dude.* I thought to myself. I left the room and returned to class with haste.

Later that night, I was in my dorm with Randy. I was studying for a quiz we would be having in my statistics class and he was watching some drama on the television.

“So, what’d the Chancellor talk to you about?” Randy asked.

“He interrogated me about my beliefs would be the shortest synopsis.” I responded.

“Must’ve been boring then.”

“Yeah he made me talk about the world and asked if I wanted to become God.”

Randy laughed, “Seriously? The Chancellor is such an oddball man.”

“Hey, it’s past ten. I need to get my sleep for tomorrow’s stat test.”

Randy turned off his television and jumped in bed. With two claps, the light turned off.

“Engineering is so cool.” Randy said.

“Shut up, Randy. The switch is right next to your pillow.”

“What a killjoy.”

*“It is time.” A voice in my head spoke.*

*“Time for what? Who’s there? Omfg I swear if I have a mental illness…” I thought.*

*“Open your eyes.” The voice said.*

And so I did. Of course I had my doubts, I mean, why listen to a random voice in my head? It was probably mine to start. What I saw in front of me could not even be compared to the most beautiful place on earth. Everywhere before me stood life and animals and fresh air. I felt as though I could smell the scent of oak trees and hear the birds chirp, and the sun was warming the back of my body. I stood upon a pillar, just above the trees. The pillars were gold and had intricate patterns on them. I could never dream something this beautiful.

I look around and I see several other pillars, four to be exact. Upon each pillar, there were what appeared to be the figures of people. I couldn’t see any of their faces, because their entire bodies were covered in black. From their figures, I could make out two women and two other men.

*“We are all here.” A gentle voice to my right spoke. There wasn’t a human beside me, but a huge gear. It was rotating, and the machine it was a part of was huge, looming over us in the sky. I could not make out the face of the figure.*

*“Who are you?” I tried to scream. I couldn’t. My voice was gone. I tried to scream. What was this?*

*“Some of you are trying to speak. I cannot allow that right now, and so I have silenced your voices. You five are candidates for my throne. I can hear all of you thinking ‘What is this creature before me?’. I am God. I am not an everlasting being, however. I was chosen among candidates like you all are. From among you, one will rise and take my throne. You will fight and kill each other for this throne.*

*“Of course, there are other, more peaceful ways for me to select my heir, but I would like to have a little fun before I go. Every millennium a new God is selected from a group of five. Each group has a topic.*

*“My topic was ‘future’. The five among me were technology, intelligence, warfare, corruption, and destruction. Your topic is the elements. You are water, earth, fire, air, and Aether. The most popular among you are the first four. Aether is an often forgotten element. Let me inform you that it has the power of the void. Now that you know what you must do, you may speak.”*

*But I couldn’t. I was stuck there, awestruck. The mechanical being who stood before me was God. And now I have to kill other people so I can control the world. No, not just the world but the universe and everything within it along with the heavens and the nether. I was paralyzed, everyone else was screaming and shouting, I think I even heard a person laughing. The one who caught my eye, however was the person straight across from me. I was trembling in place, and everyone else was clearly making movements. This person across from me was still. I hadn’t realized it but he was still the entire time we were there.*

*“So it appears as though plenty of questions have arisen. Excuse me for not explaining properly beforehand. I will make several statements and then it will be time for you all to go. You will end up killing bystanders. That is okay. If you die in battle, your soul will become that of an angel, to oversee the battle that will occur in the next millennium.*

*“From the jobs and family standpoint- everyone you know will have forgotten you. You will no longer exist on the same plane as your families. When you wake up, you will be in the same place as you were, but in a world where no one will know who you are. These alternate worlds are created for the very sake of these legendary battles. You will also enter the world unknowing of your enemies.*

*“This massacre will begin one year from now. In this grace period, I will assign a guardian angel to train you in your allotted skills. You have each been chosen because of your fiery passion about this planet and idiosyncratic ways to view things.*

*“The strength of your attacks comes from your different catalysts. A catalyst is an object, memory, or emotion that activates your powers. These catalysts are a manifestation of your abilities in their purest form. My catalyst was determination. Whenever I was absolutely determined to defeat my enemy, I would reach full power and destroy them.*

*“As for whether or not I am God. All of you will receive an angel to point you in the direction of the nearest opponent. One of you will not have an angel. If you did the math, there are five candidates and one becomes God. The four who die become overseers. There is no fifth angel. The one whom I have chosen to be devoid of an angel is Aether.*

*“Find bliss in battle. Farewell.”*

I woke up, gasping. The air was cold. My black hair glistened in the moonlight. I felt a burning sensation on my right shoulder. I tore my blanket off me and looked at my pale shoulder. There was a black tattoo of a leaf. I clutched it and sat on the side of my bunk bed.

“I’m still at school.” I breathed a sigh of relief.

*“Prepare for battle.”* A voice spoke to me.

I ran across the room to the door, startled. “God, is that you?” I asked. All I could feel was my heart hammering in my chest.

*“Why would I be God? I am the angel of warfare. I will teach you how to battle and train you to become a more likely candidate for the seat of God.”* The voice said.

