**Chapter Seventeen: The Biannual Harmony Ball**

**Year 1991, Washington DC, United States of America**

**Dr. Jonathan Thorn, PhD**

<That was interesting.>

What the hell was that?

<I have some clues. If I am not wrong, it was machine language, binary code.>

Binary code? Of what?

<Everything. It was a binary interpretation of everything around you. Every object down to the most minute details including composition and chemical composition, its relative position to you as a vector described in three dimensional space, every force acting on these objects including gravity and air pressure, hell it even had information on forces I didn’t even knew existed. The more I dig into this stuff, the more I find.>

That is all good and dandy but why is everything black?

<You passed out. Your pretty little noggin couldn’t handle the sudden influx of information. Truthfully, I’m surprised that it didn’t just burst like an over-ripe melon. I have had almost an hour to analyze this stuff and I have barely grazed the surface, you had it shoved into your unprepared mind in a few seconds.>

Jesus, this is what I get? Other people get flaming swords and killer claws while my great party trick is to passout because of useless numbers?

<I wouldn’t quite call it useless. I will try to tidy it up a little and translate this stuff to something a little more understandable. I might be able to make a useful graphical interface that would turn this stuff into something a little more refined, something that won’t overload your brain in a few seconds. Judging by the volume of the information, it might take me a few days to complete everything but I should come up with a crude prototype in a little more than a day.>

And how would that help me?

<It would give you an edge if you want to analyze things. Having an almost perfect awareness of everything around you is never a bad thing, but you are right, this doesn’t really compare to a flaming sword. But before you become too depressed, I think that there is a chance that there is a way to manipulate the machine code and subsequently manipulate the thing that the code represents. I can feel a part of you that is able to manipulate reality.>

You mean the spark that Merlin was talking about? But if that is all there is to it, why don’t I just use it as is?

<Think of it this way;m a normal stream of water couldn’t do anything to a concreate wall unless there is a whole lot of water acting over a long period of time to gradually erode it. That means that the power of multiple people utilizing their sparks might make a difference but a single person can’t make any descernable change. But consider that someone could use their spark in a very specific and targeted way, consider that someone could figure out how to change the most minute things to achieve their goals, it would be like the small stream was suddenly concentrated on a single point, turning it into a high pressure jet that would slice through concrete like butter.>

Wouldn’t that mean I will become all powerful?

<Hell no. Everything from interpreting the mess of ones and zeros into usable data to using precise targeting to affect even the smallest things would take an emmence amount of energy. >

So is it useful or useless?

<we will figure it out when I have the prototype up and running. I will be completely busy until I finish this up so I wont be here to hold your hand anymore. Good luck and don’t get yourself killed.>

“….are you insane? Don’t you know how this could have ended?”

“Don’t try to lecture me boy. I knew exactly what I was doing. His mind is a little banged up but the seal is untouched.”

“But why take the risk? Awakening the fragment in his soul might have made an already volatile situation even worse!”

“Don’t pretend to be worried about him. I can see through all that concerned bullshit. You just want to hobble him so that he has no choice but to stay. You are afraid that if he becomes capable enough to protect himself, you will no longer have an excuse to keep him here.”

“Don’t make it sound like we are imprisoning him.”

“Isn’t that what you are doing?”

“We are trying to keep him safe from those that seek to steal his power. If we handle this wrong, it might turn into a disaster. Keeping him here is the only way to insure that this doesn’t spiral out of control.”

My inner dialogue with darky was interrupted by two angry voices that seemed to be screaming at each other and it seemed like they had been going at it for some time. After a few moments of listening to the bickering, I realized that I was on my back, lying on a cold hard surface. Slowly, all of my senses returned to me one by one. I realized that the reason that it was dark was simply because my eyes were closed so I opened them.

“Jonathan, are you awake? How do you feel?”

The first thing I saw was the uncharacteristically serious face of Percy looking down at me as he squatted next to me. “I feel stiff and sore but otherwise I’m okay.”

“The stiffness is understandable. You have been lying on the floor for an hour now.”

“Did you consider maybe picking me up from the floor and taking me to a less uncomfortable place, maybe a bed or at least a couch?”