“Why me? Why me? Why me?” I screamed. I didn’t want to do this. I didn’t want to die. Why did God choose me to be a part of this stupid game? I was just kidding when I said I would be God. Why? I’m just a student, why should I be playing for something so powerful? I just wanted to live a normal life.

*“The mysteries of God are not things to be questioned by the living. Fate has decided that you would be the one to appear before God in that dream. God decided that you would be worthy of his seat.”*

I had so many things running through my mind. I began to weep. I grabbed my shoulders and fell into a fetal position. The cold wood floors sent a shiver down my spine, only making me feel worse. I wept for a few minutes and recollected all that had happened.

“Hey mister angel of warfare?” I said.

*“What?”* The voice responded.

“What should I call you?”

*“My human name before I died was Andrew.”*

“Can I just call you Goku?”

*“You’re a Dragon Ball fan too?” The voice was ecstatic.*

“Yeah!”

*“No. You cannot call me Goku. I will happily accept your highness or your majesty, however.”*

“Trash it is.”

*“Fine just call me Ender. It was my nickname and it was the name of my favorite character from a certain book.”*

“Before we do anything about this whole God thing, can I go see my family or Randall?”

*“Unfortunately, I have been instructed to not allow you to see anyone you shared close ties with. Seeing loved ones and them treating you like strangers has given previous candidates psychological issues.”*

“What?”

*“You aren’t the first to be a part of a competition like this. Also, apparently the group before mine was a weird one. They had some insane people man. Gabriel, there’s a candidate relatively close by.”*

“How close?”

*“About a thousand miles.”*

“How is that even remotely close?” I said rather satirically.

He paused for a second. *“It doesn’t matter. The candidate appears to moving away from you. Also, you’re superhuman is it that hard to believe that you all could travel across the world in a couple of minutes?”*

“Not when we’ve only had these powers for like ten minutes.” I said in a rather matter of fact manner.

*“Touch*é. *Anyway, would you like to get started using your powers? Come to my office.”*

“Your office? What are you talking about?”

*“Who do you think asked you all those questions?”*

“You’re the Chancellor?”

*“Well, I sort of possessed him and the Thirston dude so you would come to the office. And God does not need to know about our incident. It’s been a while since I’ve been around a woman.”*

“Weren’t there any women in your group?”

*“Yeah, one. She was a real snob, though. No fun with her. Samantha, I think was her name. Yeah she was raised in some high and mighty estate or something. I feel bad for the kid who got stuck with her as a guardian. Anyway, stop wasting time and come to my office.”*

I got up and wiped my tear covered face into my shirt. *That’s gross.* I changed into a white tee and khakis. It was Fall here in Virginia, so I wouldn’t expect it to be too cold if we went outside. My pale skin glistened a bit in the moonlight. I wore my old tennis shoes and headed over to the main building.

The University at night was a rather scary site. It looked like one of those haunted mansions I’d see in vampire movies. Walking out of my dorm and to the main office outside in the dark was kind of scary. Then again, I did sleep with a nightlight until my senior year in high school. The air was cold and the shriveled up leaves from the Autumn trees crunched under my feet. I stuck my hands in my pockets and hunched over a little bit.

“Of course I had to forget my phone and wallet.” I whispered into the night.

I walked into the main building and was met with, surprisingly, nothing. I thought the lights would be on, but every window, vent, or any other apparatus to allow the outside world in was blocked. All that was left in the building was darkness and the cold of the night. I sighed and made my way to his office.

Despite how hard it was to see, I found his room and entered. I saw the Chancellor sitting at his desk eating some noodles. “So was it you who was hitting on the nurse or the Chancellor?” I asked.

“Huh? Oh that was me. It’s been a while since I’ve been in a human body and why not try to have some fun?” Ender grinned.

“So how are we going to get these powers of mine started?” I sat down in the same cheap folding chair. Honestly, with how expensive this university is, you’d think they’d be able to afford actual chairs.

“Let me explain. Before I was brought here. I attended a seminar on everything I needed to know in order to prepare you. My current job is to find your catalyst, which is the thing that activates your powers. Catalysts, as God said, can be anything from an object to an emotion. In order to find yours, I need to find an important memory by possessing your body. This can’t be any important memory, however. These memories must be turning points in your life that shaped who you are today and who you will be for your eternity. There are multiple memories like this, although you may not explicitly remember them.” Ender seemed rather bored as he spoke.

“So you just go in my head and make me remember stuff?”

“Yes.”

“Get in.”

The Chancellor’s body immediately lumped back into his black swivel chair with a noodle hanging from his mouth. I chuckled a bit, but then I felt a cold presence in front of me. It entered my body and I jerked back in surprise of the sheer cold.

Many memories ran through my head. There was the one time that I stole a chicken nugget from my younger sister when she wasn’t looking. Oh, and now Ender is looking at the time that I accidentally ate a whole spoonful of wasabi thinking it was guacamole. Never trust your best friend.

*“I’m in.”* Ender spoke in my thoughts.

“Is that your best hacker voice?” I responded.

*“Be quiet. At least I didn’t sleep with a nightlight until the senior of my high school year.”* He responded with sass.

“Got me there. Anyway, how do you know which memory is the right memory?”

*“You’re still conscious right?”*

“Yeah, why?”

*“Grab my noodles.”*

“Okay.” I said, confused.

*“All that’s left in the cup is water. When I reach a memory, if the water has a reaction, tell me. The water test is a method of testing the strength of a catalyst. Only the most powerful memories can actually make the water do something.”*

“Like what?”

He went far back into when I was a child. I was at home in my room, my parents were out at work. My grandparents were downstairs watching some news show on the television. I was watching some vines on YouTube when I heard a loud knocking. I paused the video and looked outside through the window. It was a starry night, and there was a white van parked in the driveway of my house which I didn’t recognize.

“Grandma! There’s someone at the door!” I yelled in my ten-year-old voice.

“We’re not deaf, Gabriel. We’ve got a way to go before that happens.” My grandfather responded.

I heard my grandmother’s soft footsteps on the wood approach the door. I assumed it would be nothing important so I went back to the computer beside my bed. As I was putting my headphones back on, I heard a loud bang.

“Jessica!” My grandfather yelled. Another loud bang followed and not a single sound was heard from him again.

I knew what was happening, but I didn’t want to believe it. I shut off my computer and hid under my bed. I heard the voices of two men speaking Their words were inaudible but the sound of them moving around was loud. One of the men came upstairs where I was hiding. The staircase was immediately in front of three rooms, my mom’s room, the bathroom, and my sister’s room. My room was on the opposite side of the staircase, with my name written on the door in big yellow letters.

I could hear the man in my mother’s room. The sound of jewelry clinking in his hands followed by a muffled thump from him likely dropping them in a bag was all I heard. That and my heart furiously pounding. He entered the next room, what he did was inaudible, but after a minute or so, he reached my sister’s room. I was just watching *Power Puff Girls* a few minutes ago and forgot to turn the television off.

“I can smell fear.” The man said in the most sinister voice he could. This guy thought my sister was in there because I left the television on. A nice theory but wrong.

He made a ruckus with my sister’s things. He was probably trashing her room. I then heard the footsteps approaching my room.

“Gabriel, huh. I know you’re in there. I doubt your grandparents would be watching cartoons at this time. Or you could be Gabriel’s sister. Either way, I’m gonna kill you.” He sounded like he was smiling.

I wanted to scream. I wanted to scream as loud as I possibly could. As I sat there in real time, I still wanted to scream. But I didn’t. And I didn’t back then either. My will to survive was what kept me silent. He walked around my room and went through my closet. From under the bed, I could see his feet approach my desk.

“Your computer’s still warm. I know you’re here.”

He tore the sheets off my bed. I was so glad I didn’t hide there. He looked in my closet. Another good guess, but I was smarter than that. My years of hide and go seek had let me hone my skills. No one had ever found me under me bed.

Except this guy. He lied down on the carpet beside my bed and found me. My little, pale, ten-year-old body in blue fish pajamas. He smiled wide, as if he had found his next meal.

“James, I found a kid.” The man spoke loudly so the man downstairs could hear.

“Okay, so?” James responded.

“Can I have a little fun?” He asked. He turned to me, “Get out from under there or I’ll shoot you.”

I had no other choice. As I crawled out from under the bed, he pulled me up by my hair.

“Do whatever.” James answered.

The man pushed me toward the door and said, “Go downstairs. Turn around and I’ll shoot you.”

The man had curly blond hair and a pale face. His eyes were hidden under his hair. I didn’t care to look downstairs from above, for I knew what would be there.

When I reached the main floor, I saw a man fully covered in black. This was James. He was wearing a ski mask. He had a black bag wrapped around his back and a revolver in one hand. He was standing by the door keeping an eye outside.

“Let’s go to the living room.” The man seemed happy.

I knew what was there. And when we got there, my beliefs were proven true. My grandparents. Both of them lay there dead, blood all over their frail bodies and wood flooring. They were leaned against the back of a couch, and I began to cry.

“Get down on your knees.” The man said.

“Brad, the neighbor’s lights are on and I hear sirens. We’ve gotta get going.” James spoke.

The sight of my grandparents dead, and the thought of the killer being right behind me made my legs weak. I fell on my knees and sobbed silently. Brad chuckled and held the gun behind my head. I could feel the shaft brush against my hair on the cold metal sting my skin. I felt like I was going to die. This wasn’t fear anymore. What I felt was true terror. I was going to die, and there was nothing I could do about it. I heard a click. My heart felt like it was about to explode. My eyes slowly shut and everything was a blur. He hadn’t shot me, but I fainted.

“The cops are getting close; we need to go now!” Michael’s words were the last thing I heard. And they were probably the words that saved my life.

Back in the Chancellors room, the water had turned black. I was sweating profusely. My eyes were stuck wide, and I was panting, dying for air.

“It looks like we’ve found your catalyst.” The Chancellor said to me.