“No can do. We couldn’t risk moving you until you finished your awakening. As for why you weren’t taken to a safe location before your fragment was stimulated, you can thank Merlin for that.”

Merlin humphed and glared at Percy. “You know damn well why I did this without prior preparation or consulting you. The best way to protect Jonathan is to give him the tools to protect him. You cannot keep him forever. It is more than possible that he will leave this place one way or another and he needs to be prepared for when that happens.”

Percy sighed tiredly and decided not to give a response to Merlin’s. Instead, he turned to me and asked, “So, what did you get? What are your powers?”

I didn’t know whether I should honestly answer his question. From what I have heard so far, I wasn’t sure if my safety was truly his number one priority. He seemed to think that I am a potential threat and trying to explain to him the powers that I barely understood might cause him to be even more frightened. If he translates what he hears wrongly and decides that I had too much power, I didn’t know what hw would do. “ I am not sure. There was some green flashes but nothing more.”

Percy looked at me thoughtfully and then a smile krept up on his face. “That is probably for the best. It is not necessary to complicate your life any further. All of this has probably bummed you out. Tell you what, let me take you somewhere interesting so that we can forget this ever happened. “

He dragged me off the floor and took me to a fancy Italian tailor in an upscale district to get a tuxedo. I tried to tell him that I didn’t want to go anywhere nevermind a place where I needed to wear a tux, but he ignored my pleas and continued to drag me around without a care in the world. Finally, he made me put on a raven black tux and made me open the portal back to my house. Once we returned, I noticed that there was a tenth painting that5 I wasn’t there before hanging next to the other nine. It was a painting of a large ballroom full of people in fancy dresses and formal clothes. In the background, there was a string quartet engrossed in their performance while people where dancing the Waltz to their tune.

“Come on, lets go before the food gets cold and they run out of wine. I swear the wine runs out quicker every year. It is almost as if everyone in there is an alcoholic. It doesn’t even matter that we stock more whine, they still manage to decimate it in no time.”

“I keep telling you that I don’t like this sort of thing. Just leave me here so I can get some rest.”

“You can rest later. That is the Biannual Harmony Ball, it’s a place here you can mingle and make new friends, maybe you can settle in with the new croud and get comfortable with your new life.”

He forced me to open the portal to the ball. I tried to push him through the portal and close it behind him but he grabbed my arm and pulled me through before I could close the portal.

Once through the portal, we landed on some steps that led down to the crowded ball room. Giving into the inevitable, I grit my teeth and walked down the stairs with the same forced smile that I put on when I had to attend a benefit party to gather money for the university.

When Percy and I finally got to the bottom of the stairs, the normal hubhub that is natural for a big gathering gradually died down and settled into an eerie silence. All of the people in the room turned around and started staring in our direction. At first, I thought they were looking at Percy but it didn’t take me long to realize that that their piercing stairs where aimed at me.

As I stood there, trying to do something about the awkward situation, someone struggled through the gawking croud and stood infront of us, not staring at me but glaring at Percy.

“What the hell are you doing? Have you lost all semblance of sense in you? We are supposed to be protecting him, why did you bring him here? To parade him infront of everyone because he doesn’t have enough people gunning for him? Why don’t you just cover him in blood and through him into a tank full of sharks?”

Percy backed away in fear as his wife berated him while poking his chest menacingly. Her face might have been covered by her mask, but there was no doubt what kind of expression she would have had if it was visible.

“Umm…They would have found out about him anyways, right? I didn’t think it was a problem if…?”

“That’s right, you didn’t think! If you had taken a moment to think about it, this wouldn’t have happened!”

She gestured towards the crowd who where staring at me with varying levels of curiosity, interest, greed and outright hunger, making me want to back away and run back up the stairs.

Melisa stopped shouting at Percy when she noticed my panicked expression.

“This is not over. We will continue this conversation later. She then turned to the crowd and snapped her finger, producing a flash of bright light that seemed to wake everybody up from their stupor.

“If I may have your attention, I would like to introduce you to Dr. Jonathan Thorn. I can see that all of you are quite eager to meet Jonathan but I would like to ask you to tamp down on your enthusiasm. Jonathan is a personal guest of mine so he is under my protection. If any one of you tries to trick him into anything or try to play any underhanded tricks, I will obliterate your physical form and and banish your soul to the realm of mist and illusions to writhe in madness for all eternity, so please try to behave.”

She talked in a pleasant and polite way but her cold blooded threat got through loud and clear. The crouds previous expressions all changed to fear and apprehension. I could almost hear loud gulps as the people looked at eachother. They even moved to form a pathway between them as Mellisa led me around the room, pointing out people for me.

“The people over there, the ones in black and red clothes and blood red eyes are the vampires. They are mainly didvided into two camps. Dracula surrounds himself with his brides and Batheroy has her own coven. They hate eachother’s guts and both of them will probably try to rope you in to get to your blood. I would suggest that you do not accept any of the offers that are made by the vampires. They will try to tempt you with beautiful women and their version of nobility but all they are after is to extract some of your power through your blood.”

“Those guys in the white lab coats who didn’t even bother to dress up for this occasion are here representing a group that calls itself the Vanguard of Knowledge or Vanguard for short. They work to develop advanced technology using things like magic and material that could only be found here. They have been quite successful and they are one of the more powerful groups operating right now. They probably would want to invite you to their lab to study you but I wouldn’t recommend it. They always take things to far in their pursuit of knowledge, even at the expense of safety and morality.”

“That large group of beautiful women there are all witches. The one in the center is their most recent leader, Morgana. She is a vicious woman who would do anything for power. She is one of the people that you should be careful of.”

“The rest of the people here are people that posses a fragment of one god or another in their body. They are all trying to piece themselves back together, but it is a slow process. Ofcourse they could accelerate this process if they had enough power to take back their divinity, so they might approach you. They are another group you should be careful of.”

She continued to tell me about the other groups in the room but I was distracted when I noticed A familiar person standing against the wall, not talking with anybody and seemingly uninterested in the whole ball.

When Melisa noticed that my attention had wandered somewhere else, she turned towards the direction I was looking. “That woman goes by the name Sara. She doesn’t belong to any group and she has no affiliations. She is basically a gun for hire and she has made a lot of enemies. If you have noticed, most of the people are avoiding her. That is because she is willing to use any and all methods including guns. People who use guns are labeled as weak in our community. Using a gun is seen as an admission that your power is not enough that you had to resort to such things. Sara doesn’t really care about people’s opinions and no matter what people say, she is anything but weak. People might pretend to despise her but they acknowledge her ability enough to hire her when they are unable to handle things themselves.”

She had told me that she was a mercenary. I looked at the petite woman in a black mini-dress, looking deceptively weak and fragile and I couldn’t help but smile as she dug into a plate of shrimps without caring for manners or the weird looks that people where giving her.

“Excuse me, I’m going to go there and say hi to Sara.”

Melisa raised her eyebrows in surprise. “You know Sara?”

“We met yesterday.”

She frowned slightly and bit her lips before shrugging and saying, “Alright. Just be careful.”

I hurried towards Sara, ignoring numerous people approaching me and stood next to her. She didn’t even look at me but instead shoved her plate of shrimps towards me. I took one and took a bite to slowly savour the rich taste of a sause that I had never tasted before.

“What are you doing here Sara? I wouldn’t have pegged you as the type that goes to posh events like this.”

“You are not exactly a stuck up socialite either. Besides, I didn’t come here for fun, I came here for business. You would be surprised how many jobs I get because I come to events like this.”

“So, parties are the best time to hire a mercenary? What exactly do you do anyways?”

“Anything that comers my way, mostly assasinations and exterminations. I do a few retrivals and thefts here and there but that doesn’t crop up too often.”

“You kill people?”

“Hey, a girls gotta eat. You’re not going to go all scared and horrified on me, are you?”

“Can’t say I’m not bothered about the killing people for money thing but I won’t freak out before I know the specifics.”

“Good, because I haven’t had enough fun with you yet. Besides, you can relax, it is not like I go around massacering nuns and children. I don’t accept a job unless someone really deserved it. Like for example, I popped a vulture last week, a real rabid dog. He had already racked up fifteen kills under his belt before I put him down with a bullet through his skull.”