I couldn’t respond. What I felt from that memory was still affecting me. I didn’t want to die. I was so afraid of death. Afraid of death…

“Fear is a strong emotion, and that is what will now fuel your power. I’m going to begin a monologue, so hopefully by the time I’m done, you’ll have recovered. And since you already know the basic gist of what catalysts are, I’ll go into detail about how they work, and the specialties of each person.

“To start, you need to remember something that made you super afraid for training. That will activate your powers. During battle, you might be afraid of your opponent or afraid of dying, those will also activate your powers. The more fear you feel, the stronger your powers become.

“In order to harness these powers, you must concentrate on what it is that you want to do. The Earth class of the five elements has several subspecialties. For example, you can regenerate lost body parts. Mastering this art will not limit your ability to master the other techniques, so that’s a plus.

“You just need to sort of feel it. My topic was the future, so I had the power of electricity and technology to help me, but you’re stuck with some ancient mumbo jumbo. I can’t help you out much there but if God starts telling us we need to start channeling out inner energy or something like that I’m gonna sell him out because I think I watched a series about a kid who could deal with the elements and had access to some inner energy or something.

“Anyway, you just gotta think about what you’re trying to do. This takes a lot of concentration and stamina. I’m going to help you build that stamina that you need.

“As for the powers of the other people, they also have subspecialties. The fire person can control electricity and combustibility. That means the person can make things blow up with a thought and can choose to zap you with a billion volts if he feels like it. The water person can control humidity and water temperature. That means he or she can flood a room or burn you where you stand just by making the water vapor around and water in you extremely hot. The air person can control sound and the composition of the air. They could remove all oxygen around you or shriek at such a high pitch that your brain explodes.

“The void person is the scariest, however. Void has no subclass. The sole purpose of a subclass is to allow variety so that people are able to devise strategies. This person’s class doesn’t require that, however. The void power is that they can essentially destroy anything with a thought. Not like blowing it up, though. It just disappears. In my seminar, we learned about the ultimate form of every power. The drawback of void is that it has no subclasses, but the thing that makes it fatal is that it is not hard to master. The final form of the void class is that it can create miniature black holes.

“It seems like void is overpowered, but if you can master all of the techniques in the earth class, or anyone else master their class, they can definitely defeat the void master. As for you, it will take a couple weeks of training.

“Your powers include regeneration, control over metal and earth, and control over tectonic plates. You can basically recover any lost body parts, move rocks, and create earthquakes.”

I’d recovered by then. The fear of my memories had left me, but new fear entered my body. The fear of the void. Whoever controlled the void had the power to vanquish anything in his sight. I didn’t want to do this. I was just kidding when I said I would be God. I wanted to complain. I wanted to cry out. I wanted to curse God for forcing this upon me. Now I’m stuck in an alternate world where four other super humans are out to kill me.

“What should I master first?” I asked him, my voice still shook a little bit. I guess hadn’t fully recovered.

# **Sacrifice**

“Well, my suggestion would be to focus on your survivability. That means regeneration.” The Chancellor began to grin.

“Why are you smiling?” I asked, a bit concerned. In order to regenerate something, that would mean that I would need to hurt myself.

“Do you want me to help you become better at regenerating?” He cracked his neck.

“Sure.”

“It’ll be painful.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“You asked for it.” He stood up. “Even though this is an alternate world, there are still people here. I have a job to do, and I’ve made sure that everyone has forgotten you. There is a basement to this school, and that is where you will be staying. Follow me.”

He grunted as he moved his desk over to the side of the room. There was a green hatch underneath. He wiped his brow and opened it with the handle that was protruding. The ladders led him down to a dark room. I followed.

“Close the hatch.” He said from below.

And so I grabbed the side and pulled it down. Once he made it to the bottom after a couple seconds, he flipped a switch and the lights went on. The room was massive, it had checkered black and white tiles on the floor and black walls. In the center, there was a medical bed and surgical instruments in a metal tray on a rolling table. He made his way to the bed and gestured me over.

Upon further inspection, I found that there was a headboard and footboard. I lied down and looked over to him.

“Is it okay if I cuff you to the bed?” He asked me. His smile was gone and he seemed serious.

“Is it necessary?” I asked, “I’m not really into being cuffed to beds.”

“Safety precaution for me and for you.” He laughed. It didn’t seem like he meant any harm, so I complied.

“Sure.” I put my hands where he instructed and he chained me to the bed.

As he put the fetters around me and locked them with his keys, his smile began to seem a bit more menacing. After he chained my last foot, he was grinning ear to ear. He looked over to his table and grabbed a lancet.

“Wh- What are you doing?” I stuttered.

“I was hoping your catalyst would be pain, but I suppose fear would do just a well.” Ender said as he cleaned his scalpel with an alcohol wipe.

“What are you going to do to me?” My voice grew louder.

“I’ll force you to regenerate. I’ll shove fear down your throat and make you stronger. You’ll hate me for this, but you said yourself that you don’t want to die.” Ender cracked his neck and grabbed my foot.

“Why are you doing this? What are you doing?” I began to scream. Fear grew and I had no idea what to do. He carefully removed my shoes and lay them on the floor beside the bed.

He cracked his neck and smiled at me.

“Don’t do this!” I screamed. Tears began rolling down my face.

He cut into my pinky toe first. I felt a sharp metallic sensation followed by warmth, probably of my blood. I shrieked and tried to pull away. These damned manacles held me still as I cringed in pain. I could do nothing but cry and scream. Why had I been chosen to fight for some stupid throne?

I was just a second year college student trying to get his engineering degree. I grew up in a happy household with a nice little sister. I’d been friends with Randall since third grade, and he was practically my brother. Why did God have to strip all of these things away from me? Why is he forcing me to play these stupid games? Why must I suffer?

I couldn’t feel my pinky toe anymore. I looked and it was gone. I realized he was cutting off my distal phalanxes only. Next, he began to cut off my ring toe. The stabbing pain came back. I thought he was conditioning me to fear the lancet, but when I saw his face as he cut through me, I saw that he was smiling. The “angel” that was supposed to help me had possessed the Chancellor and was fulfilling his sadistic fantasies through torturing me.

This was the start of my hatred and my fear. I grew even more afraid. Afraid of the pain, afraid of him, afraid of the scalpel. My fear grew every time he would start the next toe. The warmth of my blood provided the slightest comfort, but I thought that taking comfort in blood would make me just as bad as he was.

Once he was done with my toes, he looked at me. “Time to begin with your fingers.” His smile never left his face.

“No!” I cried. I couldn’t take it. My toes were numb and warm. My skin went pale and the room felt colder than when I had first entered. I clenched my fists so that he wouldn’t be able to take my fingers. I thought that if I squeezed my fingers tightly enough he wouldn’t be able to cut my fingers off. I was wrong. The man was immensely stronger than I was.

I squeezed as tight as I could. And even though I felt numb from squeezing so hard, I didn’t let up. My attempts to save my hands were in vain. He pried my fingers apart and began cutting at my pinky. I cried. My nose was clogged as tears rolled over my pale cheeks. I was afraid. This was true fear. I was afraid that he would not stop. I was afraid that he would cut at me over and over until I would die. I was afraid that these powers would not save me and that I would not survive this torture.

He finished after a few minutes and began to laugh hysterically. He put his bloody lancet down on the tray beside him and collected my bloody toes and fingers from the floor. He then displayed them to me like they were trophies. “This is the first step for victory. Immortality cannot be achieved without sacrifice.” He put them on the tray. He then turned and began to leave.

“Where are you going?” I said weakly. My voice was gone after the scream session.

“I’m the Chancellor. I have a job to do.” Ender responded.

He turned the lights off and made his way up the ladder. He reached the top and opened the hatch.

“Wait.” I said to him, my voice echoed in the room.

“What?” He responded. His voice was soft, it sounded like he was a different person.

“Can you leave the lights on?” I was shackled in a huge room in the dark, of course I was going to be afraid.

“No.” He laughed and closed the hatch behind him.

Left alone in the darkness. The only thing I could hear was the soft beating of my heart and the breaths I took every few seconds. The pain I felt numbed down after a few minutes and I closed my eyes. I didn’t want to do this. I wanted to return to my friends, to my family. I wanted to go back home and eat popcorn while watching the television with my sister. I wanted to go drive around with my mom and dad. I wanted to beat Randy at Super Smash Bros, but all that was taken away.

The memories of my past were irrelevant. What I felt back then had no ground in this world. I just wanted to go home. I just wanted to be able to see my family one more time. But they wouldn’t recognize me. No one would. I was alone. I was alone and a target for people playing the same game as me.

I tried to keep my mind off the pain. I tried to keep my mind off the thought that Ender would come back and cut my toes and fingers off again as soon as he saw them grow back. I didn’t want to feel that pain again. Despite my attempts to avoid thinking about fear and pain, the smell of iron exhibited a strong and persistent presence that would not go away.

I didn’t know how long he would keep me down here. Heck, what if I needed to use the bathroom? I thought about all sorts of things, but it all went away as I fell asleep. I hoped to find refuge in my dreams.

Refuge didn’t await me, unfortunately. Haunting memories of the scalpel replayed over and over again. The thought of a small blade cutting through my toes was a nightmare. Over and over, I imagined the Chancellor smiling as he cut through my toes, the cold feeling of the metal stinging me. I didn’t want to dream about that. I wanted to dream of the warmth of my family. I wanted to imagine myself as a child playing with my action figures, but in the end that would just be a fantasy. And such a fantasy was something that I was unable to think of at that time. All that came through my mind was cutting over and over again.

It felt like years, but the Chancellor did eventually come back. I watched him come down the hatchet and turn the lights on. He walked toward me; he had things on his hands. He wore latex gloves this time. I don’t think he liked that fact that he left with my blood on his hands.

“I need to go to the bathroom.” My voice was raspy. Just looking at him gave me a rush of fear.

“Sounds like you’re dehydrated as well.” He wasn’t wearing his glasses. “Okay, I’m going to let you out for a little bit. There’s actually a bathroom if you walk straight to your right.”