She gleefuly continued to tell me about the goary details of her recent contract killings when she was interrupted by a loud bang made by the door at the top of the stairs being slammed open. Four people walked in wearing crisp, buttoned up, high collared uniforms that made them look like they belonged to an organized military. The woman leading them was a person I hadn’t seen in almost ten years, but blood runs thicker than water so I could easily recognize my sister Olivia. Walking meekly behind her like he always did was my brother Thomas. Flanking the two on their left and right were what I could only describe as angels with their fluffy white wings, golden hair and golden eyes.

“Greetings to lady Medussa. We apologize for our sudden and unannounced visit.”

Melisa was sitting at a table with her husband and son at the far end of the room but her voice was clearly audible when she replied, “There is no need to apologize. This is a neutral ground so anybody is free to come as long as they do not have any bad intentions.”

She seemed to be welcoming them with her polite response but there was something about the way she said ‘bad intentions’ that sounded like a warning. If she had sensed this warning, Olivia seemed to ignore it as she continued to speak. “My mother would like to thank you for saving her son. We are indeted to you for keeping Jonathan safe from those who would harm him, but it is no longer necessary to burden you with the task of looking after him. We would like to take him back home.”

“A burden? Jonathan isn’t a burden. We like having him around. As for request to take him away, I don’t think now is the best time to do that.”

“But we insist. He is our family and taking care of him is our responsibility.”

Melisa got up from her seat and she started to glow and her voice stopped being civil. “Enough of this nonsense. Jonathan isn’t going anywhere.”

Sophia didn’t back down as she also became stern. “What is that supposed to mean? This is a private family matter, you have no right to interfere.”

“Do you take me for a fool? Do you honestly think that I don’t know what is going on? Do you think I am stupid enough to just hand him over to you?”

“We know there is a problem but we can fix it.”

“Fix it? You are the ones responsible for this in the first place! Do you think I am going to trust the same people who did this in the first place? Get out! Get out before I lose my patience! You are no longer welcome here!”

Olivia didn’t budge a single step. “Are you sure you want to do this? Do you want to make the wardens your enemy?”

“Did you just threaten me?” The halo of light surrounding started to get brighter as she started walking towards my sister. “Did you just come into my territory and threaten me infront of my family?” She continued to walk towards them with her hands behind her back, looking like she was going for a casual stroll but the two angels, my brother and sister froze in place and started to levitate a few inches off the ground. “You seem to be under the impression that your little club is more powerful than me, let me correct that false assumption. Whatever your may have heard about me from the egotistical idiots in your organization who like to trumpet their own superiority, I do not stay here because I am hiding or afraid. I do not stay here because there is someone who could jeopardize my safety. I stay here because my benefactor told me that my presence in the world would bring chaos to the strings of fate. If I wanted to destroy your organization, it would be as easy as flipping my hand. I could crush you like a bug, kill you right now like an insect and there would be nothing you could do about it.”

Melisa made Olivia float towards her until they were face to face, my sisters terrified eyes looking into the shining golden and silver eyes of the furious Melisa. I didn’t know what was going to happen next but I had to do something before my sister got hurt. So I walked forward and said, “Please let go of her. I’m sure this is all a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding? Jonathan, there are a lot of things that you don’t understand so I understand your naivity but this is not a misunderstanding. This self-rightous people are playing a dangerous game with the fate of the world hanging in the balance and they need to be stopped. They want to force their own ideals of good and bad, right and wrong on everybody and they are willing to sacrifice anything to do it. Can’t you see? They are the ones responsible for every major war since world war two! They pull the strings behind every government, company, rebel force, media outlet and any other powerful organization and they use this power to rear people like cattle, pushing them where they want them to go and slaughtering them when necessary. They are your family and I understand that you care for them but they are the type of people who wouldn’t even blink to ignore familial bonds if they think that it is in line with their twisted version of morality. I am sorry but I cannot in good conscience let you return with them. As for the for of you, you will be confined to in the mirror world until you answer all my questions and I will decide what to do with you afterwards.”

And with a wave of Melisa’s hand, my two siblings and their angel escorts vanished into thin air.