He pulled out keys from his pocket and unchained me. I sat up slowly, my energy was low. I hadn’t eaten or drank for several hours. I got up and looked at my hands. My fingers had regrown. I looked at my toes, and found that they too, had regrown. Maybe I didn’t need to think to regenerate. Perhaps it was a passive skill, like those in MMORPGs. I made my way to the room all the way on the opposite side of the hatch.

I entered the bathroom and found that there was a single toilet and sink. After completing my duty, I turned on the faucet and drank some water. I then left and made my way back. I didn’t want to go back to the bed, where the Chancellor was waiting for me. I knew that even if I ran, the Chancellor would be able to catch me and force me onto the bed again. He might even have cut even more than he had before. I didn’t want to take the risk, and so I went back slowly.

“Are you ready?” He asked.

“Do we have to do this? When will it be over?” I pleaded.

“Once you’ve mastered regeneration, we can move on to control over the earth.

“I don’t want to do this anymore. Let me go home, please.” My eyes watered.

“I can’t let you go back. You’ve been chosen for this.” He gestured for me to go to the bed. He wiped his lancet.

I wiped my eyes and walked to the bed. I lied down and he cuffed me to the bed again. I didn’t even have time to mentally prepare myself before he cracked his neck and began cutting.

This time he cut off the middle phalanxes of my toes and the same distal phalanx of my big toe. I screamed. My body jerked around in bed and he had to wrestle my feet so that he could cut properly. The pain was excruciating. I wanted this to stop. The smell of blood returned even stronger this time.

“I’ll make this slow for you.” He smiled as he began cutting the toes on my right foot.

“No!” I wailed.

I hated Ender for this. I never wanted to deal with him again. He claimed that this was supposed to help me. He assured me that I would be able to survive if I underwent this pain. I knew that all of that was a lie. I didn’t understand who was to blame if I was going to be really honest. Was it Ender or the Chancellor who was pleasuring himself? Either way the sight of that the Chancellor’s body reminded me of my fear and hatred.

He began on my fingers. My heartrate escalated. The pain was too much, and upon his first incision, my blood splattered all over his face. Unfazed, he continued cutting.

After he finished, he put my fingers and toes on the tray and left. I didn’t want to say anything, and I didn’t. He left the lights off and closed the hatch behind him.

The next time I saw him, he was wearing a face mask and gloves. It looks like he hadn’t appreciated the blood I spewed over his face last time. I didn’t speak to him. I didn’t even need to use the bathroom, for I hadn’t eaten or drank anything in so long that my system was essentially empty.

He pulled his gloves down like in those doctor movies and began cutting. I screamed as he began cutting into my toes. I wanted to cry, but I couldn’t. My tears were dry. It felt like blood was the only scent I’d ever smelled. At this point I was able to sense the iron and trace solids that existed in the fluid itself.

The pain I felt was something I had never felt before. I couldn’t stop screaming and dry heaving. Every breath I took left me with a taste of blood lingering on my taste buds. After he finished cutting my toes, he began on my fingers as usual. I pulled at the fetters with both hands. I felt blood run down my forearms. I had cut my own wrists. I calmed down as he began on my fingers.

There was no point in trying to pull away. The shackles wouldn’t come off. I submit myself to the pain mentally, but I continued to scream.

He finished cutting and left. As soon as the hatch closed, my screaming ceased. The pain of it all was gone. I clenched my fists and realized that my fingers had healed immediately. My toes were the same. Since I was feeling fine, I began to devise a plan to escape.

Since I was earth, I thought that I would be able to control metals easily. I grabbed at the shackles and imagined them unlocking. I was pretty sure that Ender said all it would take was a thought, but that didn’t seem to be the case. I concentrated on unchaining myself for the entirety of the time Ender was gone.

My efforts were fruitless, as he had returned before I could get anything done.

“Water.” My voice was soft and raspy.

He went to the bathroom and returned with a cup of water.

“Where’d you get the cup from?” I asked him.

“The mirror in there can open. I keep some cups in there.”

He poured water into my mouth. Drinking water while lying down was very uncomfortable. Once I was finished drinking the water, he threw the cup on the floor.

“It appears as though your regeneration has sped up. We’re going to begin doing larger cuttings.” He pulled out a rope from under the bed.

He grabbed the keys to my shackles and let my hands free. He promptly began tying the rope under the bed and over me, keeping my hands down by my sides as well. He unchained my feet. Freedom from the chains felt so good, but the ropes were uncomfortable. I had gotten used to the shackles after just three cuttings.

After he had finished tying me up with rope, he picked up his scalpel. I realized why he chose not to use chains to tie me up. Ender didn’t want me to begin attempting to fight back against him.

He cracked his neck and began cutting at my ankles. It was a rather irregular spot, but he maneuvered his way around my tendons and ligaments.

I just grit my teeth in pain. There was no point in screaming anymore. No one would hear my cries, and the only one who could save me was myself. The tears I shed burned my cold, pale skin. He cut through my left ankle and put my foot on the floor. He then began on my right foot.

After he finished my feet, Ender cut off my hands at the wrists. This time, as he left, he took my fingers and toes he had collected on the tray along with my feet and hands with him. I turned my head and watched as he juggled my appendages up the ladder and left me in the darkness.

I tried to clench my fingers, but I couldn’t. The same sensations I had from having my hands were gone. I laid there in despair. A memory suddenly flashed through my mind.

Back when I was a kid, Randy had learned to ride a bike without training wheels before me.

“All you’ve gotta do is balance.” He told me as he rode his bike around me in circles.

“Yeah but every time I get on, I fall off.” I stood on the road in front of my house, holding my bike by my side.

“Come on, I’ll help you.” He steered off toward a vacant parking area and threw his bike down.

I walked my bike to the sidewalk and he came over to me. I attempted to get on and he held the bike steady. As I turned the wheels, he held the handles steady and walked the bike with me.

I sped up and eventually, he couldn’t keep up. He let go off the handles and I jet off on my own.

“You did it! Keep going!” He screamed words of encouragement from behind me.

I felt the breeze as I road through the sidewalk. But the sidewalk was not perfect. I hit a bump on the cement, and went flying off my bike. Immediately, the shouts of approval turned into shouts of concern. I rolled on the hard sidewalk and I felt the skin on my elbows and knees scraping off. My helmet hit a hard wall and I sat against a car’s headlight. I began crying, and Randall came rushing toward me on his bike. He jumped off and looked at my scraped up body.

“Are you okay?” He shouted in my face.

“What does it look like, moron?” I asked him.

“You should have paid more attention to the road while you were riding.”

“But that was the first time I’d ever ridden so fast.” I stopped crying.

“Well then let’s try again.” He smiled and held out his hand. The sun was behind his head, making his sweaty black hair radiate in sunlight, “You should never give up. That’s what my dad always tells me.”

This idiot thought I could ride again after sustaining so many injuries. “Okay.” I responded.

He pulled me up, and we went back to where I was practicing before.

I drifted off to sleep, wondering why I had seen that memory.

The next time the lights turned on, Ender was shouting at me.

My drowsy self struggled to wake up completely. I turned my head to the right and saw Ender walking toward me. Beside him, there was another man. I struggled to recognize who he was. That familiar wavy black hair, those thin lips and blue eyes, and his pale skin reminded me of someone. Randall? No way. I closed my eyes and tried to fall asleep again.

Someone slapped me and I jerked awake.

“I manipulated Randall so that he would have the memories from the Randall of your world. He recognizes you now. I also brainwashed him beforehand so his memories from this world don’t interfere.” The Chancellor came wearing his usual surgical attire.

I rubbed my cheeks. “Is that true, Randall?”

“Yeah. It’s nice to see you again, Gabriel.” Randall said.

I tried to get up and hug him, but the ropes held me down.

“Sorry, but this meeting is going to have to be held short. Randall needs to return to class and you need to continue training.” Ender spoke.

“But I just got to see him!” Randall pleaded.

“Return to class, now.” The Chancellor’s voice deepened.

Randall left, closing the hatch behind him. I wanted to scream, but I was afraid of what Ender might do to him or me. What if he murdered Randall right after he returned to normal? What if he tortured me even more for calling for help?

“Why did you give him Randall’s memories?” I asked Ender.

“I thought that after all this pain you might have wanted to see a friend.” The Chancellor smiled.

“Randall won’t leave me. He’s going to end up being dragged into this whole *God* mess.” I sounded angry.

“That’s unfortunate for you. Now, then. It’s been almost a week in regeneration training and it appears as though you have an affinity toward this art.” He grabbed his lancet.

“When will you let me free?” I asked him as he cracked his neck and cut into my ankle.

“When you can free yourself.” He was concentrating on cutting off my foot.

“Why do you smile as you cut me?”

“I love cutting into human flesh. Lately, you haven’t been screaming as much, and so I don’t find it as fun anymore.”

“What’s so fun about cutting into human flesh?”

“In my past life, I was a cannibal. Born and raised in a modern cannibal clan, I learned how to kidnap and eat people using high tech gizmos.”

“Wait, so what are you doing with my appendages?” I asked him, very concerned.

“Composting them. This human’s taste buds aren’t the same as mine.”

An important thought came to mind. “So you can possess people?”

“Yeah.”

“Could you possess me?”

“Yes. I could win your spot as God without you even knowing if I chose. But I could only take full control when your mental state is in complete disarray.”

That information was very important. That meant that I would have to have complete control over my mental state so that Ender could not control me.

“Can you possess someone else if you’re kicked out of the Chancellor’s body?”

“Yes, but I won’t. By the time I’m kicked out of the Chancellor’s body, you’re training will likely be over.” He finished cutting my left foot and began my right.

“One more thing. What was your catalyst?”

“Anger. Why?” He asked.

“Curiosity.” I answered.

He continued cutting. I grit my teeth and cried in pain. I didn’t ask to be tortured, I asked to be taught the art of regeneration. I wanted to escape, but how? Then I remembered that Ender had said it himself; I needed to free myself.

After he finished cutting, I would train in trying to manipulate the cuffs attached to the bed when he left. It didn’t work every time I practiced, and after several days, I found the tick. I would have to remember the fear I felt when the Chancellor picked up the scalpel. I knew that it was that very fear that fueled my regenerative abilities. The catalyst gave me the power to manipulate the cuff into whatever I wanted.

“It’s been a month.” He walked toward me. At this point, I was able to regenerate my hands and feet as soon as he finished cutting them. “When are you going to leave?”

“Today.” I smiled. I forced the fear of the scalpel and ran the memory of Brad the murderer through my mind.

The scalpel on the tray beside the Chancellor flew into his ear. It lodged itself in there, and as he tried to pull it out, I forced one of the cuffs to turn into a knife. The knife cut my ropes free and I stood before the Chancellor, who was writhing in pain.

Blood poured out of his right ear, which reminded me that I needed to use the bathroom. I quickly ran to the restroom and completed my duty. Nature doesn’t wait for you to be badass.

Once I had returned, the Chancellor was standing with the scalpel in his hand. I had forgotten to be afraid while I was urinating. I cracked my neck and manipulated the knife on the bed that had set me free to pierce the Chancellor’s heart.

I watched as he fell before me, a lifeless lump. The scent of blood wasn’t new to me, but the feeling that I had murdered someone was. Blood poured from his ear and chest. His white shirt stained red. The blond haired chancellor who ruled my school was dead. My knees trembled, as the realization of what I’d done came to me. I had murdered someone. An innocent person being manipulated by a sadistic angel. Why did the Chancellor have to die? Why not Ender?

*“You’ve mastered regeneration.”* Ender spoke in my mind.

“Yeah, but at what cost?” I cried out.

There was a dead person lying down right before me, and I was the murderer. I was no better than Brad, the man who’d murdered my grandparents. Why did I have to sacrifice a man’s life for the sake of this battle? This was not what I wanted. I didn’t want to murder people for the sake of being God.

*“Lives will be sacrificed.”* Ender said.

I needed to get out of there. I got up, knees weak, arms spaghetti. My mind was trapped on the thought of murdering someone, but my body ran. My body climbed the ladder at super speed and closed the hatch behind me.

I covered the hatch with the Chancellor’s desk and sat on his swivel chair, hugging my knees.

Several minutes later, I heard a knocking at the door. I chose not to respond.

“Chancellor? I’m here to take the compost.” I heard Randall on the other side of the door.

“Randy?” My voice was soft and hoarse.

“I’ll head back to the garden center if you’re not ready.” I guess he hadn’t heard me.

“Come in.” I spoke louder.

He opened the door with a black bag in hand. His sad looking blue eyes scanned the room. When he saw me, his jaw dropped. I got up, my hair was long enough to cover my eyes.

“Randy?” I asked.

“What are you doing?” He responded.

“What do you mean?”

“Is your training over?”

“Yeah. What’s this compost you’re talking about?”

“I’m not supposed to talk about it.” He looked down.

“What is it?”

“The Chancellor has these human body parts that he brings to the garden club every day for composting. I’m in charge of compost, so he told me to keep this a secret between us.”

“Those were my hands and feet.” I looked at my hands. There were scars all over them. My skin was purple all around my wrist.

“How? You look fine.”

“There are some things I need to talk to you about.”

“I’ve missed you for so long. Let me finish today’s lectures and we’ll go back to my place and play video games like the old days.” He flipped his hair.

“I’ll wait until after your lectures, but this isn’t the time to have fun. Head back.” I could tell my words were a depressant in his mind.

He left me to my own devices. I sat back down on the Chancellor’s swivel chair.

*“Should I possess Randall?”* It was Ender.

“No. Just stay in my mind where you are. I don’t want to murder anyone else.” I spoke aloud.

*“I thought you wanted to cleanse the earth.”*

“Yes, but I didn’t want to be the one doing the cleaning. I don’t want to have to watch innocent people die. I don’t want to be murdering people.”

*“What a hypocrite. You can’t back out now. The game’s already begun.”*

“I just wanted a world where humans and nature could live in harmony. Stop bothering me, you’re pissing me off!” I got angry.

*“I’ll just seclude myself to the deepest recesses of your mind, then. If I speak, it’ll only be to tell you about other Divine Candidates and to possess you. Is that okay?”*

“Just go.” I was in a bad mood.

But he was right. I wanted to live in a perfect world without having to do any work. I just needed to calm down. I just murdered one person. It wasn’t like I was going to murder all of humanity.

All this along with the fact that Randall was going to get involved now too. I wondered how many lives would be lost to God’s senseless game. I decided that I would tell him everything to protect him. He needed to know so that he wouldn’t be surprised when I used my powers. I needed him to know so that he knew even in this world that he could trust me.

I looked over to the shelf beside the Chancellor’s desk and saw a shelf full of books. One particular book caught my eye. It was titled, “*Planetary Resurrection”*. I reached over and pulled it out. I opened it and was met with the “old book smell”. Ecstasy. I read the inner flap out of curiosity:

Everyone is dead.

I stopped reading after the first sentence. From the looks of it, the book was likely about how the world would recover from a human extinction level event. I put the book back and laid back on the chair. Sounded like something I would read.

I drifted off to sleep in wait for Randall to return.